

# Conservation and Science Program

## Marine Birds Strategy Brief

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation's commitment to ocean conservation focuses on achieving balance to how we use and treat our oceans. The Marine Birds subprogram works to protect and restore marine biodiversity by protecting coastal environments and creating sustainable fisheries to reverse declining populations of seabirds and shorebirds.

### The Challenge

Seabirds and shorebirds both are dependent upon and contribute to robust ocean and coastal systems. Seabirds are among the most threatened animals on Earth, with 39 percent of seabird species on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). In North America, 28 of 31 shorebird species that depend on Pacific Coast habitats are thought to be declining.

We work to reduce three major threats to marine birds. First, invasive species, such as rats and cats, prey on seabird eggs and chicks, affecting 75 percent of threatened seabirds. Larger invasive mammals, such as goats and pigs, can degrade habitats, making them unsuitable for use by breeding seabirds.

Second, longline fishing is the principal cause of albatross and some shearwater and petrel species population declines. It is estimated at least 160,000 to 320,000 seabirds are caught annually as bycatch where birds are unintentionally caught and killed in fishing gear.

And last, although shorebirds as a group are less threatened than seabirds, they nevertheless face significant pressures, particularly associated with the loss of breeding and wintering habitats. The future effects of climate change will compound the threats to shorebirds.

### Our Strategy

The goal of the Marine Birds strategy is to reverse the decline of selected bird species associated with marine environments as a contribution to the restoration of sustainable marine ecosystems. Specifically, the strategy aims to:

- Increase seabird breeding success and survival through invasive species removal.
- Reduce mortality of seabirds through reduction of bycatch.
- Build conservation and monitoring capacity together with effective action at key shorebird sites.

Now in the second phase of a ten-year grantmaking strategy, we fund three initiatives, building on progress our grantees are making to conserve marine birds.

#### 1. *Island restoration*

We support projects to remove invasive species that predate on seabirds and reduce breeding productivity of threatened and endangered seabirds. Island selection is based on high return on investment opportunities, including

considerations of re-invasion risk, the beneficial impact for threatened seabirds, and no immediate threat of sea level rise.

2. *Bycatch reduction*

We support efforts to reduce seabird bycatch through regulatory improvements and fishery gear modifications. Our support focuses on advocacy for improved fisheries monitoring and reporting as well as outreach around proven bycatch mitigation methods. We prioritize interventions in areas with high rates of bycatch of threatened and endangered seabirds.

3. *Shorebird habitat conservation*

We focus our support on building conservation capacity to protect critical habitat along the Pacific Flyway, with primary investments in Panama Bay and Chiloe Island. We also support activities that increase capacity for and standardization of shorebird monitoring for Central and South American sites along the Pacific Flyway.

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## **Our Approach**

Each of the three strategic initiatives require unique approaches to achieve our goals. For our island restoration investments, we prioritize eradications projects and islands that have a high return on investments. Factors such as island size, the presence of threatened species, low risk of reinvasion and cost are considered in this ranking.

Reducing bycatch requires direct engagement with fishing fleets to ensure that gear modification both work for their practices and reduce seabird bycatch.

Our approach to shorebird habitat conservation is centered on building organizational capacity and public engagement in areas where protections for critical habitat and land-use planning are needed.

## **Where We Work**

Our island restoration work to remove invasive species is not geographically restricted, although has recently focused on islands in the eastern and central Pacific Ocean where significant opportunities to recover threatened species exist.

Work to reduce bycatch is primarily on the high seas, but wherever threatened and endangered seabirds are significantly harmed by fisheries bycatch.

We focus our shorebird habitat conservation investments primarily in supporting efforts along Central and South American sites of the Pacific Flyway with a targeted focus on Panama Bay, Panama and Chiloe Island, Chile.

## **Progress**

Since 2008, grantees have made progress in all three initiatives, most significantly in island restoration. Completed or ongoing island restoration projects will benefit at least 22 threatened and 7 near-threatened seabird species. Bycatch reduction projects have reduced global annual seabird bycatch by at least 73,500 birds, mostly albatrosses and petrels. Shorebird conservation projects have helped to place 100,000 acres of land under new management systems in the United States and succeeded in defending the designation of a 200,000-acre national protected area in Panama Bay.

### **What We Don't Fund**

While the Packard Foundation understands the importance of scientific research, the Marine Birds subprogram grantmaking for these purposes is very limited and highly selective. In addition, we do not invest in land acquisitions.

### **To Learn More**

For more information about the Packard Foundation's Marine Birds Subprogram and grantmaking, visit [www.packard.org/marine-birds](http://www.packard.org/marine-birds) or contact our team.

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