

BirdLife International Important Bird Areas Programme

The function of the **Important Bird Areas** (IBAs) programme of **BirdLife International** is:

“To identify and protect a network of sites, at a biogeographic scale, critical for the long-term viability of naturally occurring bird populations, across the range of those bird species for which a sites-based approach is appropriate”

IBAs are chosen using quantitative, standardised, globally agreed criteria. The selection of IBAs has been a particularly effective way of identifying conservation priorities. IBAs are key sites for conservation – small enough to be conserved in their entirety and often already part of a protected-area network. They do one (or more) of three things:

- Hold significant numbers of one or more globally threatened species
- Are one of a set of sites that together hold a suite of restricted-range species or biome-restricted species
- Have exceptionally large numbers of migratory or congregatory species

Following the success of the IBA programme in setting priorities and focusing conservation action in the terrestrial and freshwater realms, BirdLife is extending and adapting the IBA programme to the marine environment and has begun to identify marine IBAs (www.birdlife.org/action/science/sites/marine_ibas/index.html)

Work by a selection of BirdLife Partners has helped to determine the best methodologies for identifying and delimiting IBAs at sea. The pioneering work undertaken in Europe has been standardised to develop guidance on identification of at-sea sites, and this is now being applied across the wider BirdLife Partnership, from Asia to the Americas.

The BirdLife Secretariat is leading on the identification of high seas IBAs, applying the same standard methods used in territorial waters, and using the Tracking Ocean Wanderers (TOW) dataset to provide a first cut of high seas sites. The TOW dataset included remote sensing tracks for 28 species of albatross and petrel, provided by 57 scientists from 11 countries, making it perhaps the most comprehensive dataset on marine top predators available. Having such a wide variety of species included, and a global coverage, provides a unique opportunity for analysis to identify a network of key sites for protection on the high seas. The TOW pdf can be accessed here (www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/seabirds/tracking_ocean_wanderers.pdf)

The BirdLife marine IBA model is based on experiences gained in national waters of Spain, Portugal and the Baltic. These methods have been further tested in New Zealand, Mediterranean Europe and Argentina and continue to be refined as the work is applied further across the globe. The results of the 4 year project by SPEA (BirdLife Partner in Portugal) to identify Important Bird Areas for seabirds at sea, and the methodologies they have used can be found here.

<http://lifeibasmarinhas.spea.pt/y-book/STANDALONE/>

The methods for identifying (and delimiting) IBAs in areas of national jurisdiction (both coastal and pelagic) are being tested to determine their utility on the high seas, and work so far shows that they are equally applicable here

BirdLife is conducting further testing in this regard at a workshop to be held July 2009, that will bring together a number of experts working with tracking data obtained from seabirds to further refine the methods necessary to convert to IBA/MPAs on the high seas. Based on this BirdLife plans to conduct an analysis of the Tracking Ocean Wanderers dataset, which should result in a potential network of sites being identified across large areas of the worlds oceans.

Appendix 1

This section compares the CBD high seas criteria with the BirdLife International Important Bird Areas Programme (IBA) criteria. Further details on the IBA criteria and the IBA Programme can be found on the BirdLife Website

IBA Programme

www.birdlife.org/datazone/sites/sites_programme.html

IBA criteria

www.birdlife.org/datazone/sites/global_criteria.html

Annex I

CBD MPA criteria	Uniqueness or rarity	Special importance for life-history stages of species	Importance for threatened, endangered or declining species and/or habitats	Vulnerability, Fragility, Sensitivity, or Slow recovery	Biological productivity	Biological diversity	Naturalness
BirdLife IBA criteria	A1, A2 , A3	All criteria	A1	A1	All; particularly A4	All criteria	All?

Annex II

Required network properties and components	Definition	Applicable site specific considerations (<i>inter alia</i>)	BirdLife International marine IBA fit
Ecologically and biologically significant areas	Ecologically and biologically significant areas are geographically or oceanographically discrete areas that provide important services to one or more species/populations of an ecosystem or to the ecosystem as a whole, compared to other surrounding areas or areas of similar ecological characteristics, or otherwise meet the criteria as identified in annex I.	• Uniqueness or rarity • Special importance for life history stages of species • Importance for threatened, endangered or declining species and/or habitats • Vulnerability, fragility, sensitivity or slow recovery • Biological productivity • Biological diversity	IBAs take account for uniqueness (i.e. A2 biome restricted, and A3 restricted range; though not currently applicable to seabirds) and/or rarity (i.e. A1 – IUCN Red List species) IBAs take account for special importance for life history stages of species. IBAs have been identified for seabirds during breeding, passage and non-breeding seasons IBAs take account of threat status via criteria A1 covered under IBA criteria A1 Seabirds as top predators are an indicator of the state (and productivity) of the marine environment IBAs are suitable for identifying key areas for the vast majority of seabirds during some or all of their annual cycles

		• Naturalness	??
Representativity	Representativity is captured in a network when it consists of areas representing the different biogeographical subdivisions of the global oceans and regional seas that reasonably reflect the full range of ecosystems, including the biotic and habitat diversity of those marine ecosystems.	A full range of examples across a biogeographic habitat, or community classification; relative health of species and communities; relative intactness of habitat(s); naturalness	IBA programme has been applied worldwide using the global A-level criteria. Criteria have also been applied at a regional or sub-regional scale in some areas (e.g. Europe, Middle East, N. America).
Connectivity	Connectivity in the design of a network allows for linkages whereby protected sites benefit from larval and/or species exchanges, and functional linkages from other network sites. In a connected network individual sites benefit one another.	Currents; gyres; physical bottlenecks; migration routes; species dispersal; detritus; functional linkages. Isolated sites, such as isolated seamount communities, may also be included.	IBAs form a network of sites across regions and globally. How well the linkages between sites work is being developed through the flyways approach (currently restricted to the terrestrial/freshwater environments, though certainly applicable and being developed in the marine environment). Migration bottlenecks are one of the four types of marine IBA. Already several sites identified.

			Currents, gyres, and seamounts have been identified as some of a number (more than those listed) of key oceanographic variables that effect seabird distribution and result in aggregations that may trigger IBA criteria. These features may be used to help delineate marine IBAs
Replicated ecological features	Replication of ecological features means that more than one site shall contain examples of a given feature in the given biogeographic area. The term “features” means “species, habitats and ecological processes” that naturally occur in the given biogeographic area.	Accounting for uncertainty, natural variation and the possibility of catastrophic events. Features that exhibit less natural variation or are precisely defined may require less replication than features that are inherently highly variable or are only very generally defined.	IBAs are applied in such a way that as long as one or more of the 4 global criteria is met, then the area can become an IBA. This means that there are (in most cases) more than 1 IBA for each species. Exceptions may exist where a species nests in a restricted area (e.g. only on 1 island globally), though more than one sites for each species should be identified once at sea feeding areas have been adequately covered.
Adequate and viable sites	Adequate and viable sites indicate that all sites within a network should have size and protection sufficient to ensure the ecological viability and integrity of the feature(s) for which they were selected.	Adequacy and viability will depend on size; shape; buffers; persistence of features; threats; surrounding environment (context); physical constraints; scale of features / processes; spillover / compactness	IBA boundaries are set to adequately provide the necessary resources for the trigger species they have been identified for them though an extended period of time.

Appendix 2

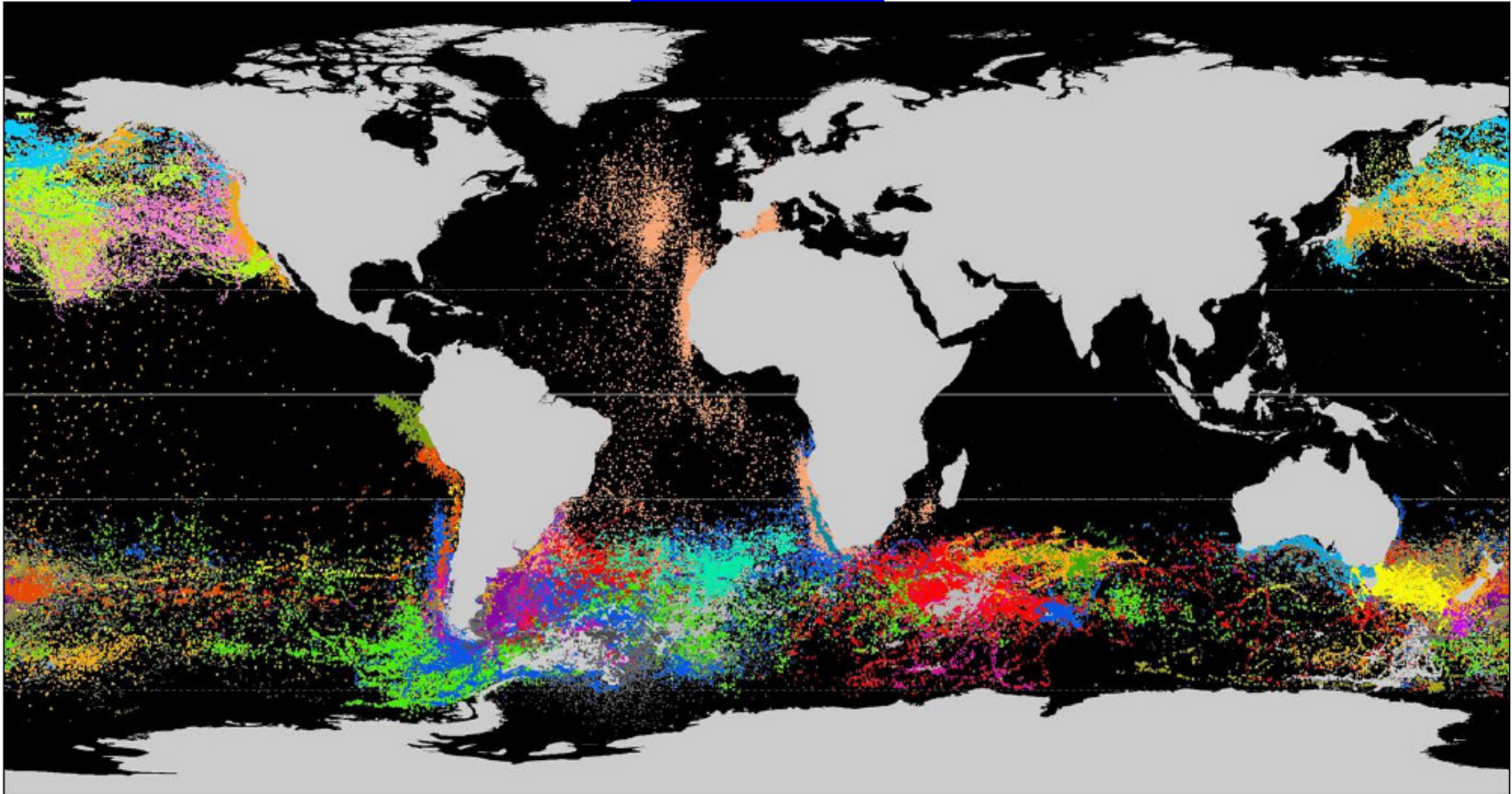


Figure 1: The Tracking Ocean Wanderers dataset. Including information on 28 seabird species, contributed by 57 scientists from 11 countries. (PTT & GPS: 3 764 tracks, 957 148 hours, GLS: 721 tracks, 61 832 days)

Analysis of this dataset using the methods developed in territorial waters for identifying IBAs will result in a potential network of high seas sites.

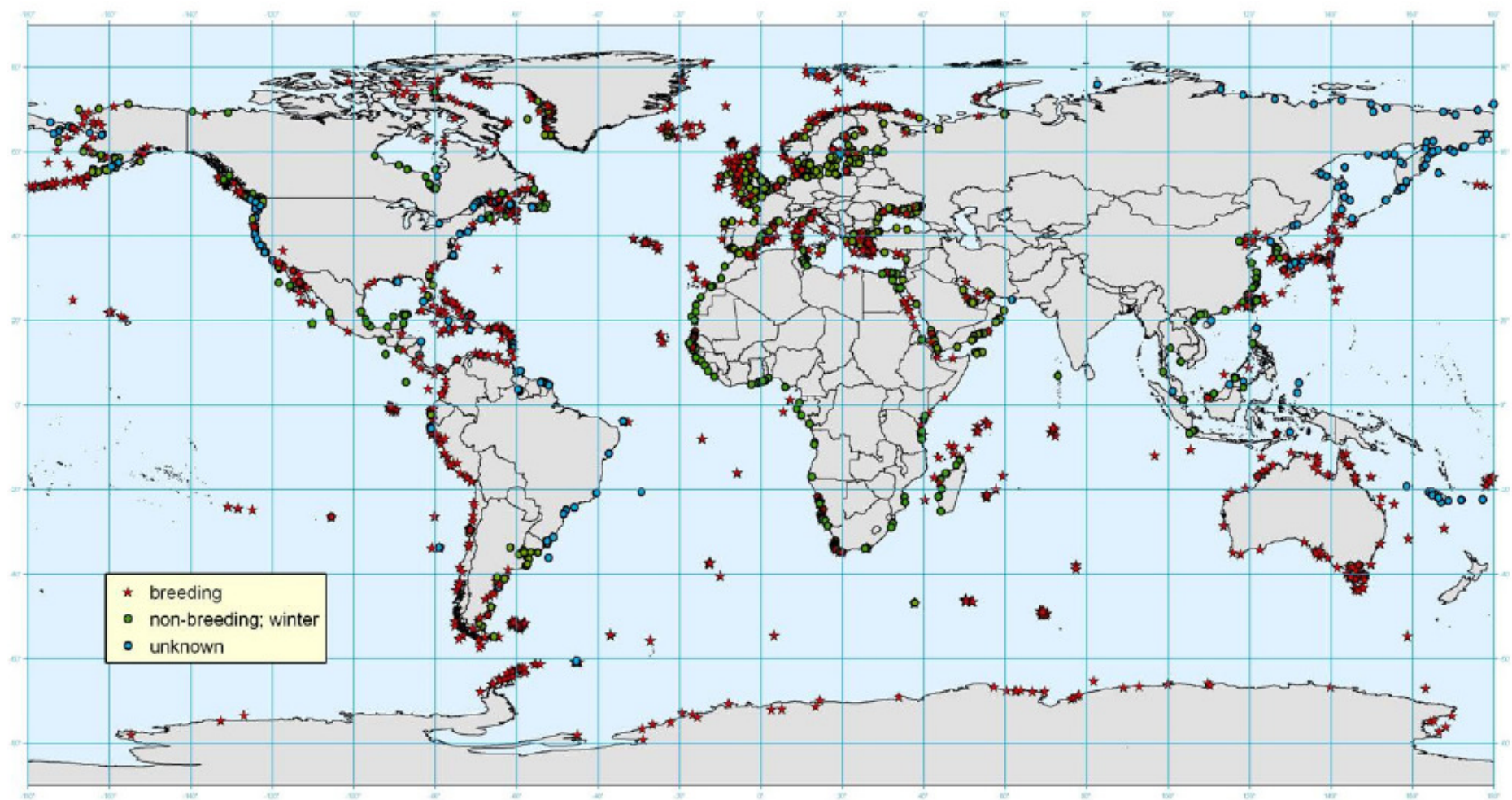


Figure 2: Candidate marine IBAs for seabirds identified up to Aug 2008. The majority of sites are seabird breeding colonies that require a seaward extension to include important at sea maintenance areas around sites. Different symbols indicate season of occurrence of the IBA trigger species occurring at a site.