



XXXIII Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting
3rd to 14th May, 2010

Punta del Este - Uruguay

IP 24

Agenda Item: CEP 6b
Presented by: IAATO
Original: English

IAATO Guidelines to Minimize Seabirds Landing on Ships

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Information Paper submitted by IAATO

Summary

Through an initiative by IAATO field staff, IAATO has brought into practice simple practical guidelines to minimize the likelihood of seabirds landing on vessels.

In anticipation of a discussion on light pollution mitigation measures by the CEP, IAATO is pleased to submit these guidelines and report form (Appendices A & B) as a contribution to the discussion.

Introduction

A ship's crew need to use light during hours of darkness for safe navigation and operation of vessels. Passenger ships can have potentially a greater amount of lighting due to the additional portholes and windows. During the breeding season in the Southern Ocean, burrowing petrels make their way to and from their nests under the cover of darkness. Attracted – or disorientated – by a vessel's lights, they may land on deck and find they are then unable to take off.

Development of the guidelines

Seabirds land on vessels in the Southern Ocean every year. The legs of petrels are not designed for walking so these seabirds often struggle to take off. Instead they hide behind the ship's equipment and in corners. Although the seabirds usually survive the initial impact, they can become hypothermic if they become waterlogged.

These incidents occur most frequently in the sub-Antarctic area during hours of darkness and usually during nights of poor visibility (snow, fog, or rain). On most occasions, this involves one or two birds landing on deck and only rarely is there mortality. Serious bird strikes (where large numbers of birds land on deck and mortality occurs) are considerably rarer. In IAATO records, there are two reported incidents of serious bird strikes: one in the 1990s and another during the 2008/09 season¹. The former took place in open ocean off the southern coast of a sub-Antarctic island during a night of poor visibility and snow storms; the latter was also on a night of poor visibility but in shallow coastal waters of a sub-Antarctic island and likely could have been avoided if the mitigation measures had been adopted earlier.

IAATO field staff working with a Birdlife International representative developed a set of guidelines to minimize the likelihood of birds landing on vessels and to provide guidance on handling stranded birds. The intention of this initiative was to promote the very simple mitigation measures which can be taken to minimize the chance of even rare occurrences happening. IAATO adopted these measures during the last IAATO annual meeting and for the 2009/10 season have dispersed the guidelines through both a poster to be put up in passenger and crew areas (Appendix A) and as a PowerPoint presentation. In addition, report forms to log any incidents were circulated to IAATO field and ship staffs (Appendix B). Anecdotal reports from field staff indicate that since adoption of the guidelines the occurrence of birds being found on deck is now rare. To date, no seabird strike forms have been received for the 2009/10 season.

IAATO would welcome any comment on these guidelines and is pleased to submit them to the CEP to assist with discussions.

¹ Additional information on Southern Ocean bird strikes can be found in Black, A: Light induced seabird mortality on vessels operating in the Southern Ocean: incidents and mitigation measures. *Antarctic Science* 17(1):67-68 (2005)

Appendix A – Information Poster

Seabirds Landing on Ships

During the breeding season in the Southern Ocean, burrow-nesting petrels travel to and from their breeding colonies under cover of darkness. Attracted – or disoriented – by a ship's lights, these seabirds may land on deck during the night hours, unable to take off.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND BIRDS?



Inform the person appointed to take care of birds to take the following steps:

- » Handle the birds as little as possible, to avoid stress.
- » Keep the birds in a warm, dry, dark room until ready for release.
- » Use one box / container for each bird. If not enough boxes are available, put the same bird species in one box.
Do not mix bird species.
- » Record the birds found and report the event to IAATO.

WHEN TO RELEASE THE BIRDS?



- » Release the birds when the deck lights are off, or at first light the next day.
- » Ensure that there are no Skuas or Gulls around during the release.
- » To release, stand at the railing on the windward side of the ship. Sit the bird in the palms of your outstretched hands – if the bird does not take off on its own then gently throw the bird up in the air.

HOW TO PREVENT BIRDS FROM LANDING ON THE SHIP?



You can help avoid attracting seabirds, particularly when the ship is near islands (where the birds breed) and on nights when visibility is poor.

- » Keep deck lights and ice lights at the minimum necessary for safety.
- » Use blackout blinds on all portholes and windows where possible.
- » Keep deck lights to a minimum when at anchor or close inshore overnight.

HELP KEEP SEABIRDS SAFE

Each year, bird landings occur on vessels operating in the Southern Ocean. The legs of petrels are not designed to walk, so these seabirds are unable to take off again. They will often hide behind ship's gear and in corners.

Although most of the time birds survive the initial impact, they can become hypothermic if their feathers become waterlogged. Bird species commonly affected include Antarctic Prion, Blue Petrel, Diving-petrels and Storm-petrels.

Conditions of poor visibility (fog, snow or rain) increase the risk of birds becoming disoriented by ship lights. Occasionally, hundreds of birds may land on a ship in a single night.

Check every morning to see if birds have landed on the ship. It is recommended to let one person coordinate the handling and taking care of these birds. This can be the naturalist or expedition leader on passenger ships, or a crew member.

Should seabird landings take place on your vessel, please forward a completed Seabird Landing Incident Report to:

iaato@iaato.org | www.iaato.org

Seabird Landing Incident Report Forms, as well as a PDF of this poster and a PowerPoint presentation on this topic, can be found on the IAATO website and in the IAATO Field Operations Manual CD.

Appendix B: Report Form

This version: 2009-a

Seabird Landing on Ships Incident Report Form

Purpose of this form

Collect data of so-called 'seabird strikes': single or multiple petrels (seabirds) that strand on ships during the night. IAATO is assisting in gathering data of such incidents on behalf of seabird conservation organisations. Please use this form if you have experienced such an incident.

How to use this form?

Please use one form per incident. One incident may include 1 or multiple birds. Explanations or examples are provided on the right side of each question. When all questions have been filled in, please mail it to: iaato@iaato.org

Thank you for your valuable input!

During their breeding season, burrow nesting petrels travel to and from their breeding colonies under the cover of darkness. Attracted -or disorientated- by a ship's lights, these seabirds may land on deck during the course of the night, unable to take off.

A poster and a slideset explaining how to handle these seabirds and how to release them are available from:

- www.iaato.org
- www.LEXsample.nl

[1] When did the bird strike occur ?		
Date :		Use: dd-mm-yyyy
Time :		Use: hh:mm (GMT)

[2] Where did the bird strike occur ?		
Site :		Example: Aitcho Islands/Barrientos
Latitude / Longitude :		Example: 62°24'S, 59°47'W

[3] What were the weather conditions prior to the bird strike ?			
<input type="checkbox"/> Rain	<input type="checkbox"/> Fog	<input type="checkbox"/> Snow	Tick all that apply.: [x]
Comments :			Additional remarks with regards to the weather.

[4] Which bird species were recorded landing on the ship ? - And how many ?						
Bird species	# birds found on ship	# birds released	# birds not released			Note: # = 'number of'
			too weak	injured	dead	
Wilson's Storm Petrel	3	1	0	1	1	This line is an <i>example</i> only!
Antarctic Prion (<i>Pachyptila desolata</i>)						
Blue Petrel (<i>Halobaena caerulea</i>)						
Diving-petrel (<i>Pelecanoides</i>)						
Storm-petrels (<i>Hydrobatidae</i>)						
Unknown/Other:						If you are not sure which species you are dealing with, report here. If your species is not listed, you can also put it here (with name).
Unknown/Other:						
Unknown/Other:						
Unknown/Other:						
Unknown/Other:						
Unknown/Other:						
Unknown/Other:						
Unknown/Other:						

Form continues on next page

[5] Which measures (if any) were taken to prevent new strikes ?			
	Measure taken	Effectiveness	
1.			Also indicate the extent to which you consider the measure to have been effective. Examples of measures to avoid seabird strikes are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum deck/ice lights; • Blackout blinds on portholes and windows. • Minimum deck lights when at anchor or close inshore.
2.			
3.			
4.			

[6] This form was filled in by:			
Your name :			
Your email address :			
Name of the ship involved :			
Your function on the ship :			
May we contact you ?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We'd like to contact you in the future – if more information is required.

[7] Any additional comments you wish to make?	
	Thank you for your feedback and comments on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● seabird strikes ● measures taken ● or this form.