



# SA home to large populations of Albatrosses

By Gaopalelwe Moroane



Above: Albatross Valley at Prince Edward Islands.

South Africa hosts large and important populations of albatrosses and petrels at its Prince Edward Islands, which are located in the southwest Indian Ocean,” said South African National Parks (SANParks), Managing Executive: Conservation Services, Dr Luthando Dziba. Dr Dziba was addressing the 6th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), held on 07 May 2018, in Skukuza, Kruger National Park.

“These islands hold, for example, about half the global population of Wandering Albatrosses and a quarter of Indian Yellow-nosed Albatrosses,” said Dr Dziba.

Dr Dziba pointed out that waters around South Africa’s coasts are important feeding grounds for several albatrosses, petrels and other birds that migrate into the region.

These birds range well beyond South Africa’s territorial waters where they are at risk to fishing activities on the high seas and in the waters of other states, particularly as

by-catch in long-line and demersal-trawl fisheries. Other threats to albatrosses and petrels include predation by introduced animals, disease and global change.

Many of the world’s albatrosses and petrels have a poor conservation status and are listed as Threatened in terms of criteria of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This status has resulted from a variety of factors, including deterioration of their breeding habitats, disease, targeted hunting and the unfortunate by-catch and mortality of seabirds in fisheries.

South Africa has substantially reduced the by-catch of seabirds in its pelagic long-line fisheries, from 1.6 birds per 1,000 hooks at the turn of the century to fewer than 0.5 birds per 1,000 hooks at present. However, South Africa readily acknowledges that it has further work to undertake in the conservation of these seabirds.

Because many of the albatrosses and petrels migrate large distances, it is not possible for States acting in isolation to secure their conservation. ACAP therefore provides a



Above: Wandering Albatross.



Above: Marion Island Light-Mantled Sooty Albatross.



Above: Sooty Albatross.

mechanism to improve the conservation status of wide-ranging albatrosses and petrels at a global scale through ensuring international collaboration. The agreement came into force in February 2004 and currently has 13 member countries, including South Africa and covers 31 species of albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters.

House mice have been introduced to Marion Island and continues to impact negatively on these seabirds. Disease in penguins has been reported at the island and there have been recent indications of an altered availability of food for some birds at the island.

During his address Dziba expressed South Africa's gratitude for the wonderful generosity of the ACAP States and organisations, and all the hard work that the ACAP Secretariat have contributed to ensuring the success of the Agreement from its infancy to a stage where it has now been in operation for 14 years and has made substantial progress.



Above: Indian yellow-nosed Albatross.

"South Africa hopes that other range states for albatrosses and petrels will soon join the Agreement and that, in collaboration with other organisations, the Agreement will shortly make significant progress with regard to the understanding and addressing the threats to albatross and petrels on the High Seas," he added.