

 <p>Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Fourth Meeting of the Population and Conservation Status Working Group</b> <i>Wellington, New Zealand, 7 – 8 September 2017</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conservation Action Plans for wandering, black-browed and grey-headed albatrosses breeding at South Georgia (2016-2020)</b> <i>Anton Wolfaardt, Jennifer Lee</i></p>
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### SUMMARY

South Georgia is a globally important breeding site for a number of seabirds, including black-browed, grey-headed and wandering albatrosses, all of which are listed in Annex 1 of the Agreement. Due to their long-term declines, the South Georgia populations of these species have all been identified as 'ACAP high priority populations'. These populations have been strictly protected and closely monitored at South Georgia, including within its jurisdictional waters, for many years. The main cause of the ongoing declines has been attributed to incidental mortality associated with fisheries operating outside of South Georgia's maritime zone. In order to strengthen and co-ordinate efforts to improve the conservation status of these populations, the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) has recently developed, and is in the process of implementing, species-specific Conservation Action Plans. These plans serve as a framework to guide, in an informed, prioritised and co-ordinated manner, actions required to improve the conservation status of albatross populations at South Georgia and globally. The plans recognise that due to their wide-ranging nature, the conservation status of these species and populations will only be achieved through a co-ordinated international approach to mitigate the threats. Consequently, the Conservation Action Plans have been developed with a range of stakeholders and serve to facilitate a collaborative process of implementation. The implementation period for the Conservation Action Plans is 2016-2010, which has been set to coincide with the time frame for the Biodiversity Action Plan for South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands. However, given the long-term nature of the overall goal (to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status of all three populations), it is anticipated that the plans will need to be extended beyond this five-year period.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

South Georgia supports globally important populations of seabirds listed under Annex 1 of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), including wandering, black-browed and grey-headed albatrosses. Long-term studies at Bird Island in the north-west of the archipelago indicate declines in numbers of all three species there since the 1970s. The annual monitoring at Bird Island was complemented by larger scale surveys of the South Georgia archipelago in 2014/15. These surveys revealed that the negative population trends at Bird Island are largely representative of the archipelago as a whole, and that the South Georgia populations of these three species have, despite efforts to address threats and improve their conservation status, continued to decline.

The main threat to all three populations is considered to be incidental fisheries mortality, or bycatch. Fisheries bycatch has been reduced to negligible levels in the fisheries operating around South Georgia, and the residual threat has been attributed to fisheries operating outside of this area. Given the wide-ranging nature of albatrosses, they encounter many different fishing fleets and vessels, highlighting the challenges associated with addressing this threat and the need for an international and co-ordinated approach.

Given the importance of the South Georgia populations for these species, and the ongoing declines, these three populations have been identified as *high priority populations* by ACAP. In order to strengthen and co-ordinate efforts to improve their conservation status, the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) has recently developed, and is in the process of implementing, Conservation Action Plans specific to each of these populations. These species-specific Conservation Action Plans complement the ‘*South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands Implementation Plan for the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)*’, a broader ranging plan outlining guidelines for the implementation of ACAP requirements at South Georgia that was first published in 2010, and updated in 2017 (see <http://www.gov.gs/docsarchive/environment/>).

## 2. ACAP HIGH PRIORITY POPULATIONS

At the sixth meeting of ACAP’s Advisory Committee in 2011 (AC6), a number of high priority populations (of ACAP species) were identified based on rates of decline and levels of threat. The aim of identifying the highest priority ACAP populations is to help identify and progress collaborative conservation efforts at the most threatened populations. The main criteria for identifying ACAP high priority populations are that the population is declining by more than 3% per annum, represents more than 10% of the global population, and for which a major underlying cause of the decline is incidental mortality. Initially (in 2011), five priority populations were identified, including wandering and black-browed albatrosses at South Georgia. Further populations have since been added to the high priority list, including the South Georgia population of grey-headed albatrosses, which was incorporated in 2016, at the ninth meeting of ACAP’s Advisory Committee (AC9). Parties responsible for these high priority populations are expected to develop a list of actions that prioritise research and conservation needs, and report to each ACAP Advisory Committee meeting on how the implementation of the actions is progressing (AC9 Doc 09 Rev 1: Report of the Population and Conservation Status Working Group, AC9, 2016). The Conservation Action Plans for wandering, black-browed and grey-headed albatrosses breeding at South Georgia serves *inter alia* as the framework for

prioritising research and management actions and reporting routinely to ACAP on progress thereof.

### 3. FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

Individual Conservation Action Plans have been developed for each of the South Georgia ACAP high priority populations: wandering, black-browed and grey-headed albatrosses. In addition, a summary document outlines briefly the highest priority actions across all three populations. The plans can be downloaded from <http://www.gov.gs/albatross-action-plans/> and are included in Annexes 1 to 4 of this document.

The Conservation Action Plans serve as a tool to guide and prioritise conservation action for these three populations. It takes advantage of knowledge gained from extensive research and monitoring, and represents our best collective understanding of their current conservation needs. The plan ultimately seeks to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for these three populations at South Georgia, and in so doing contribute towards the improve the conservation status of these species globally.

Each plan outlines briefly the current status of knowledge of the ecology, distribution and population dynamics of the focus species at South Georgia, and the threatening processes impacting the populations. It also includes information on the suite of national and international policies, plans and legislation relevant to the conservation of these species at South Georgia. Following and informed by these introductory sections, the plans present a Framework for Action, in which the goal and recommended actions are described. In order to highlight the most urgent actions, the Plans distinguish between *Priority Actions* and *Associated Activities*. The former are those that are required to create the step-changes needed to achieve the goals of the plans. These actions and activities fall into eight areas of work, or components of the Conservation Action Plans, that are outlined below, in no order of importance:

- a) Long-term monitoring of population dynamics.
- b) Long-term monitoring of foraging ecology and diet.
- c) Monitoring and management of potential land-based threats.
- d) Understanding marine-based threats to South Georgia albatrosses and implementing and promoting best practice management approaches within and outside South Georgia & South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) waters to address these.
- e) Understanding the potential impacts of climate change on the ecology and population dynamics of South Georgia albatrosses.
- f) Raising awareness of the plight of albatrosses at South Georgia, and the actions that are required and are being undertaken to improve their conservation status.
- g) Participating in international conservation and fisheries fora to promote actions that will help support the conservation of South Georgia albatrosses.
- h) Reviewing the Conservation Action Plans to evaluate accomplishments and update information on priority needs.

For each of these components, a brief summary of previous or current research, monitoring and management initiatives is provided, which together with the introductory sections on the current state of knowledge, serves to inform and underpin the actions that are specified.

The plans recognise that due to their wide-ranging nature, the conservation status of these species and populations will only be achieved through a co-ordinated international approach to mitigate the threats. Consequently, the Conservation Action Plans have been developed with a range of stakeholders and serve to facilitate a collaborative and co-ordinated process of implementation. The implementation period for the Conservation Action Plans is 2016-2010, which has been set to coincide with the time frame for the Biodiversity Action Plan for South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands. However, given the long-term nature of the overall goal (to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status of all three populations), it is anticipated that the plans will need to be extended beyond this five-year period.

The summary conservation action plan is provided as Annex 1, and the species-specific plans as Annexes 2, 3 and 4. All four plans can be downloaded from the following website: <http://www.gov.gs/albatross-action-plans/>

**ANNEX 1: SUMMARY CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN FOR WANDERING,  
BLACK-BROWED AND GREY-HEADED ALBATROSSES BREEDING AT SOUTH  
GEORGIA (2016-2010)**

**Summary Conservation Action Plan for  
Wandering, Black-browed and Grey-headed  
Albatrosses Breeding at South Georgia  
(2016-2020)**



**ANNEX 2: CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN FOR WANDERING ALBATROSSES  
AT SOUTH GEORGIA (2016-2020)**

**Conservation Action Plan for Wandering  
Albatrosses at South Georgia  
(2016-2020)**



**ANNEX 3: CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN FOR BLACK-BROWED  
ALBATROSSES AT SOUTH GEORGIA (2016-2020)**

**Conservation Action Plan for Black-browed  
Albatrosses at South Georgia  
(2016-2020)**



**ANNEX 4: CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN FOR GREY-HEADED  
ALBATROSSES AT SOUTH GEORGIA (2016-2020)**

**Conservation Action Plan for Grey-headed  
Albatrosses at South Georgia  
(2016-2020)**

