

## **The Island Biodiversity & Conservation centre of the University of Seychelles and the Island Conservation Society represented at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Albatross & Petrel Conference in Barcelona (19<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> Sept. 2016).**

### **Introduction**

The 6th International Albatross & Petrel Conference (IAPC 6th) was held from the 19th to the 23rd of September 2016 at the '*Universitat de Barcelona*' (Catalonia-Spain). The conference follows on from the 5th Conference held in Wellington, New Zealand in August 2012. It continues a series that commenced with the 1st Conference, held in Hobart, Australia in 1995, and followed in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA (2000), Montevideo, Uruguay (2004) and Cape Town, South Africa (2008). This is the first time an albatross and petrel conference was held in Europe. Most of the greatest researchers in seabird ecology as well as many students gathered for this occasion and gave inspiring speeches about their work and discoveries.

Two members of the Island Biodiversity and Conservation centre of University of Seychelles, Dr. Gerard Rocamora and Dr. Licia Calabrese, who also work with the Island Conservation Society (ICS) attended the conference and contributed one poster presentation on the Shearwater Research Project conducted by ICS on Aride Island between 2011 and 2015. Both were already in Europe at that time and had the possibility to be accommodated at no expense in Barcelona, hence minimal funding provided through the IBC-UniSey for transport and registration costs allowed them to participate. Also present was Dr Vicent Bretagnolle (CNRS Chizé, France), co-supervisor of the shearwater research programme on Aride, as well Dr Hadoram Shirihai, who gave the introductory conference about how he (re)discovered no less than six species of petrels over the years! The welcome cocktail provided also the opportunity to meet briefly with Catalan winemaker and climate change activist Miguel Torres, who had also provided sponsorship for our research on Aride, and who received a warm applause for his support to environmental causes and the great selection of wines he had provided for the occasion.

This conference was particularly important given the current status of seabirds around the world. The seabirds are indeed the most threatened marine taxonomic group with 28% of the species listed as either Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically endangered by the IUCN red list. Within the seabirds, a category requires particular attention: the order of the Procellariiformes, of which 45% of species is threatened and information on population estimates, trends, movements at sea and population dynamic is lacking for many. This conference was therefore of particular importance to review and share the latest discoveries and conservation actions engaged among stakeholders involved in seabird conservation.

The figure below shows the subjects of the different sections with the names of the keynote speakers.



The IAPC6 provided a great opportunity to learn, exchange and conduct networking with many researchers involved in petrel and albatross research and conservation. 150 researchers from all over the world, including 50 MSc and PhD students did attend. The restricted size of the conference gave us the opportunity to speak with many of the presenters and to view all the oral presentations as the sessions did not overlap. In this edition, there were a good number of keynote speakers (12) that presented the latest insights into their respective fields. The 15 sessions included about 100 oral presentations and two poster sessions.

We were the only representatives for the Seychelles although the Indian Ocean was the main topic for many presentations on petrels: from shearwaters breeding at La Reunion Island to the big albatrosses of Kerguelen and Krozet (southern Indian Ocean). Apart from attending the various sessions, we also promoted the IBC-UniSey book *Invasive Alien Species in Seychelles* (Rocamora and Henriette, 2015) through the exhibition of a promotional pull up banner. About 10 copies of the book were sold. Next to our poster, we had also displayed a pull-up banner the support from Miguel Torres wines to environmental projects in Seychelles over the last 12 years.

### **What did we learn and what are the implications for research in biology and biodiversity conservation in Seychelles?**

The presentations covered most aspects of albatross and petrel research. In particular themes like marine habitat selection, pelagic ecology, tracking and conservation, feeding ecology and diet, behavioural and sensory ecology, migration, seabirds and fisheries interactions, conservation management, by-catch and light pollution, invasive predators, demography, population dynamic and phylogeny were covered. There was also a good number of studies on smaller procellariiforms, including small shearwaters, gadfly petrels and other little petrels, which were particularly important for us as we did present the results of our study on the distribution at sea of the two species of shearwaters breeding in the Seychelles: the Tropical and the Wedge-tailed shearwater. It was particularly interesting to exchange thoughts with researchers working on migration and behaviour of Petrels. For example, Francesco Bonadonna from Montpellier presented some behavioural studies about the sense of smell of petrels and how they can recognise their own burrow smelling it from a distance. Moreover, Tim Guilford and Paulo Catry gave a good insight on petrels movements during the breeding and interbreeding seasons and the technologies used to track the birds. It was particularly useful to interact with Argos, GPS and geolocators suppliers like Ecotone, Biotrack and Technosmart. They gave us an idea on the price of new technology that we may need for future projects on Seychelles seabirds.

### **Conclusions**

Albatrosses\ and petrels are still the most endangered seabirds in the world. Thanks to conferences and meetings like the one we attended the conservation needs for this category of birds can be better identified and ideas shared among stakeholders in procellariiformes conservation around the world. Occasions like this are also important to communicate the needs of different countries and to create research groups. We met our colleagues from Italy and France with whom we already collaborated and we discussed on new projects to be developed for the conservation of petrels in the Seychelles.

**Submitted by Dr. Licia Calabrese and Dr. Gérard Rocamora.**

