

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



photo credit: Kim Creebie

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 visiting South Georgia, in addition to IAATO please contact the South Georgia government officer (go@gov.gs) as soon as possible to report bird strikes

When to release the birds



photo credit: LExample.nl

- 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



photo credit: LExample.nl

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.