

Inaugural “SeaBC” SeaBird Count Gathers Participants from Maine to Antarctica

Seabird citizen science project organized by eight noted female boaters and adopted by three international long-distance cruising rallies is a first year success

ST. AUGUSTINE, FL (March 8, 2012) — From the frigid waters of Maine and Antarctica to the warm tropical Caribbean seas, boaters focused their binoculars and cameras on seabirds to participate in the 2011-12 inaugural SeaBC SeaBird Count.

The SeaBC is a citizen science project organized by eight long-distance birdwatching voyagers from around the world:

Diana Doyle on *Semi-Local*, Founder & Coordinator (US)
 Beth Leonard on *Hawk*, Advisory Board (US)
 Brenda Free on *Willow*, Advisory Board (US)
 Devi Sharp on *Arctic Tern*, Advisory Board (US)

Jeanne Socrates on *Nereida*, Advisory Board (GB)
 Katharine Lowrie on *Lista Light*, Advisory Board (GB)
 Wendy Clarke on *Osprey*, Advisory Board (US)
 Yvonne Katchor on *Australia 31*, Advisory Board (AU)

This year’s inaugural SeaBC was promoted by three long-distance cruising rallies:

ARC (Atlantic Rally for Cruisers) — Canary Islands to St. Lucia (200 boats)
 Baja Ha-Ha — San Diego, California to Cabo San Lucas (200 boats)
 Caribbean 1500 — Hampton, Virginia to Tortola (70 boats)

Citizen science projects are experiencing explosive growth as volunteerism adapts to technology. “It’s a new generation with new tools,” states Diana Doyle, founder of the project. “We’re taking environmental social projects like Earth Day cleanups to the next level. The Facebook, Flickr, and Google generation can now participate in their area of special interest by collecting and photographing geo-referenced data and uploading it to scientists for study.”

Research projects such as migration and nesting, climate change, and beach erosion are improved and accelerated by including a larger observation and data-gathering pool.

SeaBC seabird count data goes to Cornell University’s eBird database, where boaters’ sightings become a resource for scientists worldwide.

Participation spanned over 100 degrees of latitude — from the Gulf of Maine at North 48° to South 58° on Antarctica’s Weddell Sea. But most counts were from temperate latitudes, such as the islands off Africa, Chile’s Golfo de Penas, and the Caribbean.

A SeaBC count off California’s Channel Islands became the impetus for establishing monthly seabird surveys on regularly scheduled trips. The Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park hopes to use the SeaBC to involve the wintering yachting community in Bahamian seabird surveys.

Ocean birding is much more than “just gulls,” with sightings of albatrosses, petrels, shearwaters, tropicbirds, jaegers, and auklets.

Pacific SeaBC highlights included Black-browed and Wandering/Royal Albatrosses; Southern/Northern Giant-Petrel; Northern Fulmar; Westland and White-chinned Petrels; Pink-footed, Sooty, and Black-vented Shearwaters; Wilson’s Storm-petrel; Pomarine Jaeger; and Cassin’s and Rhinoceros Auklets.



Dorothy Wadlow on s/v Joyant scans the horizon during her SeaBC off the Cape Verde Islands. Photo by Tom Wadlow.

Atlantic SeaBC highlights included Harlequin Duck; Gray-headed, Black-browed and Wandering Albatrosses; Northern and Southern Fulmars; Cape, Herald (Trinidad), Fea’s, Blue, Bulwer’s and White-chinned Petrels; Antarctic and Slender-billed Prions; Cape Verde Shearwater; White-faced Storm-petrel; White-tailed and Red-billed Tropicbirds; Magnificent Frigatebird; Brown Booby; Black-legged Kittiwake; South Polar Skua; Dovekie and Razorbill.

Until next year’s event, Doyle reminds boaters they can contribute coastal and off-shore bird sightings throughout the year to eBird (www.eBird.org). She encourages boaters to post digital photos of any seabirds, noting the latitude and longitude.

Boating birders can share sightings, receive identification help, and review a list of recommended paper and digital field guides at the community page: www.facebook.com/Birding.Aboard.

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