



*There's plenty to see and record out there! © C. Speedie*

The SeaBC Sea Bird Count is a citizen science project organized by a volunteer group of nine long-distance birding sailors from around the world. The idea of a “SeaBC” was inspired by popular, long-standing land-based counts such as Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count (CBC) and the Census Bird Count (CBC) in the U.K. Our mission is to benefit seabird conservation by mobilizing the worldwide boating community to document ocean bird sightings, providing critical and seldom-recorded data on seabird abundance and distribution and on ocean migration routes.

SeaBC seabird count data goes to Cornell University’s eBird database ([www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)), where boaters’ sightings become a resource for scientists worldwide. Seabird knowledge is described as a frontier science: Last year a new seabird species was discovered and a species believed to be extinct was sighted. For some species, breeding or wintering areas remain unknown. This lack of knowledge is troubling given that BirdLife International estimates one-third of seabirds are now vulnerable or globally endangered due to threats from predators on nesting grounds, some fisheries practices, and marine pollution such as plastics.

Conservation efforts first require understanding. In the case of seabirds, study has traditionally focused on breeding grounds where the birds are easiest to study. Yet seabirds spend most of their life at sea, and the difficult logistics have curtailed understanding of all aspects of their life history. Hence the role of citizen scientists, in this case boaters who cruise offshore or along the coast.

SeaBC Founder and yachswoman Diana Doyle believes that “it is a natural fit to ask Ocean Cruising Club members—who are already out on the water, with global reach, in under-surveyed waters—to help out by taking digital photos of seabirds, uploading photos, and reporting sightings”. And she points out that “participants do not need to be ‘seabird experts’ or knowledgeable about seabirds. We have set up an online Facebook forum and work with a designated eBird seabird reviewer for identification help and to ensure the validity of the data. OCC members can make a huge contribution simply by photographing seabirds and recording the latitude and longitude”.

With budget cutbacks leaving research vessels with less sea-time—and concern about recent shifts in the ocean's ecology—the contribution of the “yachts of opportunity” that OCC members can provide is all the more important.

**Project Goals:**

- Educate mariners about seabirds and their conservation.
- Mobilize the long-distance boating community to contribute seldom-recorded seabird data to an established international citizen science database.
- Benefit seabird conservation by contributing information on seabird abundance and distribution.
- Initiate an awareness of the urgency of collecting baseline data.
- Identify experienced and interested boaters with vessels, extending the land-based range of established projects such as Audubon's CBC and Cornell University's eBird.

**Resources:** New resources and recording forms (including electronic versions) are currently being prepared to enable you to take part. If you'd like to receive copies just as soon as they become available, please register your interest by contacting Colin Speedie at [colin@wave-action.com](mailto:colin@wave-action.com)