



# Seabird Safe Toolkit

Practical information  
to help fishers reduce  
seabird bycatch

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- Offal (Fish Guts) Management Guide
- Safe Handling Guide – Hooked Birds
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# Seabird Safe Toolkit

Practical information to help fishers  
reduce seabird bycatch.

## What is the Toolkit?

This toolkit is designed to help fishers take action to reduce the risk of accidentally catching seabirds while fishing for their target catch. It supports the objectives of the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative by making it easier for you to take action.

We want to support the fishing industry, while being seabird safe.



## Better for seabirds. Better for fishing.

The fewer seabirds accidentally caught, the less time you need to spend safely releasing them, or repairing gear damaged during bycatch events.

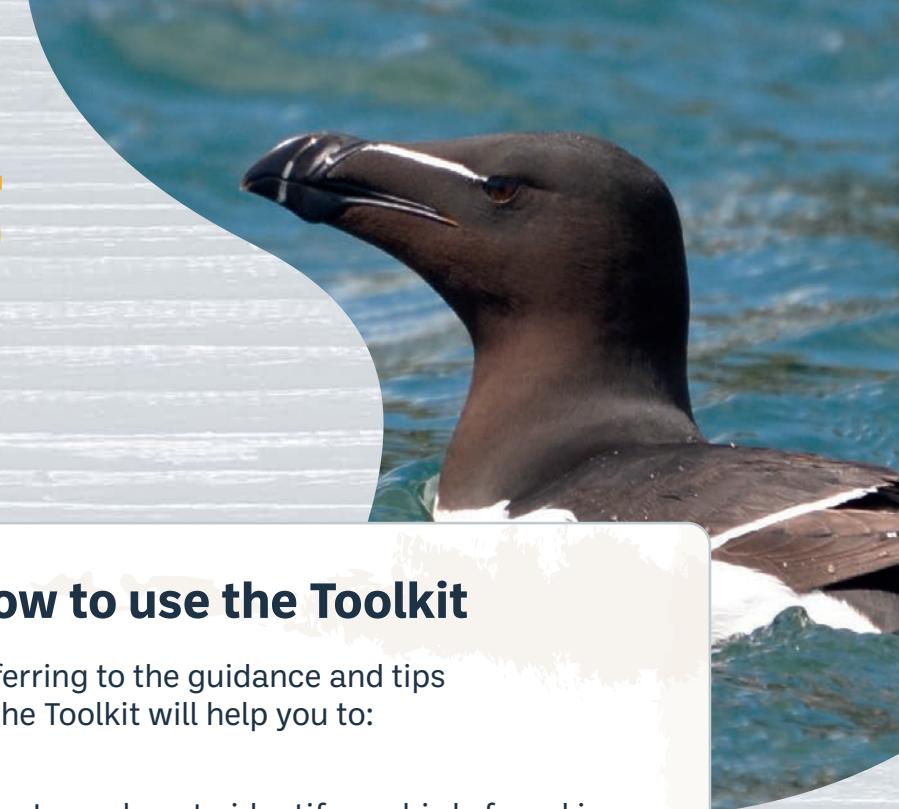
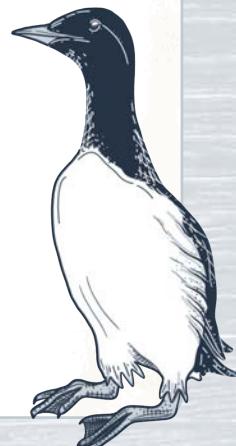
Taking small but important actions can stop seabirds from being attracted to fishing vessels, and can reduce the risk of them being caught.



## How to use the Toolkit

Referring to the guidance and tips in the Toolkit will help you to:

- Learn how to identify seabirds found in the UK, and recognise which ones are most likely to be accidentally caught.
- Adapt management of offal (fish guts) and gear to help reduce the number of seabirds approaching your vessel.
- Safely handle and release accidentally caught seabirds.



# Industry Insight



We asked some members of the fishing industry what has worked for them in reducing their seabird bycatch.

## 1 Store offal (fish guts) in a sealed container.

Keep the decks clean and store offal (fish guts) and waste in a container with a lid.



## 2 Seabirds can be safely handled by following some simple steps.

Handling bycaught seabirds properly, and giving them time to recover, can help them survive.



## 3 Reduce chances that baited hooks will attract birds.

Preparing baited hooks below deck, using devices to deter birds (i.e. tori/ bird-scaring lines) or adding additional weights to your lines\* will reduce the chance of seabirds being accidentally caught.

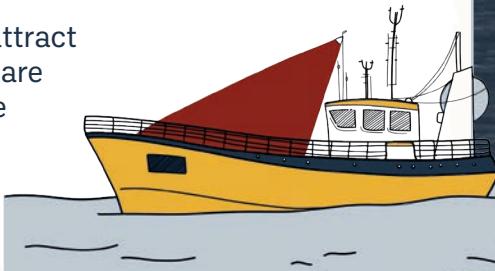
## 4 Consider the 'Decoy' effect.

White buoys can look like seabirds sitting on the water, and cause other birds to flock alongside fishing gear. Changing the colour of buoys can help prevent this from happening.



## 5 Reduce or adapt lighting on deck when fishing at night

When fishing at night, lights can attract more birds to your location. There are options to reduce light levels while still operating safely, such as adding red or green filters to your deck lights.



For more information on specific mitigation measures, please visit [cleancatchuk.com/hub](http://cleancatchuk.com/hub)

\*tori lines have been trialled in parts of the UK's offshore demersal longline fishery (semi-floated or "piedra bola" system). While they deter birds and so provide some reduction in bycatch, further trials are needed to determine how increasing the weighting of the lines can help them sink deeper, and further away from diving seabirds, more quickly.

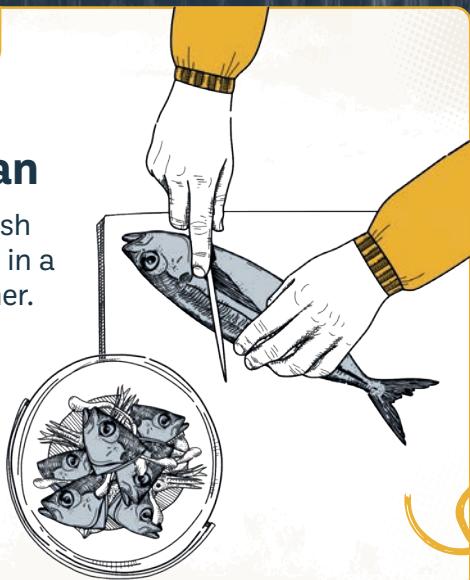
# Seabird Safe Offal (Fish Guts) Management Guide



## STORAGE

### Keep the decks clean

Store all offal (fish guts) and waste in a covered container. Keep it handy on deck during fish or bait processing.



## STORAGE

### Don't attract seabirds

Close the container to stop seabirds smelling it and flocking to the boat.



## DISPOSAL

### Dispose of waste onshore

Ideally, offal (fish guts) should be retained onboard for processing/ disposal onshore.



## DISPOSAL

### Don't release while fishing

Disposing of waste while fishing will attract seabirds, increasing the risk they could be accidentally caught.



## DISPOSAL

### If you have to dispose while fishing, use the other side of the boat.

When releasing waste at sea, make sure you do it on the opposite side of the boat to any active fishing gear. Take all steps to reduce the risk of attracting seabirds to your gear, and only release waste at sea when it's the only option.



# Safe Handling Guide

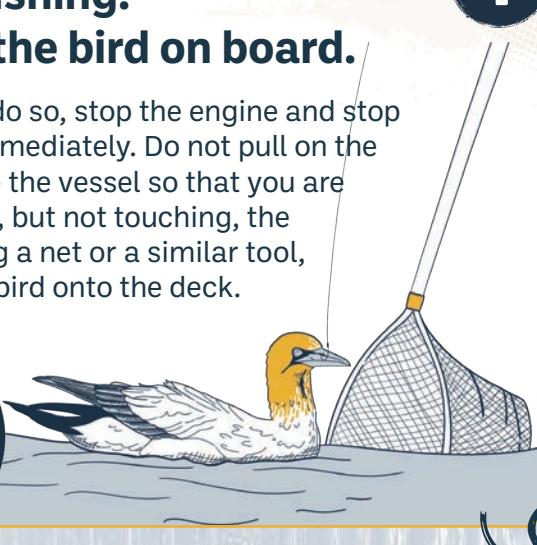
## Hooked Birds

Correct handling can save seabirds.

Please follow these guidelines as closely as you can whilst remaining safe at all times.

### Stop fishing. Bring the bird on board.

If safe to do so, stop the engine and stop fishing immediately. Do not pull on the line. Move the vessel so that you are alongside, but not touching, the bird. Using a net or a similar tool, bring the bird onto the deck.



1

### Create a safe environment.

Cover the bird in a towel, holding its wings to its sides under your arm. Wear gloves and eye protection if you have them. Hold the beak closed, making sure not to cover the nostrils. Gannets' nostrils sit inside their beaks, so keep the beak slightly open with a pencil or similar, while securing the end.



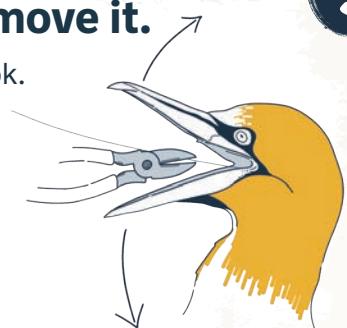
2

### Assess the hook location to determine how to remove it.

Wherever the hook is, never try to pull on the leader or line to release the hook.



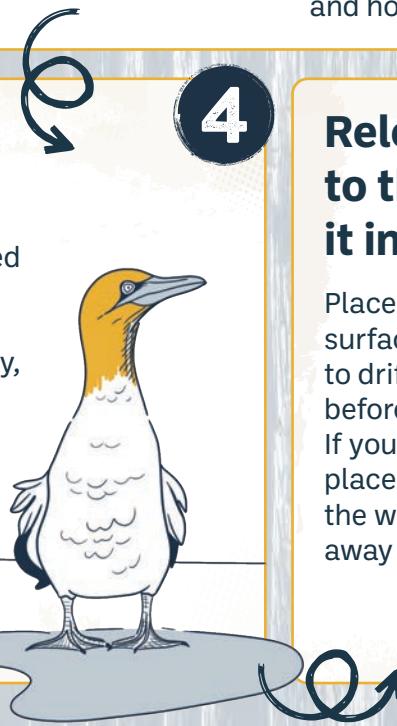
**A** If you can see the hook and reach it easily, cut off the excess line and use bolt cutters to cut the barb off. Remove the rest of the hook by passing the non-barbed end through the bird until it is released.



**B** If you cannot see the hook it has probably been swallowed. Hold the mouth open and cut the excess line as close to the hook as possible, but leave the hook in place. Do not pull the line and hook out.

### Give the bird time to recover.

Place the bird in a dry, protected area to recover – inside a ventilated box if you have one. When the bird's feathers are dry, and it is standing and alert, it is ready to be released.



4

### Release the bird gently to the water. Do not throw it into the air.

Place the bird gently on the surface of the water and allow it to drift or fly away from the vessel before restarting the engine. If you cannot reach the water, place the bird on deck facing the wind and allow it to fly away on its own.



5

# Safe Handling Guide

## Entangled Birds

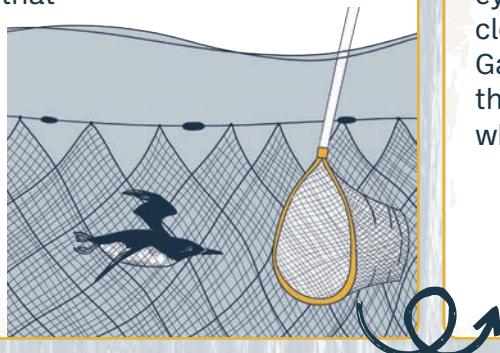
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Please follow these guidelines as closely as you can whilst remaining safe at all times.

### Stop fishing. Bring the bird on board.

If safe to do so, stop the engine and stop fishing immediately. Do not pull on the net.

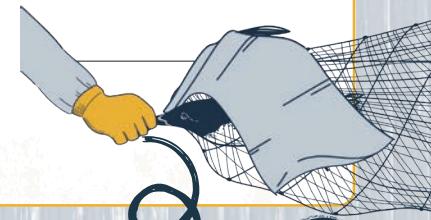
Move the vessel so that you are alongside, but not touching, the bird. Using a net or a similar tool, bring the bird onto the deck.



1

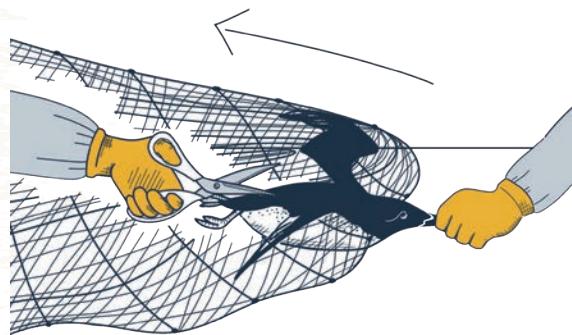
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2

### Disentangle the bird from the net.



Cut the net around the bird. Remove the bird backward – in the direction it entered the net, not further through the net.



3

### Give the bird time to recover.

Place the bird in a dry, protected area to recover – inside a ventilated box if you have one. When the bird's feathers are dry, and it is standing and alert, it is ready to be released.



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### Release the bird gently to the water. Do not throw it into the air.

Place the bird gently on the surface of the water and allow it to drift or fly away from the vessel before restarting the engine. If you cannot reach the water, place the bird on deck facing the wind and allow it to fly away on its own.



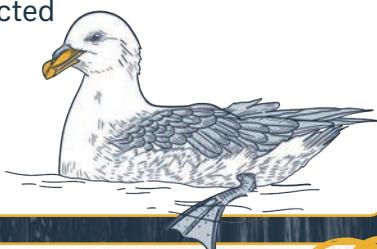
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# Scientific Insight

We asked seabird scientists why seabirds are at risk from fishing activity. By understanding how seabirds interact with fishing gear, we can take steps to avoid catching them accidentally.

## RISK

**Fulmars** are at risk of bycatch from longline fishing because they are attracted to baited hooks, which look like food they fish for. Fulmars are also attracted to offal (fish guts).



## SOLUTION

**Storing offal (fish guts) out of reach** until active fishing has ceased and baiting lines below deck are potential options to reduce the attraction of birds.



## RISK

In fixed net fisheries in southern waters, the risk of seabird bycatch appears to be higher in winter than in summer. In winter, seabirds from big colonies in the north migrate south to prey on shoaling fish like sprats.



## SOLUTION

If possible, **wait to deploy or retrieve your gear until flocking birds near your vessel have dispersed**. Alternatively, consider moving away from the flock. Increasing net attendance may also help deter birds.

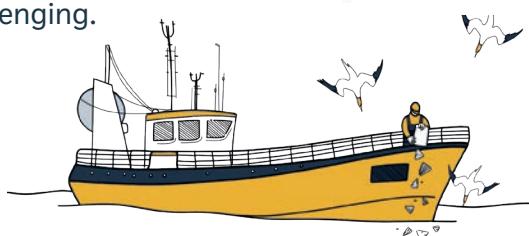
## RISK

**Gannets, fulmars & gulls** have learned to scavenge for offal (fish guts) around fishing boats (particularly fulmars in longline fishing).



## SOLUTION

**Keeping your offal (fish guts) covered and out of reach** of seabirds could stop them from scavenging.



## RISK

Bycatch of **guillemots & cormorants** in fixed nets is often higher in inshore waters. This may be because they (& other seabirds) gather close to their breeding colonies in summer, so they can feed in adjacent waters, or because nets in deeper water are beyond the depth that birds dive.

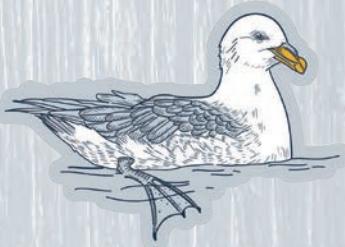


## SOLUTION

If you can see flocks of guillemots (or razorbills, puffins or cormorants) around your boat, **wait to set your net or shoot your haul until the birds have dispersed**, or consider moving somewhere with fewer birds.

# Seabird Safe

# Seabird ID Guide



Use this guide to identify seabirds you see at sea.



Beak Features



Feathers and  
other key  
features

## Gannet

*Morus bassanus*



165-180cm



87-100cm



### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** Bright white body and long pointed white wings with black wingtips and pale yellow head.

**Juvenile Markings:** Black and brown feathers all over.

### Beak Features

Pale grey with black features. Long and pointed.



## Cormorant

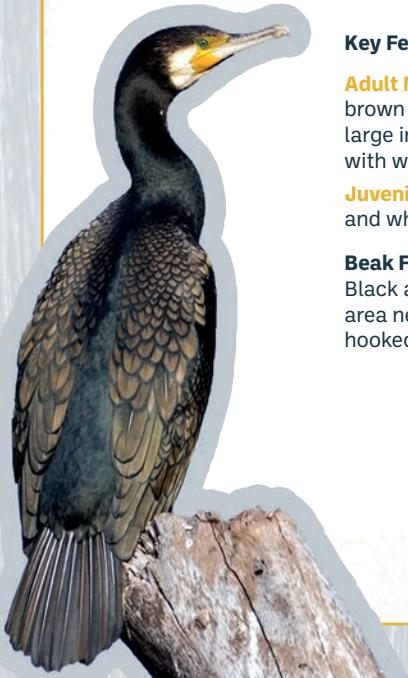
*Phalacrocorax carbo*



130-160cm



80-100cm



### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** Glossy black or brown feathers with long neck. Very large in comparison to shag. Some with white on face and thighs.

**Juvenile Markings:** Brown, grey and white feathers all over.

### Beak Features

Black and white with large yellow area near neck. Long, thick, hooked at the tip.



## Fulmar

*Fulmarus glacialis*



100-120cm



45-50cm

### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** Grey wing and body feathers, with white head and underside. Short neck.

**Juvenile Markings:** Same as adults

### Beak Features

Grey/black with yellow tip. Short and chunky.



## Guillemot

*Uria aalge*



64-73cm



38-45cm

### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** Black/dark brown wings, black head and body feathers, with white underside. White chin in winter with black, horizontal stripe behind eye.

**Juvenile Markings:** Similar to winter adults.

### Beak Features

Black, long, smooth and pointed.



# Seabird Safe

## Seabird ID Guide



### Kittiwake

*Rissa tridactyla*



95-110cm



38-40cm

#### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** White body, pale grey wings with black wingtips and black feet.

**Juvenile Markings:** Black spots behind eyes, white body, additional black feathers all along wings making 'M' shape across the upper back parts.

#### Beak Features

Yellow, medium length and pointed.



### Herring Gull

*Larus argentatus*



130-150cm



54-60cm

#### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** Pale grey back and wings with black wingtips, white underside and pink legs.

**Juvenile Markings:** Black, brown and cream mottled feathers with black beak.

#### Beak Features

Yellow with red spot at the tip. Chunky with a hooked tip and medium length.



### Razorbill

*Alca torda*



37-39cm



63-67cm

#### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** Black back feathers and head, white underside. White chin in winter.

**Juvenile Markings:** Similar to winter adults.

#### Beak Features

Black with white vertical stripe, chunky and short. Beak grooves in older birds.



### Puffin

*Fratercula arctica*



47-63cm



26-29cm

#### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** Black back with a white underside and orange legs. Large, white cheeks in summer, which turn to grey in winter.

**Juvenile Markings:** Similar to winter adults.

#### Beak Features

Chunky, triangular with grooved orange and black bands. Yellow/orange fleshy patch to each side of the beak.

### Shag

*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*



90-105cm



65-80cm

#### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** Steep forehead with tufted crest on head. Green glossy feathers during breeding (summer). No white patches on face or thighs.

**Juvenile Markings:** Brown, white feathers.

#### Beak Features

Black with small yellow area around neck. Long, medium thickness, hooked at the tip.



### Great Black-backed Gull

*Larus marinus*



64-78cm



150-165cm

#### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** Dark grey back and wings, with white head and underside and pink legs.

**Juvenile Markings:** Black feathers, brown and white mottled feather with black beak.

#### Beak Features

Yellow with red spot at the tip. Chunky with a hooked tip and medium length.



### Black Guillemot

*Cephus grylle*



52-58cm



30-32cm

#### Key Features

**Adult Markings:** Black with red legs and a large white patch on each wing in summer. White with black wings and black/grey patches on the back in winter.

**Juvenile Markings:** Similar to winter adults.

#### Beak Features

Black, medium length and thickness, with a pointed tip.





Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

