

Seabirds landing on ships

During the breeding season, burrow nesting petrels travel to and from their breeding colonies under the cover of darkness. Attracted –or disorientated– by a ship's lights, these seabirds may land on deck during the course of the night, unable to take off.



What to do if you find birds?

Inform the person appointed to take care of birds, to take the next steps:

- Handle the birds as little as possible (to avoid stress).
- Keep the birds in a dry, warm, 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 on deck. Data should be sent to IAATO.

When to release the birds?

1. Release the birds when the deck lights are off, or at first light next day.
2. Ensure that there are no Skuas or Gulls around.

How to prevent birds from landing on the ship?

Help to 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.

Each year, birds land on ships operating in the Southern Ocean. Bird species commonly affected include Antarctic Prion, Blue Petrel, Diving-petrels and Storm-petrels.

The legs of petrels are not designed to walk, so these seabirds are unable to take off again and 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.

Conditions of poor visibility (fog, snow or rain) increase the risk of birds becoming disorientated by ship lights. Occasionally, hundreds of birds may land on a vessel 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 / expedition leader on cruises, or a crewmember.

