

FINAL EVALUATION **WA3 - CONSERVING THE SEABIRDS OF CABO VERDE** **2017-2022**

19.10.2022

1. INTRODUCTION

The Cabo Verde archipelago is known over the world as a seabird hotspot. Despite this, seabird populations have declined severely, often because of direct capture, leading to local extinction in some islands and islets, and the complete extinction of the Frigatebird. This situation, together with scarcity of information on seabird conservation status and the threats they face, as well as low public awareness and engagement in the archipelago, inspired us to create an action plan for the conservation of seabirds in Cabo Verde.

Together, we sought to build a solid understanding of the ecology of seabird species while identifying and mitigating threats, both on land and at sea. In addition, we wanted to enable and promote the participation of local technicians in seabird monitoring, increase research capacity, raise awareness across the country, and improve the existing legal framework for the protection of species and relevant sites.

OBJECTIVES

- Improve knowledge on seabird ecology and conservation, and build technical capacity at local level;
- Prepare and secure approval of the National Action Plan for seabird conservation;
- Ensure effective protection for all priority seabird colonies;
- Raise public awareness on the importance of seabirds;
- Improve the legal framework and enforcement of legislation, including through advocacy;
- Develop lasting partnership between NGOs, authorities and academic institutions for seabird conservation.

BUDGET ENGAGED

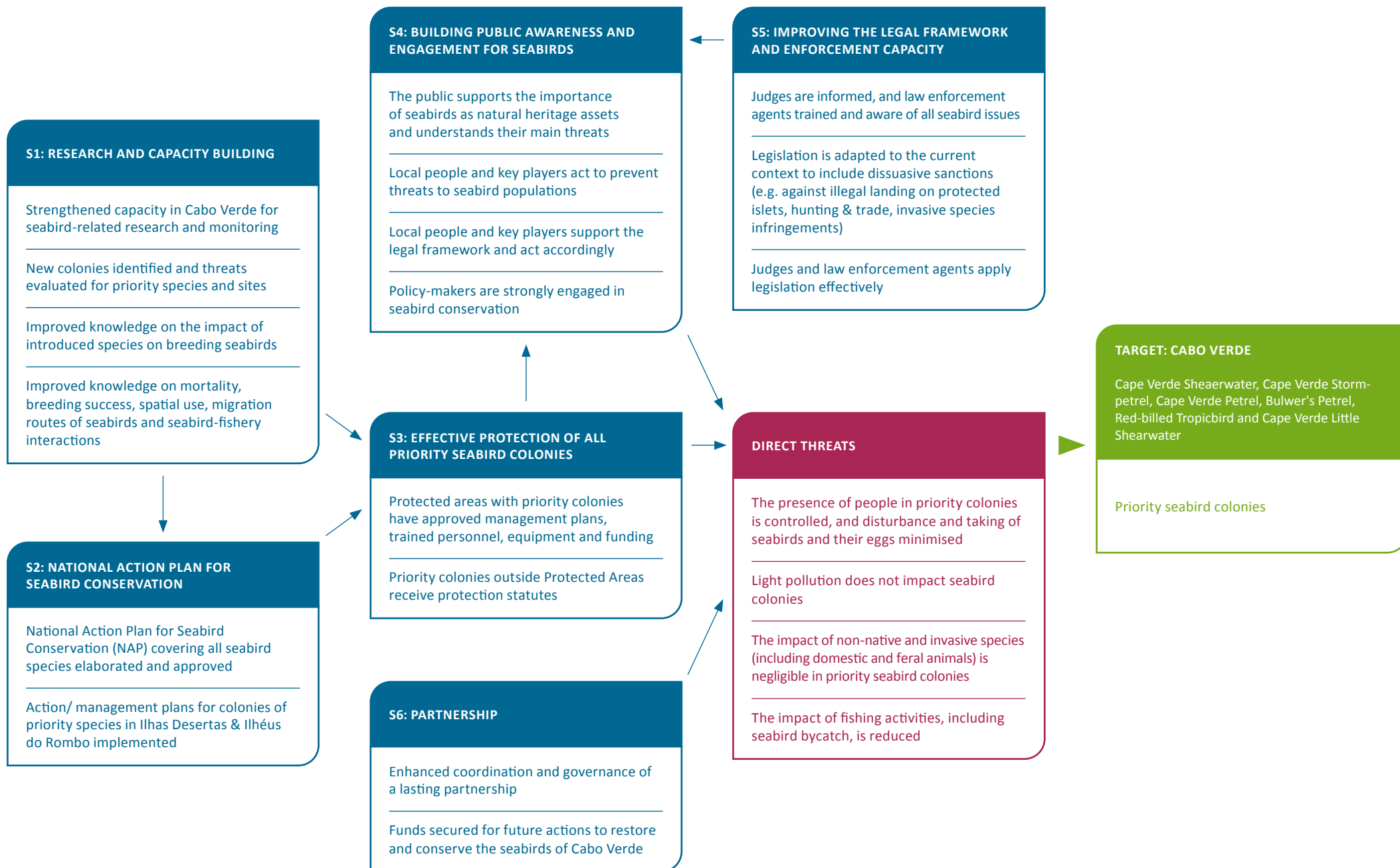
€3,608,000

Phase 1: €1,970,770

Phase 2: €1,637,180

THE PARTNERSHIP





2. PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES

We carried out activities in collaboration with local NGOs and relevant administrative authorities, and with academic and scientific support, used the most advanced technologies available to study seabirds ecology.

Innovative approaches included the deployment of GPS radar detectors on seabirds to study interactions with fisheries, the use of cameras to identify threats and/or invasive species or of automatic recorders to map seabird distribution and abundance, and of a trained search dog to locate Gongon nests.

We developed factsheets for each seabird species nesting in Cabo Verde, covering their ecology, distribution, and specific threats. These will facilitate further consultation around an informed application of relevant legislation.

All communication campaigns were dynamic and innovative, focusing on creative solutions. For the first time in Cabo Verde, we had a TV contest on Nature, documentaries on seabirds, a Mobile Application for environmental games, a Wildlife Live Cam, and a music for environmental protection.

STRATEGY 1: CAPACITY BUILDING OF CAPE VERDEANS IN MONITORING AND RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

Our activities included:

- strengthening capacity for seabird research and monitoring;
- identifying new colonies and assessing threats for priority species and sites;
- improving knowledge on the impacts of introduced species on seabird populations;
- improving knowledge on population dynamics, distribution, migration routes, and interactions with fisheries.

STRATEGY 2: DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR SEABIRD CONSERVATION

Our activities included:

- preparing and securing approval of an Action Plan covering all species of seabirds breeding in Cabo Verde;
- implementing action/management plans for *Ilhas Desertas* and *Ilhéus do Rombo*.

STRATEGY 3: EFFECTIVE PROTECTION OF ALL PRIORITY SEABIRD COLONIES

Our activities included:

- approving management plans for Protected Areas with priority colonies, training staff, and securing equipment and funding;
- improving the protection status of priority colonies outside Protected Areas.

STRATEGY 4: INCREASED PUBLIC AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT IN SEABIRD CONSERVATION

Our activities included:

- raising awareness about the importance of seabirds as part of Cabo Verde's natural heritage and the main threats they face;
- empowering local people and key stakeholders to help combat threats to seabird populations, support legal frameworks for conservation, and act accordingly;
- enhancing policymakers' commitment to seabird conservation.

STRATEGY 5: IMPROVEMENT OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ENFORCEMENT CAPACITY OF NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

Our activities included:

- informing judges and training law enforcement officers about the threats facing seabirds, and how to apply relevant legislation effectively;
- adapting existing legislation to the current context and impose dissuasive and proportionate penalties.

STRATEGY 6: STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS FOR FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY

Our activities included:

- improving coordination and governance for a lasting partnership;
- raising funds for the conservation of seabirds in Cabo Verde.

KEY LESSONS

The knowledge generated during the projects, and the synergies created between different partners, facilitated increased success and achievement, and has opened up opportunities for us to apply for future conservation funding. Amongst those we learnt in our time together, we would like to highlight the following lessons.

1. Effective protection of priority colonies depends on the involvement of relevant environmental authorities at all stages of the project. Increasing the capacity and means of authorities to be involved would improve outcomes.
2. The training of technicians and the standardisation of fieldwork methods for seabirds supported increased capacity and integration in data collection.
3. The use of remote tracking devices to identify areas used by seabirds is a crucial tool in the design of potential Marine Protected Areas.
4. Monitoring and the use of automatic recorders allowed the acquisition of comprehensive data on seabirds for use in updating and identifying new Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).
5. Academic support for and advanced training of Cape Verdean students and technicians supported autonomy in coordinating conservation projects and applying for funding.
6. Efficient communication of project activities increased knowledge and understanding about seabird conservation amongst the Cape Verdean population, and particularly amongst the students.
7. Work carried out to improve academic skills was fundamental to increasing the participation and leadership of Cape Verdeans in contributing to international scientific publications.
8. The engagement of all NGOs in fieldwork and data collection throughout the projects was key to the development of a robust Cape Verde seabird National Action Plan.
9. Strengthening relationships with fishermen was critical to collecting useful information for the design of future seabird bycatch mitigation measures.
10. Strong engagement of projects partners and the quality of results are key to attracting post-MAVA project funding.

OVERVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OAP

During the project, more than 20 students and more than 100 Cape Verdean technicians received training and capacity building in seabird monitoring, data management, and analysis. The academic training of senior staff, undergraduate, masters, and doctoral students, will enable greater autonomy for Cape Verdeans in delivering the conservation of seabirds and their habitats, including fundraising. Most of the graduates are currently working in nature conservation, in NGOs and the public administration. And academic results are generating high quality international scientific publications.

The knowledge acquired allowed for the preparation of a comprehensive National Action Plan for Seabird Conservation that will be used as a management tool for the different breeding species. The plan is in the process of being approved by the Cabo Verde Government, which will give it legislative power. There is also now increased surveillance of priority seabird colonies, mostly by local NGOs. Yet the lack of enforcement of the law banning access to integral reserves hampers the implementation of effective biosecurity measures. However, recent Government action to extend a 300m marine no-take area around Natural Integral Reserves, and to update the protected species law, may help improve the protection of seabirds and their habitats.

More than 1,000 awareness and environmental education activities were carried across the archipelago in schools, universities, and fishing communities. Television programmes and contests, an interpretation centre for seabirds, and advertising spots in airports covering the problem of seabird conservation, had the greatest scope and impact on the Cape Verdean population.

A successful investment was also made in raising awareness and capacity building with national authorities. This should contribute to better enforcement of current laws and the design of improved legislation for conservation in the future.

Professionalism, interaction, and information sharing amongst project partners will facilitate access to future funding that supports the seabird conservation network in Cabo Verde over the long-term.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACTS

More than 30 workshops and practical training sessions in the field provided local NGOs with the necessary skills to conduct all activities independently. More than 10 technicians obtained a high academic training enabling them to perform coordination and data analysis tasks. We have gained a solid knowledge of the threats (introduced species, light pollution, human capture, interactions with fishing activities) and distribution of seabirds, both on land and at sea (new colonies, population dynamics, feeding grounds, migration routes). This informed the elaboration of a detailed National Action Plan for Seabird Conservation, pending government approval.

Through outreach and environmental education activities at different levels of society, there has been a considerable increase in public awareness of seabird conservation. Ten workshops with judges and law enforcement officials contributed to improving their technical knowledge.

The legal framework for species and some conservation-relevant areas, as well as the waters adjacent to protected islets up to 300m, was improved, clarifying their legal protection status. Local NGOs coordinated a common Communications Strategy, sharing experiences and tools, and joining efforts to plan future steps in seabird conservation. These actions strengthened the partnership's ability to engage in lobbying for conservation. The implementation of biosecurity plans was hampered by the absence of controls on access to Natural Integral Reserves.

CASE STUDY 1: IDENTIFICATION OF NEW COLONIES FACILITATED UPDATING CABO VERDE IBAS

All partners were heavily involved in identifying, mapping, and censusing seabird breeding colonies. New colonies were identified on most islands and islets, in particular for Cape Verde shearwater, gongon, red-billed tropicbird, and Cape Verde storm-petrel. Knowledge on numbers and breeding grounds of all seabird species has tremendously improved. In the case of the gongon, a strong search effort by technicians from NGOs, protected areas, local shepherds, and a search dog in the islands of Santo Antão, Fogo, São Nicolau and Santiago, revealed twenty times the number of previously known nests, and the identification of new courtship areas. All this information was recorded and homogenized to develop a new proposal for terrestrial IBAs. This will provide protection to new areas and terrestrial ecosystems, with impacts far beyond the conservation of seabird colonies.



Gongon adults on Monte Fontainhas, Fogo Island (© Jacob González-Solís).

CASE STUDY 2: INNOVATIVE COMMUNICATIONS LED TO THE INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SEABIRD CONSERVATION

Several awareness-raising campaigns were carried out as part of the project, reaching all sectors of society, from schools to fishing communities and the general public. These included dedicated lectures, campaigns with 'Stand Edu', dissemination of educational videos, production of a children's comic book, a television programme (Eco-Star), and a television contest (Vencedor pela Natureza), an interpretation centre for seabirds (Funco GonGon), permanent dissemination of videos and documentaries in airports and several public spaces, a gongon Live Cam and the production of a documentary on seabirds. An Android application, 'Colecionador de Espécies' (Species Collector) was also created and a song alluding to environmental protection was produced by ten Cape Verdean artists. These campaigns were coordinated by partners and delivered across the archipelago, with special emphasis on reaching villages near seabird breeding areas. Through these activities, we secured widespread public support for seabird conservation, as well as recognition of their importance as a key part of Cabo Verde's natural heritage, which has contributed to greater interest and support from other stakeholders and legislators.



Lecture about seabirds at a school in São Vicente Island (2).jp

KEY IMPACTS

Through the project, we made a major effort to increase technical capacity. There is now at least one NGO on each island capable of working autonomously on seabirds. An innovative communications strategy helped to increase public awareness and understanding, and change attitudes to seabird conservation. And the level of scientific knowledge on seabirds in Cabo Verde is now of world-class reputation. The project also delivered organisational strengthening, empowering NGOs to engage in advocacy and lobbying with government, and securing improvement in the legal framework for seabird conservation. Together, our results set the foundations for the effective management of seabird populations and associated ecosystems. And now Cabo Verde is considered a reference for best practice in seabird conservation in West Africa and beyond! Key outcomes include the following:

1. More than 100 technicians have been trained in seabird monitoring and research, and four MSc and 2 PhDs have been awarded, providing local capacities and strong autonomy for Cape Verdeans- NGOs.
2. The great increase in knowledge about the phenology, threats to, and population dynamics of all seabird species informed the elaboration of a new National Action Plan for Seabird Conservation.
3. Knowledge on the distribution and feeding areas of seabirds has informed the terrestrial and marine IBAs network update.
4. Effective and widespread awareness-raising campaigns have led to significant behavioural change amongst the Cabo Verde population in support of seabird conservation.
5. The legal framework for the protection of seabird species and breeding grounds has been improved.
6. Development of strong partnerships amongst NGOs dedicated to seabird conservation led to increased lobbying and advocacy capacity.

4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

After MAVA closes, we foresee the following challenges and opportunities:

- maintaining our network of partners and continuing monitoring work;
- finding new sources of funding;
- continuing to raise public awareness about the importance of seabird conservation;
- implementing legislation and approving management plans for protected areas;
- implementing Cabo Verde's National Action Plan for Seabird Conservation;
- developing a network of marine protected areas;
- increasing engagement of national authorities in conservation.

All partners intend to continue collaborating through the “Taola +” network which aims to cover different conservation targets. We will also continue to seek collaboration with new national and international partners.

For the continuation of seabird conservation activities, the Hans Wilsdorf Foundation has already committed €1.8M in funding for the next three years. From this, we expect to leverage further funding opportunities. And based on the knowledge we have acquired, and using an adaptive approach, we will sustain the partnership’s strategies and actions over the long-term.

*“De Cabo Verde,
levantam no seu
primeiro voo para uma
longa jornada oceânica”*

From Cabo Verde, they fledge and fly off for a long oceanic journey (Thais Macedo)

*“Pamus di mar
patrimoniui di nos terra”*

Seabirds, our heritage; Aves marinhas, património da nossa terra (Samir Martins)

