

**PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE CONVENTION ON THE  
CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS**

**A.PROPOSAL:** Listing of *Larus atlanticus* in Appendix I

**B.PROPONENT:** Government of the Argentine Republic

**C.SUPPORTING STATEMENT**

Olrog's gull (*Larus atlanticus*) is an endemic species of the Argentine Atlantic coast, considered internationally to be a "threatened species" (Collar and Andrew 1989) and classified as "insufficiently known" (Bertonatti and Gonzalez 1992, Collar et al 1992). Some of its characteristics have important implications for its conservation. Owing to the small size of the total population and low number of breeding colonies, its limited range and apparently specialized nature of its habitat and food during the reproductive period, it forms a rare and therefore vulnerable species. The scant information available suggests that it migrates during the non-breeding season to the coasts north of Buenos Aires province and Uruguay. Adequate measures for the conservation of the population or of the environments used by it during this stage in its annual cycle are completely lacking.

**1.Taxon**

1.1. Class	Aves
1.2. Order	Charadriiformes
1.3. Family	Laridae
1.4. Genus and species	<i>Larus atlanticus</i> (Olrog 1958)
1.5. Common name	
Spanish:	Gaviota de Olrog; Gaviota Cangrejera
English:	Olrog's gull
French:	Goéland d'Olrog

**2.Biological data**

**2.1. Distribution**

Olrog's gull is an endemic species of the Argentine Atlantic coast. It has a limited breeding range. Two nesting areas have been identified: south of Buenos Aires (from Bahía Blanca - 39°12'S, 61°52'W - to Bahía San Blas - 40°33'S, 62°16'W) and south of Chubut (from Bahía Melo - 45°02'S, 65°52'W - to Caleta Malaspina - 45°11'S, 66°31'W). The two areas are more than 600 kilometres distant from one another. Outside the breeding season the species migrates northwards along the coasts of Buenos Aires province and Uruguay (Collar *et al* 1992). Individuals have been sighted at different times of the year in various places on the Argentine coast (Buenos Aires, Río Negro and Chubut, with one sighting in January in Puerto Deseado, Santa Cruz) and, mainly in winter, on the coasts of Uruguay (Collar *et al* 1992). There have been two winter sightings in Río Grande do Sul, Brazil.

**2.2. Population**

The reproductive population has been estimated to be about 2,300 pairs, distributed over 10 nesting colonies varying in size between 13 and 810 nests (Yorio *et al*, in press). Information produced by the monitoring of 5 of the colonies (Isla Puertos, Isla Arroyo Jabalí, Isla Laguna, Isla Felipe and Isla Vernaci Sudoeste) suggests that the population is stable. However, two of the colonies recorded in 1990 (Isla Brightman and Isla Gama) were not found in 1995. It is possible that the gulls from those colonies moved on to other sites since a colony of about 800 nests was recorded for the first time that year.

### 2.3.Habitat

The information available suggests that the species has a specialized habitat (Escalante 1984, Yorio and Harris 1992). Most of the breeding colonies are limited to muddy or sandy islands and islets with sparse vegetation situated in intertidal environments forming mudflats and/or numerous *cangrejales* (swampy lands plenty of crabs) (Olrog 1967, Devillers 1977, Escalante 1984, Yorio and Harris 1992). Outside the breeding season Olrog's gull is to be found at the outlets of rivers, streams and lakes containing brackish water (Escalante 1984, Spivak and Sánchez 1992). In Uruguay it has also been sighted on marine outcrops (Escalante 1966).

The apparently specialized nature of the bird's habitat seems to be linked to its eating habits. The information available suggests that Olrog's gull has a specialized feeding strategy during the breeding season. Its diet consists mainly of crabs (*Chasmagnatus* sp., *Cyrtograpsus* sp. and *Uca* sp) (Daguerre 1933, Escalante 1966, 1970, 1984, Devillers 1977, Collar *et al* 1992, Spivak and Sánchez 1992), although it also feeds on mussels (*Mytilus* sp.) along the rocky coasts in wintering areas (Escalante 1966). It is clear from this that the protection of such environments is the key to its conservation.

### 2.4.Migrations

Little is known about the migratory movements of the species. Existing information suggests however that Olrog's gull moves northwards outside the breeding season and may go as far as the northern coasts of Buenos Aires province, Uruguay and stray into southern Brazil (Escalante 1984, Collar *et al* 1992). Nevertheless, in the vicinity of Bahía Blanca, Argentina, Olrog's gull can be seen through the year (Belenguer *et al* 1993). Waterbird censuses conducted along Uruguay coast during the month of July counted 25 individuals in 1990, 10 in 1991, 210 in 1992 and 151 in 1994 (Blanco and Canevari 1992, 1993, 1995). Summer censuses during the same years did not detect the species. There is only one data for February 1994. The species was not observed during the winter and summer censuses in coastal Brazil (Blanco y Canevari 1992, 1993, 1995). The claim that this species migrates to the south of Patagonia is based only on occasional sightings.

## **3.Threat data**

### 3.1.Direct threats to the population

The only direct threat consists in the occasional removal of eggs by local people in the colonies in the southern part of Buenos Aires province, Argentina.

### 3.2.Habitat destruction

In some of the islands and islets south of Buenos Aires environments have been considerably affected by human activity. Industrial and agricultural development in this area, particularly in the neighbourhood of Bahía Blanca, is resulting in increasing pollution, which could be harming the intertidal environments where the species feeds.

### 3.3.Indirect threats

The environments used by Olrog's gull are exposed to several threats, being used in a variety of ways. Particularly noteworthy among activities having a major impact on the environment in the zone of Bahía Blanca are those to do with industry, port operations, agriculture and urban life. Several ports with transit and freight areas lie within the estuary. The zones adjoining San Blas are used for recreational activities, which have a disturbing effect on nesting and feeding areas. The zone of Bahía Anegada could also be developed for tourism, which would benefit the local human population (Gimenez Dixon 1986). In the breeding areas south of Chubut seaweed and guano gathering is practised, but it is not known whether this has any adverse effects on the gulls.

### 3.4.Threats connected especially with migrations

### 3.5.National and international utilization

Apart from sporadic use of the gulls' eggs by the local people, as mentioned in paragraph 3.1, the species is not used nationally or internationally.

## **4.Protection status and needs**

### 4.1.National protection status

The islands in the estuary of Bahía Blanca, excluding the water area, have been declared a Multi-purpose Provincial Reserve, although the provincial law to that effect has not yet been followed by any regulating decree. The colonies located in this area account for approximately 40 per cent of the estimated reproductive population in 1995. The islands are not adequately protected. The muddy adjoining and intertidal waters used by the gulls are not included in the reserve. In the recent past Olrog's gull has bred in the Bahía San Blas Reserve (Gama Island), although in 1995 there were no signs that it had done so.

The species has been sighted crossing or feeding in several other reserves on the Argentine Atlantic seaboard, such as Ribera Norte, Costanera Sur, Campos del Tuyú, Punta Bermeja, Caleta de los Loros, Complejo Islote Lobos, Punta Pirámides and Puerto Deseado (Collar et al 1992, Chebez 1992).

### 4.2.International protection status

No protection exists at international level.

### 4.3.Additional protection needs

(1) Implementing of effective measures to improve the protection currently provided for protected areas, including the zoning of reserves, the appointment of rangers and the establishment of monitoring and supervisory mechanisms.

(2) Changing the boundaries of the present provincial reserves so as to include the Islote Colina de los Riachos colony in the Bahía San Blas Reserve and so that the muddy intertidal waters adjacent to the islands can benefit from the protection of the Isla Embudo, Bermeja and Trinidad Reserve.

(3) Designation of new protected areas in the south of Chubut province, so as to include at least some of the southern colonies.

(4) Increasing measures to minimize the impact on coastal environments of the various pollution-producing human activities.

(5) Advisability of drawing up agreements among Range States to ensure the conservation of the species during the migratory period.

## **5.Range States**

Argentina (breeding, migration and resting areas), Uruguay (migration and resting area) and Brazil (occasional presence).

## 6. Comments from Range States

## 7. Other comments

## 8. References

- Belenguer, C.** 1993. Observaciones de aves playeras migratorias de Bahía Blanca. Boletín GAL n: 10.
- Bertonatti, C. y Gonzalez, F.** 1992. Lista de vertebrados argentinos amenazados de extinción. Boletín Técnico N 8. Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina.
- Blanco, D.E. y Canevari, P.** 1992. Censo Neotropical de Aves Acuáticas 1991. Programa de Ambientes Acuáticos Neotropicales (NWP), Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Blanco, D.E. y Canevari, P.** 1993. Censo Neotropical de Aves Acuáticas 1992. Humedales para las Américas, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Blanco, D.E. y Canevari, P.** 1995. Censo Neotropical de Aves Acuáticas 1994. Humedales para las Américas, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Chebez, J.C.** 1992. Los que se van. Especies Argentinas en peligro. Editorial Albatros.
- Collar, N.J. and Andrew, P.** 1989. Birds to Watch. The ICBP world checklist of threatened species. ICBP Technical Publication N 8.
- Collar, N., Gonzaga, L., Krabbe, N., Madroño Nieto, A.G., Naranjo, L.G., Parker, T.A. and Wege, D.** 1992. Threatened birds of the Americas: the ICBP Red Data Book. Cambridge, UK: Internacional Council for Bird Preservation.
- Daguerre, J.B.** 1933. Dos aves nuevas para la fauna argentina. Hornero 5:213-214.
- Devillers, P.** 1977. Observations at a breeding colony of *Larus (belcheri) atlanticus*. Gerfaut 67: 22-43.
- Escalante, R.** 1966. Notes on the Uruguayan population of *Larus belcheri*. Condor 68: 507-510.
- Escalante, R.** 1970. Aves Marinas del Río de la Plata y Aguas Vecinas del Océano Atlántico. 199 pp.
- Escalante, R.** 1984. Problemas en la conservación de dos poblaciones de laridos sobre la costa atlántica de Sudamérica [*Larus (belcheri) atlanticus* y *Sterna maxima*]. Actas de la IIIa Reunión Iberoamericana de Conservación y Zoología de Vertebrados. Bs.As. Arg. 15 al 19 de Nov. de 1984. Rev. Mus. Arg. Cienc. Nat. "B. Rivadavia". Zool. Tomo XIII: 1-60.
- Gimenez Dixon, M.** 1986. Informe de la evaluación efectuada con relación a la creación de una reserva faunística en la zona de Bahía San Blas (Pdo. Patagones). Ministerio de Asuntos Agrarios. Pcia. de Bs.As.
- Olrog, C.C.** 1967. Breeding of the Band-tailed gull (*Larus belcheri*) on the Atlantic coast of Argentina. Condor 69:42-48.
- Spivak, E. y Sanchez, N.** 1992. Prey selection by *Larus belcheri atlanticus* in Mar Chiquita lagoon, Buenos Aires, Argentina: a posible explanation for its discontinuous distribution. Revista Chilena de Historia Natural 65: 209-220.
- Yorio, P.M. y Harris, G.** 1992. Actualización en la distribución reproductiva, estado poblacional y conservación de la gaviota de Olrog (*Larus atlanticus*). El Hornero 13: 200-202.
- Yorio, P., Punta, G., Rabano, D., Rabuffetti, F., Herrera, G., Saravia, J. y Friedrich, P.** New breeding sites of the Olrog's Gull (*Larus atlanticus*) in coastal Argentina. Bird Conservation International.