

Developing Relationships to Protect the Waved Albatross



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Waved Albatrosses, such as these fighting over bait, risk being drowned on longlines in Ecuadorian artisanal fisheries. Photo: Jeff Mangel, Pro Delphinus

If you try to picture a typical conservation education workshop, you would probably conjure up images of flipcharts and rows of folding chairs under fluorescent lights, but when it comes to outreach with fishermen in Latin America, little could be further from reality.

One early morning this October, I found myself sitting on an overturned bucket in the midst of the small, local fishing port of Santa Rosa, Ecuador, watching the local fishermen land their catch. The scene seemed like utter chaos at first, with a rich bouquet of blood and offal complementing the noise and bustle. Dozens of sharks were being tossed at our feet, finned, and piled to one side. A sailfish weighing well over one hundred pounds was attracting a lot of attention nearby. Down on the beach, men hurried in every direction, most buying or selling fish, but also a few revelers from the night before, in search of fresh Ecuadorian ceviche, a cold soup of raw fish widely thought to be a potent cure for hangovers.

Soon, the scene began to organize itself. As the boats came in from sea and unloaded their catch on a narrow dock

at one end of the beach, merchants and buyers surged forward to take a look, with much ensuing shouting. As compelling as the scene was, however, our interest there was not about fish, but birds, or one specific bird, the critically endangered Waved Albatross.

ABC and the Ecuadorian conservation group Equilibrio Azul had begun a program working with fishermen from this small fishing fleet to understand more about the behavior of and threats to the Waved Albatross. Although their vessels are small and don't go far by commercial standards, we know anecdotally that these "artisanal" fishermen have frequent interaction with albatrosses. We stand to learn a lot from their experience and knowledge, and gain good data with their cooperation. Ultimately, though, our longer-term goal is to educate the fishing community and