

**Europe's birds
after 25 years of the
EU Birds Directive**



BirdLife
INTERNATIONAL

Together for birds and people

‘The EU Birds Directive has succeeded in being a vital legal instrument, acting in the broadest public interest to conserve Europe’s natural heritage for present and future generations’

The first 25 years

BirdLife International’s landmark new assessment of the status of Europe’s wild birds suggests that:

- the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) is successful in helping those bird species to which it affords special protection, for example through the classification of Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

but

- other species are suffering from the effects of EU sectoral policies, especially the Common Agricultural Policy, and from additional pressures that run counter to the Birds Directive

The overall conservation status of birds is worsening throughout Europe. Farmland birds, long-distance migrants and waders are doing particularly badly.

However, the EU Birds Directive has made some progress in reversing these trends. Specially protected species (listed on Annex I of the Directive) are faring better than other species, especially within the first 15 Member States of the EU (EU15).

This suggests special conservation measures undertaken by Member States (including the classification of SPAs) can indeed work – but only if they are implemented and funded properly.

BirdLife International calls on the leaders of all EU Member States and the EU institutions to act together in fully implementing the Birds Directive, to help fulfil their commitment to halt the loss of Europe’s biodiversity by 2010. The fate of our birds, as part of our European heritage and as indicators of the health of ecosystems, is intimately bound together with our own.

- ▼ **Corncrake *Crex crex*** is one of 40 species of global conservation concern in Europe – six more than in 1994.

The status of Europe’s birds

BirdLife International provides cutting-edge analysis and high quality data on status and trends of wild birds in the EU and in Europe as a whole. Information given in this brochure comes from *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status* and *Birds in the European Union: a status assessment* (both published in November 2004, available via <http://birdsineurope.birdlife.org>).

Using scientifically sound and widely approved methods, the conservation status of all European bird species is assessed as favourable or unfavourable.



PHOTO: C. Gomersal/RSPB-Images

- ▲ **Little Tern *Sterna albifrons***, a marine long distance migrant that has continued to decline significantly during the 1990s.

The EU Birds Directive

The European Union Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds had its 25th anniversary in 2004. It aims to conserve all wild birds occurring naturally in the European territory of the Member States.

Annex I of the Directive lists the threatened and vulnerable species for which, together with migratory species, Member States are required to undertake special conservation measures, including the classification of **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)**.

Annex II lists bird species that may be hunted under the legislation of the Member States. The Directive bans certain non-selective methods of hunting and defines the limits within which Member States can set the hunting season.

PHOTO: A. Hay/RSPB-Images



‘The Birds Directive is working best for the specially protected species listed on Annex I’



Europe's birds benefit from the Birds Directive

In the first 15 Member States of the EU (EU15), many bird populations showed a significant overall increase during the 1990s that was not evident elsewhere in Europe. In particular, the specially protected Annex I species, and species of inland wetlands, Mediterranean forest and montane grassland, have done better in the EU15 than outside.

Annex I (specially protected) species are generally faring better than other species:

- more Annex I species now have a favourable conservation status than in 1994
- of the 14 species whose status has improved from unfavourable to favourable in the last decade, ten are on Annex I

The fact that wetland and colonial bird species, which are especially site dependent, are doing relatively well demonstrates the benefits of the SPA network.

The Birds Directive seems to be working for species listed on Annex I. Many are responding positively to protection through the SPA network and other special conservation measures, such as those prescribed by Species Action Plans. The LIFE-Nature programme has been invaluable in funding this work.

But 72% of Annex I species are still in trouble in the EU.

- ▼ During 1990-2000 the **Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus***, an Annex I species, has increased so that it now has a favourable conservation status.



PHOTO: Velká Fatra

- ▲ The native coniferous forest at Velká Fatra was identified as an IBA because of its important populations of Annex I species and has now been classified as SPA.

Action plans for Europe's most threatened birds

In July 2004, BirdLife International produced a report^[1] for the European Commission reviewing implementation of the first 23 international Species Action Plans, as adopted in 1996.

BirdLife's data show:

Species targeted by an international Action Plan tend to do better than those without:

- implementation was fullest in the UK, the Netherlands, Hungary, Portugal and Austria
- significant progress was made in implementation of 18 of the 23 species action plans
- the most complete implementation was for two critically endangered birds, **Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira*** and **Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris***, followed by **Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus***
- progress was limited for only two species: **White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*** (due to inadequate eradication of the introduced **Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis***) and **Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni***
- the EU LIFE-Nature fund^[2] contributed to the conservation of all 23 species; it was the main driving force in the conservation of the eight Portuguese and Spanish island endemics, and has played a very significant role in the implementation of some 14 plans in Spain and Greece

Overall, the fortunes of these species improved in 12 cases, deteriorated in six cases, and remained the same in three cases. (Trends for two Canary Islands species are not yet known.)

^[1] 'Implementation of 23 species action plans in the European Union' can be downloaded from http://www.birdlife.org/action/awareness/eu_birds_directive/

^[2] LIFE-Nature, the EU Financial Instrument introduced in 1992, co-finances projects aimed at conservation of natural habitats and the wild fauna and flora of EU interest, in support of implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives. It may not continue after 2006.



PHOTO: C. Gomersall/RSPB-Images

‘The overall conservation status of birds is worsening throughout Europe. Farmland birds, long-distant migrants and waders are doing particularly badly’

Birds are suffering from land-use policies

Despite the progress made in the EU through the Birds Directive, the conservation status of many birds in Europe has worsened alarmingly:

- 43% of Europe's 526 bird species are now in trouble (5% more than in 1994)
- in the last ten years 45 species have declined in status, but only 14 have improved

Farmland birds, waders and sub-Saharan migrants are doing worst. Major causes are powerful EU policy instruments such as the CAP, but the causes of declines in many waders and long-distance migrants are not yet understood.

In the last ten years across Europe:

- farmland species have continued to decline significantly, especially in countries with higher agricultural intensity^[3]
- many wader species have undergone such rapid declines that more than 50% of species are now in poor condition
- long-distance migrants have declined significantly: some 60% of the 161 species wintering south of the Sahara or in Asia are now in trouble

Many huntable (Annex II) species need urgent attention:

- almost half the EU's 81 huntable species are now in trouble
- eight Annex II species have declined to unfavourable conservation status, whereas only two species (**Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*** and **Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica***) are no longer considered to be of conservation concern

This underlines the need to increase efforts by all stakeholders to implement management plans for these species.

^[3] As measured by cereal yield

▼ **Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, an Annex II species that has declined to unfavourable conservation status.**



Completion of the good work on the SPA network needed

Only about a third of the EU25 countries are coming close to completion of their SPA (Special Protection Areas) network.

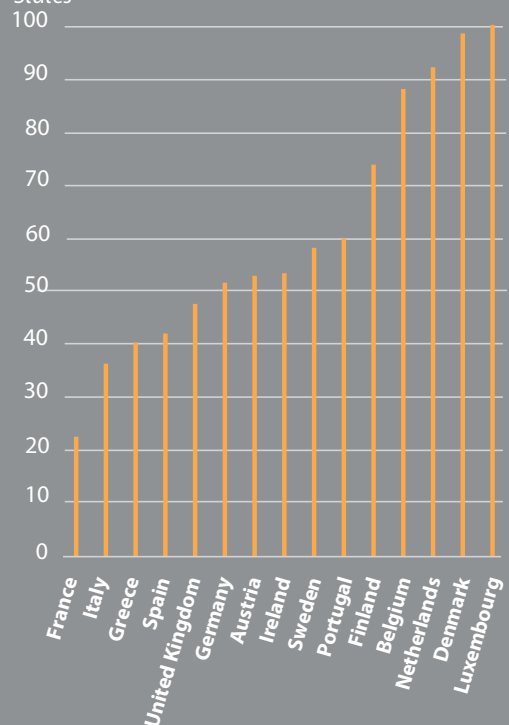
In the EU15, the SPA network is still inadequate compared to Important Bird Areas (IBAs^[4]):

- only 44% of the total IBA area is classified as SPA^[5]
- nationally, the proportion of IBAs covered by SPAs ranges from a very low 22% in France to over 80% in Denmark, Netherlands and Belgium, and 100% in Luxembourg (**Figure 1**)

The new Member States have made a good start with SPA classification:

- Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia have submitted SPA lists covering 88-94% of IBAs

Figure 1 Proportion of Important Bird Areas covered by Special Protection Areas for each of the EU15 Member States



^[4] IBAs are identified by BirdLife International according to strict scientific criteria and have been recognised by the European Court of Justice as a foundation for the classification of SPAs.

^[5] This excludes marine sites, whose identification is still incomplete.



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The Birds Directive and the 2010 target

Europe’s governments have committed themselves to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010:

- the EU Heads of State did this at the Gothenburg European Council in 2001, adopting the EU Sustainable Development Strategy
- all Europe’s Environment Ministers did this at the Fifth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, at Kiev in May 2003

At Malahide in May 2004, EU stakeholders agreed on what needs to be done to achieve the 2010 target.

BirdLife analyses indicate that the Birds Directive, the Natura 2000 network and the LIFE-Nature fund are effective instruments to achieve this target. However, they also suggest that not enough is being done to prevent other EU policies, such as the Common Agricultural and Transport Policies, running counter to the 2010 target.

BirdLife International challenges the leaders of all EU Member States and all EU institutions to:

- fully implement the Birds Directive
- demonstrate the political will to put into practice *The Message from Malahide*; this will ensure that all EU policies work towards the goal of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010

BirdLife has set nine biological targets, and 19 priority actions needed to achieve them by 2010, in its brochure *The future of the Birds Directive: the vision of BirdLife International*. Download at http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/esap/esap_intro.html



PHOTO: A Hay/RSPB-Images

▲ **Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***, one of seven farmland or long-distance migrant wader species to have declined to unfavourable conservation status since 1990.

▼ Long distance migrants like **Hoopoe *Upupa epops*** have experienced particularly severe declines, whether or not they are listed on Annex I.



PHOTO: A Torés Sánchez

BirdLife International and the Birds Directive

BirdLife International, the global bird conservation organisation, was instrumental in shaping the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC), and has been helping to make it work since its inception.

The Directive's provisions for establishing Special Protection Areas (SPAs) have motivated BirdLife's Important Bird Areas Programme (IBAs). The criteria for IBA selection in the EU follow closely the requirements of the Directive. BirdLife's species and habitats programmes have solid legal support in the Directive, and are designed to help its implementation. Protection of birds, especially migratory species, from over-exploitation was the main stimulus for the launch of BirdLife International and several of its Partner organisations, and the Directive's provisions on bird-taking remain of crucial importance.



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Front cover **Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*** is one of the species to have benefited from the Birds Directive: it is listed on Annex I. PHOTO: BirdLife

Header photo **Red-backed Shrike *Lanius Collurio***. PHOTO: M Richards/RSPB-Images

Header photo **Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis***. PHOTO: Terje Lislevand