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[Editorial: BirdLife Europe New year's wish : an agreement for a wiser EU budget](#)

The end of 2011 is marked by many global surprises – who would have foreseen a year ago the Arab Spring or the developments of the Euro crisis; but for EU environmental politics, this year has been depressingly business as usual.

Many EU countries are calling for austerity measures, but little debate has happened on the quality of spending.

It seems that the imperative to balance the books is obscuring the basic fact that a euro spent on harmful subsidies is damage to society, while one spent on procuring public goods brings a collective benefit.

As the EU budget debate moves into its decisive stage, **our New Year's wish is that Member States will finally find the intellectual courage to look up from the petty squabble on who gets what and address the fundamental questions of what sort of Europe do we want to build.**

The EU likes to portray itself on the global scene as a progressive force leading the way toward sustainability and the green economy of the future. It has certainly shown leadership in Nagoya and Durban. But these noble intentions are not matched by the actual action. The European Commission's proposal on the LIFE programme has exposed the EU's lack of commitment and ambition, dedicating a trivial 0.32% of the EU budget to the environment and climate funding stream.

LIFE is a small fund that is widely acknowledged to be successful in delivering environmental outcomes, especially for nature and biodiversity (including Natura 2000). It is also efficient in supporting local economies and mobilizing stakeholders and small businesses, thus creating important leverage effects. It is a clear example of effective spending of EU taxpayer's money.

In the current period, LIFE has invested in environmental conservation €130 million a year - less than has been spent through structural funds in one 20km stretch of motorway in Spain, just to give one anecdotic example.

No serious claim of taking the environmental crises seriously can be credible without a rebalancing of the EU Budget.

Dedicating 1% of the EU Budget to the environment seems to us a reasonable request, when 42.3% of the EU budget is formally headed "conservation and management of natural resources". Another way of looking at it is that **only 5 cents per week per EU citizen would pay for a much more ambitious LIFE fund**, able to at least have a bite at one of the greatest societal challenges that we face.

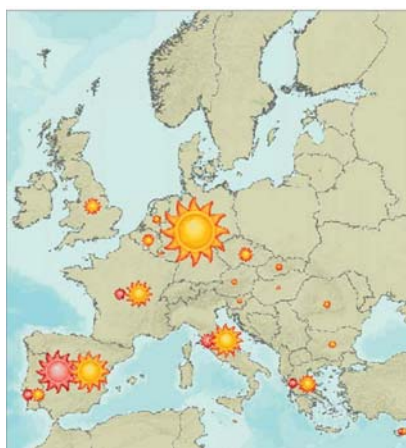
What will the New Year bring for the EU? Great political leadership will be needed to steer the EU out of its financial, economic and political crisis. Even greater leadership will be needed to put us on the road to an ecologically sustainable society.

Spending the EU budget wisely would be a modest positive step forward.

Bruna Campos

EU Financial Perspectives Policy Officer, BirdLife Europe

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Meeting Europe's Renewable Energy Targets in Harmony with Nature

BirdLife Europe launched a new report entitled "Meeting Europe's Renewable Energy Targets in Harmony with Nature" on November 22 in Brussels.

The report was welcomed by speakers from DG Environment, DG Energy, the European Wind Energy Association and the European Renewable Energy Council.

Dr Ivan Scrase, editor of the report, explained that BirdLife's starting point is the threat of climate change to birds and other wildlife. The latest science

suggests that for every one degree of global warming around 10% of all species are committed to extinction. We need to switch to clean, sustainable energy sources to stand a chance of limiting warming to a relatively safe level of two degrees.

The report finds that energy from the sun, wind, and oceans can be harnessed without harm to Europe's birds and other wildlife, but European and national governments must step up to the challenge. Over four fifths of renewables investment to 2020 will go into technologies with low or manageable conservation risks, such as solar and wind power. Without safeguards, however, the scale and pace of investment needed could make renewable expansion a significant additional threat to Europe's already-declining biodiversity.

This is why it is so important for governments to know what the risks are, understand that these are not inevitable in most cases, and put policies in place to make sure harm to wildlife is avoided. There is much the EU can do: it must ensure national governments save energy, set ambitious binding targets for renewable energy expansion to 2030, and ensure Europe's legislation protecting wildlife sites is implemented properly in every EU country.

It is left to national governments to determine their 'energy mixes' and to ensure competing demands for land-use are managed effectively. The report examines how well European countries are doing to ensure enough investment goes into the right technologies and in the right places. Detailed policy recommendations are made for national governments in UK, Germany, Spain, France, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal, Greece, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Belgium, Italy and Ireland.

Ariel Brunner, BirdLife Head of EU Policy, said: *"Climate change is a grave threat to wildlife. Liquid biofuels have proven a disaster, but wind, wave and ocean power are essential and effective ways to cut carbon emissions, and do not need to put birds, bats or other wildlife in danger. Our report is essential reading for policy-makers across Europe as renewable energy moves to centre stage in the fight against dangerous climate change."*

Downloads: Meeting Europe's Renewable Energy Targets in Harmony With Nature [Main Report](#) and [Summary Report](#).

For more information please contact [Ivan Scrase](#), Senior Climate Change Policy Officer/ report lead editor at the RSPB / BirdLife in the UK

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Fisheries Fund to keep fuelling overfishing?



On 2nd December the European Commission published its proposal for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

The fund, with a proposed envelope of € 6.5 billion for the period 2014 to 2020, will replace the current European Fisheries Fund, while at the same time consolidate all fisheries and integrated maritime policy budget lines (except fisheries partnership agreements with third countries)

BirdLife Europe welcomed the progress in shifting the fund towards supporting sustainable fisheries and protecting marine biodiversity and ecosystems, including investment into the marine Natura 2000 network. We were also pleased to see the increased transparency and conditionality of the spending.

However, BirdLife Europe is concerned that the proposal does not come with a radical enough shift towards ensuring that EU money is not used for modernizing vessels, thus still contributing to the oversized EU fleet.

As highlighted in a recently published [report by the European Court of Auditors](#), fleet overcapacity is driving the depletion of fish stock, threatening marine life and the viability of the fishing sector, while the EU has been constantly failing to use its policy and subsidies regime to address this problem.

Unless safeguards are put in place, there is little evidence that subsidies will stop fuelling overfishing, let alone help stopping it.

[NGO initial reaction on the Commission EMFF proposal](#)

For more information please contact [Tatiana Nemcova](#), Senior EU Advocacy Officer at BirdLife Europe

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Commission keeps neglecting the issue of biomass sustainability



It is striking to realise that Europe will generate over 10% of its total energy from biomass by 2020, and that there are currently no EU wide standards in place to ensure that such large scale usage does not end up harming forests.

Although the European Commission recommended all Member States adopt national sustainability criteria in 2010, only a handful has followed this advice.

BirdLife Europe believes that it is now essential that the Commission comes out with EU wide sustainability standards, ensuring that the use of biomass for energy will not result in the degradation of forests around the world (since a significant proportion of EU biomass will be imported), and that the use of biomass will not release additional carbon into the atmosphere in the name of renewable energy.

The Commission but also much of the biomass industry itself wants standards to be imposed, as they will help to facilitate commerce on a level playing field throughout Europe.

For the Commission they are also a necessity to help the EU to meet the targets in the Renewable Energy Directive.

Member States are more divided, and those with large forest industries are particularly resistant to interference.

BirdLife Europe is fighting for robust sustainability criteria to provide protection from habitat destruction and climate change, first of all, based on an honest carbon accounting for biomass that will help to prevent runaway climate change.

In that goal, the European Union will have to finally accept to recognize that biomass is not carbon neutral, as is often maintained. When biomass is extracted from forests a carbon debt is created and pay-back time makes the crucial difference between climate solution and climate problem.

And secondly, criteria must ensure that forests around the world are not degraded, and species not threatened by biomass extraction.

BirdLife Europe expects the Commission to come forward with a proposal in 2012 and will be working actively in making the Council and the European Members of the Parliament aware of these issues, in order to ensure the best outcome.

For further details, please contact [Sarah Oppenheimer](#), Head of European Policy Campaigns at the RSPB/BirdLife in the UK

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A brighter future for Europe's rarest migratory bird



The Aquatic Warbler, the rarest and the only globally threatened passerine bird in mainland Europe, is facing a brighter future thanks to six years of intensive work within a LIFE project (part financed by the European Commission), coordinated by OTOPI/BirdLife in Poland. Swarovski Optik, Cemex Poland and the RSPB/ BirdLife in the UK kindly agreed to co-finance the other part of the 5 million €-project.

“The Aquatic Warbler lives in a very special habitat characterised by peatlands fed by groundwater, called “fen mires”. Protecting this bird by restoring its habitat means at the same time to improve the conservation for other rare species that also live in fen mires” explains Lars Lachmann, the project coordinator.

In the last century, all but a very few fen mires have been drained for agriculture or peat extraction, causing a catastrophic decline in the Aquatic Warbler populations and led to classify them as “globally threatened”.

A quarter of the global population has survived in Eastern Poland, and a small and isolated group of Aquatic Warbler has found refuge along the Polish-German border.

But today, the vegetation on the few remaining fen mires is changing, and the elements composing the bird habitats are disappearing, and with them, the Aquatic Warbler and several breeding waders like the Black-tailed Godwit, the Redshank and the Lapwing. Even the establishment of National Parks, has not been able to invert this tendency.

The aim of the project led by OTOPI has been to develop a landscape-scale solution for the restoration and the sustainable management of peatlands (fen mires). On the pilot sites, OTOPI introduced a prototype mowing machine that does not destroy the delicate peat soil and vegetation. More than 30 of these machines now maintain 15,000 ha of the Aquatic Warbler habitat in Poland and this successful technique has already been exported to Germany and Belarus.

OTOPI has also implemented suitable agri-environment schemes, paying farmers for Aquatic Warbler friendly management, rehabilitating three national reserves, and supporting the idea that National Parks lease out their lands needing active management to farmers using the new machines.

Currently, OTOPI and its partners are setting up a system to convert the large amounts of low-quality hay harvested on those lands into biomass briquettes and pellets, permitting to protect the climate, to finance habitat restoration and management for the Aquatic Warbler, and at the same time to create local green activities and employments.

“We are very pleased to see the return of large numbers of waders, including Jack Snipe and Wood Sandpiper not seen in Poland for over 10 years, but the key success of this LIFE Project is of course that the Aquatic Warbler is readily returning to the areas we have restored for it.” welcomed Lars Lachmann.

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Governments of the world step up to protect migratory birds



Declining populations of many migratory birds will now face a better future after governments from across the globe, supported by BirdLife International, agreed to take important new conservation actions.

The 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) of the United Nations Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) that happened in November, in Bergen, Norway, made several decisions that should help the world's migratory birds.

Particularly, two resolutions - one on the conservation of African-Eurasian migrant landbirds and one on poisoning of migratory birds - will present, for the first time, an intergovernmental framework for helping tackle these major conservation problems.

For the migratory landbirds the urgency exists because of rapid declines in their populations. As they are dispersed in their distribution and migrate across a broad front, site-based approaches to conservation do not work. Moreover, declines are not fully understood. The first adopted resolution will generate the development of an action plan that will try to implement an effective conservation system for those endangered species, migrating from Europe to Africa.

Poisoning has long been known as a major problem for migratory birds. Decades ago the world was alerted by the decline of the Peregrine and of the Sparrowhawks, linked with human-used toxic pesticides. Yet there are still numerous birds of prey dying from feeding on poison baits, water birds ingesting lead from ammunition, and many other types of poisoning across the world. The second resolution will lead to the development of guidelines, global in scope, on minimizing the poisoning of migratory birds.

The new CMS resolutions recognise the huge significance of both issues, signalling an important step in what will be a difficult, but vitally important journey, to finally tackle both problems.

The meeting in Bergen also adopted a number of other resolutions, also important for migratory birds, especially new guidelines on minimizing mortality of birds from powerlines (collisions and electrocution). Also, the Saker Falcon (except in Mongolia) and Red-footed Falcon were added to Appendix I of the Convention that give them full protection.

For further information please contact [Nicola Crockford](#), RSPB

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Ireland's new strategy for the protection of birds in the wider countryside



BirdWatch Ireland/BirdLife in the Republic of Ireland has developed a new framework for the protection of Irish birds in the wider countryside, through a three-year project, that has been incorporated into the Irish National Biodiversity Plan.

The aim of the project was to provide protection for priority, migratory and dispersed birds in the wider countryside and within the marine environment, therefore the project had a wider remit than providing protection solely for the most threatened species.

The bird species included in the project were taken from the national Red & Amber lists of "Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland" and the regularly-occurring Annex I (Birds Directive) species in Ireland. A small number of national priority species not in the above lists were also included.

Birds were grouped as per their main habitat requirements, and an Action Plan was created for each group (10), by BirdWatch Ireland in consultation with a wide range of national and international stakeholders.

"The scope of this project was huge, as we needed to ensure that the most important factors affecting birds in the wider countryside were tackled" said Peadar O'Connell, who managed the project for BirdWatch Ireland.

The project was initiated to address some of the key areas highlighted by a still active European Court of Justice ruling against Ireland in 2007 (C-418/04). "Stakeholders were engaged through a highly consultative process, and a series of workshops and meetings informed the objectives, targets and actions in each of the Action Plans." continued Peadar.

"This is the first time this type of approach has been tried at this scale in any European country. We faced an enormous task and so needed to adopt an ambitious approach. None of this would have been possible without the support of a large number of stakeholders, researchers, ecologists and other experts." Peadar said.

The completion and publication of these plans represents a massive achievement, but they are still only the first step. They now have to be implemented, and this is to be the next phase of the project.

"The inclusion of these Action Plans within Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan provides a strong basis for this next phase." according to Siobhán Egan, BirdWatch Ireland's Policy and Advocacy Officer.

This project has been partially funded through the Environment Fund of the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government.

The Action Plans can be downloaded from the [project website](#).

The National Biodiversity Plan can be downloaded [here](#).

For more information please contact [Siobhán Egan](#), BirdWatch Ireland Policy Officer

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Spain opens the public process to designate 41 marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs), totalling almost 50.000 km²



On 18 October, the Spanish Ministry of the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs (MARM), published a proposal designating 41 marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Spain.

This proposal mirrors the marine IBAs inventory elaborated by SEO/BirdLife in Spain. This work of identification of valuable natural sites has been officially acknowledged on November when Spain's King Juan Carlos rewarded the organisation with the "Fondena" Award, a prize delivered every two years by the Spanish foundation "Fondo para la Defensa de la Natureza (Fondena) for important contributions to the protection of nature.

Only three of the 44 areas proposed by SEO/BirdLife have been left aside by the MARM proposal: the Gibraltar Strait, the Concepción Bank and the Chafarinas islands, because their limits extended beyond Spanish waters.

Once formally designated, these 41 protected sites will be the first complete national network of marine SPAs in Europe, and will represent a model for other countries.

SEO/BirdLife encourages the new government to speed up the process of designation, as well as to add the three remaining areas to this process.

The following step will be the elaboration of the management plans. SEO/BirdLife is already working on it through two projects funded by the European Union programmes LIFE+ and Interreg IV, and has already started to involve the relevant stakeholders to the process.

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Baltic Seaduck take a dive

On 1 December, a new report presenting the results of a census of wintering waterbirds in the Baltic Sea was launched. The studies revealed that overall numbers had declined by more than 40% since the 1990s.

Internationally coordinated counts were undertaken in 2007-2009 under the SOWBAS project ("Status of wintering waterbird populations in the Baltic Sea"), funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The total number of wintering waterbirds was estimated at 4.41 million, compared to 7.44 million during the last census in 1992-1993.

Of the 20 species covered, 11 decreased, including 7 that declined by more than 30%. The strongest declines were suffered by seaduck. Numbers of Long-tailed Duck, the most numerous wintering waterbird in the Baltic, declined by 65%, with similar declines recorded for Steller's Eider (Vulnerable) and Velvet Scoter. Common Eider, Common Scoter and Red-breasted Merganser all declined by between 42% and 51%.

For some of these species, the Baltic is the most important wintering area in the world, holding the majority of their global populations. These declines are therefore of global concern, and could have implications for the species' status on the IUCN Red List.

BirdLife has combined these results with available data from other parts of the world to review the species' global status and propose appropriate changes. Detailed proposals are available for comment (until January 2012) on BirdLife's Globally Threatened Bird Forums: <http://www.birdlife.org/globally-threatened-bird-forums/>

Most of these seaduck concentrate in the southern Baltic, but unlike some other waterbirds, no consistent climate-driven northward shift in their winter distribution was detected. However, climate change may be affecting them in other ways. Many of these species breed mainly in the Russian arctic or tundra, where they may be suffering from climate-induced ecosystem changes. Recent monitoring in autumn, as these birds arrive in the Baltic, has revealed worryingly low proportions of juveniles, implicating unsustainably low recruitment on the breeding grounds.

Other factors could also be involved, such as over-harvesting of certain species, or oil discharges from ships, which are known to cause significant extra mortality in some parts of the Baltic. Changes in nutrient loads could also be having an impact, and the report stresses the importance of eutrophication in determining food availability and thus the abundance and distribution of waterbirds. Finally, incidental bycatch in gill-nets has been reported in several Baltic fisheries, with diving species like seaduck being particularly susceptible.

Now that the trends of these species are known, the top priority is to diagnose and address the causes of their declines. Experience suggests that this is best achieved by bringing together key experts from across the species' range to make progress in a coordinated and effective manner, at a flyway population scale and with international cooperation.

Discussions to organise a conservation planning workshop in 2012 have already begun, involving the IUCN, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, BirdLife International, Wetlands International and the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement.

You can download the full report "Waterbird Populations and Pressures in the Baltic Sea" on [this page](#).

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The Emerald Network in the Western Balkans



In early November, BirdLife Europe played an active role in a seminar, to identify sites in the six Western Balkan countries requiring protection under the Bern Convention's Emerald Network.

The meeting (in Bar, Montenegro) was organised jointly by the Council of Europe, the European Environment Agency and its European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity, and was attended by state and non-governmental representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

The Emerald Network is an initiative to extend the Natura 2000 network of protected areas beyond the EU.

The process of identifying such sites for habitats and taxa other than birds is well established, and closely mirrors the biogeographical seminar approach used within the EU to identify Special Areas for Conservation under the Habitats Directive.

However, this was the first time that the approach had been extended to birds, for which BirdLife's Important Bird Areas (IBAs) generally provide the basis for the classification of Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive.

Before the meeting, BirdLife Europe provided the organisers with data and maps of the IBAs that have so far been identified in the Western Balkans.

This work is still in progress in most of these countries, and the outcomes of the seminar reflected this. While the proposed networks of protected areas in some states (especially Croatia) were considered sufficient for most bird species, significant gaps were identified in other countries (particularly Bosnia).

Some of these gaps can be filled by designations, but others will require funding for field surveys to compile baseline inventories.

The results of the seminar were presented to the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention in early December, who were impressed with the progress.

The outcomes and priorities identified are expected to influence the allocation of funding for further work in the region in 2012 and 2013 (to be discussed in February), ahead of a possible follow-up seminar in 2014.

The Western Balkans remains a priority area for BirdLife Europe, which will continue to follow and support this process.

For more general information please contact [Ian Burfield](#), European Science and Data Manager at BirdLife Europe

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Sponsor and protect a Cory's Shearwater, SPEA/BirdLife in Portugal's bird of the year 2011



SPEA/ BirdLife in Portugal, launched its campaign "Travel with the Bird of the Year" in order to raise funds which will be used to determine priority areas for conservation. Those areas will be based on the flight of the Bird of the Year 2011, the Cory's Shearwater.

The campaign will run until the end of 2011 and will aim at making people aware of the threats the Cory's Shearwater and other marine species face, and aims at allowing SPEA to continue to preserve the Cory's Shearwater populations and other marine bird species.

With a donation of € 5 to € 100, the "sponsor" will receive more information about "his bird" and its journeys.

The donations will allow following the shearwaters in their travels by marking them with a GPS-logger (small electronic device with a mini-GPS) in order to know the important areas for feeding and reproduction.

Each 'electronic travel of these shearwaters costs € 100, that is why one Cory's Shearwater can have several "sponsors": each donation will be added in order to reach the € 100.

These data will represent strong scientific arguments which will allow SPEA to convince the authorities to designate areas as marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and to implement conservation measures aiming to protect the marine species linked to these areas.

Sponsors will be able to follow on Google Earth the journey made by "their bird", and will receive a map featuring the bird journey.

You can make a difference today through a donation to SPEA

Donate now with the reference "travelbird" to:

IBAN: PT 50.0033.0000.00260345382.05

Code SWIFT: BCOMPTPL

And you will receive information about your species within a few days.

For more information please visit SPEA/ BirdLife in Portugal [website](#).

Or contact [Joana Domingues](#), Responsible for Communication at the SPEA/ BirdLife in Portugal

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RSPB supporters question their Minister about Marine Protected Areas for seabirds



At the end of November, RSPB/ BirdLife in the UK supporters questioned the UK Minister for the Natural Environment & Fisheries about his commitment to protecting marine wildlife, including seabirds.

The **"Question & Answer" session** was screened live on the RSPB's website, and as well as questions from the audience, those online were able to submit questions via Twitter.

The event followed recent announcements by the Minister that the UK will miss the international 2012 deadline for an ecologically and representative network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

The Minister confirmed that the delay is the result of a decision that the 'best available data' used in the stakeholder consensus process to identify nationally important sites was not considered robust enough apart for a handful of sites.

Consequently, the Government needs to collect more data before the remaining sites can be designated.

This is particularly disappointing as the aim, to identify marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in the UK by the end of 2015, is very slow and there is no clarity on when sites will be designated.

So questions to the Minister focussed on how many sites were being proposed, when they would be designated, what were the barriers, and what could the RSPB and its supporters do to help.

The RSPB also presented the Minister with a picture of a common tern made of the over 50,000 signatures of supporters calling for the designation of MPAs for seabirds now .

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Events

International events

- July - December 2011: Polish Presidency of the European Union

- January - June 2012: Danish Presidency of the European Union

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SEO/BirdLife's work in the identification of valuable sites has been officially acknowledged on November when Spain's King Juan Carlos rewarded the organisation with the "Fondena" Award, a prize delivered every two years by the Spanish foundation "Fondo para la Defensa de la Natureza (Fondena) to a delivering organisation for its important contribution to the protection of nature.



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Photo Simon Stirrup



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