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Editorial: A new look for BirdLife Europe e-news

Dear reader,



While we are all looking forward to a quieter summer period and some to resting holidays, we have decided to revamp our electronic newsletter with a new and fresher look. With this new layout and format it will be easier for you to print it out and to access previous and future issues via the BirdLife website.

To launch this new version of BirdLife Europe e-news, we chose a wide selection of stories from across the BirdLife Partnership, like the success of the Spring Alive campaign, the 20th anniversary of BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria, the work we are doing this year on Species Action Plans for threatened species, a project of habitat restoration from Slovakia and a new partnership for the Wadden Sea. Last but not least, the fact that we see some hope for the worlds

threatened seabirds. The story of the albatrosses and petrels around the world is a story of despair and hope. On the one hand, the dramatic declines that have driven 19 out of 21 albatross species close to extinction in a relatively short space of time, on the other hand the existence of relatively inexpensive and easy-to-use mitigation measures that are proven to guarantee almost 100% reduction in seabird bycatch. Here is a perfect case where the problem is huge and at the same time, the solution exists and is relatively easy to implement. What are decision makers waiting for? BirdLife will continue to push to have this issue at the top of the political agenda and to guarantee proper action in EU waters and beyond.

Best regards

Dr Clairie Papazoglou
Regional Director
European Division

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EU Common Agricultural Policy and environment debated in Slovenia

On May 28, DOPPS/BirdLife Slovenia and BirdLife International, with support from the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the RSPB/BirdLife UK, organised an international conference on the environmental perspectives of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The conference took an honest look at the sustainability of the CAP and its role in achieving the EU's environmental objectives relating to climate change, biodiversity loss and growing water shortages. The debate was organised against the back drop of the ongoing CAP "Health check" and the longer term review of the EU budget. BirdLife presented the case for an urgent overhaul of the CAP, which is widely failing to address environmental challenges and still wasting most of its

funding on untargeted measures, often benefiting unsustainable farming practices. During the conference, a new report was launched on the impact of the CAP in the New Member States.

(http://www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/Cap_slovenia_report.pdf).

The report highlights the massive failure of the CAP in supporting Central, Eastern and Southern European countries, High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems and its indirect contribution to a new wave of biodiversity loss.

If you want more information visit our website at: <http://www.birdlife.org/eu/cap.html>

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France taking over the EU affairs

On 1 July France took over the EU rotating Presidency of the European Union from Slovenia. President Nicholas Sarkozy has promised to bring Europe closer to the interests of its citizens, but French diplomats are expecting the 'heaviest Presidency in the EU history' in terms of workload. We will see over the next six months what France has orchestrated for Europe.

Tackling climate change and reforming the CAP are among the "top four" priorities for the Presidency. BirdLife welcomes these priorities and hopes for strong leadership from France on all fronts towards truly sustainable policy choices that aim at public benefits, instead of short term thinking.

The French Presidency has a unique opportunity to show its serious commitment to tackling climate change and ensure adoption of a solid and ambitious Renewable Energy Directive. A moratorium on the 10% biofuel target is the only way forward otherwise we risk making climate change worse, not better - at the same time destroying precious wildlife habitat and driving up food prices.

The "CAP-Health check" and wider EU budget review discussions will be another opportunity for France to bring Europe closer to citizens' interests. Retargeting the EU spending towards delivering public goods, while ensuring transparency for EU subsidies, is the recipe for success.

BirdLife's detailed requests from the French EU Presidency can be found in BirdLife's 'Greening Europe' brochure: http://www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/Greening%20Europe_French_FINAL_2008.pdf

More information at: <http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2008/07/frenchpresidency.html>

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Hope for threatened seabirds: The Community Plan of Action on seabird bycatch is underway

On 25 June BirdLife International presented the European Parliament Fisheries Committee with some alarming data about the extent of seabird bycatch both on a global and European level. BirdLife welcomed the European Commission's recent concrete steps to tackle the problem by developing a Community Plan of Action on seabirds with the intention of completing it next year.



300,000 seabirds, including about 100,000 albatrosses, are dying annually as bycatch in longline and trawl fisheries - which include many vessels operating under EU flags. Most of the longline vessels operate in the southern hemisphere where albatrosses live, but longlining is also practised in Europe - the Mediterranean Sea, Macaronesian waters and west of Ireland are among the areas where endangered seabirds perish on longlines. As a result species such as Cory's shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*, Balearic shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* and Great shearwater *Puffinus gravis* are being killed at an unsustainable rate. The Balearic shearwater is predicted to face extinction in the next 40 years if the current rate of mortality is not checked.

BirdLife International's message to the Parliament Committee was that any further delay in developing the Community Plan of Action is unacceptable. Seabird bycatch is a readily solvable problem and by applying an appropriate suite of fishery specific measures, bycatch can be virtually eliminated. BirdLife also stressed that it is essential that the Community Plan of Action be robust and underpinned by a proper legislation, enforcement and further research.

This is a golden opportunity for the European Commission to demonstrate its commitment to environmentally-sensitive fisheries management and to halting biodiversity decline by 2010.

If you want more information: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2008/06/bycatch_presentation.html

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A great success for Spring Alive 2008 campaign



On 22 June the Spring Alive 2008 online campaign finished on a high. Since February, children from 30 European countries have watched the arrival of four popular migratory species, and entered their observations on the project website. Altogether BirdLife International – organizer of the campaign – has received over 50,000 observations. The country with the most observations was Italy with over 12,000 sightings from events and school programmes organised by LIPU/BirdLife Italy. This was closely followed by observations from children in Ireland, Poland, Russia and Belarus.

Young participants observed the arrivals of White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Common Swift *Apus apus* and Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* back to Europe. The first arrivals were again very early, with White Storks being spotted in February in central European countries like Poland, Germany and Slovakia – locations where they normally arrive at the beginning of March. Nevertheless, because of a colder period which stopped birds from further migration, Spring Alive data showed that the average arrival date was several days later than previous years.

One of the Spring Alive goals is to track the changes in arrival dates over many years. Thanks to the help of European children, BirdLife International is increasing our understanding of climate change and migratory birds. "Observing the weather conditions during one year is one argument in the discussion about the arrival of migratory birds to Europe, but climate changes over many years are much more interesting to witness. Thanks to Spring Alive we can see how these things are connected and how they influence birds" commented Joanna Kalinowska, Spring Alive coordinator.

Overall, the European BirdLife Partners managed to encourage around 25,000 Europeans to share the beauty and fascination of bird migration. For the 2008 season, the Spring Alive campaign received the generous support of the Mitsubishi Corporation Fund for Europe and Africa.

Visit our website www.springalive.net

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The Bulgarian Government fails to designate adequate Special Protection Areas

On 5 June, the European Commission sent a first written warning (letter of formal notice) to the Bulgarian government for its failure to designate adequate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for wild birds. The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria) warned Bulgarian authorities of the possibility of such action as early as September 2006 when the current SPA network was established. The downsizing of the SPA network proposed by BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria was done without the application of any objective or verifiable scientific criteria. Instead, the exclusion of certain sites was based mostly on economic and investment interests – tree logging, windfarm construction and winter ski resort development.

Six Important Bird Areas (IBAs) – Pirin, Rila, Central Balkan, Lomovete, Western Rhodopes and Kaliakra – had their territories significantly reduced, leaving major parts of the populations of endangered species without adequate protection. The globally threatened Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*, and other threatened species such as the White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*, Boreal Owl *Aegolius funereus*, Hazel Grouse *Bonasa bonasia*, Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*, Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*, Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*, Ural Owl *Strix uralensis* and Capercallie *Tetrao urogallus* have lost the protection of more than 10% of their territories following this downsizing.

The Bulgarian government has two months to respond to the written warning and take appropriate measures before the European Commission takes the next step in the legal process – the opening of an infringement procedure (reasoned opinion).

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Three BirdLife Partners unite for the Wadden Sea



In order to take on the conservation challenge of protecting the Wadden Sea, VBN/BirdLife Netherlands, NABU/BirdLife Germany, DOF/BirdLife Denmark and the European Division of BirdLife International are currently forging a common vision and strategy for the area. This joint framework for action will be launched this autumn.

The Wadden Sea lies in the national territories of The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. The area is one of the most important wetlands in the world and a key stopover site along the Eastern Atlantic migratory birds flyway. It is home to millions of birds, both resident and migratory, for many of which it provides

essential conditions for feeding and rest. For the Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* it holds more than 25% of the European breeding population. To other species like Red Knot *Calidris canutus* and Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, it is a major refueling station along their journey between Arctic breeding grounds and wintering sites in West Africa. Populations of many bird species in the Wadden Sea are currently in decline, and human pressure on the area is still increasing. Like birds, people also benefit enormously from the Wadden Sea and its services.

The BirdLife Partners in the respective Wadden Sea countries had so far mainly addressed the conservation issues on a national scale. In order to take on the full conservation challenge, the Partners now intend to work in close collaboration. Their aim is to develop a conservation strategy for the Wadden Sea, based on a shared vision and a viable mix of natural and socio-economic interests.

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European Species Action Plans: Seven, in one go



This summer, the action plans for seven threatened birds will keep conservation experts, scientists and governments in Europe busy. BirdLife, supported by the European Commission, is taking action for Europe's most threatened birds. There is a distinct North-South focus in the list of species concerned: new plans are being developed for the Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Roller *Coracias garrulus* and Dupont's Lark *Chersophilus duponti* which represent the Mediterranean and steppic/dry grassland habitats of the South. Similarities between these species can also be found among the causes for their rapid declines. Agricultural intensification and abandonment of economically less profitable livestock grazing practices lead to reduction in animal prey, degradation and other negative changes in their habitats. Poisoning and tight sanitation measures add the final chord to the Iberian vulture

crisis, which threatens to become catastrophic. With the help of SEO/BirdLife Spain and MME/BirdLife Hungary, BirdLife is mobilizing a wide range of experts to look for effective solutions for those species.

Moving to the North, and following numerous rounds of negotiations among governments and conservationists with opposing views, AEWA has delegated to BirdLife the finalization of the long awaited International Single Species Action plan for the Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*. The famous Piskulka has lighted fire in the hearts of Scandinavians through debates around the controversial re-stocking programme implemented in Sweden. While Norwegians, Finns and ... Greeks alike raised voices of concern calling for the conservation of the wild Fenno-scandian population along its migratory route.

Another set of three species which already benefit from action plan implementation and whose plans will be evaluated and fine-tuned are the Aquatic Warbler *Acrecephalus paludicola*, the Marbled Teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and the Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti*. All these three species have one thing in common nowadays: conservation actions have helped them survive, and for some even increase their numbers in the EU. Taking the good news further and rolling it out to their entire population remains a challenge that requires increased coordination among institutions and governments, on which BirdLife is also working.

For current news, discussions and access to draft action plans and other related documents please visit www.birdlifeforums.org and look for the European SAPs link. This is the webspace dedicated to Species Action Plans.

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Restoration returns wetland habitat back to birds in Eastern Slovakia

The Natura 2000 site "Senne" – the most important place for breeding and migrating water birds in Eastern Slovakia- is a real bird paradise but was gradually damaged in the past years. Now, SOS/BirdLife Slovakia has purchased valuable habitats and is restoring some drained wetlands to save this area for future generations.

The area started to be drained, changed and developed, following the economic transition in Slovakia and the EU accession. This resulted in the reduction of suitable breeding and feeding habitats for many birds. However the site still supports important breeding populations of many threatened bird species even in the reduced area including Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* and Corncrake *Crex crex* while species regularly occurring on migration include the Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* and the Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus*.



SOS/BirdLife Slovakia together with the Slovak State Nature Conservancy and other partners started in 2006 a LIFE project called "Conservation of Senne and Medzibodrozie Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in Slovakia" which aims at improving conditions for birds in those wetlands. One of the tools used to protect the valuable habitats is land purchase and wetland restoration. Thanks to generous financial support from the European Commission, Aage V. Jensen

Charity Foundation, SVS/BirdLife Switzerland and SOS/BirdLife Slovakia purchased and re-flooded already more than 70 hectares of wet meadows for nature conservation.

The first results from the habitat restoration were already visible in spring 2008, when many species of birds returned to rest and feed in the restored wetland, such as Ferruginous Ducks, Red-necked Grebes *Podiceps grisegena*, Cranes *Grus grus*, thousands of Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax* and rare species such as Purple Herons and Spoonbills. Hopefully more wetlands will return to the favourable state in Senne in the future.

More information on the project can be found at

<http://www.life-senne.sk/index.php?lang=en>

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Balearic Shearwater listed by OSPAR

During the recent OSPAR (Oslo-Paris Convention on Protection of the Maritime Environment of the North-East Atlantic) Commission meeting, which took place from the 23 to the 27 June, it was agreed that the Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* should be included on the OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species. In recognition of the increasing threats facing the species, and its increasing occurrence in the north-east Atlantic area, BirdLife International nominated the species, which is Europe's only Critically Endangered seabird, for inclusion on OSPAR's List in 2006.

Recent research revealed that the Balearic Shearwater has become increasingly prevalent in the Atlantic region in the post-breeding season, as it follows key prey species such as anchovies and sardines. Their distribution is thought to have shifted northwards, probably as a consequence of warming seas linked to climate change.

Now that OSPAR have listed the Balearic Shearwater, work will begin to assess the status of the species within the OSPAR area, and consider the need for coordination of management and monitoring by OSPAR and its Contracting Parties. BirdLife International has already contributed to the assessment of the species' status in the OSPAR Region through the collection of information for its nomination. We are also currently working to identify suitable management measures that OSPAR could take for this species.

In 2008, BirdLife nominated SEO/BirdLife Spain and SPEA/BirdLife Portugal as Species Guardians for this seabird.

Both organisations are currently implementing a project that will provide more data on the species, and also promote the species status and threats to wider audiences.

For further information on BirdLife's work with OSPAR, please contact Kate Tanner (Kate.Tanner@rspb.org.uk).

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Meet the Communicator !

In every issue you have the chance to meet the communication officers from the whole of the BirdLife European Partnership and learn more about their key priorities and favourite projects

For this issue, we've teamed up with Wim Van den Bossche, Development and Communications Officer at Natuurpunt Belgium



My name is Wim Van den Bossche, and since 1998 I am the international contact person for Natuurpunt, the Flemish branch of BirdLife Belgium. Since 2007 I am Head of the Communication department of Natuurpunt. Our team of three dedicated communicators keeps the almost 73.000 family members informed and involved in our wide range of Natuurpunt activities.

Even before I became a professional biologist I had an endless fascination for the world of migratory birds. While I was counting migrating birds in my parents' garden or in the nearby nature reserve, I was also dreaming of watching millions of Turkey Vultures *Cathartes aura* in Mexico or hundreds of thousands of Honey Buzzards *Pernis apivorus* in Israel.

From night migrating passerines, my interest evolved to raptors and later to Storks, in particular White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* and Black Storks *Ciconia nigra*. Staring at a flock of 1200 Black Storks on an early October morning in the Bet she'an Valley in Israel is 'jummy', knowing that the individuals in that flock breed from Germany to Kazakhstan. Some of them are on their first dangerous voyage, others on a routine flight for their 10th or more time. Are they heading for the mountain lakes in Ethiopia or for drinking pools in eastern Chad?

I think this example describes why I believe working together with Partners of BirdLife International is a daily pleasure. Even when things get difficult you know there are other people all over the world who share your ideas, are confronted with similar challenges, find solutions for them and very importantly: can share your fascination.

One of the most fascinating BirdLife projects that I know and play a little part in, is the protection of the Harapan rainforest in Sumatra. The protection of this 101.000ha jewel is very important for Hornbills, Tigers and many migrant bird species from East-Asia. But more than that, it is a pilot project on conservation concessions for

Indonesia and other parts of the world, highlighting the threats for the protection of the rainforest from paper to palm oil and forest fires and luckily proving that even the most difficult nature protection targets can be achieved through hard work.

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Project seeks support: Conserving seabirds in marine areas across Europe



Europe's seas cover almost five times the continent's land area and support 62 bird species. Forty five percent of Europe's seabirds have an unfavourable conservation status in Europe, and seven species are of global conservation concern. One of the most effective ways of conserving biodiversity is to identify and protect key sites. According to the EU Biodiversity Action Plan endorsed by Environment Ministers in 2006, Member States committed to designate a comprehensive network of marine sites that should be protected because of their rich biodiversity. Based on the success of BirdLife's Important Bird Area (IBA) programme on land, BirdLife is well placed to influence this process by identifying and documenting marine IBAs, and then lobbying for their protection. Most Member States are slow to meet this commitment and few are providing adequate resources for it. There is a serious risk that the process will

not be effective and this unique opportunity will be wasted.

Taking advantage of this opportunity, however, requires boosting BirdLife's capacity to achieve two main goals, which are preparing a preliminary consolidated inventory of all marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Europe, and building Partners' advocacy capacity and coordinating advocacy efforts at national and EU level.

If you want to support this project or you wish to have more information about it, please contact Maria Solernou maria.solernou@birdlife.org

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Happy 20th Birthday BSPB!



This year the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria) celebrates its 20th anniversary. In 1988, just one year before the "wind of change" which has revolutionized the political climate in the country, a group of young enthusiastic nature lovers established the first civil society organization in Bulgaria dreaming to implement "real nature conservation". This ambitious project immediately became real. The same year the BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria started a campaign to halt the decline of vultures in Bulgaria. And hence they have chosen the Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus* as their "logo" inspiring their work.

An emblematic activity BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria carries out is the identification and promotion of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) network – which counts 114 sites in the country, all being Natura 2000 Special Protection Areas (SPA). To ensure the protection of the IBAs through a sustainable development approach, BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria has launched a new line of work aiming at involving both farmers and small and medium enterprises interested in protecting biodiversity.

In the last 20 years BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria has also enhanced the conservation status of many globally threatened species like the Red breasted goose *Branta ruficollis*, the Imperial eagle *Aquila heliaca*, the Red footed falcon *Falco vespertinus* and the Saker falcon *Falco cherrug* in Bulgaria.

BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria finally, through urgent interventions, managed to install special fencing preventing wild boar from disturbing breeding pelicans on the lake, and therefore the Dalmatian pelican *Pelicanus crispus* is still a part of the Srebarna nature reserve – a unique transboundary IBA declared and the first Ramsar site in Bulgaria, and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

You can read more about their activities, lessons learnt, and success stories on their website www.bspb.org

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Events

European events

- July - December 2008: French Presidency of the European Union
- 21-26 August 2009, Zurich, Switzerland: 7th conference of the European Ornithologists' Union (EOU)

<http://www.eou2009.ch/>

BirdLife Events

- 22-24 July, Besenyőtelek, Hungary: Workshop on European Roller Action Plan hosted by MME/BirdLife Hungary

- 3-5 September, Topolovgrad, Bulgaria: 6th Meeting of the BirdLife International Eastern Imperial Eagle Working Group hosted by BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria

- 22-27 September, Buenos Aires, Argentina: BirdLife's World Conservation Conference- Taking on the Millennium Development Challenge

<http://www.birdlife.org/worldconference/>

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