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Editorial: Pelicans and common bird monitoring

Dear reader,

I remember the first time in my life I saw pelicans it was 20 years ago and I was in the Amvrakikos bay in Western Greece where for years the Hellenic Ornithological Society (BirdLife in Greece) had a guarding programme for a small colony of breeding Dalmatian Pelicans *Pelecanus crispus*. Seen through the telescope they were just far away dots, but the excitement at seeing them was enormous and the cause was good. This small colony of breeding pelicans was frequently disturbed and we were there to make sure this didn't happen. Coming from Greece, in the years to come, I have many times marvelled at those beautiful birds, both the Dalmatian and White pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. I have enjoyed their surprisingly graceful gliding flight, seen their outrageously coloured pouches during the breeding season, or their really pink mantle, watched them 'play and fight' with other pelicans as they congregate waiting for fishermen to throw unwanted fish overboard, as well as seen them defenceless with broken wings, shot by curious, macho hunters. One could say pelicans were among the 'bird ambassadors' that made me interested in birds. In this issue of the newsletter, we highlight a story about the protection of these beautiful creatures from Romania, which is carried out with European Commission support. This is such good news. And it's good news for other reasons also. Getting people to see pelicans which are big and easy to see, is a perfect way to get people interested in birds. Getting interested in birds, leads to being interested in the fate of birds, their conservation, and what needs to be done to achieve it, such as monitoring them. Maybe, some of the people participating in the budding common bird monitoring schemes in Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Bulgaria, Turkey, Poland, etc) which our other story highlights, got interested in birds by seeing pelicans, or some other equally charismatic 'bird ambassadors', which then led them to give their time for recording the common, usually unnoticed but equally important, birds. It's a thought anyway!

Best regards

Dr Clairie Papazoglou
Regional Director
European Division

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[Renewable Energy Directive: positive step, but biofuels target remains worrying](#)



As part of the climate and energy package, the European Parliament voted on 17 December 2008 to approve the Renewable Energy Directive (RED). While the RED as a whole is positive legislation aiming to significantly increase the share of renewable energy use in the EU, unsustainable production of biofuels is set to expand as the 10% mandatory target for transport fuels from renewable sources by 2020 comes into law.

On the plus side, a number of improved safeguards for biofuel production, strongly advocated by BirdLife, have made it into the final text compared to the original proposal. These are:

Biofuels will be required to provide greenhouse gas savings (compared to fossil fuels) of at least 35% from the time of the adoption of the Directive, increasing up to a minimum of 60% (for new installations) from 2017. High biodiversity areas such as primary forest, highly biodiverse grassland, protected areas, and other areas with high numbers of endangered species or ecosystems are excluded from biofuels development. Regrettably, many natural habitats like savannah and scrubland are not afforded any protection and many definitions are vague or weak. Wetlands, forests with more than 30% canopy cover and most peatlands are defined as “no-go” areas for biofuels development due to the high carbon stock in the land. However, the definitions of these habitats allow dangerous loopholes for the destruction of peatlands (hugely important carbon stocks) and exclude from protection almost half the world forests as defined by the FAO (10% canopy cover).

The key issue of indirect land use change (ILUC), i.e. the displacement by biofuel plantations of other human activities into natural areas, finally got into the legal text, but will not be tackled immediately. The European Commission will have to submit a report to the European Parliament and Council on carbon emissions from ILUC by end 2010, with concrete methodology on how to measure and minimize these. Although this is still far too weak, this requirement is nonetheless a step forward compared to the fully inadequate original Commission proposal. This means that ILUC is still likely to make the EU biofuels policy generate more emissions than it saves, while destroying important habitats for biodiversity.

For more information contact Ariel Brunner at Ariel.Brunner@birdlife.org

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Happy Birthday to the Birds Directive!

The Directive on the conservation of wild birds, better known as the “Birds Directive” will turn 30 on 2 April 2009. It was adopted by Member States in 1979, and was the first EU Directive on nature conservation. Since its adoption it has been a vital legal instrument for the conservation of all birds that occur naturally across the EU, acting in the broadest public interest to conserve Europe’s natural heritage for present and future generations. Together with the definitions and objectives of the Habitats Directive, adopted in 1992, it offers useful legal conceptual models and a set of standards and norms in common use.

From this issue on, until the Directive’s birthday, we will introduce you to different bird species that have benefited from its implementation and enforcement across Europe.

Have a nice travel with us!

The bird of the records - Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* narrated by Rastislav Rybanic



Peregrine Falcon can be easily described as the “records collector” in the bird world. Exceptional and powerful hunter, it is also the bird of prey with the widest distribution around the globe and the world’s fastest moving animal, reaching speeds of up to 270km/hour when chasing prey.

This impressive falcon was also one of the main alarm bells which helped humans understand the threats to health people also face from environmental pollution.

By the 1950s the world population of Peregrine Falcon had been decimated, mostly due to the accumulation of pollutants, such as DDT, in its fat tissue. This happened through eating food (small birds mostly) that were also contaminated but in smaller, non lethal amounts. This accumulation of DDT caused the thinning of eggshells, which broke when the female bird tried to incubate them and thus led to the species’ unsuccessful breeding. Drastic changes in its habitats and persecution of this bird of prey were also additional causes for its decline. Spurred by this dramatic decline, environmental activists

joined forces to save this wonderful predator. This led to a campaign which banned the use of DDT in Europe and North America in the 1970s. From this moment on, the population of Peregrine Falcon slowly started to recover,

also supported by the protection that the Birds Directive afforded to this formidable bird.

By helping Peregrine Falcon recover from the brink of extinction and to become again one of the most widely distributed bird species, the EU Nature Legislation is playing a major role in protecting this and other species for future generations.

For more information on this species and how to protect it contact Rastislav Rybanic at Rastislav.Rybanic@birdlife.org

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Action for Europe's last wilderness areas

On 5 February 2009, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on Wilderness in Europe. The resolution describes Wilderness as virgin areas where the natural environment has not been significantly modified by human activity. Such areas are almost non-existent in the EU-15, but are an important part of the environment and culture of many Central and Eastern European countries, including many of the recent EU accession countries.

Wilderness areas are very important for biodiversity conservation, acting as a refuge and genetic reserve, and play an important role in keeping ecosystem services functioning. At the same time, they are extremely vulnerable to human exploitation and environmental impacts such as climate change and invasive species.

Fortunately, a large part of these areas are already included in the Natura 2000 network of protected sites. Natura 2000 provides a flexible and adaptable framework for conserving the wide range of habitats and species found across the EU, including Wilderness areas.

This is why the resolution asks the European Commission to provide guidance to Member States on protecting present and potential wilderness areas, in the context of Natura 2000.

Wilderness areas are also being championed by the current Czech Presidency of the EU. The Presidency will organise a Conference on "Wilderness and Large Natural Habitat Areas" from 27-29 May in Prague to promote the debate on the protection of primary, natural and semi-natural areas.

If you are interested in receiving more information, please contact Alistair Taylor alistair.taylor@rspb.org.uk or Boris Barov at Boris.Barov@birdlife.org

For more information on the wilderness conference, please see <http://chm.nature.cz/stories/conference-wildnearly-wild-areas-eu-27-28-may>

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Implementation of new EU Marine Directive gets under way

On 9-11 December 2008 the French Presidency organised the conference "2012 marine targets: European marine strategy and issues in the High seas". Over three days, participants coming from governments, research institutes, Regional Seas Conventions and NGOs discussed the best ways of interpreting the new Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and in particular the development of an agreed approach which will put the concept of Good Environmental Status (GES) into practice. In this very early stage participants discussed especially the different indicators, officially called "descriptors", which fall under the Good Environmental Status notion.

BirdLife welcomes the European Commission's plans to cooperate with external institutes and to set up a stakeholder group which will be involved in the discussions on the GES and other issues related to the Directive's implementation.

While the Commission is preparing the technical guidance for the Marine Directive, Member States are transposing it in their national laws and establishing a framework for its implementation. The BirdLife Partnership urges Member States to seize the opportunity provided by this new legislation and to take bold action for the protection of our seas. If we fail to do so we risk that aquariums such as the Oceanopolis in Brest (which participants visited during the conference) will become the only opportunity to see and admire the beauty and diversity of our European sealife. More importantly we would endanger these crucial ecosystems and their ability to provide us with resources on which humankind depends.

For more information contact Tatiana Nemcova at Tatiana.nemcova@birdlife.org

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Saving Dalmatian Pelicans in the Danube Delta



Pelicans are undoubtedly some of the most emblematic bird species on Earth. The large size of these birds, their charismatic bill with the extensible coloured pouch which can turn from yellow to red, and their particular feeding techniques make them well known all around the world.

Romania is one of the few European Union countries where both European pelican species can be seen: the Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* and the Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*.

The Dalmatian Pelican is classified as vulnerable species within its whole geographical distribution and particularly because of its small European population, which is concentrated in few sites. The European population of Dalmatian Pelican is crucial for the survival of the species, as the two major subpopulations, in Greece and Romania, are the last remaining strongholds of

the species outside the former Soviet Union, where large declines have been noted in recent decades. In Romania, all the colonies are located in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve.

The LIFE project "Saving *Pelecanus crispus* in the Danube Delta" financed by the European Union is a species conservation project covering the entire Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve. Started on 1 November 2005 and running until 30 September 2009, it involves several organizations, such as SOR (BirdLife in Romania) and RSPB (BirdLife in the UK). The anticipated result of this project is to create safe and suitable breeding conditions for the Romanian Pelican breeding population by overcoming the most important threats they have to face: disturbance and degradation of breeding sites.

Some of the most important and direct conservation measures undertaken during this project were the installation of 150 plastic markers on power lines to reduce the mortality due to power line collision, setting up a protection wall to reduce wave erosion on two islands where Dalmatian Pelicans nest and installing a fixed platform in the Ceaplace Island to compensate for the eroded nesting surface.

The current work is focused on the development of the National Species Action Plan and on finalizing the site management plan, which will be followed by formal approval by the Romanian Government. The maintenance of artificial structures and other activities, such as public awareness campaigns and satellite tagging are also ongoing.

For more information contact Alida Barbu at alida.barbu@sor.ro

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New Hope for Ilisu

A few days before Christmas, as a perfect present to civil society groups and NGOs, the German government decided to withdraw its support for the controversial Ilisu Dam project in Turkey.

For many years nature conservation organisations, including Doğa Derneği (BirdLife in Turkey) and NABU (BirdLife in Germany), have been campaigning against the construction of the hydro-electric dam on the Tigris River in the south-eastern part of Turkey. The project, which had financial backing from Germany, Switzerland and Austria, would destroy the habitat of up to 123 bird species, including the Endangered Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* that breeds in the cliffs along the valley in Hasankeyf, and the Near Threatened Cinereous Bunting *Emberiza cineracea*, which breeds on the rocky slopes of the river basin. It would also have devastating consequences for the local community, flooding many villages including Ilisu and the ancient city of Hasankeyf and forcing up to 60,000 people to leave their homes.

The German government decided to start the pullout proceedings just before Christmas as environmental and human rights standards have not been met. As a last chance the Austrian, German and Swiss export credit agencies have still agreed to give the dam authorities another deadline of 180 days to fulfil their obligations. Nevertheless the German government's decision is an exceptional u-turn that is rarely seen by governments and an important step towards victory for people and nature. However, the final pullout can only be enforced after the deadline has passed. This will sadly come too late for the local inhabitants whose homes have already been taken and who have neither been offered suitable compensation nor an appropriate site to resettle.

For more information, please contact the NABU International Projects Office at international@nabu.de

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Threatened breeding birds in France



A new threat assessment analysing 277 bird species breeding in Metropolitan France was published in December 2008. The analysis shows a worrying situation whereby 73 of the species analysed are threatened and on the national Red List. The list was prepared by the National Museum of Natural History and the French Committee of IUCN, in partnership with LPO (BirdLife in France), the National Hunting Agency (ONCFS) and the French Society of Ornithological Studies (SEOF).

The threatened species listed belong to one of the three IUCN threat categories, i.e. Vulnerable, Endangered and Critically Endangered Species.

Agriculture intensification, together with the high use of pesticides and the conversion of natural meadows into fields, have been identified as the major threats for the habitat loss and the decline of species such as Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* and Corncrake *Crex crex*. On a different scenario, while direct persecutions are less frequent than 30 years ago, raptors, like the Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, still fall victims of illegal shooting and poisoning.

Nature conservation NGOs such as the LPO (BirdLife in France) are cooperating with local administrations to increase the number of protected areas and create safe sites for breeding birds, in order to protect them from the degradation of biodiversity which is affecting too many areas in France.

For more information contact Bernard Deceuninck at bernard.deceuninck@lpo.fr

and visit <http://www.uicn.fr/Liste-rouge-oiseaux-nicheurs.html>

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All Polish IBAs finally designated as SPAs!



January 2009 will be remembered as an important date for the protection of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Poland, where the government officially announced the designation of the remaining 16 IBAs as Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Known as the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) Programme, this global BirdLife International initiative aims at identifying and protecting a network of critical sites for the conservation of the world's birds.

Since Poland joined the EU, OTOP (BirdLife in Poland) has actively advocated the inclusion of all IBAs in the Natura 2000 network. Because some significant sites hosting important species such as White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Lesser-spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, Great Snipe *Gallinago media* and Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* were left unprotected, a coalition of Polish NGOs published a Natura 2000 Shadow List including OTOP's 140 IBAs. After pressure from the European Commission, the Government declared a revised list of 126 SPA in September 2007, which still was not comprehensive. Following the European Commission's decision to bring the case to the European Court of Justice, the Polish Government decided to revise the list of IBAs and start close collaboration with OTOP. As a result, an official governmental list was published on 27 October 2008, designating all 140 Polish IBAs as SPAs.

For further information please contact: Jaroslaw Krogulec at jaroslaw.krogulec@otop.org.pl,

or Rastislav Rybanic at rastislav.rybanic@birdlife.org

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Developing common bird indicators in Eastern Europe

After two years of capacity building initiatives involving BirdLife Partners in Belarus, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Poland, Lithuania and the Macedonian Ecological Society, the SEED Bird Indicators (SEED BI) project is about to finish. One of the objectives of this project was to create a successful national Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (CBM) based on citizen science approach in these seven countries. Skilled volunteers collect data which are then analysed by scientists, who look for the short and long-term population trends of widespread birds. From this they develop indices for the quality of the environment. One of them, used in EU policies, is the Farmland Bird Index,

also used to measure progress towards the 2010 target to halt the loss of biodiversity.

New national CBM schemes were launched in Turkey, Belarus and FYR Macedonia. Lithuania re-launched its scheme, while Poland, Romania and Bulgaria improved them and strengthened the links with policy and conservation. Communication and coordination with other projects, programmes, sector agencies and organisations were enhanced and dialogues with governments about the use of bird indicators in sectoral policy formulation were initiated or improved.

The SEED BI project was coordinated by BSPB (BirdLife in Bulgaria) and funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme, RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and the Black Vulture Conservation Foundation. The project was implemented in close cooperation with the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (PECBMS), a joint initiative of the European Bird Census Council and BirdLife International, who provided expertise and invaluable support. At the end of January, European CBM coordinators and key experts in bio-indicators met for their regular symposium in Prague. Among the main discussion topics were the value and versatility of bird indicators which can be developed for different habitats. Future challenges and improvements of the national CBM schemes and the lessons from the SEED BI project were also discussed.

For more information contact Sylvia Barova –Project Coordinator at BSPB (BirdLife in Bulgaria) at sylvia.barova@gmail.com

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Portuguese breeding birds recorded in a new Atlas



The new Atlas of Portuguese breeding birds has been officially launched in Lisbon on 2 December 2008. Several organisations such as SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal), the Nature Conservation and Biodiversity Institute (ICNB), the Madeira Natural Park (PNM) and the Regional Secretary of the Environment Azores (SRAA) jointly cooperated to produce this impressive publication.

Between 1999 and 2005 five hundred volunteers carried on intensive field work, covering nearly 1000 square km, including for the first time also the Madeira, Selvagens and Azores archipelagos. In parallel to the research work SPEA organised several trainings and promotional activities, playing a very active role in this project and leading on the preparation of the Atlas.

The Portuguese BirdLife Partner is very proud of this publication, which analyzes 235 species in its 590 pages, with illustrations of seven local artists and contributions by more than 100 authors. Every species has a personalised distribution and population map.

Among the results, one of the most sensational is the return of the Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti* and of the Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* as breeding species. Other positive news is the registered remarkable increasing number of other species, such as White-rumped Swifts *Apus caffer* and Red-rumped Swallows *Hirundo daurica*. On the other hand, the work confirmed the extinction of Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus* and the decline of other species such as Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Red Kite *Milvus milvus* and Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura*.

For more information and to get a copy of the Atlas please contact Luis Costa at luis.costa@spea.pt

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Meet the BirdLife European Partnership

In every issue you have the chance to meet a staff member from the BirdLife European Partnership and learn more about their key priorities and favourite projects

For this issue, we've teamed up with Iván Ramírez, European Marine Coordinator of BirdLife International



My name is F. Iván Ramírez, and since January 2009 I am the new European Marine Coordinator of BirdLife International. This position is new to the BirdLife European Division and its creation has been possible through the collaboration

and co-funding between this office, the Global Seabird Programme, SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) and HOS (BirdLife in Greece). Although I will still be based in Lisbon, I will often be traveling to Brussels and other European countries.

For those of you who don't know me, I studied biology in Salamanca, as I'm Spanish, and from the very beginning I started working at several small-scale research projects, some of them not really related to birds!. Once I finished my studies I worked at the Council of Salamanca and then I moved to the UK, where I worked first as Research Assistant at the Bedfordshire and Rutland Wildlife Trust and later at the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK).

After two years in the RSPB, in 2004 I moved to SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal), where I worked as Marine and IBA Programme Coordinator until last December. These past 8 years have been wonderful both personally and professionally. The RSPB showed me the importance of taking care of people and SPEA has allowed me to implement and design some of the most important and challenging conservation projects in Europe.

It was in Portugal, and specifically in Madeira, where I definitely fell in love with the sea and its birds, and now I must confess I'm hooked on them, staying long nights listening to seabird calls on remote islands and trying to understand what threatens them at the high seas and what can be done to protect them.

With this new position I hope we can all continue to work towards full seabird and marine protection in Europe, by coordinating our activities and showing politicians the importance of our seas. We also hope northern African countries will join us, as many of our seabirds feed at their waters, and we will try to create a coordinated database of seabird tracking for the whole continent. I look forward to working with you and wish a very productive and joyful 2009 for us all!

You can contact Ivan at Ivan.Ramirez@birdlife.org

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Sustainable tourism and the BirdLife Partnership



In March Marcelino Cardalliaguet, the Extremadura representative from SEO (BirdLife in Spain) will make his short annual journey to meet a group of British tourists on a wildlife holiday, where he will explain more about the challenges for bird conservation in this wonderful Spanish region, and will go back with a considerable donation for SEO. Similarly, in June, British birdwatchers will be meeting young birdwatchers from Falco cherrug, one of SOR's (BirdLife in Romania) local groups, in Romania's Danube Delta.

What these meetings have in common is that both are organised through Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays, an organisation based in Norwich, England. Honeyguide organises sustainable travels and supports BirdLife Partners by including a donation of £35 for each holiday participant, which will support a conservation project in the country they have chosen for their holiday. The donations go through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust, allowing top-ups from the UK Government through a 'gift aid' on charity donations. Established in 1991, Honeyguide has already contributed £53,635 to various conservation projects.

Honeyguide's manager, Chris Durdin, says: "We see this donation as giving back something towards the conservation of the wildlife we have enjoyed. Where possible, we arrange meetings between tourists and local conservationists. An exchange of information, moral support from our travellers and sometimes local publicity for the donation adds extra value to the supported projects".

Until recently Chris has been working for the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), where this activity in Honeyguide was a natural link between holidays and conservation work. The destinations of these natural history holidays cover many European countries and South Africa.

For more information contact Chris at honeyguide@tesco.net or visit www.honeyguide.co.uk

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The Spring Alive Project launched its fourth edition!



On the 1st of February, Spring Alive, BirdLife's main education project, was launched for the fourth time by nearly 30 BirdLife Partners all across Europe.

Spring Alive is BirdLife's pan-European project designed to promote children's interest in nature and its conservation through celebrating the arrival of spring and migrant birds. Citizens, especially children and families, are encouraged to observe and record the arrival of four migratory bird species such as the White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, the Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica, the Common Swift *Apus apus* and the Common Cuckoo

Cuculus canorus.

Participants are then asked to enter their sightings on the Spring Alive website, where they can track the progress of migratory birds arriving in Europe throughout spring. Last year 56.264 observations have been registered.

Spring Alive has proven to be a wonderful tool for BirdLife Partners for education purposes and for helping to raise awareness on climate change and biodiversity issues.

For more information visit <http://www.springalive.net/>

Or contact Magdalena Chrzanowska at magdalena.chrzanowska@otop.org.pl

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New staff in the European Division



On 1 January 2009 Yasmine Boxus started work at the BirdLife European Division as Office Manager. Yasmine is responsible for running the day-to-day business of the European Division office and she provides secretarial and administrative support to the staff. You can contact her at Yasmine.Boxus@birdlife.org

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Events

European events

- January- June 2009: Czech Presidency of the European Union
- 02-03 April 2009, Trier, Germany: ERA Conference on 30 Years of the wild birds Directive. Online registration at www.era.int
- 27-28 April 2009, Athens, Greece: European Commission's International Conference on "Biodiversity Protection - Beyond 2010, Priorities and options for future EU policy"
- 27-28 May 2009, Prague, Czech Republic: Conference on Wilderness and Large Natural Habitat Areas in Europe. Visit <http://chm.nature.cz/stories/conference-wildnearly-wild-areas-eu-27-28-may>
- 21-26 August 2009, Zurich, Switzerland: 7th conference of the European Ornithologists' Union (EOU) <http://www.eou2009.ch/>

BirdLife events

- 1 February 2009: Launch of the 4th Spring Alive season. Visit <http://www.springalive.net/>
- 02 April 2009, Brussels, Belgium: Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Birds Directive

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