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Editorial: Celebrating the Birds Directive

Dear reader,

I recently learnt what the journalistic term MEGO means: "My Eyes Glaze Over".

A term reserved for those unlucky subjects that are deemed boring and undeserving of attention or exposure. When it comes to the world of conservation and nature protection, progress on implementation of existing legislation and enforcement must get the MEGO medal from decision makers and politicians. Unfairly, however. The EU has the 1979 Birds and the 1992 Habitats Directives, two world class pieces of legislation that can be credited with many successes in nature conservation already. They are both visionary pieces of law that although they came about when the need for nature protection had become imperative, they also had ample provisions for human activities, encouraging sustainable development at a time when nobody knew this term. Today, some Member States still struggle with the implementation of these directives, often misinterpreting their requirements or over-reacting to their restrictions. The truth is that both directives are flexible, not exclusive and above all vitally important, and implementing them correctly and respecting them is not only about protecting the birds and the plants that benefit but also about the ecosystems we all depend on for our own wellbeing.

In April 2009, the Birds Directive will be 30 years old and from this issue until its birthday, we will celebrate some of the most famous species that have directly benefited from its requirements. Although the Directive protects all birds in the EU, some are more especially protected and there is scientific evidence showing that these species are doing better.

So enjoy the stories and we hope your eyes won't glaze over!

Best regards

Dr Claire Papazoglou
Regional Director
European Division

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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 six bird species that have benefited from its implementation and enforcement across Europe.

Have a nice travel with us!

The Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* narrated by Rastislav Rybanic



I remember as a small boy being impressed by documentaries showing birds in their big mixed colonies in Southern Europe. Some of those birds looked particularly funny. I had noticed that adults have a curious bill which looks like a spoon while nestlings have straighter and shorter bills. Later I learned that they are in fact called Spoonbills.

When I saw them for the first time flying over the Senne area in Eastern Slovakia I definitely fell in love with these wonderful birds. I still remember that moment, when after landing in a nearby pool they started feeding making funny movements from side to side, dipping their curious bill in the shallow water. If you ever have the opportunity to watch them feed you will notice the appeal.

I am really glad that Spoonbills are among the birds that have benefited from the Birds Directive. The population has increased in Europe and they are now present

in several European States, thanks also to the efforts of thousands of enthusiastic people working on the ground and contributing to their conservation.

I wish my small daughter will also have the opportunity to enjoy seeing Spoonbills around when she grows up.

For more information please contact Rastislav Rybanic at Rastislav.Rybanic@birdlife.org

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Is EU taxpayers' money used for public goods?

On 12 November the European Commission hosted a conference titled "Reforming the budget, changing Europe", aimed at collecting views on how the EU should reform its revenue and spending policy in order to meet the challenges of the decades to come. BirdLife International, for many years promoting more and better financing for environmental protection, welcomes this Budget Review as a rare chance to finally match Europe's priorities (like addressing climate change and biodiversity loss) with its spending policy. At the conference the European Commission announced that a reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will be a central element of the Budget Review, in order to ensure public money is spent on public goods.

As part of BirdLife's contribution to the debate, OTOP/BirdLife Poland organized, in cooperation with the German Marshal Fund (GMF) and IUNG-PIB, a Polish agriculture institute, a well attended conference on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the environment on 28-29 October 2008. Poland holds some of Europe most important biodiversity and is a major recipient of CAP subsidies. It will thus be one of the countries most affected by the choices that will have to be made in the context of the EU Budget review and the related CAP reform. On 11 December BirdLife and the GMF will organise another important conference on this topic, this time in Prague, Czech Republic.

The Regional and Cohesion Policy, which is one of the biggest part of the EU budget, has been addressed by BirdLife's new publication called "Growth, Jobs and Biodiversity", launched on 12 November 2008. Using 12 case studies from 10 countries, the report shows how EU Structural Funds can be used to the benefit the environment and economic development, but also how wrong things can go, for nature and investors, when environmental legislation is not respected.

Learn more about BirdLife's work on the EU Budget Review at

http://www.birdlife.org/eu/EU_policy/EU_budget/index.html

You can find more information on BirdLife International's vision for the CAP at http://www.birdlife.org/eu/EU_policy/Agriculture/eu_agriculture4.html

You can download the "Growth, Jobs and Biodiversity" publication at http://www.birdlife.org/news/extra/growth_job_biodiversity.html

For more information contact Konstantin Kreiser at Konstantin.Kreiser@birdlife.org

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Setting Environment at the heart of Europe: hopes for the new European Parliament 2009-2014



At the end of September the Green 10, an informal grouping of the ten leading non-governmental environmental organisations working at EU level, published a paper called 'Environment at the Heart of Europe - An environmental roadmap for 2009-2014'. The joint document is targeted to the European Parliament Political groups and Members of the European Parliament (MEP) candidates in advance of the Parliamentary elections, which will take place in June 2009.

In times of resource scarcity, ecosystem breakdown and climate change, the success of the EU and the prosperity of its citizens depend on the strength of its environmental vision. And indeed, BirdLife and the Green 10 believe that sustainability must be at the heart of any EU policies on national, regional and European level.

In the document the NGOs present their vision on 10 policy areas, such as Biodiversity protection, Agriculture, Climate change and Energy, and highlight specific asks for every issue.

The Green 10 call on all political parties and MEP candidates to sign up to their recommendations and use them to make Europe a global leader on sustainable development

You can download the document at http://www.birdlife.org/eu/EU_policy/green10.html

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

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Storks without borders



White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* breeding in the Belgian region of Flanders are tracked with satellite transmitters since 1999 by Natuurpunt/BirdLife Belgium. Tagged Storks from Belgium are migrating to Spain, Portugal and West Africa. White Stork "Germaine" was tagged in 2005 and usually spends the winter in search of locusts in Mali, Niger or Mauritania. Hatched in 2000, Germaine bred successfully this summer for the first time and raised two young. Usually Storks use thermals to cover large distances without using much energy; however, this autumn the weather conditions were not good for soaring birds. She covered the 5.430 km between Belgium and southern Mauritania in 50 days, an exceptionally long time especially compared to last year, where she completed the same distance in 28 to 33 days. She was forced down by rains for a week south of Paris and was hesitating to cross from Tarifa to Morocco for 6 days. But she also scored a personal record of 507 km in one day in the border area between Morocco and Algeria.

Storks without borders - *Ooievaars zonder Grenzen* is a joint project from Natuurpunt/BirdLife Belgium, Animal Parc Planckendael, Zwin and is sponsored by the Flemish government.

More information on the project is available on www.storks.be or contacting Wim Van den Bossche at

Wim.vandenbossche@natuurpunt.be

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Monitoring common breeding birds in Spain



The Spanish common breeding bird monitoring scheme (Programa de Seguimiento de Aves Comunes Reproductoras en España – SACRE) was launched by SEO/BirdLife Spain in 1996. The programme aims to detect major changes in breeding bird populations throughout Spain, in order to better plan national conservation strategies. Monitoring breeding birds also tells us much about changes in other biodiversity and habitat quality.

Since 2002, SEO/BirdLife Spain has submitted SACRE data to the Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (PECBMS), a common initiative of the European Bird Census Council (EBCC) and BirdLife International. PECBMS collates similar data from 20 other countries and combines them to produce policy-relevant indicators on a European scale. One output, the European farmland bird indicator, has been adopted by a number of high-level EU policy processes. All EU Member States are now obliged to monitor their farmland birds to demonstrate the sustainability of their national agri-environment schemes. Spain is the most important country in the EU for species such as Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra* and Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*, which depend on sustainable farming practices.

The results from SACRE's first decade show that farmland bird populations in Spain declined over this period, while urban bird populations remained stable.

At the same time, many forest birds increased considerably, although it is not clear if this trend reflects genuine ecological improvements in forest habitats, or simply an increase in forest cover.

In order to obtain more information about common birds, SEO/BirdLife Spain has decided to start a winter monitoring programme, which will take place this year for the first time.

For further information, please contact Virginia Escandell at vescandell@seo.org

For more information about SACRE, see:

http://www.seo.org/programa_seccion_ficha.cfm?idPrograma=3&idArticulo=223

Learn more about the new winter monitoring programme (SACRE INVIERNO) at:

http://www.seo.org/programa_seccion_ficha.cfm?idPrograma=3&idArticulo=2951

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Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project



Wallasea Island is located on England's south-east coast in the heart of an internationally important estuary, and could soon be one of the UK's best sites for birds, even if it is not identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) yet. The RSPB/BirdLife UK is working to transform a large area of arable farmland, which will create a wetland mosaic of mudflats, shallow lagoons and pastures.

In the past the Essex coast was a haven for wildlife and a source of livelihood for local communities. Today, less than a tenth of this wild coast remains.

The RSPB Project aims to restore this special landscape for people and wildlife, helping adaptation to the challenges of climate change by providing space for nature and a place for relaxation and enjoyment.

It will be an exciting landmark conservation and engineering project for the 21st Century on a scale never before attempted in the UK, and the largest of its type in Europe. It will demonstrate how land can be managed to help the coast and its wildlife adapt in the face of climate change and accelerated sea level rise.

The British government has already turned a small part of the island into a living example of just what is possible. If the RSPB project bears fruit – and the funds needed are huge – the rest of Wallasea will be transformed in the same way, and the first new habitats should be created in two years.

Graham Wynne, RSPB's Chief Executive, says: "Wallasea will become a wonderful coastal wetland full of wildlife in a unique and special landscape. It will be a supermarket for birds, create nursery grounds for fish and be a true wilderness that people can visit, savour and enjoy."

If you can help, by supporting the first phase of developing this exciting project, please visit

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/w/wallaseaisland/index.asp>

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Switzerland publishes a new IBA inventory



SVS/BirdLife Switzerland and the Swiss Ornithological Institute recently published 'Important Bird Areas in Switzerland'. The book describes 31 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) which are important for 29 bird species that meet the qualifying criteria. The book will now be distributed to decision-makers to help gain more protection for these key sites.

The IBAs presented cover 13% of Switzerland's total area. Nearly half (48%) of the IBAs are located in the Alpine habitat which dominates Switzerland. Indeed, many bird species identified as important in the new publication are limited to the Eurasian alpine habitat. Three sites are in the Jura Mountains, two are in the cultivated landscapes of the Central Plateau, and 11 sites were selected for

wintering waterbirds and are along the most important Swiss lakes and rivers.

At present, many IBAs in Switzerland don't have any special protection status. However, a current objective is to integrate them into the Emerald-Network. This is a non-EU equivalent of the Natura 2000 network. Some IBAs are partly protected because they have been designated as Ramsar sites, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, or federal protected areas. However, a lot of work remains to be done to ensure a more complete protection of Swiss IBAs. Werner Müller, Director at SVS/BirdLife Switzerland added: "the publication is an important step in biodiversity conservation, but much more work will be needed to achieve the official protection of the sites under the Emerald Network".

The main threats to Swiss IBAs presented in the book are from lowland agricultural intensification, the abandonment of agriculture in the less accessible Alpine meadows, and the increasing disturbances caused by sports activities in more remote areas.

Publishing this book takes place after a long series of activities related to the IBA Programme in Switzerland: The first Swiss IBAs were identified in 1989 for the Inventory "Important Bird Areas in Europe". They contained only areas for wintering waterbirds. The criteria were revised in 1995, leading to the identification in IBA 2000 of further IBAs for breeding bird species in the Alps, the Jura Mountains and the Central Plateau. The new book now presents all the 31 IBAs of Switzerland in detail and will be used to convince the Swiss authorities of the importance of protecting IBAs to stop biodiversity loss.

For more information visit SVS/BirdLife Switzerland website at http://www.birdlife.ch/d/home_e.html

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Experts on the Great Bustard *Otis tarda* meet in Crimea, Ukraine



The second meeting on the Memorandum for Understanding for the Great Bustard *Otis tarda*, in the framework of the Convention on Migratory Species, took place between 9 and 12 November in Feodosia. The Autonomous Republic of Crimea is where the main breeding and wintering areas for this species are in Ukraine. The representatives of the states which are parties to the Memorandum for Understanding adopted several changes to the working program for this international agreement thus incorporating the latest scientific outcomes into their considerations. The meeting reviewed the status of the Great Bustard's population and the scientific results of the on-going conservation projects, which looked into the future distribution of Bustard habitats in Europe. It is now estimated that around 45,000 Great Bustards live across our continent, the two most important countries being Spain and Russia.

Good progress in implementing conservation measures was reported from most delegations and as a result the pan-European population of the Great Bustard remained stable or improved during the last four years. It became clear that the future of the Great Bustards in Central Europe mostly depends on favourable farming practices and intensive management of their habitats. Spain, Hungary and Austria reported powerlines to be the main cause of mortality of Bustards there. Russia and Ukraine are hosting a 'wilder' migratory population that is faced by similar threats, but also poaching and extreme weather conditions play their part.

Participants concluded that to be successful, Great Bustard's conservation in Europe must be expanded to cover all countries where the species breeds or winters now. Therefore maintaining good quality Bustard habitat remains top priority within the current range. But conservation also needs to look into future scenarios. Habitat models based on climate change predictions seem to be suggesting that France and Latvia will be on the winning side and

offer suitable space for Great Bustards in the future. Why not?

Documents from the meeting can be found here:

http://www.cms.int/species/otis_tarda/meetings/GB_2/Great_Bustard_2nd_SS_Meeting.htm

For more information please contact Boris Barov at Boris.Barov@birdlife.org

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“Europe still has good potential to preserve its wilderness”



This was one of the main conclusions of the workshop organized last month by BirdLife’s European Forest Task Force in Slovakia’s High Tatras National Park. Europe has a long history of intensive land use which too often was simply savage, nature exploitation.

Nevertheless, we can still count on a number of remote areas where bears, wolves, chamois and lynx can find refuge. In order to keep these areas, we need to look at them from a wider perspective, considering all the possible ways for restoration as well as more biodiversity-sensitive management of their surrounding landscapes.

The word wilderness, especially in the common language, has inherited the sense of spooky, mysterious places visited by weird creatures. However, instead of threatening humans, wilderness is nowadays threatened by human development.

What is the perception of wilderness in Europe and how can the North American experience be applied on the Old Continent? How would it be possible to reinforce wilderness preservation using the existing policy instruments? These were among the questions looked at by the participants and which generated fruitful discussions.

An increased interest in conservation has helped wilderness gain momentum in Europe. BirdLife International, together with other big conservation NGOs, has become part of the Wild Europe initiative aiming at protecting and restoring wilderness and large natural habitats along with promoting its wider economic and social benefits. The meeting of the Forest Task Force was one of a series of initiatives to broadly discuss wilderness protection – the next big one will be Wilderness Conference in Prague in May 2009 hosted by the Czech Presidency of the EU.

For more information contact Veronika Ferdinandova at veronika.ferdinandova@bspb.org

or visit the BirdLife website at

http://www.birdlife.org/action/change/europe/forest_task_force/FTF_annual_workshop_2008.html

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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 Riho Rinks, Conservation Officer at EOS/BirdLife Estonia



My name is Riho Rinks and I have been working for the Estonian Ornithological Society (EOS/BirdLife Estonia) as Conservation Officer since January 2008. My tasks are quite wide and cover both IBA (Important Bird Areas) monitoring and the production of our Newsletter.

Nature has always had a special place in my life, having spent my childhood walking in forests and taking trips on the lake, but I was not particularly interested in birds until the third University year, when I got involved in a research project on forest birds. These days spent watching them and studying their habitats stole my heart. At the same time, I was involved for the first time in the mid-winter waterfowl census, a long term international program, and from this moment on, a two-day birdwatching camp with friends in mid-January

to do the census has become a tradition.

I joined EOS/BirdLife Estonia first on a voluntary basis in 2004 and then as coordinator of several projects.

This four-year experience showed me that working for nature conservation requires dealing with policy issues and

diplomacy on a daily basis. When running a project I have often been disheartened at how little we know about birds, their needs and habitats, but I have also learnt that by working hard it's possible to make a difference and protect our wonderful planet.

You can contact Riho at Riho.Kinks@eoy.ee

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BirdLife European Partners get together for the first Communication & Education Workshop in Massaciucoli, Italy



On 5 and 6 November 2008 BirdLife Communicators and Educators from 22 BirdLife European Partners met for the first time in the Oasi del Chiarone, one of the nature reserves managed by LIPU/BirdLife Italy. The meeting was sponsored by the Mitsubishi Corporation Fund for Europe and Africa, Spring Alive and the European Commission, with the support of the Migliarino S. Rossore National Park. During plenaries and breakout sessions, participants shared ideas and projects on how to promote biodiversity better, how to write a communication strategy and how to evaluate national and international projects or campaigns. They heard about new online programs that offer possibilities for campaigning and about BirdLife's tools on how to be informed about the latest

news from the Partnership.

Meeting for the first time and having the possibility to know each other made communicators and educators feel that the BirdLife spirit is alive and that a joint collaboration will really make a difference.

Special thanks goes to Elena D'Andrea, Director of LIPU/BirdLife Italy who hosted the Workshop, to the LIPU staff who helped with the organization, especially Chiara Manghetti, Miranda Lupo and Ugo Faralli, and to LIPU's volunteers, who have been great in welcoming the participants and organizing the transfers during these two days.

The two busy days were enlivened by early morning walks in the nearby LIPU reserve and nice Italian food.

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Project seeks support: Site protection and NGO development in Western Balkans



There is a serious gap in knowledge and conservation action in the Western Balkans region, despite its extraordinarily rich biodiversity and important location at the heart of Europe. These countries host a large number of European and Globally threatened birds, including the Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*, Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*, European Roller *Coracias garrulus* and Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*.

Currently, BirdLife has no member organisations in the Western Balkans (i.e. Albania, Montenegro, FYR Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia) but has identified a number of organizations that are very interested in joining the BirdLife Partnership and who are carrying out a range of small-scale conservation activities related to birds.

The work to identify key sites for birds (Important Bird Areas) and biodiversity and deliver priority conservation actions is threatened by this lack of capacity, while the threats are increasing all the time.

This project, which aims at reinforcing the BirdLife network in the region, will help protect the rich biodiversity in Western Balkans in the long term. The short-term goal will be to improve the capacity of local conservation organizations to protect birds and their habitats.

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

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Wellbeing through wildlife "parle français" !

After the English, Polish and the Slovak version, the popular BirdLife publication "Wellbeing through wildlife in the EU" now speaks French also.

Interestingly analyzing examples from across Europe it shows the close connection between nature and people, and the many benefits we get from an healthy environment, in our daily life, for our health, for the economy and as protection against climate change effects.

You can download the brochure in French at http://www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/wellbeing_french%20.pdf

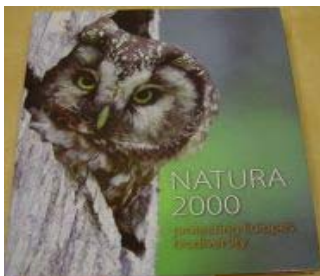
For more information contact Alison Duncan at Alison.Duncan@lpo.fr

You can also download the brochure in other languages at

http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/02/barroso_meeting_EU.html

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Get your free copy of the book "Natura 2000 – protecting Europe's biodiversity"



"Natura 2000 – protecting Europe's biodiversity" is a wonderful book produced by the European Commission, taking you on a journey through some of the most beautiful Natura 2000 sites in the EU. It will help you exploring and enjoying the rich variety of landscapes and wildlife in Europe with inspiring articles and astonishing pictures.

Interested in receiving your free copy?

Don't miss "*BirdLife Europe e-news*" in December then!

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Events

European events

- July - December 2008: French Presidency of the European Union
- 1-12 December 2008: UN Climate Change Conference, Poznan, Poland <http://www.cop14.gov.pl/index.php?lang=EN>
- 11 December 2008, Prague, Czech Republic: BirdLife International conference "The CAP and the EU Budget Review-Visions for the Future" <http://www.cso.cz/index.php?ID=1748>
- January - June 2009: Czech 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

- 26-28 November 2008, Brussels, Belgium: Birds and Habitats Directives Task Force for BirdLife Partners
- 28-29 November 2008, Old Lake Tata, Hungary: Wild Geese Festival 2008 <http://www.mme.hu/>

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