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Editorial: Born to Travel – the BirdLife Flyways campaign

Dear reader,



though it's hard to believe that spring has started here in Brussels - despite the optimistic, singing Blackbirds and Dunnocks - all Southern European countries by now have seen their first migratory birds arriving, some already in February. Swallows, storks, warblers and martins, as well as all the birds singing in towns and in the countryside, signify the start of spring for thousands of Europeans every year. This year, on 21st of March, the official start of spring in the northern hemisphere, BirdLife launched its new campaign called 'Born to Travel – the BirdLife Flyways campaign'.

Every year migratory birds perform magnificent feats of endurance and strength, crossing continents, flying thousands of miles, navigating during the dark, overflying deserts and seas, connecting people, cultures and habitats in Africa, Middle East and Europe through their journeys. Europe belongs to the African – Eurasian Flyway, one of the three flyways in the world.

However, despite their cultural importance and their role as indicators of the general ecosystem health, migratory birds are declining quite dramatically, with more than 40% of those that migrate between Africa, Middle East and Europe being threatened. During their journeys they have to face increasingly growing deserts, unsustainable land-use, obstacles built in their way such as power lines and windfarms, loss of habitat in their traditional resting or feeding places and they also often get illegally shot or trapped.

BirdLife's campaign launched on the first day of spring aims to address those problems, raising awareness of migratory birds, inspiring people to care for them and showing people and decision makers what they can do to help and make a difference. The campaign is currently strongly supported by Vogelbescherming Nederland (BirdLife in the Netherlands), SVS/BirdLife Schweiz (BirdLife in Switzerland) and the BirdLife Secretariat, and more than 60 organisations from the BirdLife Partnership in Europe, Africa and the Middle East are participating.

If you would like to know more please visit:

The Born to Travel website: <http://www.borntotravelcampaign.com>

The Flyways pages on the BirdLife website:

http://www.birdlife.org/flyways/africa_eurasia/borntotravel/index.html

Best regards

Dr Claire Papazoglou
Regional Director
European Division

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European Parliament asks for more action on biodiversity

Since last December when the Commission announced through its communication on biodiversity that the EU is unlikely to meet the 2010 target of halting the loss of biodiversity, there have been increasing calls for stronger action to safeguard wildlife and to restore ecosystems. The European Parliament, especially, is now very vocal in asking governments and the European Commission for stronger measures on biodiversity.

On 9 February, the Environment Committee of the European Parliament agreed on a set of questions, which the European Commission and the European Council (i.e. Member States) will have to answer during one of the next plenary sessions of the Parliament. For example, the Council will have to explain what Member States will do to strengthen the Natura 2000 network of protected areas, and specifically how more funding can be directed towards nature conservation.

At the same time, the European Commission will have to present Parliamentarians its new biodiversity policy for the post-2010, which will hopefully be based on the positive impacts of the Birds and Habitats Directives on Europe's environment. Both the Commission and the Council will also have to explain how they want to address the threat of Invasive Alien Species.

On the occasion of the event held on 11 February in the European Parliament, the European Commissioner for the Environment Stavros Dimas stressed the successes of the EU Birds Directive and Natura 2000, mentioning the ban of spring hunting in Malta, or the actions to save the Rospuda Valley in Poland. He nevertheless also underlined the need to finally integrate the protection of ecosystems in all EU Policies and the EU Budget. He stated that with only one Euro per citizen per month, Europeans could finance the Natura 2000 network, if there was only the political will to do so.

See BirdLife press release "2010 biodiversity target is a hundred years away" [here](#)

For more information contact Konstantin Kreiser, EU Policy manager at the BirdLife European Division at Konstantin.Kreiser@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.

In previous issues we have introduced you to some bird species that have benefited from the EU Birds Directive. This month we present you the White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, the last in this series. Thanks for travelling with us over these five months!

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* narrated by Rastislav Rybanic



March is without any doubts my favourite month of the year. Trees are blossoming, days become longer, and migratory birds are coming back from their long journey south and bring spring to every corner of Europe. In many European countries White Storks are the real messengers of spring. These amazing black and white birds, with their long red bill and skinny legs, are probably among the most beloved birds in Europe. White Storks and people have been living together for more than two hundred years, adapting to each other habits.

According to the legend and probably because they often nest in urban areas, White Storks bring the babies to the new parents. Poles, Lithuanians and

Ukrainians believe that Storks bring harmony to the family on whose property they nest, while both the Dutch city of the Hague and Lithuania have chosen White Storks as their symbol. On the 1st of March in Bulgaria friends exchange a bracelet made of woven red and white cotton strands, the so called 'Martenica bracelet', which brings health and prosperity, and which one has to wear until they see the first Stork of the year.

Every spring, while wearing my Martenica bracelet, I look forward to seeing my first White Stork, which will finally also bring spring to Belgium. During these past 30 years, the EU Birds Directive has made sure that these wonderful spring messengers can surely fly over European skies and has allowed the population to recover in many countries where it was decreasing.

If you have already seen your first Stork this year, register your observation on www.springalive.net, the website of the BirdLife Spring Alive Campaign, which brings spring all over Europe!

For more information contact Rastislav Rybanic, EU Nature Policy Officer at BirdLife European Division at Rastislav.Rybanic@birdlife.org

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Seabirds receive good news from the United Nations



On 3 March, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) agreed a ground-breaking set of best practice guidelines to reduce the accidental deaths of seabirds in fisheries. These guidelines set the gold standard for how fishing nations around the world should take simple, practical steps to halt the appalling loss of seabirds in fishing gear. The new guidelines extend the scope of the FAO's seabird action plan from longline fisheries to also include trawling and gill-nets.

However, it is vital that this does not remain a paper exercise, but gets published and enforced. With the aid of this powerful new FAO tool, countries which already have plans can improve them, and those which are developing plans or have yet to do so have a robust model to build on.

The European Union is part of this second group and its Seabird Action Plan is planned to be finalised by the end of 2009. With the Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* on the brink of extinction and other seabird species being killed at unsustainable rates, a swift finalisation and implementation of the Community action plan, commendably the first to be based on these ambitious and comprehensive new FAO guidelines, is badly needed.

For more information please contact Tatiana Nemcova, Senior EU Advocacy Officer at the BirdLife European Division at Tatiana.Nemcova@birdlife.org

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Starving vultures wait for Brussels decision

The EU Animal By-products Regulation, created in 2002 and currently being amended, had unexpected, severe and long-term starvation consequences for populations of vultures and other animals that feed on dead carrion, particularly in their main remaining stronghold, the Iberian Peninsula. Newspaper headlines have been captured when flocks of hungry vultures have strayed as far as Brussels. Sanitary rules requiring farmers to collect and incinerate all dead livestock have massively reduced the amount of carcasses available for carrion feeding birds.

While the European Commission has eased the rules to allow the management of controlled "feeding stations", this solution has not been sufficient, particularly in Spain where vulture populations are still big and widespread. BirdLife and SEO/BirdLife, its national Partner in Spain, have been calling for a more flexible derogation regime. This would allow, with strict control safeguards, an easier management of feeding stations. It would also allow leaving dead animals in the field in those extensive grazing systems and in those regions where vultures can actually effectively and safely dispose of them in a natural way.

The European Parliament Environment Committee voted in favour of such amendments and the European Commission has shown signs of being open to a positive solution. Negotiations between the two institutions and the European Council are ongoing. The future of one of the world's last strongholds of these magnificent birds

of prey now hangs in balance and depends on the EU institutions taking the right decision.

You can find more information about the EU Animal By-products Regulation (EC)1774/2002 [here](#)

For more information contact Ariel Brunner, Senior EU Agriculture Officer at the BirdLife European Division at Ariel.Brunner@birdlife.org

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RSPB working with children



Ever since it was formed in 1889, communication and education have been an integral part of the RSPB's work. Today, among the one million members, more than 170.000 are children. RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) works closely with schools to educate and inspire children about nature. Big Schools Birdwatch involves schoolchildren watching and recording the birds in their school grounds or local park for one hour at the end of January. It is an effective way of stimulating teachers to mention birds during their lessons and encouraging schools to create bird-feeding stations.

In 2009, over 2000 schools and almost 90,000 children participated in Big Schools Birdwatch. The Bird Friendly Schools Project trains volunteers to visit schools and encourages teachers and children to help birds and to study

the common species that visit their grounds during the year.

In partnership with other nature conservation organisations, the RSPB also manages the BBC Breathing Places Schools programme, which involves schools in various activities with a focus on simple actions for biodiversity. Some RSPB nature reserves also have structured education programmes for schools, allowing children to experience nature in an interactive and interesting way. Local, enthusiastic and informed children can be excellent ambassadors and communicators for conservation. Involving them in nature activities can also help to engage local communities in support of conservation.

RSPB will continue working closely with schools. Educating and inspiring children will remain one of the main areas of involvement.

For more information contact Barrie Cooper, RSPB International Education Manager at barrie.cooper@rspb.org.uk and visit <http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/teaching/>

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The Spring Alive campaign runs for the fourth time!



On 1 February, the BirdLife Spring Alive Campaign was launched for the fourth time by 30 members of the BirdLife International Partnership in Europe.

Spring Alive is a pan-European campaign to promote children's interest in nature conservation through the celebration of the arrival of spring, and its core component is a mass-participation website. It was designed especially for children between 8 and 12 years old, but of course their families are also encouraged to take part! Participants of the Spring Alive Campaign are encouraged to observe and record the arrival of four migratory bird species:

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Common Swift *Apus apus* and Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*.

Web surfers can already discover the first observations of migratory bird arrivals to Europe through several maps on the website. So far, sightings of the four Spring Alive species were submitted by participants from 18 European countries. Until now most of the birds were seen in southern Europe, but on the Spring Alive website, it will be easy to follow the rush of spring towards the north. "We get great responses from our participants" – says Magdalena Chrzanowska, European Coordinator of the Spring Alive Campaign – "We receive regularly wonderful bird stories from people all around Europe."

Hopefully this year the Spring Alive campaign will be even more successful than in 2008, when 56.264 observations were collected. Spring Alive has proven to be a great educational tool for the BirdLife European Partnership.

Join us now and record your sightings!

For more information contact Magdalena Chrzanowska, European Coordinator of the Spring Alive Campaign at magdalena.chrzanowska@otop.org.pl

Visit the Spring Alive website at <http://www.springalive.net>

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Last Italian derogation to the EU Birds Directive

The EU Birds Directive, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary on 2 April this year, aims at creating a comprehensive scheme of protection for all wild bird species naturally occurring in the European Union. Nonetheless under the article 9.1 of the Directive Member States can apply some derogations to the Directive in particular cases and for specific purposes, if allowed by their national law.

And this is exactly what happened in Italy, where in 2004 Lombardy, one of the northern regions, allowed some derogations to the implementation of the EU Birds Directive.

The result is that in the past five years Lombardy has allowed the shooting of 2.359.363 Eurasian Chaffinches *Fringilla coelebs*, 415.404 Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla*, 249.639 Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris*, 9.000 Tree Pipits *Anthus trivialis*.

Reacting to this situation in 2006 the European Commission opened an infringement procedure against 13 Italian regions, including Lombardy, for the bad application of this derogation. In the meantime, LIPU (BirdLife in Italy) collected 200.000 signatures against the use of derogation 9.1c in Italy and together with other environmental organizations they reported the violation of the Directive to the Italian Government, whereas the Italian Constitutional Court stated that the law from Lombardia did not comply with the Italian legislation.

As a consequence, at the end of 2008 the President of Lombardy finally admitted the illegality of the regional law and declared that derogations related to the shooting of protected birds will not be allowed in the future.

For more information contact Claudio Celada, Conservation Director at LIPU at Claudio.celada@lipu.it

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Mixed fortunes for Malta's breeding birds



BirdLife Malta launched the first Malta Breeding Bird Atlas on 27 February 2009 at an event attended by the Minister for Resources and Rural Affairs. The Atlas, done in collaboration with the British Trust for Ornithology, reveals the mixed fortunes of Malta's breeding birds in 2008.

A total of 29 species were confirmed breeding, along with a further eight listed as 'Possible' or 'Probable' breeders. The Atlas highlights the continued importance of the Maltese islands for its seabird populations and shows the range expansion of several species after the 2008 ban on spring hunting.

However, the results of the Atlas show that, while some species were widespread on the island, the majority of them were highly localised. This is particularly true of Finches, which are targeted in large numbers by trappers, and Raptors, heavily persecuted by poachers. As a result, these particular species were shown to be extremely rare or not present at all, something which is not justified by the availability of suitable habitat as these species have viable breeding populations in similar-sized islands throughout the Mediterranean.

"Malta is the only country in Europe with no viable breeding population of Raptors or Finches," said Dr Andre Raine, one of the Atlas's co-authors. "In future Atlases we will hopefully see a reversal of fortunes for species such as these, but only if Malta abides by the EU Birds Directive and the law is enforced".

For more information please contact Dr. Andre Raine, BirdLife Malta's Conservation Manager at andre.raine@birdlifemalta.org

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Egyptian vultures *Neophron percnopterus* exposed to toxic substances

In 2008, BSPB (BirdLife in Bulgaria) and the Natural History Museum of Spain carried out a toxicological study on a sample of 15 juvenile Egyptian vultures hatched in Bulgaria. The aim of the study was to determine the causes of their catastrophic decline in the Balkans.

All young vultures tested showed signs of dangerous infections, most probably originating from consuming dead poultry or pigeons at garbage pits, while three of them had been exposed to antibiotics and several others to anti-inflammatory and anti-parasitic drugs, all used in veterinary medicine to treat livestock. Some had high doses of heavy metals such as lead and cadmium in their tissues.

All these contaminants destroy the immune system of wild birds and are especially dangerous for vultures. The resulting immuno-depression could cause increased mortality among juveniles and adults after they get infected by parasites or pathogens. The tested individuals appeared to be much worse affected than Spanish Egyptian vultures, subjected to the same tests. The continuous exposure to antibiotics ingested through consumption of treated animals is known to damage the liver and kidneys. The scale of the problem was recognized by the recently completed BirdLife European Action Plan for the Egyptian Vulture.

The rate of decline of Egyptian vultures in the Balkans is very high and there are fears of imminent extinction of the species. In Bulgaria 22 pairs disappeared from 2003 to 2008, which is nearly half of the population. Measures to halt the decline of this flagship species are urgently needed, but unfortunately funds are not available. The continuous lack of governmental funding in Bulgaria is the most significant factor preventing the implementation of the adopted National Species Action Plan, while at least several hundred thousand Euros are needed for effective large-scale conservation measures.

For further information, please contact Ivaylo Angelov, Project Coordinator at ivailoangelov@abv.bg

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The Financial crisis hits Latvian forests



From 2009, the maximum allowed volume of trees that could be cut each year in Latvian state forests was increased to 2 million cubic metres in response to the slump of timber prices. The Government decided to increase this quota until the end of 2010 - a measure justified by the Government as precautionary, to address the possible impact of the financial crisis. The increase in maximum allowable volume is thought to compensate for the fact that private owners are unwilling to sell their product while prices are low.

The consultation process before the decision, unfortunately, left out major stakeholders such as conservation NGOs and the Ministry of Environment, while the decision was presented as 'only if needed option' and not as the actually planned cutting volumes. But what will happen in Latvian forests if this new measure is actually used?

Currently there are no measures in place to safeguard general biodiversity or birds in forests in Latvia and therefore the Latvian Ornithological Society (LOB; BirdLife in Latvia) fears that the new regulation may have dramatic negative consequences.

It is estimated that every year in Latvian state forests between 14,000 and 20,000 bird nests are destroyed by forestry operations. The figure is based on data of population densities published in the Latvian Breeding Bird Atlas, and related to the size of the annually logged forest area, but experts reckon the actual number to be even higher. Even when bird nests are not destroyed, forestry operations disturb threatened breeding species, such as Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* and Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, which already show declines in Latvia the last 20 years.

With the adoption of the new regulations, forest issues obviously become one of LOB's top priorities for 2009. Forests cover almost half of Latvia but at the moment there are no clearly defined forest conservation targets to determine the area of forest which should be cut or protected. The creation of micro-reserves could be a possible solution to protect nesting sites but it alone cannot guarantee the protection of all forest species. For example, micro-reserves are not capable of protecting species using large tracts of undisturbed habitat.

For more information please contact Viesturs Kerus, Chairman of the Board of LOB at Viesturs@lob.lv

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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 Thierry Dutertre, Director of the Communication and Partnership Department at LPO (BirdLife in France)



My name is Thierry Dutertre and I have been working for LPO (BirdLife in France) for seven years as Director of the Communication and Partnership Department.

After many years of working with companies and communication agencies, I felt I wanted to use my experience to serve a great cause, and that is why I joined the LPO. In a way, this could also be considered as a kind of "carbon offsetting", since in the past I have been Marketing Director of an airline company!

Building on my previous experiences, I have tried to strengthen the links between private companies and LPO, making them contribute more to protect the environment and encouraging them to actively participate in LPO's activities, and it worked very well! For example, LPO is now managing the natural sites of the ACCOR hotels group and last year it ran a successful communication campaign with Clear Channel, an advertising display company.

With the concept of sustainable development becoming more prominent, LPO has been increasingly involved in improving the environmental decisions of many other firms, such as Danone.

Conserving our biodiversity and our birds for future generations is among my main motivations and my reward is seeing people taking action to make this world better. I have always been inspired by a sentence from Ian Mac Millan, an ornithologist of the 19th century, who once stated: "The Condors must be saved. Not so much because we need them, but because we need the human resources that can save them. Those are the same resources we will need, when we shall save ourselves". So now it is up to us to take action to save our wonderful planet!

You can contact Thierry Dutertre, Director of the Communication and Partnership Department at LPO on Thierry.dutertre@lpo.fr

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European Elections: a chance for Europeans to choose representatives who care



From 4 to 7 June 2009 European citizens will have the opportunity to choose their representatives in the European Parliament (MEPs).

In this early phase of the elections campaign, when political party manifestos have been published, candidates have been selected and the atmosphere is warming up, BirdLife calls on its members and supporters to engage with the MEP candidates and to make sure biodiversity will be one of their main priorities.

MEPs elected for the next Parliamentary term will shape the future of the EU's nature conservation policy. They will have to learn from the likely failure of the EU in halting the loss of wildlife by 2010, but will also have the opportunity to build on the success of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. They will decide the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, which has a serious impact on our seabirds, they will determine how green the Common Agricultural Policy budget is, and they will make or break Europe's approach to climate change.

The BirdLife International Partnership, with almost two million dedicated members across the EU, presents its four political priorities in the publication 'Vote for our planet – An environmental vision for the 2009-2014 European Parliament'. BirdLife calls on MEP candidates to lend their support to its vision for a Europe which cares about its citizens and about the environment on which we all depend.

Find out more on www.birdlife.org/EuroElections2009/introduction.html

For more information please contact Tatiana Nemcova, Senior EU Advocacy Officer at the BirdLife European Division at Tatiana.nemcova@birdlife.org

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BirdLife launches its first publication highlighting its strategic priorities for 2009-2012



BirdLife International European Division recently published its first brochure on the European Programme for the period 2009-2012, highlighting the key issues on which the European Partnership will work jointly in that period. Species, Sites, Habitats and People are the four main pillars around which BirdLife's work is developed, while the new programme promotes cross cutting issues like Climate Change, Flyways and Marine particularly.

In the coming years, BirdLife will focus particularly on preventing the extinctions of threatened bird species and keeping common birds common. More Important Bird Areas (IBAs) will be identified and monitored thanks to a strong promotion and protection of the European IBAs network. On the policy side, the BirdLife European Division will continue to influence relevant EU policies at all levels to protect terrestrial and marine habitats. And last but not least, BirdLife will continue to engage people and build capacity for future generations. To achieve this goal, BirdLife needs to raise the profile of birds and biodiversity while growing its network of grassroots organisations and ensuring

solid financial stability.

You can download your copy from the BirdLife website at:

<http://www.birdlife.org/regional/europe/index.html>

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BirdLife presents its new pages on Biodiversity policy

BirdLife International launched a renewed section on its website to present European Biodiversity policy and explain the contribution of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives to saving European natural heritage. The two Directives provide a strong and modern framework for the conservation of species, sites and habitats, and one of their key requirements is the establishment of a network of protected areas for nature, on land and sea, the so-called "Natura 2000 Network".

On the new BirdLife pages, readers can find information on how the Directives work, as well as concrete examples of how the implementation of the Directives helped biodiversity survive in a changing world.

To find out more visit:

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

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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

- 30 March 2009, Madrid, Spain: International Conference on "The future of the Common Agricultural Policy beyond 2013: For a new Common Rural Policy - A View from Spain". Visit http://www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/agenda_vision_seo.pdf

- 02 April 2009, Brussels, Belgium: Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Birds Directive

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