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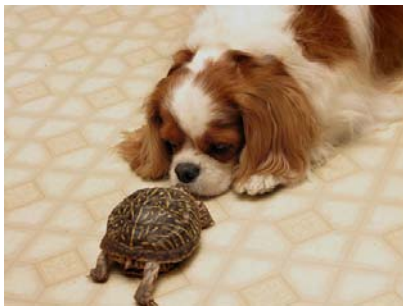


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Editorial: Good news for Malta in serious times

Dear readers,

On 10 September the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg issued good news for Europe's migratory birds and all who care about our natural environment. The Court declared that the Maltese Government had breached the EU Birds Directive in the last years by allowing the spring hunting of Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*. Since Malta entered the EU back in 2004, and actually well before that, there had been controversial discussions whether hunting as practiced in Malta was compatible with EU law. BirdLife International and BirdLife Malta from the very beginning insisted that the opening of a spring hunting season by Malta did not comply with the Birds Directive and therefore had to stop.

We very much hope that last month's Court decision now closes the chapter of spring hunting in Malta. At the same time we urge the Maltese government to de-escalate the ongoing conflict on hunting through firm steps towards a climate of dialogue, transparency and proper law-enforcement. At the doorstep of 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, and in the light of an unprecedented planetary environmental crisis, we simply cannot afford to have such conflicts any more. All those who care for nature, including hunters, must join forces, making sure our own activities are sustainable and fight the threats to biodiversity together.

This issue of our newsletter offers you a wider range of examples how BirdLife is active for Europe's and the world's biodiversity, and I hope it will inspire you to work with us for a better environment!

With best wishes,



Konstantin Kreiser
EU Policy Manager
BirdLife International European Division

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European Court condemns Malta on spring hunting

In a verdict delivered on 10 September, the European Court of Justice (ECJ, case C-76/08) declared that Malta has breached European law by allowing spring hunting of Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* in the years 2004-2007.

BirdLife International and BirdLife Malta welcomed the ruling as it shows that this practice jeopardizes the conservation of these species, which have been classified by BirdLife as having an unfavourable conservation status in Europe. As a consequence, BirdLife concludes spring hunting has to end permanently. Hunting in autumn can continue for these and 30 other species in Malta, under certain conditions laid out in the EU Birds Directive.

BirdLife International and BirdLife Malta had submitted a complaint to the European Commission on Malta's insistence on spring hunting in 2005. "This ruling is good news for millions of European birds, including Turtle Dove and Quail that cross Malta every spring on their dangerous migration back from Africa. Once again we have an example how the EU Birds Directive can help our common natural heritage", said Konstantin Kreiser, EU Policy Manager at BirdLife International in Brussels.

"Malta needs to come in line with the Birds Directive and ban spring hunting. At the same time, as we have said many times before, Maltese hunters have every right to continue their practice during the autumn hunting season within the parameters of the law, and respecting the list of huntable species" said Joseph Mangion, BirdLife Malta's President.

For more information please contact Rastislav Rybanic, BirdLife's EU Nature Policy Officer at rastislav.rybanic@birdlife.org

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Beacon of hope for our seabirds?



Up to 2 million birds have been killed in the European fisheries as bycatch, since the European Commission made its initial commitment to tackle the problem 10 years ago. Dismayed by the lack of the action by the Commission's DG MARE, BirdLife has prepared a 'Shadow' Action plan for reducing seabird bycatch and have presented it to Commissioner Borg and DG MARE in the hope of galvanizing progress.

The data from BirdLife show that seabird bycatch is a serious problem in the EU, with greatest concern for those species that are either facing global extinction or those with the majority of their breeding populations in Europe. In particular, Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*, which is confined as a nesting bird to Spain's Balearic Islands, is predicted to become extinct within a generation. It is believed that bycatch in longline fisheries is a significant factor in the chronic decline of this 'Critically Endangered bird'. Up to 50 individual birds have been caught on hooks on a single longline.

BirdLife also shows that, particularly for longline fisheries, the problem can be virtually eliminated by applying an appropriate suite of fishery-specific mitigation measures. This not only removes a primary threat from species which are a

subject to international conservation obligations, not least the EU Birds Directive, but can also reduce economic losses to the longlining fleets because bait-snatching by birds can lower the fishing efficiency of vessels.

BirdLife has been encouraged by positive new signals from the Commission about some forthcoming concrete steps aiming to address the plight of seabirds. At the same time, however, we remain cautious about being over-optimistic as our hopes for any action at all, far less a comprehensive plan, have so often been in vain before and the clock is ticking for the Balearic shearwater.

Download BirdLife Shadow Action Plan at

http://www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/Shadow_Community_Plan_of_Action_Sep_FINAL.pdf

For more information contact Tatiana Nemcova, Senior EU Advocacy Officer at Tatiana.Nemcova@birdlife.org

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Governments confronted with inconvenient truth about biodiversity – Stromstad conference of the Swedish EU Presidency



BirdLife International welcomed the strong wake-up call given by a high-level Ministerial meeting organised by the Swedish EU Presidency in Stromstad, Sweden. The aim of the conference was to outline how Europe can take global leadership in protecting ecosystems and biodiversity. 2010 has been declared by the UN as the 'Year of Biodiversity' and new global targets and strategies are needed to tackle the loss of species and habitats which threatens human well-being in an unprecedented scale.

In Stromstad, the latest scientific findings on the economic impacts of the planetary environmental crisis were discussed. The main topic of the discussion was a new groundbreaking report by the economist Pavan Sukhdev based on a study project on 'The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity'.

Konstantin Kreiser, EU Policy Manager, representing BirdLife at the Stromstad meeting, commented: "Thanks to the shocking facts unveiled by Pavan Sukhdev it seems politicians now start to realise what is at stake: biodiversity protection is no longer an issue just for nature lovers, but it has become a matter of survival for mankind. Unfortunately this learning process is much slower than the ongoing destruction of our planet".

"The real drama is that EU governments, like many others, still follow a short-sighted economic model that unravels our safety net against climate change, and dismantles the pre-condition for economic prosperity: a healthy environment. If we do not protect nature, nature will not protect us".

Mr Sukhdev shocked the participants of the Stromstad meeting with a very inconvenient truth on the future of coral reefs, stressing how biodiversity protection is no longer an issue just for nature lovers, but it has become a matter of survival for mankind. Coral reefs protect coasts against sea-level rise, and secure the income of half a billion people. But coral reefs are under threat from global warming, fisheries and other pressures. If governments do not manage to agree on very ambitious climate targets in Copenhagen, they basically take the decision that we will live in a world without coral reefs – and will be responsible for hundreds of millions of environmental refugees.

In the light of this new evidence, BirdLife calls on EU leaders to no longer hide behind empty declarations and non-binding action plans. Together with other NGOs, BirdLife presented a proposal for an „EU Rescue Plan for Biodiversity“.

EU Member States and especially Commission President Barroso want to be seen as green world leaders. This is only credible if Europeans do their homework, and here are three urgent things to start with: **first**, we must strengthen and better finance our EU nature protection legislation, **secondly** we must green all EU policies, especially relating to agriculture and fisheries, and **thirdly** we must reduce Europe's impact on global biodiversity (e.g. by revising the EU's destructive biofuels policy). If we continue to fail on this, the EU risks to end up on the backseat in global environmental negotiations.

Download the Chair's conclusions at http://www.se2009.eu/polopoly_fs/1.14381!menu/standard/file/Chairs%20conclusion%20Str%C3%B6mstad.pdf

More information on the TEEB at www.teebweb.eu

Download BirdLife's "EU Rescue Plan for Biodiversity" at

http://www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/BirdLife_briefing_sweden_09.pdf

More information also at the Swedish Presidency page on biodiversity.
http://www.se2009.eu/en/meetings_news/2009/9/7/high-level_meeting_visions_for_biodiversity_beyond_2010_people_ecosystem_services_and_the_climate_crisis

For more information please contact Konstantin Kreiser, BirdLife's EU Policy Manager at konstantin.kreiser@birdlife.org.

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Go birdwatching with BirdLife in Latvia!



LOB (BirdLife in Latvia) has established 'Motacilla', a new company aimed at promoting and developing birdwatching tourism in Latvia. The name comes from *Motacilla alba*, the scientific name for Pied Wagtail, the national Latvian bird and symbol of LOB. The company will also sell bird-related products and in the future will organise educational trips and conferences.

As part of LOB, the income from 'Motacilla's' activities will fund research and bird protection activities in Latvia.

Ilze Vilskerste, Director of 'Motacilla', explains that she thought about establishing such a company during the BirdLife World Conference she attended in Buenos Aires last year, where she was impressed by the projects

of the Argentine 'Seriema Nature Tours'. "It is amazing to see how new and great ideas start when there is the opportunity to exchange experiences with similar organisations engaged in the same field of work", she commented.

The team working for 'Motacilla' comprises experienced ornithologists and birdwatchers, who are involved in different projects in Latvia. "With a joint effort we are trying to turn the public's attention to Latvia's incredible birds and nature," continued Ms Vilskerste.

Foreign tourists interested in nature and birdwatching will find that Motacilla's programme can be adapted to their needs, allowing them to discover interesting parts of the country.

After the first birdwatching tour organised by the new born 'Motacilla', Jarmo Uimonen, a Finnish tourist commented: "Thank you for an excellent and well planned tour in Latvia! I have heard only praise and positive feedback, and on behalf of the group I can say that our stay in Latvia was very successful and certainly something to remember. Everything went smoothly and even the weather was on our side. In fact, we are already planning to come back next year".

Visit the website (also available in English): www.motacilla.lv

For more information please contact Ilze Vilskerste at ilze@lob.lv

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Kestrels breeding in an Armenian TV station

ASPB (BirdLife in Armenia), in collaboration with children and other Partners, managed to help Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* breeding in the Gorayk IBA, located in the southern part of the country.



The bird colony used to breed on the roof of a Television station, a high concrete building with roof cavities surrounded by pasture meadows and cereal fields. Thanks to a project involving schools and ASPB, more nests were created in order to welcome all the nesting pairs.

After the TV station decided to destroy one of the "nesting buildings", ASPB, supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy and SVS/BirdLife Switzerland, started successful negotiations which led to a positive solution for birds and people.

The TV station agreed to rent one of the buildings to ASPB, who is now free to restore it and make it comfortable for breeding Kestrels.

ASPB visit to the site demonstrated how successful their initiative has been, with Kestrels already using the artificial breeding structure. APSB hope that this project will be useful for other Partners in the world to help the conservation of this species.

For more information please contact Luba Balyan, National IBA Coordinator at ASPB at armbirds@yahoo.com

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Swedish breeding birds finally feeling better

As current holder of the Presidency of the EU, Sweden is leading the work on strengthening EU biodiversity policy after 2010. But has Sweden put its own house in order? Or, more specifically, what is the state of the populations of breeding birds in Sweden? The trends indicated in Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status - showing that almost half of Sweden's breeding birds had seen their populations dwindle between 1990 and 2000 - were worrying enough for the Swedish Nature Protection Agency to commission a more thorough analysis. An expert group was hence formed in 2007 with a mission to gather the best available data and provide a comprehensive overview of population changes in Swedish breeding birds over the last 30 and 10 years, respectively.

The resulting report confirms an overall negative trend over the past three decades, with more species declining (38%) than increasing (32%). Birds associated with the agricultural landscape, as well as with forests, are disproportionately negatively affected.

However, over the last decade, more species have in fact seen their populations increase (29%) than decrease (19%). Most notably, the proportion of species with stable trends was around 50% over the past 10 years, compared to 28% over the 30-year period. The authors hence identify increasing stability as the most prominent trend over the last 10 years. Many species that have long been in decline have now seen their populations level out, and some have even started to increase. Overall, though, the recent population stabilisation is taking place on levels much lower than in the past. Much work thus remains to be done. We may have counted our birds, but it remains true that one should not count one's chickens before they've hatched.

For more information please contact Linus Blomqvist at linus.blomqvist@gmail.com

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BirdLife's major contribution to international conferences



BirdLife International and its Partners just attended two key international conferences, giving a major contribution to both of them. At both conferences, Ian Burfield, BirdLife's European Research Manager, presented a novel method for identifying national responsibilities for bird conservation.

The 7th Conference of the European Ornithologists' Union in Zurich in August was attended by 380 participants, and included symposia on many relevant topics, from 'impacts of land-use change on farmland birds and potential policy opportunities', through 'causes of Palearctic-African migrant declines', to 'recent developments in GPS tracking and satellite telemetry'. A keynote plenary by Juliet Vickery from the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), covered 'farmland bird declines: from diagnosing declines to testing solutions'.

The 2nd European Congress of Conservation Biology in Prague in September was even larger, with 1,200 participants, including many students. Staff from many BirdLife Partners made presentations, including several in a special session on Natura 2000. Irina Mateeva described how BSPB (BirdLife in Bulgaria) used scientific data to identify candidate Special Protection Areas, Zoltan Waliczky from the RSPB presented the European Habitats Forum's views on the future of Natura 2000, and Przemek Chylarecki (former President of OTOP - BirdLife in Poland) described the campaign to save the Rospuda Valley.

For more information, visit <http://www.eou2009.ch/> or <http://www.eccb2009.org/>, or e-mail Ian Burfield, European Research and Database Manager, at ian.burfield@birdlife.org

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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 **Vaclav Zamecnik, Agriculture Officer at CSO (BirdLife in the Czech Republic)**



My name is Vaclav Zamecnik and I am working in CSO (BirdLife in the Czech Republic) as Agriculture Officer. My passion for birds and nature started already during the primary school and still continues!

After graduating in Landscape Engineering at the Prague University, I have worked in the Ministry of Agriculture for two years.

When I saw that CSO was recruiting an Agriculture Officer in 2003, I knew this was a chance I should not miss. Today I can surely confirm that joining CSO was a good decision.

The work of the agriculture team within BirdLife in Europe is really making a difference. From the policy point of view, the BirdLife vision for a sustainable and nature friendly Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is more and more accepted by political leaders and CSO has slightly contributed to it by organizing an international conference about future of CAP in December last year. I am glad

that the ongoing lobbying for new agrienvironmental schemes supporting biodiversity in arable land is also bringing its first success.

As a member of the working group for the protection of Great Bustard *Otis tarda* I am also actively involved in the analysis of suitable breeding conditions for this magnificent bird. Part of my work is also connected to the creation of 'Josefovské louky', the first ornithological park in the Czech Republic, which will mainly host Waders and other bird species living in wet grasslands. We welcome any supporters of this unique project!

Thanks to my work I have met a lot of extraordinary people, from farmers, devoted birdwatchers, high politicians, to my beloved colleagues from the 'BirdLife family'. I do believe that I will be meeting them again in the future and if these meetings will take place in a lovely farmland area with singing skylarks above us, I will even enjoy them most.

You can contact Václav at zamecnik@birdlife.cz

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Events

European events

- July- December 2009: Swedish Presidency of the European Union

BirdLife Events

- 22-23 October 2009, Purkersdorf, Austria: The BirdLife European Forest Task Force Annual Workshop (for BirdLife Partners only)

- 26-30 October 2009, Huesca, Spain: 6th International Symposium: Limnology and Aquatic Birds: Monitoring, Modelling and Management

<http://www.ipe.csic.es/congreso/principal.html>

- 9-11 November 2009, Malta: BirdLife European Partnership Meeting (for BirdLife Partners only)

- 18-19 November, Gdansk, Poland: II Communication, Education and Fundraising Workshop (for BirdLife Partners only)

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