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Editorial: Will our politicians ever listen?

Dear reader,

Christmas, the holidays, the New Year are times of relaxation and happiness, optimism and good wishes. I have struggled for weeks to think of a positive message to send you in this last issue of 2008. In a year when focus on short-term profit triggered a financial crisis that has gripped the whole world, affecting the lives of billions of people already, most severely the poor, and when governments seem to be flailing uncertain what to do. When the environmental crisis, caused by the same unsustainable behaviour, is becoming more evident than ever before. When governments around the world, caught up in a panic, think they are helping the economy and society by weakening environmental commitments (like the EU did on climate change recently). With all this happening, it's difficult to find something positive to say. But there is.

Through this year, once more, while fighting hard many unfair battles on biofuels, the CAP, the Via Baltica in Poland, spring hunting in Malta, destruction of sites in Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and elsewhere across Europe, we weren't alone, and collectively we had successes.

BirdLife Partners from across Europe collaborated with passion and with state of the art scientific and on the ground information supporting our efforts in Brussels, the RSPB/BirdLife UK continued to give us tremendous support with its excellent team, and all contributed to fighting these unfair battles. As did many other NGOs. In Brussels, we worked a lot with the EEB, Greenpeace, Transport and Environment, WWF and others. We found support from Members of the European Parliament, Commission officials, national government officials and academics. So here's my positive message, there exist out there, many people with excellent ideas, a passion for doing good and stopping short-term thinking and irresponsibility, people who care for the public interest and things would have been much worse without them all.

It's people who do the damage, and it's people, and people alone, who can put this world on a sustainable path, the only practical, ethical, and vitally needed route.

All best wishes for a great festive season, and a happy and sustainable New Year 2009!

Dr Claire Papazoglou
Regional Director
European Division

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The EU is unlikely to meet 2010 target



In its mid-term review of the "2010 Biodiversity Action Plan", published earlier this month, the European Commission confirmed BirdLife's concerns about the state of Europe's nature. The 27 Member States are about to fail collectively to halt the decline of European biodiversity by 2010. Heads of government had agreed on this target already in 2001, and repeatedly reaffirmed their commitments (last time at the European Council in spring 2008).

Now the European Commission presented a comprehensive analysis of what the EU and each Member State individually have done to implement this action plan. It also looks at the EU's responsibility to address the destruction of ecosystems outside Europe. The facts delivered by the report speak a clear language and reveal huge gaps between stated ambitions and real action. To cite some examples, the majority of species of European interest are in unfavourable conservation status; many Member States do not use fully the opportunities provided by the EU budget to finance biodiversity conservation (e.g. through agri-environmental measures); European seas are severely overfished and Member States made very little progress in designating marine protected areas; and while progress has been made on designating Natura 2000 sites, appropriate management plans have been developed for only about 20% of them.

Therefore BirdLife fully agrees with the Commissioner for Environment Mr Dimas who called "on all Member States to redouble their efforts to sustain the variety of life, and the health of the ecosystems that underpin our prosperity and well being". Next year debates have to start discussing which additional measures need to be taken after 2010 in the light of the expected failure.

For more information visit

www.birdlife.org/news/news/2008/12/biodiversity_mid_term_review.html

[http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?](http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1988&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en)

[reference=IP/08/1988&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/bap_2008.htm)

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/bap_2008.htm

Or contact Konstantin Kreiser 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.

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 Great Bustard: a bird of freedom narrated by Rastislav Rybanic



Although the Great Bustard *Otis tarda* is a rare bird, it is actually quite well-known among some Europeans. At first glance one can be mistaken to think it's a Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo*, but it's an all different kind of bird. Hungarians consider this bird a national symbol and call it the 'King of the Steppe'.

To me, the Great Bustard is a symbol of natural freedom. Freedom that still can be found in some parts of Europe despite all the changes in our natural environment.

The Great Bustard lives in open steppe lands in Spain, Portugal and Central

Europe. It needs open, natural landscapes, quite large areas and low intensity agriculture. Unfortunately there are very few such large, natural, open spaces left in Europe these days and as a consequence, this bird has declined in most European areas, especially in Central Europe. Main reasons for the decline are the severe fragmentation of its habitat, by massive construction of power lines, roads and other infrastructures as well as intensification of farming practices. The picture is not so gloomy though, with the populations in Spain and Portugal doing well and a subpopulation on the Austrian, Slovakian and Hungarian border increasing thanks to strong conservation efforts. The survival and restoration of the Great Bustard in parts of Europe would not be possible without important legislation such as the Birds Directive, the EU LIFE funding tool and the work of many dedicated people who really want to save this species in order to allow our grandchildren to enjoy the 'King of the Steppe'.

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

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The European Commission willing to protect the Black Sea coast



On 27 November 2008, the European Commission took a strong stance by officially opening a legal infringement procedure against Bulgaria for failing to implement the EU Birds Directive. The Bulgarian government has recently agreed to a very large number of developments that are likely to do significant harm to the unique Kaliakra Important Bird Area (IBA) site on the Black Sea coast, which until recently was pristine coastal steppe land.

Currently, more than 450 individual development projects are being constructed or proposed on the Kaliakra site, among them tourist complexes, golf courses and more than 200 wind turbines. The projects occupy an area as big as 25 kilometers, nearly 30% of Kaliakra's area.

BirdLife International and the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB/BirdLife in Bulgaria) welcome the move by the European Commission and hope Bulgaria will now take the necessary steps to save Kaliakra – to avoid a European Court case and ultimately a heavy penalty.

BirdLife is in favour of sustainable tourism – and strongly supports the development of wind energy, but what is happening at Kaliakra has nothing to do with strategic, responsible planning. Investors and authorities should have learned by now that sound assessments of environmental impacts and checking for alternative solutions is the best guarantee for successful investments. A European Court case can bring huge delays and costs.

The Kaliakra site is a very important place for many migratory birds breeding in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe: more than two hundred thousand Storks, Cranes and Raptors pass this site every autumn and spring on their way to and from the Middle East and Africa. These birds would be put at a high risk by the foreseen developments, because most of their foraging or resting places would be lost. At the same time large parts of the important, Europe wide protected, Black Sea coast steppe habitat, would be lost if the mentioned projects would be realised.

For more information contact Irina Mateeva at irina.kostadinova@bspb.org

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Climate change: leaders fail to read the signs, neither in Poznan nor Brussels



The year ends with two disappointing and very worrying news for the world's climate. Governments did not have the courage to take the necessary steps to save society and the environment from a climatic collapse. While scientists ring more and more alarm bells, the UN Climate Change Conference in Poznan failed to formulate concrete greenhouse gas reduction targets, and industrialized countries shamefully avoided concrete commitments on how they would help the world's poor to cope with the already unavoidable, potentially devastating, impacts of climate change.

Progress in Poznan was undermined further by the embarrassing performance of many EU governments who, under the pressure from the financial crisis, seemed determined to dismantle Europe's leadership role in addressing climate change. The

negotiations on the formerly praised EU “climate and energy package” resulted in weakened rules for car emissions, an almost toothless Emission Trading Scheme (that will not help creating the urgently needed low-carbon economy) and a biofuels policy that is likely to accelerate deforestation and biodiversity loss without reducing greenhouse gases.

All this will make the next year even harder: 2009 needs to end with a very ambitious climate change deal in Copenhagen, if we want to escape disaster.

For more information visit BirdLife’s pages on climate change (http://www.birdlife.org/eu/EU_policy/Climate_change/index.html) and a recent press release on the EU’s role in the Poznan climate talks (http://www.birdlife.org/news/extra/europe/climate_change.html)

Or contact Konstantin Kreiser at Konstantin.Kreiser@birdlife.org

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Welcome back Imperial Eagle!



The year 2008 marked the 10th anniversary of the Imperial Eagle’s *Aquila heliaca* return to Austria after nearly 200 years of extinction, and the big raptor celebrated the event by expanding its breeding distribution. Up to 2007, three to four eagle pairs used to breed at Austria’s Eastern border and four to five pairs were visiting from Eastern neighbouring countries. But this spring, for the first time, another pair bred successfully in the North-eastern edge of Austria. The Eagles’ comeback was encouraged by conservation measures implemented across the border in Hungary and Slovakia, as well as by the widespread use of set-aside measures and the implementation of agri-environmental programmes. A conservation project developed by BirdLife

Austria on behalf of the province of Lower Austria will focus on monitoring the population, securing natural nests and providing artificial ones, as well as on informing the public, and in particular landowners. Protecting these majestic birds against illegal persecution will be of crucial importance for BirdLife Austria. However, dishearteningly, their future success might well be jeopardized by recent changes to the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy such as the abolition of the set aside. Long time strategies for habitat protection will have to compensate the negative effects of set aside loss and the rather insignificant shift of funding from large-scale to small-scale farming.

For more information contact Susanna Martinek of BirdLife Austria at Susanna.Martinek@birdlife.at

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Fuglavernd/BirdLife Iceland works with schools



For the last three years, Fuglavernd/BirdLife Iceland has managed to increase its membership by about 20%, reaching the threshold of 900 members. At the same time, Fuglavernd’s activities in Iceland have become more visible, making it a modern NGO working to promote a better and sustainable world.

For the past two years, Fuglavernd/BirdLife Iceland has been running successfully an education programme called “Garden birds, habitats and bird protection” in schools, reaching an audience of 2.500 children, teachers and adults. The project aims at raising awareness and interest for birds and their habitats, while simultaneously promoting the activities of Fuglavernd/BirdLife Iceland and boosting membership recruitment.

One of the programme’s many activities is giving lectures at schools, during which children are shown pictures of birds and their habitats, discuss the threats birds face and learn how to build nest boxes. As part of these lectures, children and teachers also receive the “Garden bird booklet” on how to work together to create a good habitat for birds in gardens or schoolyards and receive a “window-warning” sticker of a Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*, for using on windows to prevent small birds from flying against them.

The programme has been so successful in the past months that NGOs and local communities have also expressed their interest and requested similar talks. Even the Ministry of Environment has asked for a talk!

Fuglavernd/BirdLife Iceland has also participated in Christmas markets and other events promoting the organisation by selling postcards and nest boxes. These initiatives have been quite successful in attracting new members and raise awareness about Fuglavernd/BirdLife Iceland’s activities.

During the next Reykjavik winter festival in February 2009 Fuglavernd/BirdLife Iceland will organise an exhibition

of bird pictures in the Reykjavik City hall. The exhibition, which is organised in order to promote nature, birds, bird photography and the Fuglavernd society itself, is planned to travel around the country to schools and possibly nature reserves and national park information centres over the following months in spring 2009.

For more information contact Einar Thorleifsson at Einar@fuglavernd.is

Or visit <http://www.fuglavernd.is/enska/home.html>

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Do birds see glass?

We know that birds can easily fly over barriers in their habitat but probably not everybody is aware that birds are not prepared for invisible obstacles like glass panes. Today the danger of collisions is increasing and several studies have shown that every year at least one bird dies per building.

Ten years ago, SVS/BirdLife Switzerland and the Swiss Ornithological Institute led a campaign to inform people about the danger that transparent noise screens, located along the roads, represent to birds. Following their effort, almost all noise screens in Switzerland have been equipped with stripes or other symbols to make them visible to birds.

Nowadays, with the increasing use of glass in buildings and other constructions, birds face a new menace. Reflecting glass facades or transparent balconies or balustrades kill a lot of them. In order to prevent these killings, at the beginning of October the Swiss Ornithological Institute and SVS/BirdLife Switzerland edited a new booklet for architects with many illustrations on how to avoid collisions of birds. This 52 pages booklet will serve as support for the new SVS/BirdLife Switzerland and Swiss Ornithological Institute information-campaign targeted to architects and building departments that has been recently launched. SVS/BirdLife Switzerland has also informed other European BirdLife Partners and proposed a collaboration to translate the booklet in other languages. Some partners immediately agreed to collaborate and started working actively on the issue in their own country.

SVS/BirdLife Switzerland and Swiss Ornithological Institute have also created another document titled "Glass – a deadly trap for birds" which is available on their website. Interested BirdLife Partners can send SVS the translated version of the PDF and they will design it in the same layout.

With a joint effort it will be possible to reduce these unnecessary deaths!

To download the PDF, please visit <http://www.windowcollisions.info>

For more information contact Eva Inderwildi from BirdLife Switzerland at eva.inderwildi@birdlife.ch

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Ray of hope for Europe's threatened raptors and owls



BirdLife International has recently analysed the status of Europe's 56 species of raptors and owls. The analysis concludes that currently, the majority of these species are not doing well.

The BirdLife study, published in the Swedish journal *Ambio*, also shows that Europe's raptors are disproportionately threatened at the global level. Ten species are listed as threatened or near-threatened on the IUCN Red List, which is widely considered to be the most objective and authoritative system for classifying species in terms of the risk of extinction. This list also includes two of Europe's most endangered species: Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* and Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*.

Many of these species are migrants, so hopefully their situation will improve as a result of the agreement reached in Abu Dhabi in October 2008. Following a joint initiative by the Governments of the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom, a Memorandum of Understanding under the United Nations Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) was concluded, which will coordinate the protection of migratory raptors and owls in Europe, Africa and Asia. The new measures, which should benefit more than 70 species of migratory birds of prey, will help to protect them from threats such as habitat loss and degradation, persecution, accidental killing and climate change.

For more information, contact Ian Burfield at Ian.Burfield@birdlife.org

and visit http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2008/10/cms_mou2.html

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Last hope for the Pripjat Valley



The Ukrainian Pripjat valley is a very important natural site and home to most of the Ukrainian Aquatic Warblers *Acrocephalus paludicola*. Despite the national and international protection of the site, a serious threat is facing the floodplain habitats. A flood reduction program called "Ecology-2010", which is in fact a hidden system of draining the Pripjat fields, has already caused severe ecological damage to the area, according to USPB/BirdLife Ukraine and the BirdLife Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team. The regional authorities for water management in Volyn, the Ukrainian province in the north-west, are proposing further river dredging and deepening. The project, which will cost roughly 1.5 millions US dollars, has raised the expectations among the local population for new job openings and increased the project's popularity. Thus USPB's

awareness campaign against it had to start against the odds.

USPB, supported by the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and APB-BirdLife Belarus organized an active lobbying campaign to conserve the fragile ecological balance in the Pripjat floodplain. Several initiatives involved the main supporters of this project, in order to raise awareness and concern and try to save this important site for biodiversity.

After having considered some compromise solutions, which were aiming at reducing the environmental impact of the project on the ground, a final decision was not reached and has been postponed indefinitely. Another reason to hope that the project has lost its momentum is the fact that any funds have been allocated on this project in the 2009 Ukrainian State budget.

If you want to be up to date on this project, contact
Uladzimir Malashevich, spadarmalash@yahoo.com
BirdLife/CMS International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer

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Input to the 2009 Globally Threatened Bird Update is needed



As the official authority for birds for the IUCN Red List, BirdLife runs an annual online consultation forum to discuss possible changes to the global threat status of bird species. Over 1500 experts are registered users to the web-forums where this discussion takes place. This wide consultation, along with the robust system of criteria used, make the Red List the most objective system for classifying species according to their risk of extinction. In recent years, this process has yielded valuable information used to review the status of many species. For example, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmeus* were both removed from the Red List in 2005, having recovered from earlier declines.

Unfortunately, many more European species have been added to the Red List. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* and Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* face a very high risk of extinction in the wild and were therefore added to the Endangered category in 2007, while a dozen more species are about to face the same risk and have been listed as Near Threatened. However, action to tackle the declines of some of these species has been rapid. In 2008, the European Commission funded the development of action plans for Egyptian Vulture and two Near Threatened species: European Roller *Coracias garrulus* and Dupont's Lark *Chersophilus duponti*.

Plans for three more species will follow in 2009. A discussion about the status of one of them, the Red Kite *Milvus milvus* – is currently underway on the forum. If you have information to contribute, or evidence to suggest that the status of any other species may need to be reviewed, please contact BirdLife via the forum. All contributions that are used will be acknowledged in the species accounts that will appear on the BirdLife and IUCN websites in due course, and in future publications.

To find out more, or to contribute, please visit: <http://www.birdlifeforums.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 Alejandro Sanchez, Director at SEO/BirdLife Spain



I was appointed Director of the Spanish Ornithological Society (SEO/BirdLife Spain) a long time ago, in 1992. At that time the Society was a small NGO with just a few staff, a very limited budget and less than 2.000 members. However, with the help of many, SEO/BirdLife Spain has grown a lot and it is now one of the most renowned conservation organisations in Spain.

I was born in the outskirts of Madrid in 1961, when natural rural countryside still surrounded the city. There were lizards and toads to chase after, poppies and many other wild flowers to pick, and many Holm oaks to climb looking for bird nests! My career is the natural evolution of those early naturalist vocations. When I was just six or seven years old, I was already discussing with my school teachers about every little thing related to nature and animals, and I became famous in my classroom for that, a real terror for nature science teachers! That passion was nourished and encouraged by my family, especially my grandparents, who taught me a lot about flowers and wild animals and gave me their old binoculars for my first birdwatching experiences, a pair of Carl Zeiss Jena from the Spanish Civil War.

When I was a Biology student at the Madrid University, SEO had its headquarters in the same building where I was studying, and I immediately got involved in their activities, both within the University and in the field. I finally became a Board Member of SEO in 1990.

During this time, I have seen the fast evolution of the Spanish society towards a full democracy, while the environment protection agenda has grown in importance on the political agenda. I really think that we, at SEO/BirdLife Spain, have significantly contributed to this evolution, by becoming one of the major actors in nature conservation in this country. Today we are also trying to help some other BirdLife Partners to grow and increase their own national influence, as others helped us in the past. I am convinced that this exchange of resources and expertise is something we must promote within the BirdLife Partnership and therefore I am constantly involved in BirdLife activities and I will try to do my part for contributing to the conservation of birds and the world's ecosystems. I am personally very proud of what we have achieved in all these years and to have seen SEO/BirdLife Spain growing and becoming a much bigger conservation NGO than I ever thought possible.

You can contact Alejandro Sanchez at asanchez@seo.org

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Wildgeese Festival at the Hungarian Old Lake Tata



The Wildgeese Festival at the Old Lake Tata took place during the last weekend of October in Hungary. This was the eighth time MME/BirdLife Hungary organized this two-day event, and it was the most successful to date, with more than 4000 people attending, despite the bad weather, in order to admire the 20000 geese roosting on the lake.

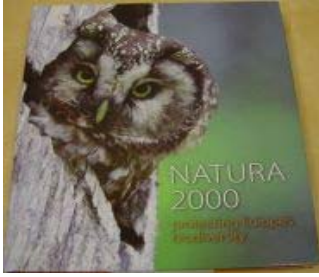
During the Festival a birdwatching competition was also organised, with 27 groups participating and 90 species observed. Among them some Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis* and Peregrine falcons *Falco peregrinus* were spotted.

There were many side events organised also, during which MME/BirdLife Hungary showed videos, sold BirdLife International pins and other materials, recruited new members and volunteers and presented their projects, such as the Birdfriendly Garden Programme. Finally, recognizing the importance of working with children, there was also a special tent for them, where children as young as six could learn their first facts about birds, learn to recognize the different species through playing quizzes, seeing pictures and videos. Following what is by now a tradition, the next Wildgeese Festival will take place during the last weekend of November 2009.

For more information please contact Berenyi Zsombor at berenyi.zsombor@mme.hu

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



As announced in the November issue of this newsletter, this is the chance for your organisation to win a free copy of the book "Natura 2000 – protecting Europe's biodiversity" produced and offered by the European Commission. Participate today by helping us to promote our newsletter!

You have time until the 30 January 2009 to invite people to subscribe to this newsletter, by placing a link on the homepage of your organisation.

Simply place a clear, visible sentence on the homepage linking to the following address: http://www.birdlife.org/regional/europe/newsletter_subscribe.html

Once you have placed the link, send Alessia Pautasso (Alessia.Pautasso@birdlife.org) the address of the homepage of your organisation. The first 20 organizations who will activate the link on their homepage and inform us will receive a free copy of this wonderful book.

Good luck and thank you!

While adding the link to your homepage, you can add the following text:

Subscribe today to BirdLife Europe e-news and receive all the latest updates on its work on EU nature policy and conservation issues at:

The link to subscribe to BirdLife Europe e-news is

http://www.birdlife.org/regional/europe/newsletter_subscribe.html

For more information contact Alessia Pautasso at Alessia.Pautasso@birdlife.org

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Events

European events

- 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/>

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