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Editorial: Cherishing our messengers of change

Dear reader,



Birds deserve to be cherished and cared for, and this for more reasons one can think of at first sight. We often seem to forget that we are part of the same ecosystem as the wildlife and nature surrounding us. Birds play an important part in this ecosystem as they distribute seeds which support the conservation of our forests and provide the necessary food supply for other bird predators, and also help controlling insect populations. When the natural balance in the ecosystem is disturbed, birds are one of the first indicators to tell us that we need to act as our environment is in danger.

Birds are also one of the richest forms of life on the planet, and provide an amazing source of information as they adapt throughout the world to different habitats. This is how they can be a true example to us, humans, as we try to come to grips with the ever changing, multicultural world we live in.

The BirdLife Partnership recognizes that birds are vital to our wellbeing, and engages various communities in appreciating birds' unique contribution to a diverse planet.

Birds also provide BirdLife with a great 'hook' to make our supporters aware and act for wider environmental problems such as the use of pesticides, the effects of deforestation and the negative impact of European policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy on the natural environment.

Finally, climate change will be the hottest topic on the world's agenda during December as our leaders gather to negotiate the post-Kyoto agreement.

The effects of Climate Change, another threat to our ecosystem, already start to be visible, and here as well our avian friends show the writing on the wall and prepare to adapt to these challenging circumstances.

Therefore, take some time next month to observe the next bird you come across with, as there's more to them than meets the eye...

With my very best wishes

Herlinde

Herlinde Herpoel
Media & Communication Manager
BirdLife International European Division

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BirdLife thanks Commissioner Dimas for action on biodiversity – and asks for more

On 27 October BirdLife's Regional Director for Europe, Angelo Caserta, and the EU Policy Manager, Konstantin Kreiser met the EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas for an exchange of views at the end of the Commissioner's term of office.

BirdLife specifically thanked the Commissioner for the high importance he gave to biodiversity protection in times where climate change dominates political agendas. During the meeting the Commissioner strongly agreed with BirdLife that climate change can only be tackled if biodiversity loss is addressed – and vice versa. In particular BirdLife stressed how instrumental the Commissioner was in saving Poland's unique Rospuda Valley from the harmful Via Baltica road-construction and in stopping spring hunting of European birds in Malta.

Looking ahead, BirdLife expressed its deep concerns about the ongoing loss of biodiversity in Europe and asked the Commissioner to do what is still possible in his current term to ensure action on two issues: Firstly, he should ensure that the Commission proposes, in January 2010, ambitious new biodiversity targets for the EU. Next year, the International Year of Biodiversity, will require true EU leadership based on an honest analysis of why Europe failed its 2010 target - and how it will ensure it will not fail again in the future.

Secondly, BirdLife urged Commissioner Dimas to press for EU action against seabird bycatch in fisheries. It is estimated that every year in European waters 200,000 birds die in fishing nets – and many of them are protected by EU law. An action plan on this issue has been announced by the EU for ten years but without any results so far.

For more information contact Konstantin Kreiser, EU Policy Manager at BirdLife European Division at Konstantin.kreiser@birdlife.org or visit <http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/09/seabirds.html>

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Green reform is turning sour



In October, BirdLife International sounded the alarm bell over the failure of several Member States to use the new funding (from the so-called EU Agriculture Policy "Health Check") to address the decline of biodiversity and other environmental emergencies. In a letter to the European Commissioner for

Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Mariann Fischer Boel, BirdLife asked the Commission not to approve the revisions of Member States' Rural Development plans as they hardly include any funding for biodiversity and the environment and channel important investments into further unsustainable intensification of the dairy sector.

The Commission has always presented the 2008 "CAP Health Check" as a green reform aiming to tackle biodiversity loss, climate change and the looming water crisis (labeled as the 'new challenges'). The Commission has maintained that the harm inflicted upon biodiversity by the abolition of 'Set-aside' in 2008 would be compensated by the deployment of targeted agri-environmental schemes funded through the Health Check reforms.

Despite these notional good intentions, it is becoming increasingly clear that most Member States are using the opportunities offered by the Health Check mainly to promote further intensification in the dairy sector, often with harmful environmental consequences, while hardly any of the promised funding for biodiversity and other environmental concerns is materialising.

BirdLife International urged the Commissioner to take adequate action to ensure Member States implement the Health Check-objective on biodiversity. In particular, the Commission should not approve Member States' revised Rural Development Programmes that fail to address biodiversity conservation and other environmental challenges.

"This is the last opportunity for the outgoing Commissioner to leave a positive legacy on the environmental front" commented Ariel Brunner, Senior Agriculture Policy Officer at the BirdLife European Division; "Further pandering to the industrial milk lobby will deal another blow to both the European environment and the CAP's credibility, probably while making the dairy sectors' problems only worse".

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

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Romania and Bulgaria break EU nature laws



Two of the richest EU Member States in terms of biodiversity, Romania and Bulgaria, face now more serious action from the European Commission for their insufficient protection of nature.

On 8 October 2009 the European Commission announced that it will take Romania to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) for failing to designate sufficient Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for migratory and threatened wild bird species, as requested by the EU Birds Directive. Currently, only 69,94% of the Important Bird Areas (IBA) territories in Romania receive protection as SPAs, leaving many important bird species such as Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, Red Breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*, Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* and Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* without effective protection.

IBAs are key sites for conservation – small enough to be conserved in their entirety and often already part of a protected-area network. The IBA Programme of BirdLife International aims to identify, monitor and protect a global network of IBAs for the conservation of the world's birds and other biodiversity. Romania is a very important place for these globally threatened species and many migratory birds breeding in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore BirdLife welcomes the decision of the Commission.

In the case of Bulgaria the Commission opened further five infringement cases in October 2009, increasing the number of areas where it sees a scarce application of EU law in Bulgaria to seven in total. The most serious infringements are insufficient designation of SPAs, destruction of the Kaliakra SPA and the systematic violation of Bulgaria's obligations to safeguard SPAs and to properly assess the effects of the numerous authorised plans and projects on the environment, bird habitats and species. In BirdLife's view it is now very important that the Commission continues to seek compliance by Bulgaria to the EU's Nature Directives – as in all other Member States.

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

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A new boost for Sweden's forest wetlands



Sweden's "100 Wetlands" project is now halfway towards its goal of restoring one hundred forest wetlands by 2010. Wetlands across Europe had a rough time over the past couple of centuries. In Sweden, less than a fourth of the pre-industrial wetland area remains after extensive draining and destruction. Now, however, the trend is being partly reversed – to the benefit of birds and people.

In the last few decades, many wetlands – particularly in agricultural lands – have been created or restored. Forest wetlands, however, have received relatively little attention. The "100 wetlands" project, a joint initiative by SOF (BirdLife in Sweden), Sveaskog (Sweden's largest forest owner) and the Swedish Wetland Fund, aims to restore one hundred wetlands on lands owned by Sveaskog by the end of 2010. The project got into full swing during 2008 and already approximately half of the restorations are accomplished or in the pipeline, and it is expected that the goal of a hundred wetlands will be reached according to schedule.

The results in terms of returning breeding birds and other flora and fauna have been very promising. The Älgmaden wetland in south-eastern Sweden, for example, was nearly completely drained in the 1950s, but already a few years after restoration began in 2005, birds like Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*, Redshank *Tringa tetanus* and Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* have re-established. The "100 Wetlands" project is one of the largest of its kind, and promises to contribute to reaching Sweden's national and international biodiversity commitments.

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

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The Park of peace



President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and President Ernest Bai Koroma of Sierra Leone have further underlined their commitment to a Transboundary Peace Park Project to protect the Gola Rainforest during a press event at the fourth European Development Days Conference in Stockholm.

The presidents' press statement at the European Development Days Conference strongly noted the effect of climate change on their countries and stressed how "Through the Transboundary Peace Park Project we have demonstrated our commitment to be part of the solution."

Both presidents reiterated their commitment by stating that "this project is therefore a symbol of our renewed commitment to peace and stability in the sub-region" and that this is a "joint commitment to forest conservation and the fight against climate change".

The Presidents also strongly positioned themselves in supporting the United Nations Reducing Emissions from Deforestation in Developing Countries (REDD), which focuses on joint cooperation between developed and developing countries to avert deforestation.

The presidents ended their statement by saying that "there is every reason for us to protect the Gola Forest on both sides of the border, since doing so will ensure that it will continuously provide ecological services to the surrounding communities. A protected Gola Forest will further increase the resilience of the ecosystem to climate change and play an important role in global climate stabilisation".

The Peace Park will establish a huge protected area covering over 2,000 km² that will protect one of the largest remaining frontiers of the Upper Guinea Rainforest. These rainforests, as well as holding vast carbon stores that will help in the fight against climate change, are also home to some of the world's most threatened species of wildlife such as Pygmy Hippo, Forest Elephant and 14 species of threatened birds.

The Peace Park unites the Gola Forest Reserve in Sierra Leone (75,000 ha) and the Lofa and Foya Forest Reserves in Liberia (80,000 ha and 100,000 ha respectively), with additional forest to provide corridors for the movement of wildlife between them.

The work to establish the Peace Park has involved several conservation organisations in the BirdLife International Partnership, the two national BirdLife Partners (Conservation Society of Sierra Leone and Society for the Conservation of Nature in Liberia), the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), Vogelbescherming (BirdLife in The Netherlands), working together with the Forest Development Authority (FDA) of Liberia, and the Forestry Division in Sierra Leone.

The BirdLife Partnership, which is already working on a 4.2 million Euro project to protect Sierra Leone's Gola Forest, funded by the European Union and FFEM (French Government), has secured an additional 3.2 million Euros to fund the four-year project to establish the 200,000 ha protected area from the EU, with the balance made up from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), and the Sustainable & Thriving Environments for West African Regional Development (STEWART) Program of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the US Forest Service, International Programs. CEPF is a joint initiative of Conservation International, the French Development Agency, the government of Japan, the Global Environment Facility, the MacArthur Foundation and the World Bank.

For further information please contact Alex Hipkiss at alex.hipkiss@rspb.org.uk

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Serbian IBA inventory launched

The first detailed inventory of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Serbia was launched on 21 September 2009. This comprehensive and beautifully illustrated book was published by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, the Provincial Secretariat for Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development, and the Institute for Protection of Nature of Serbia, with significant contributions from the League for Ornithological Action of Serbia and the Bird Protection and Study Society of Vojvodina. It describes 42 IBAs, covering 14% of the country's area, where priority action is needed to conserve biodiversity and to ensure long-term management and monitoring.

The network contains the entire Serbian breeding population of globally threatened species such as Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* and Great Bustard *Otis tarda*. Sites important for migratory species like Common Crane *Grus grus* are also included, as are foraging areas for Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*. Nine of the IBAs form transboundary sites with neighbouring countries, emphasizing the importance of cross-border cooperation. The book has been designed to appeal to a wide audience, from the general public to decision makers, as well as birdwatchers, scientists and other stakeholders, with the aim of raising awareness and promoting IBAs as places where birds and people can live in harmony.

For more information visit www.ptica.org or www.pticevojvodine.rs

Or contact Dragan Simic at albicilla@sezampro.rs

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Restoring the „birds' paradise“



The Slovak Senne National Nature Reserve and its surrounding meadows were restored successfully by a joint project of SOS/BirdLife Slovakia and the Slovak State Nature Conservancy. Many birds species returned to breed to this amazing Natura 2000 site.

The drainage of the reserve was stopped in 2008, which allowed the restoration of its habitats. As soon as the next year the recovery of several species such as Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, and Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* was confirmed through the ongoing monitoring.

New species, such as the White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, and the Common Crane *Grus grus* have chosen the Senne Reserve as their first breeding area in Slovakia. The Project was supported by LIFE.

Further information is available at the LIFE-Nature project „Conservation of Senne and Medzibodrozie SPAs in

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European IBA Coordinators Workshop



From 27-30 September 2009, 28 staff from 23 European BirdLife Partners met at Smardzewice in central Poland for their first Important Bird Area (IBA) workshop in more than 3 years. The event was hosted and co-funded by OTOP (BirdLife in Poland), who linked it to a conference celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Polish Common Bird Monitoring Scheme.

The IBA workshop started by reviewing the progress made since the last conference in Lisbon, focusing on the targets set in the BirdLife Partnership's European Programme for 2009–2012. One of the most valuable sessions involved Partners sharing their diverse experiences with IBA monitoring. These ranged from establishing IBA caretaker networks in Armenia and Poland, through methods and challenges of collecting data from caretakers in Portugal and Denmark, to winning state support for monitoring Natura 2000 sites in the Czech Republic. Many lessons were learned and ideas sparked for other Partners to pursue back home.

Another key session tackled the need for National IBA Conservation Strategies (NIBACS). Partners from Spain, The Netherlands and Poland presented examples of the benefits to be gained by taking a strategic approach to IBA case work. They demonstrated how directing limited resources to ensuring successful outcomes at key sites can set valuable legal precedents that help to protect many other sites in the network.

Overall, the workshop provided a rare opportunity for national IBA coordinators to meet, spend time together and learn from each other. Owing to staff turnover, 80% of the participants had not attended the previous workshop, so talking to their counterparts between sessions was as important as the formal programme. To maintain the good community spirit generated in Poland, everyone agreed that it was vital to ensure good communication and to hold another workshop in no more than two years.

For more information, please contact Boris Barov, European Conservation Manager at boris.barov@birdlife.org, or Ian Burfield European Research and Database Manager, at ian.burfield@birdlife.org

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BirdLife Partners campaign for nature!

On 14 and 15 October 2009, 22 participants from 12 BirdLife Partners attended the Campaigning for Nature workshop in Brussels. Policy and Communications Officers worked side by side learning how to create an environmental campaign and how to effectively reach politicians. Through presentations and team work, participants shared best practices on how to create a successful campaign and planned their activities for 2010, which will be a milestone for biodiversity. A session on social media opened the doors to an increased use of Twitter, Facebook and many other tools to enhance the communication activities and visibility of many Partners. We hope this workshop has been the first one of this kind, and that in the future other Partners will have the opportunity to attend it and contribute to it.

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Ornithology Congress in Portugal



SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) and SEO/BirdLife (BirdLife in Spain) organise the VI SPEA Ornithology Congress and the IV Iberian Ornithology Congress In Alentejo, Portugal, from 5 to 8 December 2009. The organization expects about 200 participants, with more than 60 oral presentations, 70 poster presentations and 3 workshops. During the congress, held every 2-3 years, the main debated themes will be climate change, agriculture and nature conservation, management of wetlands,

seabirds and marine environment protection and invasive species control.

The programme includes a nature Fair, with stands, exhibitions and activities for children, Fieldtrips to Portuguese and Spanish IBA, a congress Dinner and a Silent Action in favour of Albufeira do Caia IBA, one of the Portuguese IBA that will be visited.

For more information please visit <http://www.spea.pt/index.php?op=congresso2009> or contact congresso2009@spea.pt

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Meet the BirdLife European Partnership

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

For this issue, we've teamed up with Barbora Neversil, Communication and Information Manager at SVS/BirdLife Switzerland



My name is Barbora Neversil: I started just one year ago to work for SVS/BirdLife Switzerland as Communication and Information Manager. My work is so varied that it feels like only a few days ago: communication of the Bird of the year and for the biodiversity strategy, raising awareness for the protection of snails (!) and for migratory birds..... just to name a few of the tasks.

Before joining SVS/BirdLife Switzerland I worked for many years as a journalist and senior news-editor for the Swiss broadcasting corporation. And I took a postgraduate degree in Political Communication since I have always been fascinated by communication and politics. I am also a field ornithologist and vice-president of a local association near Berne, the wonderful capital of my country, and its river Aare, where I live. Nature has always been important to me and is now even more so. Therefore it is a privilege for me to combine professional skills with my personal engagement. And it is a pleasure to help promoting the work and the ideas of SVS/BirdLife Switzerland, even more because of its international aspect. My country has a long tradition of different cultures living and working together. In BirdLife all the Partners do the same and it is great to be part of such an active network of grassroots organizations

and dedicated people.

SVS/BirdLife Switzerland is a federation itself, with 19 cantonal associations and 460 local groups. My colleagues from the ORNIS magazine, Info BirdLife Suisse and I keep our more than 60'000 members and the media and public informed. At BirdLife Switzerland we work mainly in German and French, sometimes in Italian and only rarely in Rumantsch. Does that sound complicated? Sometimes it is, but it's just perfect for me: As a binational (Czech-Swiss) I like to communicate with lots of different people in different languages. But of course life is not only about work and Switzerland is not the only country with fascinating landscapes. I also love Scandinavian landscapes and nature. Usually my husband and I spend our summer holidays in Sweden, with beavers, cranes and elks just around the corner and bears and wolves just behind the next hill.

Switzerland is a great and greatly demanding place: The nature and the country are varied: from the Rhine river to the peaks of the Alps, species, sites and habitats differ a lot. So do the cultural parts from Geneva to Berne, from Lucerne to Locarno or from Zurich to Davos – they are all different and so is the protection and communication work of SVS/BirdLife Switzerland and its local organizations. The biggest pleasure for me is every spring to discover that Barn Swallows *Hirundo rustica* and Common Swifts *Apus apus* of my village have come back again. We like their calls, we watch their artistic flight and we admire their capability of traveling thousands of kilometers without any technical help. I really hope my work helps that this will stay so for many, many years to come.

You can contact Barbora at barbora.neversil@birdlife.ch

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Events

European events

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

- 11-12 November 2009, Uppsala, Sweden: Conference on future forest monitoring in the European Union. Providing information for multifunctional forest management.

<http://www-conference.slu.se/futforestmon/>

- 5-8 December 2009, Alentejo, Portugal: VI SPEA Ornithology Congress and the IV Iberian Ornithology Congress

<http://www.spea.pt/index.php?op=congresso2009>

- 15-16 December 2009, Uppsala, Sweden: Providing a knowledge basis for sustainable hunting and biodiversity conservation. Streamlining hunting bag statistics in the EU.

<http://www-conference.slu.se/gamemonitor>

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BirdLife Events

- 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)

- 30 November- 01 December 2009, Brussels, Belgium: Birds and Habitats Directives Task Force (for BirdLife Partners only)

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