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Sent: jeudi 10 mars 2011 14:52
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Subject: FW: BirdLife Europe e-news March 2011
Attachments: adresbalk_l.jpg; adresbalk_r.jpg; flag_eu(1).gif; logobalk2.jpg

To: hherpoel@hotmail.com
Subject: BirdLife Europe e-news March 2011
Date: Thu, 10 Mar 2011 07:50:55 -0600
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<http://europe.birdlife.org>
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Editorial:

Dear reader,

BirdLife is a uniquely wide-ranging, international Partnership of national nature conservation organisations. Our great strength is in the way we work together, complementing efforts and

building synergies to protect biodiversity where more experienced Partners support new ones, focusing on empowerment and capacity building.

In this March issue of our e-newsletter, we would like to share with you examples of projects that highlight this strength. On the conservation side, there is an innovative fundraising project in Ukraine supported by RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and VBN (BirdLife in the Netherlands) to assist biodiversity conservation in the steppes of Ukraine and Moldova. Also in the conservation section, you can read about our "Wings across the Balkans" project, which aims to build capacity in grassroots, civil society organizations in the Western Balkans so that the rich biodiversity of the region is protected. Lastly, from the scientific corner, the Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (BirdLife in Azerbaijan) has published 'Important Bird Areas of Azerbaijan' in association with NABU (BirdLife in Germany).

These examples will hopefully give you an insight into how the BirdLife Partnership works, pulling together experience from all our Partners – local to global – to protect birds and the wider environment.

With best wishes,

Maria Solernou

Funding Development Manager for Europe
BirdLife Europe

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One billion for biodiversity - BirdLife proposes a reform of the EU's LIFE Programme

The LIFE Programme is the EU's only dedicated environmental funding instrument. Although small in size (currently around 300 million EUR annually, representing 0.23 % of the EU Budget) it is significant in value, providing a wide range of innovative projects that are often developed and implemented at a local level and at the same time generating exchange of best practice and know-how across Europe. Many European BirdLife Partners have successfully made use of these funds from OTOP/BirdLife Poland for saving the habitats of the rare Aquatic Warbler ([click here for more information](#)) to SPEA/BirdLife Portugal ([click here for more information](#)) for identifying important areas for marine birds.

The European Commission is currently drafting the next LIFE Regulation for the financial period 2014-2020 (the legal proposal is expected in autumn 2011). On 28th February, BirdLife International together with the NGOs Conservation International, EEB and WWF presented suggestions that would help the next LIFE instrument to meet future challenges and deliver even better for Europe's ecosystems and biodiversity.

Most importantly, the NGOs ask for the total LIFE budget to comprise around 1 % of the EU budget, with at least 750 Million EUR tagged for the implementation of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas. Another 250 Million EUR should be dedicated to biodiversity-related measures including conservation projects in the EU's overseas entities and targeted measures to protect migratory birds along their whole flyway, including areas outside the EU.

The NGO position paper also contains suggestions for strengthening the uptake, efficiency and effectiveness of the LIFE instrument ([available for download here](#)).

More information: [Konstantin Kreiser](#), Coordinator of BirdLife's EU Birds and Habitats Directives Task Force - NABU

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EU discards policy: selective fishing and scrapping of excessive fleet are key to success

On March 1st 2011, Commissioner Maria Damanaki met with members of the European Parliament, EU fisheries ministers and the Court of Auditors to discuss how to end discards in the context of the Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

BirdLife commends the Commissioner for her great efforts to eradicate this wasteful practice of dumping unwanted fish back into sea, which can reach levels of 70% in some European fisheries.

We are concerned, however, that the proposed solution – a discard ban- would not solve the issue, unless accompanied by other necessary measures. Any effective discards policy must address the unselective fishing practices which result in unwanted catches. It must address not only commercially exploited fish but also the bycatch of other non-target taxa, especially endangered and protected species such as seabirds. To bring about changes in gear use and fishing patterns that are needed to reduce accidental mortality, catch quotas must be introduced, accompanied by onboard surveillance to ensure compliance.

Tackling discards will be an important step towards making EU fisheries sustainable. If the EU is serious about restoring fishstocks and protecting marine ecosystems however, it must first scrap the excessive boats which should not be there in the first place, regardless of the fact whether they land or discard the fish they shouldn't be catching.

More information: [Tatiana Nemcova](#), Senior EU Advocacy Officer at BirdLife Europe

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Spring migration starts off with a bang in Malta



Spring migration started early in Malta with two large flocks of Eurasian Spoonbill, one of which consisted of a record 70 birds and a flock of around 200 Common Crane migrating over Malta these past few weeks.

The record flock of Spoonbills was met with a barrage of gun fire from

illegal hunters, causing the birds to disperse along the coast. Approximately 70 Eurasian Spoonbill came to Malta, but only 6 were seen leaving roosts the following day.

Reports of large numbers killed in the south of the island reached the BirdLife Malta office, together with photos of one of the poachers. The ALE unit of the police force reportedly apprehended several people for illegal shooting of these protected birds.

The other flocks were somewhat luckier. The second flock of Spoonbills, consisting of around 50 birds, spent the day at Ghadira Nature Reserve and were all seen leaving out to sea. The large flock of Cranes roosted for the night in Gozo, Malta's smaller sister island, and five birds were reported killed while roosting at night and as they left their roost in the morning. Nobody was reported apprehended by the police.

Illegal hunting in Malta is a serious and widespread problem. To make matters worse the Maltese government has also promised a 2011 spring hunting season, despite having being condemned by the European Court of Justice for opening a spring hunting season in 2004 to 2007.

Acting cautiously, the government last year opened a limited six day hunting season, which was boycotted by the hunting federations for being inadequate. Legislation was also adopted permitting future seasons to open for up to three weeks with a bag count of up to 25,000 Turtle Dove and Common Quail.

The Commission renewed last October legal proceedings against Malta over this legislation. Malta's Prime Minister however, defended Malta's position stating that Malta is 'prepared to go all the way' on spring hunting, even if this results in a court case and possible fines.

As this year's spring approaches, Malta has announced that it is in discussion with the Commission over the 2011 spring hunting season, however the Commission has clarified that the final decision rests in the Maltese government's hands – and it may take legal action based on the government's future decision.

To counter the illegal killings, BirdLife Malta has invited international volunteers to join locals for its annual Spring Watch camp, held between the 10th and 24th April.

During the camp, teams will maintain a strong presence in the countryside to monitor bird migration and deter illegal hunting and trapping. When the teams' presence fails to deter, illegalities will be reported to the police. Photo and video evidence will be collected to aid the police in their investigations.

If you are looking to volunteer abroad and want to make a real difference, consider joining BirdLife Malta's Spring Watch camp. You can also help by spreading the word that volunteers are needed.

Read more about Spring Watch [here](#)

Listen to an interview with BirdLife Malta's Campaigns Coordinator on illegal and spring hunting in Malta [here](#)

More information: [Geoffrey Saliba](#), BirdLife Malta Campaigns Coordinator

Photos:

Marsh Harrier - Marsh Harriers are some of the most common migrating raptors seen in Malta. Other rarer raptors include Montagu's and Pallid Harriers. Photo by Robert Camilleri.

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NABU campaigns for the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy



BirdLife Europe's German Partner NABU has begun campaigning against the current Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), pressing for a serious reform in which a general 'greening' of the policy should be properly prioritised.

NABU supported a huge NGO demonstration ('Wir Haben Es Satt' – 'We Have Had Enough') that took place on 22 January 2011 in Berlin, protesting against factory farming, industrial agriculture and genetically modified food. Despite cold weather, 22,000 people gathered to send a clear message to the German and EU governments that agriculture should be environmentally friendly and in line with strong environmental legislation like the Birds and Habitats Directives.

The German government, as well as the EU, is still allowing too much public support to go to the types of farming that are polluting the water, destroying what little biodiversity we have left, contributing to climate change and depleting the soil.

The demonstration on 22 January coincided with a meeting of agro-chemical corporations and international agricultural ministers in Berlin. This demand for a change in agricultural policy also falls during a crucial period of CAP reform. In November last year, the European Commission put a communication document on the table which is being discussed in the European Council and by the European Parliament. Once all stakeholders have given their input, the Commission will have to put out a concrete legislative proposal which will determine the future direction of EU farming starting in 2014.

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Wings across the Balkans: from IBA identification to protection



During 14-16 February 2011, 38 staff and volunteers representing seven national bird conservation organisations from across the Western Balkans met at Samobor, Croatia, for a workshop designed to build their capacity; moving beyond identifying Important Bird Areas (IBAs) to ensuring their protection.

The event was organised by DOPPS (BirdLife in Slovenia) in collaboration with CZIP (Montenegro) and BirdLife Europe and hosted by BIOM (Croatia). It was the second of three workshops to be held under 'Wings Across the Balkans', a two-year project funded by the

European Commission and implemented by BirdLife Europe, with the aim of preparing countries in the Western Balkans for implementing the EU Wild Birds Directive.

The first day reviewed the state of IBA identification across the region, which revealed a disparity of progress. In Croatia, for example, the IBA network is extensive and the focus is now on designating these sites as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) as the country prepares to join the EU. In Bosnia

however, very few IBAs have been confirmed and there is an urgent need for baseline field surveys in many parts of the country.

Building on these outcomes, the second day saw the group prepare a detailed, step-by-step plan for achieving official protection for at least one site in each country. This involved reviewing national legislation in each country and analysing obligations and opportunities to develop a customised advocacy strategy. Implementing these plans will form a core part of each organisation's work during the final ten months of the project.

The final day introduced the participants to BirdLife's global IBA monitoring framework and to the potential of using local data to produce national and international indicators of the status and trends of key sites for biodiversity. DOPPS showed how it has used this opportunity to secure government funding for SPA monitoring; a model that can be replicated elsewhere.

The workshop was well organised and ran smoothly, with plenty of lively discussion and exchange of ideas. This bodes well for the final workshop, due to take place in Macedonia in Autumn 2011.

For more information, [Borut Rubinic](#), BirdLife Europe's Project Manager of Wings across the Balkan

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New 'Steppes' in biodiversity conservation from USPB

An innovative fundraising project from USPB (BirdLife in Ukraine) with the support of Arcadia, RSPB (BirdLife in the United Kingdom) and VBN (BirdLife in the Netherlands) to assist Biodiversity Conservation in the Steppes of Ukraine and Moldova has just begun.

The Steppe Biodiversity project is funded by the European Union in the framework "Thematic programme for Environment and sustainable management of natural resources, including energy". The project will be implemented in association with Institute for Community Development – Ukraine; Rural Development Centre – Ukraine; Mott MacDonald – The Netherlands; European Centre for Nature Conservation – The Netherlands

The focus is on protecting habitats, but the approach combines classic tools (protected area designation and management) and innovative approaches (development and marketing of carbon credits and renewable energy from grassland and agri-biomass).

They tap into a new and favourable funding source, while simultaneously developing USPB's capacity.

The three-year project named 'Enhanced Economic & Legal Tools for Steppe Biodiversity Conservation and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation' aims to restore depleted or abandoned steppe lands in a sustainable way and to understand and prepare for climate change issues locally.

The hoped-for outputs will be a series of future climate change scenarios at national level; then split into regional scenario models. These models will lead to Regional Action Plans, which will also provide secondary benefits to local authorities and other organisations who are working on climate change adaptation.

The project will develop an action plan for a pilot region to identify its climate change risks and enhance steppe biodiversity through management or restoration. The plan will also specify sites for globally threatened bird species.

Another output will be the development of "green" infrastructure to increase the resistance of livelihoods and steppe ecosystems to climate change and desertification, including steppe and native forest restoration on degraded or abandoned arable lands.

Areas to benefit financially from the climate change mitigation activities, in particular, include:

- Long term carbon sequestration in soil/ wood, benefitting from the value of tradable carbon credit (AAUs)
- Exploiting biomass energy opportunities (small business development)

Finally, the project is expected to promote "best practice" land use planning and carbon sequestration by encouraging replication of the demonstration farm/ protected area experiences. In doing so it will improve livelihoods and preserve biodiversity and healthy steppe ecosystems that provide the services which the linked communities depend upon, taking into account the latest climate change predictions. It will deliver tangible biodiversity conservation measures by ensuring a future for the key species within these ecosystems.

More information: <http://www.birdlife.org.ua>

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New IBA book published in Azerbaijan

Important Bird Areas of Azerbaijan: halfway there



The Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (BirdLife in Azerbaijan), in association NABU (BirdLife in Germany), has published a new book: 'Important Bird Areas of Azerbaijan' (Volume One).

The book describes 27 of Azerbaijan's 53 IBAs, including details of biotopes, threats and recent bird data for each of these, updating the earlier data presented in 'Important Bird Areas in Europe' (Heath and Evans 2000). A GIS boundary map for each IBA has also been created and published for the first time in this book.

Azerbaijan has a wide variety of landscapes and ecosystems, ranging from semi-deserts and lowland forests to mountain steppes, sub-alpine and alpine belts. The 53 IBAs of Azerbaijan include all of these landscapes with their specific climate, vegetation and fauna, and together encompass about 9% of the country's total territory.

'Important Bird Areas of Azerbaijan' was prepared by authors of the Azerbaijan Ornithological Society collective (Elchin Sultanov, Sevinj Sarukhanova, Tahir Kerimov, Sevinj Humbatova, Arzu Mammadov, Aytekin Jabbarova and Sevinj Mirzayeva) in both Azeri and English languages.

The remaining 26 IBAs will be included in Volume Two, due by the end of 2011.

More information: contact [Elchin Sultanov](#) or [Sevinj Sarukhanova](#)

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BirdLife in action

Aren't Birds Brilliant? BirdLife shows you nature like you've never seen before



Aren't Birds Brilliant (ABB) is a fantastic BirdLife initiative to keep the European public's interest in birds growing through a series of interactive events in public spaces.

Currently nine BirdLife Partners across Europe are organising events to promote and create awareness for the work they do with people who might otherwise never come in contact with them. In recent years, ABBs, originally a concept developed by the RSPB, have also become an important way to recruit new members for the participating BirdLife Partners.

In all the participating countries, BirdLife Partners set up stands in green city spaces, urban areas or nature reserves where people pass by anyway. Nature is all around us; it is just a matter of opening our eyes and taking it in. By making use of the telescopes and binoculars at the stands, of which a large majority has been generously lent by Swarovski Optics, the BirdLife Partners help citizens and other future or existing nature lovers to re-connect with nature and discover the work of BirdLife.

2010 proved to be a major boost for the Aren't Birds Brilliant events across the participating countries, with e.g. DOF organising over 30 events attended by nearly 6000 people, many of whom became new members. Portugal called its ABB events 'De Olho nas Aves' (Eyes on Birds) and reached out to the public in 9 different locations including prime wild habitats. In Spain, 99 people decided to become a member of SEO/BirdLife after visiting one of the 'Aves en Vivo y en Directo' events.

In 2011, you can discover unique nature treasures by visiting our Partners' ABB stands in the following countries: Norway (NOF), Poland (OTOP), Denmark (DOF), Portugal (SPEA), Germany (LBV), Spain (SEO/BirdLife), BirdLife Austria, the UK (RSPB, where the event is called 'A date with nature') and Hungary (MME), so do not hesitate to contact the national BirdLife Partner for a detailed calendar.

BirdLife Europe aims at bringing ABBs to many more BirdLife Partner countries in the future and therefore chose the ABB concept as the theme for the Day of Biodiversity on May 22nd 2011.

More information: [Herlinde Herpoel](#), Head of European Communication and Marketing at BirdLife Europe

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Events

EU Funds - Assets or Liability. Is the EU putting citizen's money where it is most needed?

On Wednesday 13th of April, a European Parliament public hearing on the next Multi-annual financial framework (MFF) will take place, organised by BirdLife with 6 other environmental NGOs and co-hosted by 5 MEPs of different political groups.

Following the launch of our publication (click here to download) in coalition with 6 other environmental NGOs for a comprehensive vision for a greener, fairer, and more effective EU budget, this cross-party public hearing will be held to discuss the potential for the EU budget to provide for green jobs, and tuned to tackling the core environmental challenges of our time: climate change, biodiversity loss and resource inefficiency.

The event invites the commission to rebuttal on the arguments put forward by the NGOs specifically in funding for climate mitigation under the cohesion and transport policy, funding the greening of agriculture policy, and funding for biodiversity. The event will be an opportunity to bring together experts of different topics and publicly question the quality of spending of European funds.

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This publication receives its support from the European Commission, the RSPB and numerous other EU BirdLife Partners.



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