

EDITORIAL

Growing BirdLife's presence in Brussels

On 20th September BirdLife officially opened its new European headquarters in Brussels. Formerly present only with the European Community Office (ECO), BirdLife's European Division is now coordinating its EU and pan-European work from one central location in the "capital of Europe".

BirdLife is grateful to the Commissioner for Environment, Mr Stavros Dimas for coming to the opening as guest of honour and for his complimentary speech underlining BirdLife's contribution to EU policy, conservation and the study of birds. BirdLife's Director and Chief Executive Dr Mike Rands also welcomed the guests of the reception with a speech on behalf of the global BirdLife Partnership.

Around 50 guests from EU Institutions, other NGOs and stakeholders, as well as from national BirdLife Partners were present at the event, which successfully marked a new milestone in BirdLife's work for biodiversity in Europe and beyond. The European Division of BirdLife had moved to the new premises in April 2006. The new office is centrally located, near the metro station "Louise", which makes it easy to reach from the airport, the Midi train station and the EU quarter. The office not only provides room for meetings and receptions, but also offers



*Stavros Dimas, Commissioner for Environment;
Claire Papazoglou, BirdLife International Head of European Division;
Mike Rands, BirdLife International Director & Chief Executive*

desk space and work facilities for visitors from the national BirdLife Partners during their visits to Brussels.

BirdLife's decision to increase its presence in Brussels by moving some staff positions from the Netherlands, and by creating additional ones, comes following a strategic decision at the highest level in the organisation. The reason behind is Brussels' increasing importance as a decision making centre, not only for EU Member States, but for all European countries, as well as on a global scale given that Europe is a major player through its external and development policies, international trade and through its huge "ecological footprint".

Therefore, from now on BirdLife's former European Community Office (ECO) is

substituted by the European Division Office. The Brussels based staff of the European Division, headed by Claire Papazoglou, includes staff working on the BirdLife conservation programme, fundraising and communications as well as a team dedicated to work on EU Policy.

By January 2007 BirdLife will have a dynamic team of ten people set up in Brussels and be in a good position to give even more support to the BirdLife Partnership for safeguarding Europe's and the world's biodiversity and ecosystems.

Inside this issue:

<i>Editorial</i>	1
<i>BirdLife and FACE continue their dialogue</i>	2
<i>European Partnership Meeting 13-15 October in Slovenia</i>	2
<i>The BirdLife Community goes online!</i>	3
<i>Via Baltica</i>	3
<i>IBA Poster</i>	4
<i>The Commission's work programme 2007: Lisbon, energy and climate are top priorities</i>	4
<i>EuroBirdwatch 06</i>	5
<i>LIFE+, heading for delays</i>	5
<i>Rural Development: decision time for biodiversity</i>	6
<i>European Parliamentary Questions & Answers</i>	7

Special points of interest:

- Extranet
- Via Baltica
- IBA Poster
- Rural Development



BirdLife and FACE continue their dialogue

Following the signing of a ten-points Agreement in 2004 BirdLife International and the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU (FACE) continue their dialogue at EU level. On 22 September the fourth high-level meeting between the two organisations took place in BirdLife's European Division Office. Issues on the agenda included the amendment of Annex V of the Birds Directive, Avian Influenza, possible

cooperation in the field of agriculture policy, management plans for huntable bird species, the phasing out of the use of lead shot in wetlands and the future of the European Commission's Sustainable Hunting Initiative. Also discussed was an ongoing EU funded communication project carried out by FACE and the European Landowners Organisation (ELO) with participation of BirdLife International which aims at generating more support for Natura

2000 from hunters and land-owners. Finally, a document was approved which gives guidance and options to national members and Partners of both organisations for the implementation of the ten-point Agreement in the respective EU Member States.

More information:

Konstantin.Kreiser@birdlifeeco.net

European Partnership Meeting 13-15 October in Slovenia

The European Partners of BirdLife International met in Slovenia in October. The meeting was one of the largest ones ever organised with the participation of 37 organisations from the European Partnership, of which 28 Partners, 5 Partners Designate and 4 Affiliates. Furthermore, there were four organisations from the ex-Yugoslavian countries which were invited as observers: Serbia, Montenegro, FYROM and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, as the Partnership meeting was followed immediately by the Global Council Meeting this gave the opportunity to several Global Council members from other regions to participate in the EPM.

An important issue at the EPM were the elections of a new European Committee for the period 2006-2008 and a Global Council member from Europe to replace Johanna Winkelman who left in 2005.

The new European Committee is composed of: Marc Argeloo (VBN/Netherlands), Mika Asikainen (BirdLife Finland), Claudio Celada (LIPU/Italy), Jan Ejlsted (DOF/Denmark-also Global Council), Alis-tair Gammell (RSPB/UK), Werner Müller (SVS/Switzerland-also Global Council) and Thomas Tennhardt (NABU/Germany). The new Global Council member for Europe is Werner Müller.

The EPM also commented on the mid-term implementation of the European Programme and worked towards proposing changes and elements that would need to be integrated in the 2009-2012 European Programme, which will be adopted in 2008. The EPM agreed to work towards a new BirdLife campaign on Flyways, linking continents through migratory birds, to increase work on climate change and exchanged experience on Avian Flu. It also tackled a number of other issues that are closely linked to the BirdLife European Programme such as the new IBA conservation strategy, policy work and innovative ways of fundraising.





The BirdLife Community goes online!

Our BirdLife Online Community (the "Extranet") was launched in Ljubljana during the European Partnership Meeting. It will become an essential tool which will enable staff at BirdLife Partners, Affiliates, Regional Offices and the Secretariat to share information, documents and expertise. Simply by registering, it is possible to find profiles of the other Partners, documents and presentations which have

been put online, and be updated on the events organised by the Partnership. Moreover, a specific part will be dedicated to Special Interests Groups on several issues like Communication and Education, IBAs and the Task Forces, where members will find all the related documents. In order to ensure its success, it is crucial that Partners promote it widely and contribute to it regularly.

If you want to register, visit www.birdlife.net and apply for membership which is only available to staff working for BirdLife organizations. You will be provided with a password and will be able to start sharing! Welcome to the Net!

For more information, please contact Alessia.Pautasso@birdlifeeco.net

The screenshot shows the BirdLife International website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'home', 'accessibility', 'password', 'logout', and 'help'. A search bar is located on the right side of the header. Below the header, there is a main navigation menu with categories: 'Who's Who', 'Groups', 'News', 'Events', and 'Files'. The 'Events' section is highlighted, showing a '1st events' icon. Below this, there is an 'Upcoming' section with a 'Find event' button and a 'Select Region' dropdown menu set to 'Europe'. A list of upcoming events is displayed, including:

Event Title	Date
Consultations & Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Council Meeting	04 Dec 06
AGM of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research	05 Dec 06
Conference on 'Desertification and the International Policy Imperative'	17 Dec 06
Cambridge Conservation Forum (CCF) Symposium 2007	12 Jan 07
Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisations - Joint Meeting	22 Jan 07
24th Session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum	05 Feb 07

Via Baltica

OTOP, the Polish Partner of BirdLife International, WWF Poland and the CEE Bankwatch Network launched an e-petition in October to express their concern at the impact proposed road construction activities will have on fragile – and protected - natural areas in Poland. The website based petition urges the Polish government to immediately stop work on four projects (part of the Helsinki to Warsaw international transport corridor, often called "Via Baltica") and wait for the results of the Strategic Environmental

Assessment currently being carried out to examine the most appropriate route for the international road corridor. Under the EU's Birds and Habitats Directives, the Rospuda Valley, the Augustow and Knyszyn Primeval Forests and the Biebrza Marshes – the biggest wetland area in central and Western Europe and the most important breeding site for the Great-spotted Eagle and the Aquatic Warbler – should be safe from such projects through their listing as Special Protection Areas and

proposed Sites of Community Importance. But mechanisms within the Polish government meant that building could begin at any time – hence why a protest action was considered crucial immediately. More than 12,000 people signed the online protest, which will be joined with the 150,000 signatures already collected within Poland and handed over to the Polish Prime Minister in the new year.



IBA Poster

For the first time ever, a poster showing the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) across the EU27 countries has been produced, and the final results are impressive. 15.7% of the total surface area of the EU27 is covered by IBAs, which equals 69,535,056 hectares.

There are 3,404 IBAs across the 27 countries, which are the result of hard work by BirdLife Partners, identifying areas and mapping them out.

BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas Programme is a global initiative that aims to protect a network of sites critical for bird conservation. All IBAs meet one or more ornithological criteria, which are internationally agreed and scientifically defensible.

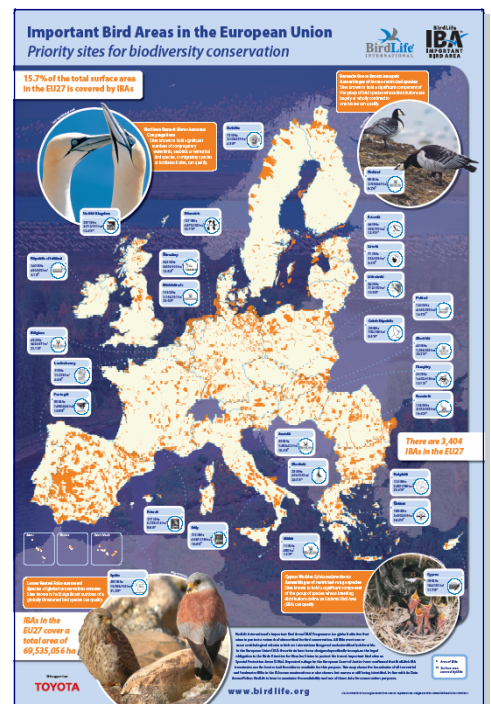
In the European Union (EU), the criteria have been designed specifically to capture the legal obligation in the Birds Directive for Member States to protect their most important bird sites as Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

Repeated rulings by the European Court of Justice have confirmed that BirdLife's IBA inventories are the best scientific evidence available for this purpose.

This map shows the boundaries of all terrestrial and freshwater IBAs in the EU; some marine sites are also shown, but many are still being identified.

For more information on IBAs, go to <http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/sites/index.html> or contact Ian Burfield at: Ian.Burfield@birdlife-europe.nl

Copies of the poster are also available from BirdLife's European Division Office at: bleco@birdlifeeco.net



The Commission's work programme 2007: Lisbon, energy and climate are top priorities

The Commission launched its work programme for 2007 on 24th October, outlining plans for achieving its strategic objectives - prosperity, solidarity and a "strong voice in the world" - over the next year

It comes as no surprise that the top priority is delivery of the Lisbon strategy for jobs and growth. In this context, "better regulation" is a key theme for 2007. The intention is to develop a "modern, efficient and effective regulatory culture throughout Europe" by seeking to simplify existing legislation, to screen pending proposals, to improve impact assessments and to reduce administrative costs.

Energy has also climbed to the top of the political agenda. The Commission

will present the first "Strategic Energy Review" for Europe, accompanied by an Action Plan containing individual initiatives for developing an EU energy policy. Linked to this debate is the EU's approach to tackling climate change. The Commission is committed to putting forward a Green Paper on options for EU climate change policy and perspectives for international co-operation post-2012. A White Paper on adaptation to climate change and an amendment to the EU emissions trading scheme are also expected during the second half of the year.

Other issues of interest to BirdLife include a Communication on maritime policy; a regulation on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing;

a Communication on the implementation and enforcement of EC environmental law; and a report on cross compliance and legislative proposals for direct support schemes under the CAP. Of notable absence are proposals relating to banning the import of wild birds into the EU and the Action Plan on reducing seabird by-catch in longline fisheries. BirdLife is seeking to work with the Commission to put these issues firmly on the agenda for 2007.



EuroBirdwatch 06

On the first weekend of October every year, BirdLife partners and their supporters head out into nature to participate in Europe's biggest birdwatching event, EuroBirdwatch.

As part of the World Bird Festival, a global, month-long event highlighting birds and nature conservation generally, EuroBirdwatch 2006 was another huge success, with almost 450,000 people participating in 34 countries, and spotting almost 2.3 million birds. For the first time the EuroBirdwatch Launch was supported by the Toyota Fund for Europe.



Toyota Motor Europe and BirdLife International established a partnership that not only involves the support of the EuroBirdwatch Launch but also practical cooperation between local Toyota affiliates and local IBAs.

There is always some rivalry between countries for the highest results, and this year's winners were:

Number of events organised:

- | | |
|----------------|-----|
| 1) Hungary | 204 |
| 2) Poland | 182 |
| 3) Netherlands | 130 |

Number of participants:

- | | |
|------------|--------|
| 1) Spain | 25,000 |
| 2) Hungary | 4,899 |
| 3) France | 3,000 |

Number of birds observed:

- | | |
|----------------|---------|
| 1) Lithuania | 813,251 |
| 2) Hungary | 387,251 |
| 3) Netherlands | 306,387 |

Number of bird species recorded:

- | | |
|----------------|-----|
| 1) Romania | 200 |
| 2) Italy | 198 |
| 3) Netherlands | 195 |

LIFE+ heading for delays

The European Parliament has now finished its LIFE+ Second Reading. It has proposed several major improvements, such as a much-needed increase in ringfencing for biodiversity and the inclusion of the 'lost' 50 million Euro allocated under the EU budget deal for LIFE+ and Natura 2000 financing.

It is essential that Member States do not delay. Environment Ministers must now strive to get quick agreement on LIFE+.

Yet a major sticking point remains. MEPs, Environment Ministers and the European Commission cannot agree on who is going to distribute most of the money: the Member States or the Commission.

Both models of distribution have their strengths and weaknesses. One principal model must be adopted, and soon. Any messy compromise between the two models would be unfortunate as it would render LIFE+ complex, confusing and inefficient, therefore making it a vulnerable target for future budget cuts.

Whichever model is adopted, it is essential that NGOs are able to apply for a significant portion of the biodiversity funds. NGOs are well positioned to be good at delivering biodiversity projects, often being cheaper and more efficient than other bodies.

It is likely that LIFE+ will now go to a Third Reading ('Conciliation') which means that money will only start to

be distributed mid-2007 at the earliest. And still the 2010 target of halting biodiversity loss comes closer. LIFE+ should be a major instrument in helping to tackle this target.



Rural Development: decision time for biodiversity

As the start of the 2007-2013 programming period approaches, Member States' Rural Development (RD) strategies and plans are rapidly taking shape. BirdLife and its national Partner organisations have been actively engaged with Member State Governments over the preparation of the new strategies and programmes and are now liaising closely with the Commission services, to ensure that the Rural Development policy really delivers on its declared objective of addressing the decline of farmland biodiversity and providing adequate support for the management of the Natura 2000 network. As more and more drafts are scrutinised however, it is becoming apparent that there is a real risk that the opportunities offered by the new RD policy will be missed in much of the EU.

Despite the EU's decision to adopt an integrated approach to financing the Natura 2000 network from several EU funding streams, with the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) being the most important, many Member States are not allocating sufficient funds for managing the Natura 2000 network under their national programmes. Furthermore, delivery will, in many cases, be left entirely to voluntary agri-environment schemes. Such an approach is unlikely to guarantee sufficient coverage and therefore adequate management of sites. Key European biodiversity "hot spots", the regions where most threatened birds are concentrated, are at risk from a near complete lack of targeted, biodi-

versity-focused agri-environment schemes. So while in some parts of Europe the farmland biodiversity crisis may be addressed, critical gaps in key areas such as the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe may undermine the overall EU objective of halting the decline of biodiversity by 2010. While targeted and "sophisticated" schemes are unpopular with many governments, 'broad and shallow' or horizontal agri-environment schemes, applied across the farmed landscape, are being designed in many cases as 'top-up' payments for farmers, rather than as effective tools for environmental improvement. This attitude undermines the credibility of agri-environment, as well as the conservation objectives of RD policy.

Concern is also emerging over the risk that RD funds will be misused. Many programs are likely to focus on "competitiveness" (axis I) as a means to channel significant investments into farming that could undoubtedly lead to further intensification. This includes drainage, irrigation and land re-parcelling, all activities that are liable to have severe impacts on biodiversity unless strong safeguards are built into the system. Alas, only a minority of these activities will be accompanied by mechanisms to ensure environment compatibility, or even compliance with the EU's own nature legislation.

Finally, the success of many agri-environment and other schemes is dependent on the right advice and information being made available to farmers and foresters. There is a real

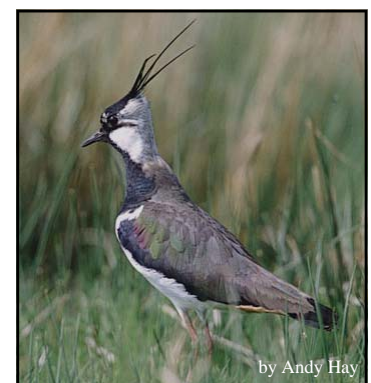
risk that advisory services in many Member States will continue to lack the appropriate knowledge and technical competence on ecological and environmental issues that go beyond that required to implement cross compliance. We thus face the possibility that even when the right schemes are adopted, actual delivery will fail due to ineffective deployment of the necessary competences on the ground.

Many of these problems are due to systematic violations, on the part of Member States, of the 'Partnership Principle' enshrined in the RD Regulation. During the drafting of programmes, there have been some notable instances where Member State governments have either failed to properly engage (if at all) with environmental NGOs or have dismissed their proposals without due reason.

While some Member States are expending great efforts to ensure their new RD Plans do deliver for the environment, and biodiversity conservation in particular, many are still not facing up to the challenge. Where Member States fail to deliver, the last hope for biodiversity resides with the Commission who must show a strong determination in ensuring compliance with the EU Regulations and Strategic Guidelines. If the EU is serious about its Göteborg commitment to halt biodiversity decline by 2010, the new Rural Development period programming is a test it must not fail.



by H Taylor



by Andy Hay



European Parliamentary Questions & Answers

The Questions & Answers are set out as follows:

Subject, Question nr., Name & Party asking, date of question, Summary of Question, Commissioner answering, date of answer, Summary of answer.

Please contact us for more information on any of these questions & answers.

Portugal: agri-environmental measures for 2005 - E-1733/06 - 21/04/06 by José Ribeiro e Castro (PPEDE)

A controversy is currently under way in Portugal between the government and thousands of farmers who are complaining that the present government is not honouring the commitments given by the Portuguese state under the previous government in relation to agri-environmental measures for 2005.

These measures have been the subject of the necessary legislation and regulation. Thousands of farmers have carried out activities in the expectation that they would receive the material support promised. Payment of this support is now being refused, causing significant damage and indignation in the industry.

It is always a very negative occurrence when, following changes of government in the Member States, the expectations created are disappointed and European Union money, i.e. money from the Community budget whose administration falls to the Commission in conjunction with the Member States, is the target of manipulation linked directly or indirectly to purely party political considerations.

It is even more negative that Community budget lines in-

tended to help European farmers — in this case Portuguese farmers — to develop rural communities and improve the environment are illegitimately withheld, thereby disappointing the expectations raised and breaking the commitments given, as well as frustrating the aims of Community policy.

1. Is the Commission monitoring the situation in Portugal with regard to agri-environmental measures for 2005? What comments would it make?
2. Will it verify the legality and practical application of the Community regulation in Portugal?

Answer by Mrs Fischer Boel

The Commission informs the Honourable Member that it is aware of the fact that Portugal will not pay the new agro-environment aid claims introduced by the farmers in 2005. The Commission is also closely monitoring the execution of the European Agriculture Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF)-Guarantee budget for the rural development in Portugal.

The Commission understands the Honourable Member's concern, especially because such an important measure as agri-environment is given a high priority in the Commission's rural development policy and society as a whole expects a positive return from all farmers willing to adopt new ways of production, more respectful of the environment, or to conti-

nue beneficial traditional ways of farming.

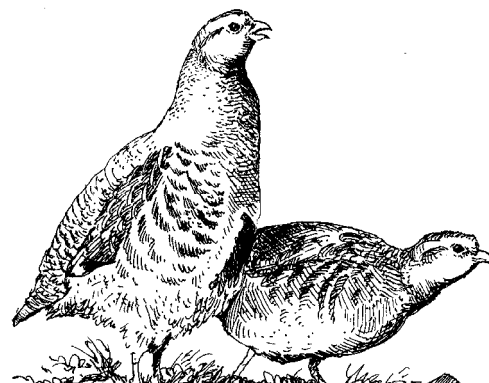
The programmes approved by the Commission create the legislative framework and provide for the necessary EU budgetary resources for concrete action on the ground. Obviously, everyone is eager to see that the results of these programmes are the best possible and it is always regrettable when some measures cannot be financed in a Member State, hindering the full performance of the specific programmes. It is of particular concern since agri-environment is the sole compulsory measure for Member States within rural development.

However, it should be noted that the priority criteria for subsidy attribution of any rural development measure is one of the elements for which the Member States are responsible, not the Commission. Payments to farmers are made by the national authorities in their implementing function of the rural development measures, in the respect of European and national legislation. The Commission cannot decide whether one Member State should pay one particular measure, sub-measure or project within the framework defined by the programme.

This aspect is clearly outside the Commission's competence.

In this particular case, the Commission was informed that, on one hand, Portugal has a specific budgetary difficulty in meeting the full demand for new agri-environment contracts and, on the other hand, the operational context has changed with the introduction of decoupled payments and cross-compliance within the first pillar of the common agricultural policy.

In the coming months, when the Portuguese authorities present them, the Commission will be discussing Portugal's national strategy for rural development and a new draft rural development programme with them, and will be concerned to see a high quality agri-environment programme with sufficient funding for the coming seven years.



Perdix perdix by Christof Bobzin



By Ingar Jostein Oien, Ovre Pasvik Nature Reserve, Norway



European Division
Av. de la Toison d'Or 67
B-1060 Brussels
Tel.: +32 (0)2 280 08 30
Fax: +32 (0)2 230 38 02
E-mail: bleco@birdlifeeco.net
Website: www.birdlife.org/eu

The Brussels Briefing

The Brussels Briefing is compiled by the EU Policy Team of European Division in Brussels.
It is intended to give up-to-date information on the activities of BirdLife International at EU level and the European Union.
Editor: Claire Papazoglou

The Newsletter is supported by: RSPB, NABU, SOF, Vogelbescherming Nederland
and the European Commission.



Further information on specific topics

The Briefing is not large enough to contain the text of all the source materials used to compile it. If you would like further information on specific topics reported in the Brussels Briefing, please contact us - details above.