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Dear reader,

Although while I am writing these lines we are still in autumn, Brussels is freezing cold. The snow that fell abundant last week is still visible in some parts of the city. Low temperatures reinvigorate the winter viruses that are so familiar at these latitudes. The way viruses act on our body reminds me of a famous 1999 science-fiction movie, Matrix. The Earth is controlled by intelligent machines that use human beings as their energy source and keep them imprisoned in a virtual digital world (the Matrix). Neo and Morpheus, the good heroes, fight against Agent Smith, an evil virtual creation of the machines. When Agent Smith succeeds to catch Morpheus, he reveals him the machines' thoughts about human beings:

"I'd like to share a revelation that I've had, during my time here. It came to me when I tried to classify your species and I realized that you aren't actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with its surrounding environment, but you humans do not. You move to an area and you multiply, and multiply until every natural resource is consumed. The only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus."

Back then it was indeed a revelation for me. Isn't it true that every single day we are attacking 'Gaia', the complex and fascinating living organism that is our planet? Isn't it true that with our 'development models and patterns' we are depleting *Terra Mater's* resources, devastating nature and bringing other species to extinction? Extinction is not new to nature. But the pace at which this is happening now is scaring. As viruses, it seems we do not care about the possible death of the body that is hosting us. It seems.... and it is partially true.

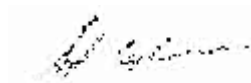
However, unlike viruses, there are people who care about our living planet. We at BirdLife are among those. We believe that another world is possible because **another human being** is possible. A human being who, as any other mammal, is able to live in a natural equilibrium with its surrounding environment. A human being who seeks personal and collective development **together with nature** and not against nature. A human being who, following

moral, ethical, economic and political imperatives, actively works to protect and restore biodiversity and healthy ecosystems and avoid extinctions of other species.

Throughout the whole BirdLife Partnership we have been working hard this year, to make the International Year of Biodiversity a positive landmark in Nature conservation. Through this newsletter we have told you stories of hope and casted light over positive examples that show that yes, we can turn the tide.

Just to mention some of them, there was the recovery of the Azores Bullfinch *Pyrrhula murina*, or the first timid signals of a greener Common Agricultural Policy, or the adoption of a meaningful 'package' of 'Strategic Plan, Strategy of Financial Resource Mobilization and the ABS Protocol' by 193 countries at the CBD-COP 10 in Nagoya, or the almost fully completion of the terrestrial SPA network (with 70% spatial overlap with IBAs) and the evolving blueprint for designation of marine protected areas following our publication of the Marine IBAs in the EU and Marine IBA Toolkit.

In the epilogue of Matrix Neo defeats Agent Smith and tells people imprisoned in the Matrix that 'anything is possible', before flying into the sky like a new superhero. We are not superheroes and we are not viruses either. We are normal women and men and we believe that with passion, rational and emotional intelligence and together with you, dear reader, we can make 'possible the seemingly impossible': **bringing biodiversity back from the brink**.



Angelo Caserta
Regional Director
BirdLife Europe

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Green shoots for CAP reform? Commission signals green CAP reform is on the table

The European Commission's CAP reform proposal is an important first step towards greening the policy. The inclusion in the proposal of a pure 'public money for public goods' option is a good way forward for the future of the CAP as this option could deliver for the environment and ensure maximum value for taxpayers' money. However, the document makes clear that the Commission's preference is for a less ambitious middle option which, whilst containing some positive aspects, would still allow significant waste on outdated and untargeted subsidies.

"The Commission's proposals are an encouraging sign that the EU might be taking seriously its recent commitment at the Nagoya biodiversity summit to achieve sustainable farming by 2020" says Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy at BirdLife Europe. "It is now time for our decision makers to show real leadership and transform a policy that has been historically a source of embarrassment of the EU into a green flagship".

One of the clear improvements suggested for the direct payment system is to link basic income support to farmers with meaningful environmental commitments such as environmental set-aside and crop rotation. But the lack of detail and emphasis on this green payment means the document still falls short of providing clear justification for the significant budget attached to the policy or insuring that green intentions are not turned into green wash.

Further concerns regarding the proposals of the first pillar relate to the lack of environmental conditionality attached to three of the five payments proposed. At a time of fiscal constraint and environmental crisis any payment that does not secure broader societal benefits cannot be defended.

For the proposed changes to Pillar two, BirdLife strongly welcomes the specific reference to High Nature Value farming and the Natura 2000 network. These systems and sites provide outstanding environmental public goods and yet are almost entirely overlooked by the current CAP support framework. Much clearer and more focused commitment would be expected given the relevance of both issues and the EU's legal commitments.

Finally, it is disappointing that no explicit mention is made about agri-environmental schemes. Such schemes are critically important as they reward farmers for environmental delivery and they play a key role in contributing to the EU's biodiversity target.

BirdLife expects the EU now to do a proper assessment of all the options it proposes. It is time for Europe to prioritize environmental protection as the basis for the long term future of not only biodiversity but the farming sector and food security.

More information: [Tees Robijns](#), EU Agriculture Policy Officer at BirdLife Europe

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Solutions to end harmful subsidies in EU Budget revealed in new report



A new report launched by seven green NGOs proposes concrete solutions to put an end to environmentally harmful subsidies within the EU Budget. In this time of austerity, European taxpayers' money is not delivering what it should, such as public goods and the well-being of Europe's citizens. Our key challenges in tackling climate change, biodiversity loss and resource inefficiency need to be prioritised ahead of funding for unnecessary infrastructure projects and the subsidising of intensive agriculture.

The report, called "[Changing Perspectives – How the EU Budget can Shape a Sustainable Future](#)", presents a new proposal on how to reform the EU funds, analyses different EU policies and suggests concrete solutions that take into consideration the key environmental challenges facing the region. This is the first time that major NGOs with a presence across the EU have presented a joint proposal on how to allocate funds in the overall EU budget 2014-2020.

"The EU needs to ensure sufficient funding is available for its current environmental policies and that these commitments are seriously integrated in other sectoral policies," commented Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy at BirdLife Europe. "Each European consumes three times more resources than an Asian and four times more than an African. We need to face up to and tackle these disparities if we want to be credible on the international scene", concluded Mr Brunner.

According to the groups, the EU funds should emphasise and promote sustainability in sectors such as transport and housing, while targeting plans and projects that actively reduce greenhouse gas emissions and energy and resource overconsumption, and that maintain Europe's green infrastructure.

Antoine Kedzierski, Policy Officer at Transport & Environment, said: "EU transport spending should be less about joining up points on a map, and more about smarter ways of using existing infrastructure. There should be incentives to help member states implement congestion charging schemes or modernize existing rail infrastructure, for example. And aviation, which causes ten times higher emissions than other modes of transport, should no longer receive taxpayers' money from the EU".

Jean-Philippe Palasi, Director for EU Policy at Conservation International Europe, said: "The great challenge of the century is the switch to a green economy, and this cannot be achieved with a budget structure from the sixties. With the reform we are proposing, the EU budget will contribute to make Europe the world leader in creating green jobs, while addressing the most pressing ecological challenges of our time, like climate change and extinction of species".

The report also stressed the importance of increasing LIFE funds (the single EU instrument directly allocated to the environment) to 1% of the 2014-2020 budget and mainstreaming the EU's biodiversity and climate objectives within all policies and spending, including on the external dimension.

The report can be downloaded [here](#).

More information: [Bruna Campos](#), EU Financial Perspectives Policy Officer at BirdLife Europe

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Common Fisheries Policy: business as usual is not an option

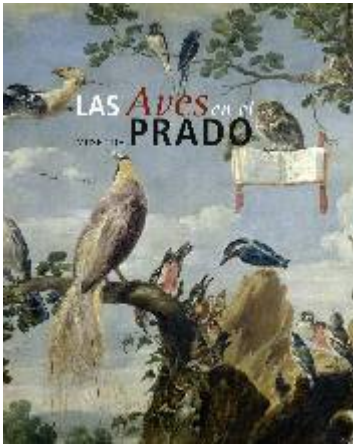
On 16 November the European Commission organised its final stakeholder conference on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) before bringing forward firm proposals in 2011. The key message from Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Maria Damanaki was clear: if we want to continue fishing in the future, radical change to the current CFP is needed. She will aim for a policy with sustainability as its primary goal, with decisions based strictly on science and with an ecosystem approach that is geographically specified. This was supported by Commissioner for the Environment Janez Potočnik, who also reminded that the fisheries policy must contribute to achieving objectives under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and fulfill recently agreed biodiversity commitments from Nagoya calling for sustainable fishing.

BirdLife strongly supports Commissioner Damanaki in her struggle for a greener EU fisheries policy, not only for the sake of disappearing fish and degraded marine ecosystems, but also for seabirds which are an integral part of that wider ecosystem and a good indicator of its health.

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

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Birds flying in the Prado Museum



Kingfishers, bustards, robins, spoonbills, eagles, vultures, falcons, hoopoes and goldfinches and many other birds 'fly' in the Prado Museum. Their flight has been 'captured' by the brushes of artists such as Brueghel the Old, Rubens, Bosch, Goya, Snyder or Jan Fyt. This amazing but still hardly studied artistic, scientific and naturalistic beauty is now brought to light thanks to the exhaustive research led by SEO/BirdLife (BirdLife in Spain). This extensive study has identified over 700 images of birds - representing 136 world species - from the 7,600 paintings hosted in the Madrid-based museum.

"Birds have always had such an important role in our imaginary, representing a world people never managed to conquer completely. With their amazing colours, their songs and their freedom to fly, they have been chosen as main symbols in the mythology and religion, but also in people's daily lives", commented Eduardo de Juana Aranzana, President of SEO/BirdLife.

To undertake this research, the Prado Museum opened its graphic database to SEO/BirdLife's experts who could analyse the paintings to identify the numerous bird species. This through study revealed the brilliant and sometimes unrecognised talent of some painters as naturalists, unveiling perfectly detailed painted birds but also invented ones, and showing the difficulties of painting

flying birds in a time where photographs still did not exist.

Such study has been conducted by the biologist and teacher Joaquín Gómez Cano and has benefited from the joint technical direction of Juan Varela and Gerardo Orellana, two important artists and experts.

The study has led to the publication of *Birds in the Prado Museum*, a fantastic book issued with the support of Red Elctrica de España and the cooperation of this magnificent museum.

You can buy the book "Las Aves en el Museo del Prado" at SEO/BirdLife [online shop](#), at the Museo del Prado bookshop and other bookshops.

Further information: www.seo.org

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The International Year of Biodiversity in the Czech Republic: Summing up



CSO (BirdLife in the Czech Republic), with the support of the Czech Ministry of Environment, organised various activities all over 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity. As part of the Ministry Preparatory Committee in charge of organising the year, CSO worked very closely with local authorities, NGOs and other institutions.

CSO organised 96 spring excursions and 41 Birdwatching events, raising awareness on biodiversity. Common Swift *Apus apus* and Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* were included in the "2010 Biodiversity Calendar" as species of the month in April and June. Swift nest boxes have also been installed in the Ministry's main building, providing new breeding opportunities for these birds.

During one of the Biodiversity Days held in 2010, special attention was drawn on urban biodiversity and the problem it is continuously facing, stressing how many swift breeding sites and bat shelters get destroyed every day.

On the occasion of the Ekofilm Festival, CSO presented its own film on "Human and Bird Areas or Natura Paradoxa?", receiving very positive reviews.

Several workshops and conference were also organised with Governmental bodies and institutions, promoting BirdLife's activities, projects and main conservation successes.

More information: [Lukáš Viktora](#), Project Manager at CSO.

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Bird poaching in Serbia – business as usual



Two recent cases of bird smuggling, prevented by Serbian Customs, showed again the size of bird poaching in this country. The first case took place last August, when customs stopped a shipment of 221 Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* and 130 European Turtle Doves *Streptopelia turtur* and Eurasian Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* that were shot in northern Serbia, near the town of Senta. Furthermore a second case occurred mere two months later, at the beginning of November, when smuggling of 700 birds, including Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos*, Common Quails, Grey Partridges *Perdix perdix* and Common Redshanks *Tringa totanus*, was discovered.

To add oil to the fire, the Serbian Ministries of Agriculture and Environment issued a new Decree on Hunting Seasons (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 75/10 - 2010) without a prior public consultation. This decree allows shooting of waterfowl until the end of February, when flocks already split apart and pairs are being formed. Even if against European norms, the decree also allows spring shooting of Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, as well as of Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, a well known raptor species. Hunters in Serbia commonly dislike raptors and shoot them indiscriminately, so every year thousands of Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo* are being shot under the mask of "Goshawk hunting".

Last spring I was talking to an ethno-tourism entrepreneur in western Serbia, who already had some birdwatchers in his establishment. He told me how surprised he was to find out that there were so many species of Goshawks. I was surprised at first, but then I understood that the word Goshawk is commonly used for any raptor! And as hunters are allowed to shoot Goshawks, it implicitly mean to them that they can shoot any raptor!

More information: [Dragan Simic](#), League for Ornithological Action of Serbia

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Mixed fortunes for Important Bird Areas in Luxembourg



LNVL (BirdLife in Luxembourg) has just published the first national Important Bird Area (IBA) status report in Europe. Appearing in the autumn 2010 issue of LNVL's members' magazine *Regulus*, it presents updated information for 12 existing IBAs and describes six newly identified sites, which were recently confirmed by BirdLife International. It also applies BirdLife's global IBA monitoring framework to all 18 IBAs, revealing that only six sites are currently in good condition, while the state of ten is average and two poor.

Through its network of volunteers and members, LNVL collated the latest bird data from across the country and used them to review the last national IBA inventory (from 2000). New information on the abundance and distribution of species listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive, such as Hazel Grouse *Bonasa bonasia*, Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*,

Red Kite *Milvus milvus* and Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, were particularly valuable. EU Member States are obliged to take special conservation measures for these species, and LNVL is now encouraging the Luxembourg Government to designate the six new sites as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the Natura 2000 network.

LNVL intends to produce a more detailed technical report in the future, but has already witnessed a positive response to the summary publication. Several consultancy bureaus have requested the boundaries of the new IBAs to use when evaluating development proposals, and various decision-makers have requested further information about the IBAs. Hopefully this will lead to an improvement in the state of those sites that are not in good condition.

For more information, click [here](#) or contact col@luxnatur.lu

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Conference welcomes progress and makes recommendations for further conservation of threatened birds in the EU

The first European Species Action Plans were adopted 15 years ago and since then almost all European bird species listed on the Global Red List have received their recovery plan. Furthermore, 13 management plans have been approved for huntable bird species whose conservation status in the EU is considered unfavourable. In 2010, the European Commission requested a review to be made on the effectiveness of these important tools for the conservation of threatened birds in the EU and how these processes deliver the EU commitments under the Birds Directive and beyond the EU borders. BirdLife was contracted to carry out this assessment together with the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation (FACE). An important element of this work was the organisation of the International Conference: Bird Conservation in the EU: planning for recovery action and sustainable use on 23-24 November 2010 in Brussels.

It gave opportunity to 130 participants from different stakeholder groups across the EU to present their point of view, give opinions and debate on methods of improving the way these processes are organized and managed. Keynote speakers set the scene to the discussions that followed with some exciting examples illustrating both the successes and challenges to bird conservation in the EU. The example of the increasing population of the White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* along the Danube clearly shows how a formerly threatened species can benefit from coordinated conservation action across Europe. It has now recovered in many countries, thanks to careful management in protected areas and the challenge is how to bring it back to the wider countryside. Another example of future challenges was illustrated by the case of increasing numbers of wintering geese.

On one hand they demonstrate how some species can benefit from improved protection and how adaptive some birds can be to changes in their environment, including climate change. On the other hand, the question is now how to ensure that conservation successes stories like these are not compromised by the increasing costs of managing conflicts with e.g. farmers. The need of a more flexible system of population management and conservation of sufficient habitats is now needed.

Most of the Conference participants united around the following conclusions:

- The Conference was successful and useful in sourcing good suggestions for future improvements of species recovery planning. More will follow through consultation and dissemination of the conference results.
- There was a prevailing agreement that conservation delivers good results, especially when it is based on good data, scientific approach and strong commitment from all stakeholders.
- Choosing the right priorities and setting good conservation goals rely on the best available data, so better coordination and cooperation is needed in its gathering.
- As the EU can only do part of the job, better coordination at international level is required among key organisations and legal frameworks. Such a process had already started and strengthened further by the Conference.
- The implementation mechanisms for recovery plans have to be made much stronger, as at present the main difficulties come from low levels of integration in structural policies such as agriculture, transport, energy and urban planning.
- The potential of cooperation among stakeholders should be used more in the future.
- The usefulness of management plans for huntable species has to be evaluated and their development and implementation – greatly improved.
- The 2020 Biodiversity Strategy offers new opportunities for recovering the threatened birds in Europe and should not remove the focus on this important task.

For more information contact [Boris Barov](#), European Conservation Manager at BirdLife Europe

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A new Director at SEO/BirdLife

Asunción Ruiz is the new Director of SEO/BirdLife (BirdLife in Spain). Asunción has been working for SEO/BirdLife for 17 years and will replace Alejandro Sanchez, who recently left.

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BirdLife on Air

Following the new tradition, BirdLife provides an answer “on air” to some of our readers’ questions: this month the microphone is in the hands of Elena D’Andrea, General Director of LIPU/BirdLife Italy.



You have been the director of LIPU for 6 years now. Which are the main achievements and changes that you have brought to the organisation?

In these six years I have tried to improve how LIPU works both in Italy and within the BirdLife Partnership, organising our activities in a more coordinated and strategic way. To achieve this, we have created a multiannual strategic plan, re-defining and broadening LIPU's vision to better include biodiversity protection and not just birds, also taking into account economic, social and political aspects.

Even reaffirming its associative principles, LIPU has reinforced its relationship with Ministers, foundations and companies, also improving fundraising activities targeting the general public. In order to do so, I supported the opening of a new institutional office in Rome. We have put a lot of efforts in strengthening the links with our volunteers, who are essential to run the 102 local sections and 30 Reserves all over Italy. We successfully developed our environmental education department, which every year plays a fundamental role in the Spring Alive BirdLife campaign. With the support of our Board I have also focused on consolidating the organisation introducing more efficient management procedures and permanent staff.

As the first woman leading LIPU, which have been the main challenges?

In a non profit organization, where people are much more sensitive to the respect of human values, they immediately accepted a woman as General Director. Of course there are still situations where I think they would consider me differently if I were a man. On the other hand my feminine way of thinking, mixing pragmatism, intuition and willingness to listen have helped me a lot in my position.

Which are the main problems LIPU and other NGOs have to face in Italy? What could be done?

I will probably sound very predictable, but the financial crisis is the main problem we all have to face, both in Italy and abroad. This is a two-edged sword though: on one hand the funding opportunities to protect biodiversity constantly decrease, and on the other it is much easier to push environmental issues to the background. Therefore we must do our best to remind people, governments and companies that we are part of the solution for a sustainable future, not one of the obstacles to it. We know that protecting our planet and our biodiversity is economically more profitable than destroying it.

And now, what's next?

If I look at the future, I see a more secure and prouder LIPU, which strongly influences environmental decisions and fights against biodiversity loss, much more involved on the international scene. As member of BirdLife's European Committee, I am convinced it is our role to do our best not only to protect nature within the national borders, but everywhere.

You can contact Elena at elena.dandrea@lipu.it

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Events

International events

- July- December 2010: Belgian Presidency of the European Union
- January - June 2011: Hungarian Presidency of the European Union

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