

GREENING EUROPE

PRIORITIES OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL FOR THE UK PRESIDENCY - JULY TO DECEMBER 2005

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Introduction from the Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), BirdLife Partner in the UK

The UK takes over the Presidency of the EU for six months on 1 July 2005. This presents an opportunity for the UK to make a tangible difference to the European and global environment, and to the quality of life of millions of people.

BirdLife believes that much needs to be done to meet the ambitious targets for action laid down in the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy, particularly those relating to halting biodiversity decline by 2010, climate change and transport growth, which on current trends Europe will fail to meet.

Environmental integration

It is vital that the environment is effectively integrated into all EU policies and programmes. The experience of the Common Agricultural Policy has shown that we risk bequeathing an impoverished environment to future generations if political priority is not given to mainstreaming the environment into European policy.

There is a strong political as well as policy case for an environment-focused Presidency. According to a 'Eurobarometer' survey published on 29 April of this year, 72% of citizens said environmental factors influenced them "very much" or "quite a lot".

The Government should make the case for ambitious European and international action on environmental issues such as climate change, wildlife protection and water quality, where countries cannot act effectively by operating independently.

Passer Montanus by Jos Zwarts

Key challenges for the UK Presidency

Rural development

A major priority for action at EU level must be continued and progressive reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. The debate on the financial perspective currently taking place at EU level presents the principal opportunity to secure a strong rural development programme (Pillar 2 of the CAP) for the period 2007-2013. The budget for rural development must be increased after 2006, particularly for measures that enhance farmland wildlife.

Reward environmentally friendly farming and Natura 2000 financing

Sufficient funding must also be allocated to the management of the Natura 2000 network of EU-protected areas, which covers around 17% of the Union's territory. The European Commission estimates that at least EUR 6.1 billion per year is required to finance Natura 2000. Funds must be delivered from the major EU spending streams to co-finance the network, particularly from the Rural Development programme, the Structural Funds, the 'LIFE+' environment budget line and the European Fisheries Fund.

Climate change

Climate change is the most serious long-term environmental threat that we face. The UK has rightly identified climate change as a key theme of both its Presidency of the EU and chairmanship of the G8 in 2005. In Europe, the Presidency should ensure that effective action is taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Internationally, the Presidency should demonstrate leadership in setting objectives for the Kyoto period after 2012.

This document outlines priorities for action in nine key areas during the UK Presidency of the EU. The RSPB and BirdLife International look forward to working with the UK Government to make the Presidency a success for Europe and for the environment.



Graham Wynne
Chief Executive, The RSPB,
BirdLife Partner in the UK

Milvus milvus by Koen Devos

The EU's Financial Perspective 2007-2013

The EU's financing policies, particularly the CAP and the Structural Funds, have a significant impact on Europe's wildlife. A recent assessment of the overall status of birds in Europe by BirdLife International indicates that 43% of all bird species are now in trouble, and that the situation has worsened over the past ten years.

The discussions on budgetary priorities for the next financial perspective present an opportunity to reverse this trend by putting the environment and sustainable development at the heart of the EU's spending plans. Of particular importance to BirdLife is the delivery of the EU's commitment to 'halt biodiversity loss by 2010' made by Heads of State and

Government at the Gothenburg Summit in 2001.

It is very difficult to judge from the draft financial perspective how much priority will be given to the environment compared with competing Lisbon economic development objectives and fixed agricultural subsidies. There are plenty of opportunities, but no guarantees, that environmental needs will be met.

Depending on the outcome of the European Council meeting in June under the Luxembourg Presidency, the UK could play a vital role in bringing forward a final Inter-Institutional Agreement on the financial perspective.

The UK Presidency should:

- Ensure that any change in budget is accompanied by a review of all the EU spending streams. Any necessary cuts must fall on those budget lines which offer the least value for money and the lowest contribution to Europe's common targets and commitments
- Safeguard the Rural Development programme (Pillar 2 of the CAP) from budgetary cuts. Rural Development funds provide vital support for measures to protect and enhance Europe's farmed environment. BirdLife believes that Rural Development should be allocated a bigger share of the overall CAP budget in the next financing period
- Guarantee sufficient financing for the Natura 2000 network of EU-protected wildlife sites from the major funding programmes, particularly from the Rural Development programme, the Structural Funds, the LIFE+ environment budget and the European Fisheries Fund

Action on climate change

The UK has rightly identified climate change as a key theme of both its Presidency of the EU and chairmanship of the G8 in 2005. A major initiative is required to give new life to the international process on climate change, and three major opportunities present themselves in 2005.

First, the Kyoto Protocol commits its developed country parties to have made 'demonstrable progress in achieving [their] commitments' by 2005. Second, it commits parties to starting, by 2005 at the latest, a review of emission

reduction commitments for the period after 2012, the end of its first commitment period. Third, the Climate Change Convention requires its parties to conduct a review of the adequacy of its commitments no later than 1998, a review that has yet to occur.

The EU's credibility as a climate change leader would be considerably enhanced if the EU were to take action to cut its fastest growing source of emissions: those from transport, especially aviation.

Calidris canutus by Maris Strazds

The UK Presidency should:

- Ensure that the EU conducts a thorough internal review of its 'demonstrable progress' in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, identifying areas where more effort is needed to ensure that the EU achieves its Kyoto targets
- Ask the Commission to present proposals for an emissions charge on EU aviation and a 'well-to-wheel' carbon tax on road vehicle fuel
- Initiate discussion on bringing aviation emissions into the EU trading scheme

Rural Development and agriculture policy

BirdLife International is calling on EU decision-makers to ensure that Europe's rural policy protects and enhances the natural environment, supports communities, conserves traditional landscapes, encourages the production of healthy and safe food, and maintains a diversity of habitats for wildlife.

EU citizens are increasingly scrutinising the effects of EU agricultural policy on the environment in Europe and on farming communities throughout the world. Over recent years, intensive farming promoted by the CAP has led to the serious degradation of habitats, soil, waters, traditional landscapes and biodiversity. This has been accompanied by

economic stagnation in rural areas, with land abandonment in many parts of the EU.

If correctly funded and structured to support a balanced number of measures, the Rural Development Regulation could become the primary mechanism to deliver sustainable land management in the EU over the period 2007-2013.

The UK Presidency should encourage Member States to formulate meaningful and sustainable Rural Development plans by influencing the implementing regulation and the content of the agreed Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development in Europe.

The UK Presidency should:

- Ensure that any budgetary cuts resulting from agreement on the financial perspective do not fall on the Rural Development budget and its environmental measures
- Ensure that the implementing regulation for the rural development framework further improves its environmental content, in particular by setting environmental standards for the competitiveness axis, which at present is made up of measures for which respect of environmental legislation is not required
- Promote the importance of supporting multifunctional agriculture through rural development payments (as opposed to market support and subsidies) on the world stage at the Hong Kong WTO round
- Push forward radical reforms of the sugar regime to promote the sustainable production of sugar in the EU and worldwide
- Review Member States' progress in implementing the CAP reforms agreed in 2003, particularly provisions on cross-compliance and decoupling subsidies from agricultural production
- Press Member States to use Natura 2000 payments to help farmers comply with the Birds and Habitats Directives, and therefore contribute to the protection of the best natural farmed sites in the EU



Financing the Natura 2000 network of EU-protected areas

The Natura 2000 network protects Europe's most valuable sites for nature and covers around 17% of the EU's territory. In July 2004, the European Commission published a Communication on how the network would be financed.

The Commission estimates that EUR 6.1 billion is required per year for the financing of Natura 2000 management activities, such as the restoration and maintenance of wildlife habitats, the development of management plans and conservation measures for protected species. According to the Commission's Communication, Natura 2000 will be financed primarily from the Rural Development programme and the Structural Funds, with limited support for certain activities from the LIFE+ environment budget.

BirdLife welcomes the Commission's proposal to integrate Natura 2000 financing objectives into the major spending

programmes. However, the Commission's proposals are unlikely to deliver adequate levels of funding in practice because the Natura 2000 financing provisions in the Rural Development programme and the Structural Funds are not compulsory. Moreover, the Commission's proposals fail to continue the highly successful LIFE-Nature programme, the EU's only dedicated funding line for biodiversity. This dedicated funding line is necessary to 'fill the gaps' left by the other funds.

The UK Presidency could play a vital role in brokering a final agreement on the financial perspective and key funding Regulations for Natura 2000, such as the LIFE+ environment budget, the Rural Development Regulation, the Structural Funds and the European Fisheries Fund.

The UK Presidency should:

- Ensure that Natura 2000 financing is highlighted as a funding priority in the final deal on the financial perspective 2007-2013
- Seek to amend the 'LIFE +' environmental financing proposal to ensure a dedicated funding line for biodiversity conservation after 2006
- Strengthen the Structural Funds Regulations to ensure that Member States are obliged to show how they intend to finance the needs of the environment and nature, including supporting the Natura 2000, as a condition for the release of funds
- Seek to amend the Rural Development Regulation to ensure a mandatory and adequate payment to farmers, foresters and other relevant land managers to help them guarantee the proper protection and maintenance of Natura 2000 sites
- Make provision for marine Natura 2000 sites within the European Fisheries Fund



Delivering effective water management

Drinking water resources and the health of aquatic and wetland ecosystems are under severe pressure in the EU, from development, pollution and over-abstraction. The Water Framework Directive (WFD) sets new holistic environmental standards to ensure that the health of the water environment in the EU is secured for the future.

At present, the achievement of the WFD objectives is severely jeopardised by other EU policies and programmes, particularly the CAP (even in its reformed condition),

transport policies, and the deployment of Structural and Cohesion Funds to support water regulation and flood risk management projects. Real integration of policies, with funding dependent on demonstrable compliance with environmental laws, is required.

The UK should continue to progress WFD implementation during its Presidency and seek to complete work on the new Groundwater Directive.

The UK Presidency should:

Recurvirostra avosetta by Mark Hulme

- Protect the core environmental standards of the WFD, by ensuring that the 'intercalibration' exercise is adequately resourced, delivers outcomes compatible with the definitions of Good Ecological Status provided in the WFD itself, **and can be repeated** where current data is inadequate for this task
- Promote the integration of WFD objectives into all EU policy areas, particularly the CAP, transport policies and the deployment of Structural and Cohesion Funds
- Ensure that the proposed Flood Risk Management Directive is integrated with the planning structures of the WFD, and is designed to provide maximum support to the achievement of WFD objectives
- Strive for EU agreement on the new Groundwater Directive. The Directive should focus on preventing and limiting the entry of pollutants into groundwater to reduce pollution progressively and provide long-term protection for drinking water quality and groundwater-dependent ecosystems

Delivering sustainable development

The principle of 'sustainable development' must be effectively applied in practice if the planet is to be safeguarded for future generations. The link between economic development and environmental degradation must be broken. It makes sound economic sense to work safely within ecological limits. The total economic benefits of global ecosystems, such as climate regulation, nutrient cycling and flood defence,

outweigh the costs of managing them by 100:1.

The UK's Presidency of the EU presents an opportunity to drive forward the commitments to sustainable development enshrined in the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy which was agreed by Heads of State and Government at the Gothenburg Summit in 2001.

We call on the UK Presidency to:

- Ensure that a full review of the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) is carried out at the European Council in December. This review should give renewed momentum to the SDS by clarifying its scope and content, as well as highlighting key milestones for action and indicators
- Promote sustainable development as the overarching goal of the EU's Lisbon process of economic, social and environmental renewal
- Push for the Pan European Indicator of Common Birds to be listed as a Biodiversity Headline Indicator on the shortlist of indicators that measure the Lisbon process. This is vital to chart progress towards meeting the target of halting biodiversity decline by 2010 and to give this target the political priority that it deserves
- Improve significantly the Commission's current 'Impact Assessment' procedures for major policy proposals in order to ensure that these assessments adequately take into account environmental considerations

Cohesion Policy post 2006

The future scope of the EU Structural Funds largely depends on the outcome of the negotiations on the financial perspective. Whatever the outcome of these negotiations, two fundamental principles must apply with regard to the Structural Funds: the new regulations must deliver on the Gothenburg agenda for EU sustainable development and offer opportunities for co-financing the Natura 2000 network.

The new Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG) will establish political agreement on the priorities for EU Cohesion Policy for the period 2007-2013. These will influence the preparation of National Strategic Reference Frameworks (NRTFs), Operational Programmes (OPs) and, potentially, the delivery of EU Cohesion objectives through 'own resources'.

BirdLife International's direct experience of Natura 2000 has taught us that Member States' uptake of measures for Natura 2000 is not sufficient to ensure the necessary level of support. Therefore, the CSG must emphasise that biodiversity and the proper management of Natura 2000 are EU priorities – and ensure that this is acknowledged in the preparation and allocation of Funds in the NRTFs and OPs.

The Regulations must also contain safeguards to prevent damage to Natura 2000 sites and species, and extend similar protection to the habitats of endemic and globally threatened species in the outermost regions of the EU.

The UK Presidency should:

- Ensure that the General Regulation for the ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund includes a new article laying down the requirement for Member States and the Commission to promote the protection and improvement of the environment at the various stages of implementing the Funds
- Ensure that the ERDF, the ESF and the Cohesion Fund support the proper management of the Natura 2000 network. In this respect, Natura 2000 should be highlighted as a funding priority in the Community Strategic Guidelines
- Ensure that Member States show how they intend to finance the needs of Natura 2000, and that the Commission does not approve Member States' National Strategic Reference Frameworks or Operational Programmes or release funds until it is confident that adequate funding for biodiversity and Natura 2000 is in place
- Support the suspension of payments to projects which are likely to damage wildlife requiring protection under EC nature conservation legislation



EC Biodiversity Strategy Review

The European Community Biodiversity Strategy was adopted in 1998 as the Community's framework for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The review of the Strategy and its thematic Action Plans (on natural resources, agriculture, fisheries and overseas development) started in 2003 with the objective of developing a Delivery Plan to reach the EU target of halting biodiversity decline by 2010.

The review has taken place with the involvement of various stakeholders, culminating in the conference "Biodiversity and the EU – sustaining life, sustaining livelihoods" during the Irish Presidency. The "Malahide Message", which was the outcome of this conference, was endorsed by the Environment Council in June 2004. Another important event was the conference "25 years of the Birds Directive: Challenges for 25 countries" held in November 2004 in

The UK Presidency should ensure that:

- The Biodiversity Communication is finalised by the Commission in a form that is clear, concise, precise and ambitious, building on the objectives and targets agreed by stakeholders in the "Malahide Message" and the conclusions of the Bergen op Zoom conference
- The implementation of the Communication is made a high political priority for all Member States and EU institutions, with support from all the relevant stakeholders

Bergen op Zoom in the Netherlands, which produced a set of conclusions concerning the future of the Birds Directive.

The European Commission has this year started preparing a Biodiversity Communication, which should include a Delivery Plan for the 2010 target and incorporate the Malahide and Bergen op Zoom conclusions. Towards the end of the Luxembourg Presidency, the Commission also initiated a public consultation on the main areas of the Communication. It is expected that the Communication will finally be adopted in November 2005.

BirdLife International believes that, to date, the process has been lacking in vision, urgency and political support. With less than five years left before the target of halting biodiversity decline must be met, the prompt adoption and implementation of this Biodiversity Communication is essential.

Protecting the marine environment

Fish stocks in EU waters are at historically low levels, with cod on the verge of collapse and most other stocks fished beyond safe biological limits. Deployed fleet capacity needs to be further reduced in the years ahead if these impacts are to be alleviated.

The review of the Structural Funds currently taking place presents an opportunity to alter the future direction of aid post-2006 to take account of the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The CFP reforms in 2002 collective-

ly allow a shift in the future deployment of fisheries Structural Funds away from traditional capital investment projects towards funding 'softer' and longer term management measures.

The Sixth Environmental Action Programme requires the Commission to present a Thematic Strategy to protect and conserve the marine environment. The UK should ensure that the Council takes forward discussions on the shape of this strategy so that it can be implemented as effectively as possible.

The UK Presidency should:

- Promote in the new European Fisheries Fund a shift in emphasis away from traditional capital investment projects towards measures to monitor and manage the marine environment, including support for: small-scale fishing as part of an integrated development plan for coastal zones; Regional Advisory Councils; development of environmentally-friendly fishing gear; Environmental Impact Assessment of new fisheries; pilot schemes for No Take Zones
- Progress work on the European Marine Strategy to ensure that it embraces a proper planning system and that the management of human activities is in accordance with an ecosystem-based approach. The strategy should be based on a legally binding framework requiring specific actions at regional level to protect and conserve the marine environment
- Encourage full and swift implementation of the Natura 2000 marine network in keeping with the deadline of 2008, as agreed at the Malahide conference

Fratercula arctica by Thelma K Sykes

BirdLife International Partnership

The BirdLife International Partnership strives to conserve birds, their habitats, and global biodiversity working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.

This memorandum to the UK Presidency was produced by the European Community Office of BirdLife International and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Partner of BirdLife International in the UK. For further information please contact either :

BirdLife Secretariat

European Community Office (ECO) -
BirdLife International
81a rue de la Loi, BE-1040, Brussels, Belgium,
Tel +32 2280 08 30 - Fax +32 2230 38 02

United Kingdom

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, UK
Tel +44 1 767 68 05 51 - Fax +44 1 767 69 23 65
Victoria Phillips (EU Institutions Manager)
e-mail: Victoria.Phillips@rspb.org.uk

Austria

BirdLife Österreich - Gesellschaft für
Vogelkunde, BirdLife Austria
Museumsplatz 1/10/8, A-1070 Wien, Austria.
Tel +43 1 523 46 51 - Fax +43 1 524 70 40

Belgium

BirdLife Belgium vzw
Kardinaal Mercierplein 1,
BE-2800 Mechelen, Belgium
Tel +32 15 297249 - Fax +32 15 424921

Cyprus

Cyprus Ornithological Society (COS)
PO Box 28076, CY Nicosia 2090, Cyprus
Tel +357 2632155 - Fax +357 2383310

Czech Republic

Czech Society for Ornithology (CSO)
Hornomfcholupska 34, CZ-102 00 Praha 10,
Czech Republic
Tel +420 2 748 66 700 - Fax +420 2 748 66 700

Denmark

Dansk Ornitologisk Forening (DOF - BirdLife DK)
Vesterbrogade 140,
DK-1620 Copenhagen V, Denmark
Tel +45 3331 4404 - Fax +45 3331 2435

Estonia

Estonian Ornithological Society (EOS)
PO Box 227, 50002 Tartu, Estonia.
Visiting: Veski Str. 4
Tel +372 7 422 195 - Fax +372 7 422 180

Finland

BirdLife Suomi - Finland
Annankatu 29 A, P.O. Box 1285,
FI-00101 Helsinki, Finland
Tel +358 9 4135 3300 - Fax +358 9 4135 3322

France

Ligue pour la protection des oiseaux (LPO)
La Corderie Royale, B.P. 90263,
FR-17305 ROCHEFORT CEDEX, France
Tel +33 546 82 12 34
Fax +33 546 83 95 86, +33 546 82 12 50

Germany

Naturschutzbund Deutschland (NABU)
German Society for Nature Conservation
Herbert-Rabius-Str. 26, DE-53225 Bonn, Germany
Tel +49 228 40 36-0 - Fax +49 228 40 36-200

Greece

Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS)
Vas. Hrakleiou 24, GR-10682 Athens, Greece
Tel/Fax +30 10 8227 937, +30 10 8228 704

Hungary

Hungarian Ornithological and Nature
Conservation
Society MME/BirdLife Hungary
Költő u. 21, Pf. 391, HU-1536 Budapest, Hungary
Tel +36 1 275 62 47 - Fax +36 1 275 62 67

Ireland

BirdWatch Ireland
Rockingham House, Newcastle, Co, Wicklow, Ireland
Tel +353 1 281 9878 - Fax +353 1 281 9763

Italy

LIPU (Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli)
Via Trento 49, IT-43100 Parma, Italy
Tel +39 0521 27 30 43 - Fax +39 0521 27 34 19

Latvia

Latvian Ornithological Society LOB
A.K. 1010, LV- 1050 Riga, Latvia
Tel +371 72 21 580 - Fax +371 76 03 100

Lithuania

Lithuanian Ornithological Society LOD
Naugarduko St. 47-3, LT-2006 Vilnius, Lithuania
Tel +370 5 213 04 98 - Fax +370 5 213 04 98

Lëtzebuurger Natur- a Vulleschutzliga LNVL

Kräizhaff, Rue de Luxembourg, LU-1899
Kockelscheuer, Luxembourg
Tel +352 29 04 04-1 - Fax +352 29 05 04

Malta

BirdLife Malta
57 Marina Court, Flat 28, Abate Rigord Street,
MT-Ta' Xbiex, MSD 12, Malta
Tel +356 21 34 76 46 - Fax +356 21 34 32 39

The Netherlands

Vogelbescherming Nederland
Netherlands Society for the Protection of Birds
PO Box 925, NL-3700 AX Zeist, Netherlands
Tel +31 30 69 37700 - Fax +31 30 69 18844

Poland

Polish Society for the Protection of Birds OTOP
Hallera 4/2, PL-80-401 Gdansk 50, Poland
Tel +48 58 341 2693 - Fax +48 58 341 2693

Portugal

Sociedade portuguesa para o estudo das aves
(SPEA)
Rua da Vitoria 53 - 3º Esq
PT-1100-618 Lisboa, Portugal
Tel +351-21 213 220430 - Fax +351-21 213 220439

Slovakia

Society for the Protection of Birds in Slovakia
SOVS
Mlynské Nivy 41, SK-821 09 Bratislava 2, Slovakia
Tel +421 2 5542 2185 - Fax +421 2 5542 2186

Slovenia

DOPPS - BirdLife Slovenia
Prvomajska 9, PO Box 2722,
SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
Tel +386 1 544 12 30 - Fax +386 1 544 12 35

Spain

Sociedad Española de Ornitología (SEO/BirdLife)
Spanish Ornithological Society
Melquiades Biencinto 34, ES-28053 Madrid, Spain
Tel +34 91 4340910 - Fax +34 91 4340911

Sweden

Sveriges ornitologiska förening (SOF)
Swedish Ornithological Society
Ekhagsvägen 3, SE-104 05 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel +46 8 612 25 30 - Fax +46 8 612 25 36