

# GREENING EUROPE

## PRIORITIES OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

FOR THE PORTUGUESE PRESIDENCY – JULY TO DECEMBER 2007

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### Introduction from the Director of SPEA, BirdLife Portugal

Following in the footsteps of the German Presidency and with the ambitious objectives defined by the “triple Presidency” of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia the Portuguese government faces a strong challenge but also great opportunities for the second half of 2007. Environmental concerns are being increasingly discussed in Portugal and Europe, with climate change and the loss of biodiversity recognised by citizens as the most urgent and pressing problems. Halting biodiversity loss by 2010 is a key target of the European Union that deserves all the attention and effort from the Portuguese Presidency.

### Key challenges for the Portuguese Presidency

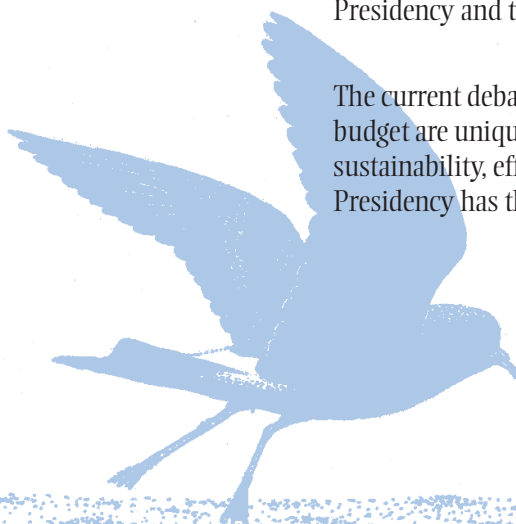
#### Bringing biodiversity to the business world

The Presidency announced a new initiative for bringing together the business world and the conservation of nature and biodiversity. This Business & Biodiversity initiative will culminate in a high-level conference in Lisbon, 12-13 November 2007. SPEA and BirdLife International welcome this approach and hope that it will improve the commitment of private companies for the preservation of nature and ecosystems as a basis for sustainable development. BirdLife is keen to contribute to the initiative for example by encouraging and promoting the establishment of partnerships with small and medium sized enterprises for the mutual benefit of both, biodiversity and business.

#### Taking care of oceans and rural communities for true sustainability

As the demand for resources and global competitiveness increases it is ever more important to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment, but also of rural landscapes. Portugal has the opportunity to showcase good examples for the conservation of oceans (through the designation of marine protected areas). Portugal can also present its innovative approaches to sustainable rural development which are of benefit to both biodiversity and people. SPEA and BirdLife are looking forward to supporting the Presidency and to promote these positive case studies from Portugal across the EU.

The current debates on a new EU Treaty and the initial discussions on the review of the EU budget are unique opportunities that must not be missed to make the EU a global leader in sustainability, effectively addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. The Portuguese Presidency has the opportunity to make a real difference.



Luis Costa  
Director of SPEA

## Halting Biodiversity Loss by 2010 – the clock is ticking

With less than three years to go, and with a detailed Biodiversity Action Plan available for 2010 (developed and approved by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Governments of EU Member States), there is no valid excuse for delaying action to stop the dramatic decline of biodiversity in Europe and the world. Strong leadership to implement this action plan rapidly is required by the EU. The Portuguese Presidency has a key role to play during the second half of 2007.

The loss of species and the degradation of habitats and ecosystems is one of the most pressing environmental problems of our times. The extinction of animals and plants means they are lost forever. They leave gaps in the web of life with serious consequences for ecosystem services on which human society and the economy rely. Working in combination, climate change and biodiversity loss pose a grave threat to the future of a sustainable, prosperous and competitive Europe.

Amongst many other important and urgent tasks that need to be implemented by EU Member States and the European Commission, the completion, protection and adequate finan-

cing of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas stands out as especially important. Natura 2000 and the EU Nature Directives form the backbone of the EU's contribution to the 2010 target, both at European and global level.

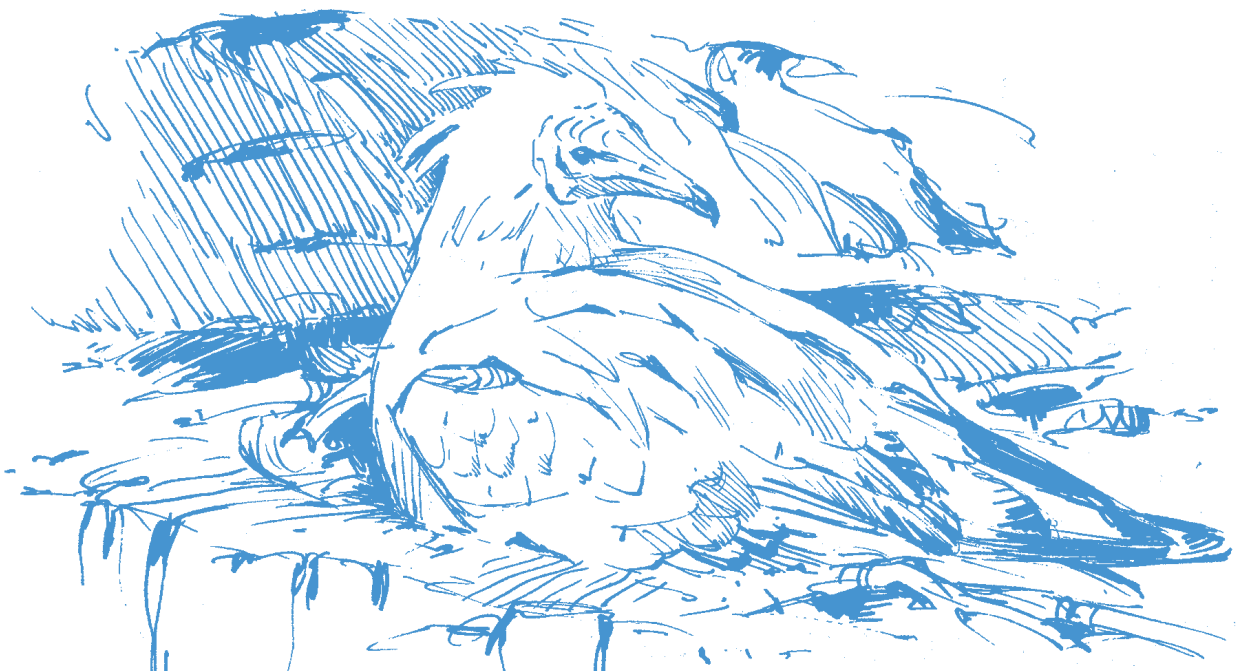
It is imperative to designate remaining protected sites, especially in the sea, where Portugal has a special responsibility - and the potential to become a global pioneer.

It is also essential to allocate sufficient funding to Natura 2000 (especially from Rural Development Funds) to ensure that the network functions and can provide benefits for both biodiversity and people. Last but not least, the beginnings of the discussions on the EU budget review and the "CAP Health Check" present opportunities which must not be missed. They will make the difference in safeguarding biodiversity in the wider countryside.

The Portuguese Presidency has ample opportunity – as well as duty - to make progress in these and many other fields, otherwise the EU will fail to meet the 2010 target, and risks losing credibility among European citizens and on the world stage.

### The Portuguese Presidency should:

- Take a leading role among EU Member States in promoting the implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan, with new initiatives, but most importantly with implementing and adequately financing Natura 2000. A sustainable and biodiversity-friendly agriculture and rural development policy will be another prerequisite for halting the decline of wildlife.
- Ensure permanent and effective monitoring of Commission and Member State implementation of the Action Plan. In this context, work on biodiversity indicators should be further developed and funding secured.
- Use the opportunity provided by the Nature Directors meeting to exchange information and review progress on the implementation of the Action Plan, involving representatives of environmental NGOs active at the EU level.



*Egyptian Vulture by Juan Varela*

## Rural Development: investing in a sustainable countryside

The Portuguese Presidency will coincide with the final stages of the planning process for the Rural Development policy spending in the 2007-2013 period. Rural Development represents the most advanced and forward looking part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and, if correctly implemented, holds the promise of combining environmental improvements with increased prosperity and quality of life in rural areas, including some of Europe's most disadvantaged regions.

Portugal faces important challenges in supporting its traditional and highly sustainable farming and forestry systems such as cork-oak open forests (Montados) and cereal-fallow steppes. These systems deliver significant public goods in terms of biodiversity conservation, watershed management and climate change mitigation but are threatened by economic marginalisation and rural emigration. Their survival requires bold policies combining agri-environmental payments with investments in better product

transformation, marketing and diversification (e.g. into tourism and recreation activities).

The Portuguese Presidency should show European leadership on this issue by ensuring its own Rural Development spending is well targeted, adequately responds to the needs of high nature value farming systems and does not include funding for environmentally harmful projects such as irrigation expansion that worsens water shortage and destroys biodiversity rich habitats.

Cork is a flagship sustainable rural product in which Portugal is a world leader. Its production, and the biodiversity associated with cork oak forests, is currently threatened by the spread of synthetic wine stoppers. The promotion of natural cork is a way to show how conscious consumers can translate their everyday choices into environmental conservation and sustainable rural development.

### The Portuguese Presidency should

- Ensure that Portuguese Rural Development plans are of outstanding quality and deliver significant support to high nature value farming systems threatened by abandonment while avoiding investment in environmentally harmful projects.
- Promote an EU wide debate (e.g. through organizing an event during the Presidency) on the need to support traditional farming systems that deliver substantial public goods such as wildlife habitats, landscape and carbon storage.
- Champion the use of natural cork and work to increase awareness to its environmental benefits. Ensuring that all Presidency events serve natural cork stoppers wine bottles could be a symbolic gesture useful for communicating this message.

Stone Curlew by Jos Zwarts

## The CAP "Health Check": towards a sustainable land use and rural development policy

As part of the forthcoming wider EU budget review, Commissioner Fischer Boel has committed to a review of the Common Agriculture Policy in 2008 ("CAP Health check"). The Commission is expected to publish its initial Health Check proposals for this in autumn 2007, launching a wide consultation exercise that will lead to more detailed proposals and Council decisions in 2008. The review represents a key opportunity to re-examine the role of the CAP and ensure it evolves into a funding stream for public goods from land management.

A new vision for the CAP after 2013, and concrete stepping stones for the transition period, must emerge from the Health Check if the EU is to meet the huge challenges facing the rural environment in coming years. The biodiversity crisis and the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change are key issues, demonstrating the need for a sustainable European land use policy.

BirdLife International and its national Partner organizations are arguing for a new CAP that would pay farmers and land managers to deliver specific public goods such as biodiversity conservation and ecosystem service enhancement. A new CAP should provide adequate funding for the management of Natura 2000 sites and support high nature value farming systems that are threatened by economic marginalization and abandonment.

Enacting a deep and far reaching reform of the CAP will also provide farmers with a stable investment horizon and will re-legitimize EU spending on farming and rural areas.

Portugal is characterized by some of Europe's most biodiversity rich traditional farming systems such as dry cereal steppes and cork-oak open forests ('Montados'), but it is also facing a dramatic decline of these systems. It is thus well placed to champion the need for a new CAP to support sustainable land management.

### The Portuguese Presidency should

- Promote an open and transparent debate about the long term role and objectives of the CAP in the context of sustainable development, for example through a wide stakeholder conference.
- Champion the need to retarget agriculture support at high nature value farming systems, Natura 2000 sites and the delivery by farmers of environmental goods and services.

## Protection of the wider marine environment

During the Portuguese Presidency, decisions will be taken on two EU dossiers important for the future of European seas: the adoption of the Marine Strategy Directive and Council Conclusions on the wider EU Maritime Policy ('Maritime Package'). In addition, Portugal will be well placed to urge the Commission to come forward with strategic solutions to tackle the chronic problem of seabird bycatch in longline fisheries.

First Reading discussions on the Marine Strategy Directive, a new law for ensuring good environmental status of Europe's seas, resulted in a wide gap between the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament with regards to level of ambition and setting sound targets. BirdLife International hopes that the Presidency will urge the Council to be more ambitious and move towards the Parliament's position, hence ensuring that the new EU marine protection law is robust, effective and enforceable.

Following a full year of extensive consultation on the Maritime Policy Green Paper, the Commission is due to publish a Road Map on the 'Maritime Package' with concrete proposals for future actions. BirdLife hopes that Council, in its conclusions, sends a strong message about the need to put sustainability and environmental protection at the heart of the future Maritime Policy.

Every year, 300,000 seabirds, including 100,000 albatrosses are killed in longline fisheries around the globe. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Regional Fishery Management Organisations to which the European Community belongs -and where it has significant influence-have requested fishing nations to implement a National Plan of Action to reduce seabird bycatch in their longline fisheries. The European Community, deploying a large longline fleet that operates worldwide, has the responsibility and the tools to tackle this problem. Despite several previous commitments to implement a Community Plan of Action, negligible progress has been made to date.

### The Portuguese Presidency should

- Ensure the adoption of a strong and robust Marine Strategy Directive, matching the ambition of the European Parliament first reading resolution.
- Ensure that future proposals on the 'Maritime Package' place sustainability and environmental protection as the framework for any decisions and actions under the new Maritime Policy.
- Call on the Commission to take urgent steps to develop the long awaited Community Plan of Action for reducing incidental catch of seabirds in longline fisheries.

## Future of Europe and the environment

Following the agreement on the new Reform Treaty, the Portuguese Presidency will have to launch and conclude the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) by December 2007. It is important that the Portuguese Presidency safeguards all the environmental provisions carried forward following the agreement of Heads of State and resists any last moment moves to weaken them.

The principles of the current EU Treaty specify that the environment should be integrated into the definition and implementation of policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy and EU transport policy. This provision will be carried over to the Reform Treaty as the new Part III.

This commitment gives political and legal legitimacy to all activities that aim to 'green' EU policies. The drive to green the EU

is fundamental to curbing the tendency of some policies to cause declines in birds and other wildlife.

It is important that these provisions remain unaltered in the Reform Treaty. If not, this would relegate the political importance, and maybe even the legal standing, of the environment.

A significant amount of public support for the EU is given by positive actions on the environment. It would be foolish to demote the importance of the environment at a time crucial to both the future of Europe and the biosphere.

Finally, the IGC seems to be prepared to highlight the risk from Climate Change as the most important environmental problem. Biodiversity decline and the benefits of biodiversity protection are also of crucial importance and should be highlighted also.

### The Portuguese Presidency should

- Ensure that there is no weakening of the provisions relating to the integration of the environment in all policies and the protection and improvement of the environment.
- Highlight the threat of biodiversity decline as an important threat equal to and interlinked with that of climate change.
- That the Intergovernmental Conference is conducted in a participatory and transparent manner.

## Portugal leads race to the 2008 deadline for marine Natura 2000 sites!

As the Portuguese Presidency takes the EU helm it has the responsibility of steering all coastal EU Member States towards fulfilling the deadline to designate their marine Natura 2000 sites, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the Birds Directive by 2008.

Portugal has both a long tradition of seafaring culture and also has the EU's largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), eighteen times the size of its land mass. Its islands Madeira and the Azores also contribute to the EU's natural heritage providing havens for marine birds such as Cory's Shearwater, Bulwer's Petrel and Roseate Tern. Seabirds are among the most threatened birds in the world. There are 62 species in Europe and 45% of these are in Unfavorable Conservation Status. It is high time to invest more effort in reversing this current condition and secure the future of these seabirds through Natura 2000.

BirdLife Partners all over Europe are active to identify marine Important Bird Areas (IBAs) which form the widely accepted basis for SPAs. These sites need to be designated and protected without delay, while existing knowledge gaps need to be filled.

As inventories on marine biodiversity are costly, they should be one of the key priorities both for the EU's financial instrument LIFE+ and for specific Member State funding – with a particular regard for transboundary projects.

As a marine nation, Portugal should do all it can to prioritize the conservation of the marine environment. BirdLife would welcome a Presidency-led event to enable an exchange of information and expertise on SPA designation and promotion of the newly published European Commission Guidance on marine Natura 2000 sites. With the fulfillment of these initiatives and recommendations important advances will be made in protecting the EU's marine environment under the Portuguese Presidency.

### The Portuguese Presidency should

*Fea's Petrel by Filipe Viveiros*

- Prioritize marine Natura 2000 implementation and ensure that all relevant Member States focus on achieving the 2008 deadline by designating already identified Important Bird Areas as SPAs.
- Designate its first marine SPA during its Presidency, promoting this through an event, engaging other Member States.
- Encourage Member States and the European Commission to invest in improving and enlarging the scientific information needed to underpin the identification and management of marine SPAs. In particular Member States should support applications for project funding from LIFE+, but also earmark own long-term funding to ensure the financing for marine protected areas.



*Storm Petrel by Paul Hirst*

## Business and Biodiversity: a chance for new partnerships

BirdLife welcomes the “Business & Biodiversity” initiative of the Portuguese Presidency, culminating in a conference on this issue from 12-13 November in Lisbon. This initiative provides a good opportunity to include and engage the private sector in the efforts to halt biodiversity loss by 2010.

The socio-economic values of biodiversity need to be better understood and promoted. It needs to be a core interest of any responsible company to enhance, rather than harm the ecosystems on which all long-term economic development is based on. As the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso states in his foreword to BirdLife’s new publication *Wellbeing through wildlife in the EU* “biodiversity is integral to sustainable development and underpins competitiveness, growth and employment, and improves livelihoods”.

A clear commitment is needed from the private sector to implement existing legal frameworks, like Natura 2000. Conservation

and profitable business can go hand in hand and examples of such win-win situations should be showcased. BirdLife has a lot of experience to work with both big and small enterprises at various levels. As BirdLife pilot projects in the new Member States show the cooperation between banks, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Natura 2000 site managers is a very promising approach. On the Azores, SPEA (BirdLife Portugal) demonstrates, in an EU funded project, how conservation of the endangered Azores Bullfinch can create jobs in the conservation, tourism and farming sectors.

It is important to note, that the preservation of biodiversity is a task for the whole society and therefore will always need regulatory frameworks and public financial support. Adequate financing for the Natura 2000 network through EU and Member States budgets is essential to make the concept work and to make it attractive for private investors.

*Azores Bullfinch by Jose Projecto*

### The Portuguese Presidency should

- Use the Business & Biodiversity initiative and conference to promote, with concrete examples, the socio-economic benefits of biodiversity and how the private sector can contribute and benefit from nature conservation.
- Promote the opportunities for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises arising from Natura 2000, and to encourage decision makers, banks and site managers to establish creative win-win solutions.
- Use the Lisbon conference to kick-start concrete initiatives and projects, and to encourage various sectors of the business community to show clear commitment to Natura 2000 and biodiversity conservation.

## Review of the EU Budget: public money for public goods!

Starting first with a consultation by the European Commission, the summer of 2007 marks the beginning of a fundamental review of the budget of the European Union, which will take several years and might change completely the way the EU generates its income and allocates its spending. This review is a unique opportunity to use the taxes paid by Europeans in a better way – to support sustainable development, following the principle “public money for public goods”.

An essential element of this review will be the question of how public money should be used to support activities in rural areas serving the whole of society, including sustainable farming and energy production, nature conservation, tourism and innovative business activities.

The BirdLife Partnership will promote the approach of an EU fund to be spent on sustainable rural development, with dedicated financing for biodiversity conservation. The EU needs its rural areas, and these areas need public support – in a sustainable way!

### The Portuguese Presidency should

- Ensure that the consultations and discussions on the EU budget review are transparent, comprehensive and open to all stakeholders.
- Take leadership in the discussions from the start by promoting the concept of “public money for public goods” ensuring that the most pressing challenges of the future, including climate change and biodiversity loss, will be taken into account sufficiently (and to a much higher degree than at present) in the future EU budget.
- Promote the need for dedicated EU funding for sustainable rural development and biodiversity conservation – by using positive case studies from Portugal.

## Climate change: need for real action now - with biodiversity conservation as part of the solution

The increased attention given to climate change in the political media agenda is welcome. However, the “noise” around this issue may cover the fact that little adequate action has been taken to date and some of the measures that are being discussed are insufficient, if not unhelpful.

BirdLife International asks the Portuguese Presidency to champion the following key principles for EU climate change policy:

1. Tackling climate change requires a wide international consensus and bold and concrete commitments by all major polluters, with the EU taking a leading role.
2. A massive reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions needs to be achieved through a significant reduction of energy consumption and radically improved efficiency. Efforts undertaken in this field to-date are worryingly insufficient, even from so called ‘front-runners’ in the debate like the EU and some of its Member States.
3. To address remaining energy needs, the share of renewables needs to be increased significantly through strategic and sustainable development of the most appropriate sources, based on real greenhouse gas benefits and avoiding damage to ecosystems and biodiversity.
4. To address unavoidable climate change, adaptation strategies have to be developed and implemented along the guiding principle of ecosystem resilience. This means: Halting the decline of biodiversity by addressing existing pressures, and at the same time improving the possibilities for species and ecosystems to adapt to climate change (e.g. through bigger and better connected protected areas and through a more biodiversity friendly landscape). Strengthening ecosystem resilience forms part of the best and most cost effective measures to protect society from the worst impacts of climate change. At the end of June the European Commission has published a Green Paper on adaptation, launching a public debate on EU actions.
5. An increased risk of drought and water scarcity will be a specific consequence of climate change in Southern Europe, and the commitment of the Portuguese Presidency to this issue is to be welcomed. Water scarcity must be addressed mainly through consumption reduction and efficiency. Perverse policies that lead to increased water stress, such as expansion of irrigation, must be avoided and ecosystem viability must be ensured in all infrastructure development.

### The Portuguese Presidency should

*Great Bustard by Juan Varela*

- Promote bold EU action on energy efficiency and reduction of consumption in all relevant upcoming initiatives and political debates.
- Promote the swift adoption of ambitious renewable energy legislation aiming at achieving the 20% target, including the requirement of strategic and sustainable planning at national and EU level, taking account of greenhouse gas benefits and effect on biodiversity.
- Promote the adoption of the proposed Fuel Quality Directive addressing the reduction of greenhouse gasses from transport fuels on the basis of a life cycle approach. Ensure the sustainability of biofuels through the establishment of a solid certification scheme for both domestic production and imports, based on significant greenhouse gas saving and minimizing impacts on biodiversity.
- Following the publication of the Commission’s Green Paper on climate change adaptation, promote EU and national adaptation strategies using the principle of strengthening ecosystem resilience. Urge Commission and Member States to accelerate efforts to halt biodiversity decline as fundamental measure in adapting to climate change.
- In the context of the “drought and water scarcity” initiative promote better efficiency of water use and reduction of consumption. Work to ensure that water scarcity is tackled in harmony with the objectives and mechanisms of the Birds, Habitats and Water Framework Directives.

## 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 Portuguese Presidency was produced by the European Division of BirdLife International and SPEA, the Partner of BirdLife International in Portugal. For further information please contact:

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