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Sent: 05 March 2010 10:56

To: Alessia Pautasso

Subject: BirdLife Europe e-news March 2010



<http://europe.birdlife.org>

<http://www.birdlife.org/eu/newsletters.html>

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Editorial: Isn't it time to give biodiversity the care it deserves?



Dear Reader,

Isn't it time to finally give biodiversity the care it deserves?

It certainly is, and we in BirdLife have been putting our money where our mouth is for a long time already...

Stopping the loss of biodiversity is more than just saving rare species and beautiful places. It is about the way life on earth will continue. It is about adapting our lives and lifestyles and about the choices we make today and their implications tomorrow.

By working with politicians and decision makers, we aim to change the way people reap the benefits of biodiversity to make it more sustainable and equitable (for example, managing fish catches). By putting pressure on governments and

legislators we aim to change the irresponsible behaviour towards birds and indeed our planet. Whether it is applying illegal hunting methods or circumventing environmental impact assessment, saving biodiversity is about taking the right decisions and striking the sensitive balance between public interest and private gains.

And the most important part is enforcing these decisions. Can anyone still justify and explain the indiscriminate trapping of song-birds in the Mediterranean with the need to keep 'cultural traditions' alive and indulging a few extravagant taste buds?

Certainly not in the 21st century, if you ask me! The same goes for assessing the impact of economic development. BirdLife advocates that short term economic gains should not be given priority to long term public interests, such as nature.

In fact, nature and biodiversity have great value in their own right and as components of viable economies and healthy lifestyles. For example, many Europeans think that regular contact with wild nature is a vital component of their quality of life and thus happiness. Economies rise and fall. What we need today is stability in our relationship with the planet and in our own values.

Why don't we give a hand to biodiversity to help us in this fate?

With best wishes,



Boris Barov
European Conservation Manager
BirdLife International European Division

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Bioenergy- time to get the head out of the sand?



The EU policy around bioenergy has long been an outstanding case of bungled decisions, taken on the basis of misguided assumptions, while pandering to vested interests and systematically overlooking scientific evidence. A few recent events suggest that the European Commission is inexperienced as to how to dig itself out of the pit into which it has blundered. A constant stream of leaked documents has been confirming many of our fears.

It appeared that the outgoing Commission has been at the point of releasing a communication arguing not to introduce binding sustainability criteria on biomass, despite the widespread recognition of the urgent need for such safeguards.

This “do nothing proposal” has then been temporarily delayed and is still pending. Studies ordered by the Commission and looking into the emission footprint of biofuels (cause by indirect land use change or ILUC), have been languishing unpublished for months, despite several requests tabled by Transport and Environment, BirdLife International, EEB and Client Earth to formally access the documents. Recent media reports have even suggested a conscious cover up, aiming at withholding evidence on the real impacts of biofuels. Another recent scandal has been the revelation that the European Commission is proposing an interpretation of the biofuels sustainability standards by which palm oil plantations would be considered as “forest”, paving the way for biodiesel produced on recently cleared rain forest.

All of these offer a poor image both of the EU’s levels of good governance and of its commitment to fight climate change and halt biodiversity loss. The newly installed Commissioners have a golden opportunity for a fresh start. They could signal a clear break with the culture of subterfuge and loopholes, openly discuss the science and come up with credible solutions. This would do much to cement the credibility of the new Commission, not to mention helping avert global scale environmental and social harm. An opportunity not to be missed.

For more information contact Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy at BirdLife International European Division at ariel.brunner@birdlife.org

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The European Parliament discusses the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

About 88% of the EU’s fish stocks are overfished and nearly one-third are outside safe biological limits. With its Green Paper on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), the European Commission wants to bring about the fundamental change needed to put fish stocks back on the road to recovery. In 2009, the Commission gave the

public the opportunity to respond to the Green paper. The Commission is currently analysing the hundreds of responses received with a view to issuing a white paper for consultation late in 2010, followed by the legislative proposal expected at the beginning of 2011.

At the same time, last month the first discussion on fisheries quota in the European Parliament took place, enabling the Parliament to take a view on the CFP Reform. The Parliament's vision of the CFP is particularly important because its powers in the fisheries sector have recently been greatly enhanced. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, legislative proposals on fisheries must be adopted by the Council of the EU and the European Parliament under the co-decision procedure. In the past the Parliament was only consulted for advice, while the final decision lay in the hands of the Council.

In its report, the Parliament stresses the importance of decentralising the decision-making power or in other words "shorten(ing) the distance between those who work in the sea and those who take the decisions". BirdLife also supports devolving greater responsibility to regional management bodies on technical issues. On the other hand we strongly maintain that that this must happen in the context of the CFP's top priority being ecological sustainability, as a pre-requisite for healthy marine ecosystems and a viable fishing sector. Taking a different view, the Parliament argues that ecological, social and economic objectives should be put on an equal footing.

For more information please contact Nathalie de Snijder at Nathalie.DeSnijder@birdlife.org

And visit:

Green paper on the reform in the Common Fishery Policy (CFP):

http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/publications/greenpaper/greenpaper_en.pdf

BirdLife International submitted its comments on the Green paper to the Commission:

http://www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/BirdLife_response_consultation_CFP.pdf

The Parliament adopted the report of the Portuguese centre-right MEP Maria do Céu Patrão Neves.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A7-2010-0014+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

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Shocking News from the trapping front in Cyprus



We are now in 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, but Cyprus has a mountain to climb if it is to reverse disturbing recent trends in illegal bird trapping. Autumn 2009 was a disastrous season for bird trapping and more specifically for mist netting. A 35% increase in mist net use showed that Cyprus is rapidly losing all that it has gained in the battle against bird trapping over the past 10 years.

Bird trapping is an illegal and indiscriminate practice that threatens many bird species of conservation concern and especially migrants. With the well-documented combined effects of Climate Change, habitat loss and habitat degradation already hitting migrant birds hard, this is an added pressure this vital portion of biodiversity cannot afford. BirdLife Cyprus's monitoring of autumn bird

trapping continued for the 8th year in a row with data gathered systematically in the field by a trained team of surveyors and all evidence of trapping relayed to the relevant enforcement authorities.

The field evidence points clearly to a rise in trapping activity last autumn – an alarming one in the case of mist netting. A total of just over 3 km of active net rides were located by the survey team – a 35% increase on the autumn of 2008. Netting levels were particularly high in the British Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs), notably on the Pyla Range. A British-army backed sweep operation in this area in early October was a welcome first step in tackling 'industrial' trapping on the Range. Lime stick use also increased in autumn 2009, and was largely the preserve of the Republic areas.

In keeping with the pattern of recent years, there was widespread evidence of many restaurants in the Republic serving illegal bird delicacies (ampelopoulia), and no reports of effective enforcement action against these. Hundreds of thousands of birds can be estimated to have fallen prey to trappers in autumn 2009 – an unacceptable toll. Our field findings obliterate the cautious optimism created by the reductions in trapping levels recorded in spring 2009, especially as autumn is always the principal trapping season. Adding insult to injury, a group of members of the Parliament from the trapping 'heartland' of Famagusta made a repeat (if failed) attempt to push through the parliament a bill slashing penalties for trapping.

At least, the two big parties made clear their opposition to this amendment. More encouraging was a high level of

media coverage of this issue, almost all of it sympathetic to BirdLife's anti-trapping campaign. The issue even made the front page of the Christmas Eve edition of the London Times. As a result of this high-profile media coverage, the UK House of Parliament passed a resolution pressuring the Cyprus Government to adopt harder actions against this illegal practice. BirdLife Cyprus is pressuring for top-level political decisions to re-double the enforcement effort and bolster the enforcement bodies.

Repeats of the October 2nd large-scale sweep operation of the Cape Pyla trapping 'black spot' must become the norm, BirdLife Cyprus insists. Crucially, Nicosia must at long last decisively tackle the restaurants fueling trapping by serving ambelopoulia. Such political decisions could begin to have an effect on ambelopoulia consumption (which remains popular) and even a knock-on effect on courts, leading to deterrent sentencing of convicted trappers. Only then can the backsliding witnessed since 2007 be arrested and reserved.

For more information please contact Martin Hellicar, Campaigns Manager at BirdLife Cyprus at martin.hellicar@birdlifecyprus.org.cy

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Wings over Europe



Last year the Hubeného Gymnasium in Bratislava, Slovakia, and the Liechtensteinisches Gymnasium in Vaduz, Liechtenstein, have started 'Wings over Europe', a joint project to raise awareness among students on the importance to protect biodiversity and birds in the Danube lowlands in both countries. 45 students discovered the secrets of ecological farming and sustainable natural energy sources. The project is carried out in close cooperation with experts from SOS/BirdLife Slovakia (BirdLife in Slovakia) and will run until 2011.

With this project, students are confronted with the international aspects of environmental protection, and easily understand the importance of cooperating with other States in order to guarantee proper nature conservation. Especially while studying migratory birds and their habitats, students have the possibility to focus on the need to preserve birds on their travel from their breeding grounds to the places where they will nest. "In 2010, during the International Year of Biodiversity, we will concentrate our activities on the protection of species living in vulnerable ecosystems. Our Bird of the Year 2010 is the Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, and it will be the symbol of all our campaigns to inform the public and authorities about the loss of biodiversity and the need to protect it", commented Ján Gúgh from SOS/BirdLife Slovakia.

"Last year the project tasks ranged from school activities to field work, where students could visit wet meadows, the natural habitats for Northern Lapwing and learn how to concretely protect biodiversity". Essential in the project were the ornithological camps organised both in Slovakia and in Liechtenstein. During these camps, participants could observe birds, install nest boxes and learn more about their habitats. "The enthusiasm of young people in learning more about birds and biodiversity furthers the work of conservationist and increases their awareness on the importance to protect our nature" concluded Katarína Labašová, coordinator of the Wings over Europe project.

The project activities are realized with the support of the EEA Financial Mechanism, Norwegian Financial Mechanism and Slovak Scholarship Fund.

More information and pictures:

<http://www.vtaky.sk/index.php?page=woe>

<http://www.eeagrants.org/id/1405>

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More and more Finches in Malta!



A study by the EU LIFE+ Project on Bird Migration and Trapping revealed that the number of Finches recorded in the Maltese countryside increased dramatically in the first year of the trapping ban in 2009, compared to 2008 when finch trapping

was still permitted. The study aimed at examining the impact of trapping on birds in Malta, and analysed reports by ornithologists of sightings all over the Maltese archipelago throughout the year.

The study shows that in 2009 all the Finch species were seen more frequently and in larger numbers than in 2008. The largest increases were recorded for European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*, Eurasian Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, and Eurasian Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*, with Eurasian Greenfinch increasing by over 300 percent. These three species were generally the most commonly caught Finches before the trapping ban.

Five of the seven species increasing by over 100 percent each, and increases for all the Finch species were noted in every month of 2009 over 2008, except for January where the count was almost identical. The largest percentage increases were observed in April and November during the peak spring and autumn migration periods for these species. In April over 800 percent more Finches were sighted in 2009 than in 2008, for all the species combined.

The percentage increase in Finches recorded in June stood at a high 380 percent, indicating that more birds were staying over in Malta after the spring migration season. Geoffrey Saliba, BirdLife Malta Campaigns Coordinator said: "The increases in the number of Finches seen last year and the confirmed breeding of two species of Finch show that given the chance, these birds could also breed in the Maltese islands. Finches are common breeders in Europe and they also breed on other small central Mediterranean islands."

For more information please contact Geoffrey Saliba, BirdLife Malta Campaigns Coordinator at geoffrey.saliba@birdlifemalta.org

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The International Year of Biodiversity: photo exhibitions celebrate biodiversity in the Netherlands and in Belgium



On 19 February Naturalis, the biggest natural history museum in The Netherlands, launched their year-long exhibition on bird migration. The exhibition was jointly organized by the museum and VBN (BirdLife in The Netherlands).

Over 300 people, mainly researchers from the field, supporters and volunteers of Vogelbescherming were invited to celebrate the opening. The exhibition presents information on how birds have to eat carefully before embarking on their migratory journeys, and shows the grouping of bird species according to the distances they fly each year (with the Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* as the well-known champion).

Furthermore visitors can watch clips from Jacques Perrin's award winning film "Winged Migration" and see some creative presentations on the man-made threats that birds face on their journeys. For VBN, the exhibition is part of their prioritised effort to bring the threats to migratory birds under the attention of public and policy makers. The fact that long-distance migrants travelling annually between Europe and Africa are declining particularly fast is a cause of great concern. It indicates some disconcerting facts about, for example, the poor state of natural areas and the level of illegal hunting along the whole route.

For this reason, strong international cooperation is needed to effectively save bird migration, a cause the BirdLife Partnership is very well-placed to fight for. If you happen to be in The Netherlands this year, the exhibition is definitely worth a visit!

Around the same time, a very peculiar photo exhibition opens its doors at the Natuurpunt (BirdLife in Belgium) Museum in Belgium. Entitled "Species looking for species", the exhibition displays pictures by the most famous Belgian nature photographers revealing unexpected scenes and secrets hidden in biodiversity. Visitors will discover which bird carries the same colours of the Belgian flag, which one nests on the cooling tower of a nuclear power plant and many other details on the animals surrounding us.

The exhibition will be open from 6 March to 31 August.

For more information on the exhibition in The Netherlands visit

<http://www.vogelbescherming.nl/flyways/tentoonstelling>

For more information on the photo exhibition in Belgium visit <http://www.natuurpuntmuseum.be/>

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SPEA-Madeira keeps construction project at petrel colony firmly on its radar



After many years of uncertainty and inaction, the Portuguese Government has finally started building a military radar on top of Pico do Areeiro, one of Madeira's most popular tourist destinations and the only home of Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira*, a rare endemic seabird. The Pico do Areeiro lies within a Natura 2000 site designated as a Special Protection Area, and therefore has the highest level of protection under European Union law.

"It is the only known breeding site in the world of Zino's Petrel, a globally Endangered species whose total population of 65-80 pairs makes it the rarest seabird in Europe and one of the rarest birds in the world", said Dr Ian Burfield – European Research and Database Manager at BirdLife International.

Since as long ago as 2000, SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) and BirdLife International have opposed the construction of this radar station at Pico do Areeiro, which is an area of extreme importance for rare high-altitude flora, as well as Zino's Petrel. Concerned that its construction and operation could have a detrimental impact on Zino's Petrel, as well as the unique landscape, SPEA and BirdLife have repeatedly requested that the plans be shelved and EU nature legislation respected.

"Unfortunately, none of the valid arguments presented proved sufficient to convince the Madeiran and Portuguese authorities, who have now gone ahead, arguing that building the radar is a matter of national security", added Dr Burfield. Construction began in November 2009. The summit hostel, which used to serve as a must-stop tourist destination where people could admire the incredible mountain range that protects Zino's Petrel, has already been removed to make way for the radar.

"However, the project must follow all of the mitigation and compensation measures indicated in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), such as avoiding any construction work during the breeding season of Zino's Petrel between March and October", warned Dr Burfield. "SPEA is following progress very closely, and verifying that every precaution mentioned in the EIA is adhered to", said Ivàn Ramirez – BirdLife's European Marine Coordinator. "SPEA-Madeira staff are visiting the site regularly and will immediately report any anomalies to the Ministry of Defence and the University of Aveiro, which produced the EIA and is responsible for the follow-up and monitoring of the project". Through SPEA, BirdLife is also keeping a very close eye on the situation, as any negative impacts on the species could rapidly move it closer to extinction.

For more information please contact Ivàn Ramirez, European Marine Coordinator at ivan.ramirez@birdlife.org the next

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BirdLife protects biodiversity in the French overseas departments



BirdLife International and LPO (BirdLife in France), in cooperation with local conservation organisations, have just published "Un patrimoine, un atout – Oiseaux des départements d'outre-mer", presenting the status of birds and biodiversity in the French overseas departments, and focusing on their added values and the threats they are facing. "More than ever it is now urgent to mobilise all the available legal, technical and financial tools at our disposal to halt the biodiversity decline both in Europe and in France", commented Angelo Caserta, Regional Director of BirdLife International European Division.

Birds represent a unique asset to develop eco-tourism activities and boost local economies. Within the publication, some concrete financial and economic measures are also proposed in order to better preserve the biodiversity in those territories. For example, including their species and habitats in the EU Birds and Habitats Directive will be essential to be in line with the European goals of halting the biodiversity loss and fighting against climate change.

"The five overseas French departments which are part of the EU are highly concerned with bird conservation, because they hold close to 900 bird species, a significant proportion of French species", commented Bernard Deceuninck, Program coordinator at LPO. "Martinique, Guadeloupe and Reunion are also classified by BirdLife as Endemic Bird Areas. They have unique assemblages of breeding endemic birds which are not found anywhere else in the world", concluded Mr Deceuninck.

In Critically Endangered Birds: a global audit, BirdLife has identified ten priority actions to save Critically Endangered birds from extinction, and calls on governments and agencies to implement them urgently. Tackling multiple threats on French and UK Overseas Territories is one of them.

Download the publication at

http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2008/09/Complete_Critical%20Birds_superlowres.pdf

Download *Un patrimoine, un atout – Oiseaux des départements d'outre-mer* at http://www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/un_patrimoine_un_atout_2010.pdf

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Floods in Madeira

On 20 February, the Atlantic island of Madeira (Portugal) suffered massive floods and mudslides after torrential rains. As a result, a trail of destruction is still very visible in several localities in the region, which caused 42 deaths and left 6000 homeless.

Despite all this devastation, the staff of the SPEA office in Madeira (BirdLife in Portugal) was not affected and the headquarters, located in one of the lowest and oldest parts of Funchal, only suffered minor damages on its basement floor; accesses remained blocked with mud and stones for 48 hours and internet communications have been week since. The situation is now slowly coming back to normal and despite some limitations, telephone calls and internet were restored earlier this week.

We would like to express our gratitude to all the collaborators and friends who have tried to contact us to be acquainted with the situation of SPEA Madeira.

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BirdLife ON AIR

For the first time, BirdLife provides an answer "on air" to some of our readers' questions related to biodiversity: this month the microphone is in the hands of Ariel Brunner, BirdLife's Head of EU Policy.

Ariel, welcome to this first edition of "On Air". My first question is a general but important one: Which are the main challenges/priorities you see in for biodiversity in the future?



"...well, the magnitude of the crisis that we face around the collapse of biodiversity is now completely clear and the case for urgent action is compelling. In terms of moving from just understanding that we have a problem and starting to solve it, I think the key is for all of our policies and our collective decisions to really start incorporating the logic of ecosystems and how they function. Until now we have still been looking all too often at biodiversity as a sort of "afterthought". We have an economy which lives beyond its means, we have a whole way of life which is based on pillaging the ecosystems and then, we say "ok, we put some money into conservation and we will do it through a few little nature reserves" and so on. It doesn't work. It will only work when we really start thinking in terms of ecosystems and think about biodiversity and the functioning of ecosystems and the climate as a preliminary condition and as a broader condition for pretty much everything we do"

What about the role of the BirdLife Partnership in protecting biodiversity in Europe? What do you think our role will be, as BirdLife and as BirdLife Partnership?

"The BirdLife Partnership has a fundamental role and I think BirdLife has already been making a massive difference in Europe. If you only think about the role that BirdLife has had in the establishment of the Natura 2000 network in Europe, I really think that a lot of our biodiversity would not be here any longer if it wasn't for the very hard work of the BirdLife network, its members, its volunteers, its supporters, its staff. And I think we will need a massive further effort at all levels; it goes from the volunteers in the field who collect data, monitor sites, educate people, to the national level, where the work is done to influence national policies, and shape national debates in countries, all the way up to the work we are doing in trying to improve European policies and to our global work beyond the borders of Europe or our work to try and decrease the footprint of Europe itself"

So the message is clear, we need to keep up the good work!

"Yes, absolutely!"

We had quite high expectations for the COP 15 in Copenhagen last December. What do you think the EU should do now to react to this failure, especially considering the preparation for Nagoya in October?

"I think the only way forward is for the EU to lead by example. The EU should get its act together, stop just talking about conservation and sustainability and start doing it and doing it seriously. And because the facts are there and people will not be able to negate evidence forever, sooner or later people will follow, and the further we have gone, the easier it will be for other people to follow us. I think it's just an issue of coherence and we should stop this game where we make very fancy declarations and then we do not put our money where our mouth is and we get disappointed when other people don't believe us. We should just get going and get it done. At least at home"

You can contact Ariel Brunner at ariel.brunner@birdlife.org

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Events

International events

- January-June 2010: Spanish presidency of the European Union

- 22-26 March 2010, Cáceres, Extremadura, Spain: 18th International Conference of the EBCC - "Bird Numbers 2010: Monitoring, indicators and targets"

<http://www.ebcc.info/index.php?ID=370>

<http://www.seo.org/ebcc2010/frmHome.html>

-7-11 September 2010, Victoria, Canada: 1st World Seabird Conference - Seabirds: Linking the Global Oceans
www.WorldSeabirdConference.com

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



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