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Sent: 06 May 2010 14:23

To: alessia.pautasso@birdlife-enews.org

Subject: BirdLife Europe e-news May 2010



<http://europe.birdlife.org>

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

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Editorial: Good potential

Dear Reader,

in many modern primary schools a child's failure to achieve the expected results is described through some variation of the following formula: "the child shows good potential but needs to apply itself more thoroughly". Something similar can be said about the EU's (and most other countries') failure to halt the decline of biodiversity by 2010- a pledge made public by Heads of State in 2001.

The failure is undeniable. Most of our habitats are in "unfavourable conservation status", even within protected sites, species keep joining the sad "red list" that is the waiting room of extinction, while many once common species keep moving from being part of the landscape to being a sought after prize for dogged birdwatchers. That the failure matters should by now be crystal clear. It is not just about losing the beauty of our unique planet, and betraying the moral imperative that a species self defining itself as *Homo sapiens* has to look after its home; it's also, in the long run, about the survival and health of our civilisation. And yet, the knowledge is there and good practice abounds.

The assorted articles in this edition include examples of how precious sites can be properly managed, how infrastructures can be developed without devastating unique natural areas, how education can spread knowledge and sensitivity and how farmers can work in harmony with nature. The potential is clearly there. What has lacked until now has been the will to apply ourselves systematically and constantly. In school it's called motivation. In policy it's called political will. Without it, clever pupils fail their exams and advanced technologies fail to stand up to the challenges of their environment.

On 22 May, International Day of Biological Diversity, BirdLife will publish its own assessment of where the EU stands on its biodiversity conservation pledge. Based on an EU wide survey of conservation experts and on the best available data, we conclude that while the EU has spectacularly failed on biodiversity, more than enough good examples show the way forward. Where the right things are done, results do come.

In the same publication, we'll be also spelling out our road map to 2020, detailing the urgent actions that need to be taken if the EU is not to fail again on its recently adopted 2020 target of not only halting biodiversity decline, but also starting to reverse it and contribute to conservation at the global level.

We believe it does all boil down to that primary school formula: the potential is good, but do we have the will power?

With best wishes,

Ariel Brunner
Head of EU Policy
BirdLife International European Division

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European Commissioner for the Environment visits Natura 2000 sites in Slovenia



Accepting a BirdLife International invitation, Dr Janez Potočnik, European Commissioner for the Environment, visited Natura 2000 sites in Slovenia, his home country.

BirdLife recently invited President Barroso and all European Commissioners to visit Natura 2000 protected sites in their home countries. Through this visit they would stress the importance of the Commission's commitment and efforts to preserve Europe's common heritage and underline the construction of a sustainable future for Europe.

DOPPS (BirdLife in Slovenia) welcomed Dr Potočnik and guided him during his sunny birdwatching day, visiting the Iški morost nature reserve in the Ljubljana's marshes area and the Škocjan Bay nature reserve, an important wetland. Commissioner Potočnik stressed the economic and environmental relevance of the Natura 2000 network, and declared biodiversity conservation to be one of the top priorities for his mandate.

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Spring hunting season opened in Malta is unlawful according to BirdLife



On 9 April the Maltese government announced its decision to open the spring hunting season in 2010. BirdLife International and BirdLife Malta believe that the decision contravenes the EU legislation and stresses that Malta has already been condemned for allowing spring hunting in the past.

The new derogation contravenes the requirements of the EU Birds Directive as it clearly fails to satisfy the key conditions required by EU legislation: Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* are in unfavourable conservation status in Europe and as required by the Commission's guidance on hunting, no derogation for these species should be allowed.

Secondly, insufficient clarity of the law and the extent of illegal shooting, already ongoing and amply documented in Malta, completely undermine Governmental claims to be able to enforce the bag limits and other conditions under which the derogation is supposed to take place.

The decision is a set back for nature conservation, particularly disturbing as 2010 is supposed to be the International Year of Biodiversity. The European Commission should react to avoid further misuse of spring hunting derogation in Malta.

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BirdLife Partner staff wins world's top environmental prize



Malgorzata Górska from OTOP (BirdLife in Poland) has been awarded the world's top prize for grassroots activists having led a successful campaign which stopped a road being built through Poland's precious Rospuda Valley.

The Goldman Environmental Prize – often called the Nobel Prize for the environment – is awarded to men and women around the world who take great personal risks to safeguard the environment. Throughout the campaign, Górska and her colleagues were intimidated by local authorities and radical right-wing groups, and even labeled as Russian spies. Górska was awarded the prize at the San Francisco Opera House, along with \$150,000 to pursue her vision of a renewed and protected environment.

"I'm so pleased to win the prize because this will - I hope - promote the requirements for protection of Natura 2000 sites. The Via Baltica campaign and saving the Rospuda Valley showed that it is possible to combine nature protection with transport infrastructure development. On the other hand it proved that ignoring nature conservation as a factor of sustainable development leads to serious problems", commented Górska.

The Rospuda Valley is one of the last truly wild places in Europe, acknowledged for its beauty and environmental importance. Its designation as an EU Natura 2000 site should have offered it permanent protection, but it was threatened by a major road-building project – called Via Baltica - which aimed to link Helsinki and Warsaw.

Despite early opposition from scientists and conservationists, the Polish government supported the Via Baltica project believing that, having joined the EU in 2004, the new road would facilitate the increased flow of international traffic between Poland and the Baltic states. To save the Rospuda Valley from destruction, Górska - alongside her colleagues in OTOP, BirdLife International, the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and other NGO's such as Polish Green Network and WWF - spearheaded the campaign against the construction of the expressway. Górska led the coalition to develop a legal case against the Polish government, coordinated research into the environmental impacts of the road construction, and raised public awareness of the irreparable damage it would cause to the area and its wildlife.

The campaign has led to the first ever successful intervention by the EU to obtain an order from the European Court to stop a Member State from breaching environmental regulations and damaging a Natura 2000 site. This court ruling now has the potential to strengthen the legal framework for EU environmental regulations across Europe, specifically the protection of Natura 2000 sites.

Following their success in saving the Rospuda Valley, Górska and her colleagues in OTOP continued to campaign to halt construction of the Via Baltica Expressway through other protected sites including the Knyszyn Primeval Forest, the Biebrza Marshes, and the Augustow Primeval Forest. Developers initially ignored strategic assessments recommending viable, less damaging alternatives but, on 20 October 2009, the Polish government finally agreed to re-route the whole controversial section of the Via Baltica Expressway, saving these valuable EU- protected sites from destruction.

See the video presenting the project at

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hqd93rxQyFY&feature=player_embedded

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Natuurpunt: 15 years educating people to love nature



This year "Natuurpunt Educatie", the education branch of Natuurpunt (BirdLife in Belgium), celebrates its 15th anniversary. The tradition of environmental education in Belgium is much older, however; the institution dealing with these issues which was to merge with Natuurpunt in 2001 was already operating in 1935.

Environmental education plays a fundamental role teaching how natural environments function and, particularly, how human beings can manage their behaviour and ecosystems in order to live sustainably. "Learning together", Natuurpunt's education programme, focuses on the organisation of outdoor activities for local groups and communities.

Over the years educational activities have noticeably widened in scope, including the global biodiversity crisis, climate change and sustainable development. This development requires a new approach, with innovative educational methods to address those new themes and involving new target groups.

Most of all, nature education is about people. Together we have to "invent" new ways of living with our planet and our biodiversity. Nature conservation organisations can play an important role in involving people to protect our environment, and that's why in the coming years Natuurpunt Educatie will persistently invest in training volunteers and supporters.

For more information please contact Jos Gysels, Head of Natuurpunt Educatie, at jos.gysels@natuurpunt.be

And visit www.natuurpunt.be/educatie

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Farmers and biodiversity : true love ?



Conscious that meeting the 2010 biodiversity target is becoming every day more challenging, LPO (BirdLife in France) started various new activities within its program "How can farmers concretely protect biodiversity on their land?".

Launched in 2005, together with three agriculture networks for sustainable and organic farming, this program involves farmers in 8 French regions and 18 departments.

As a practical follow up to this program, LPO and its Partners have published a handbook with best practices on how to achieve biodiversity conservation on farms. During this International Year of Biodiversity, LPO plans to implement innovative actions on management plans for 50 of the farms involved around France. These

actions address the problem of biodiversity loss, and promoting the value of wildlife.

As part of this action, 19 June 2010 will be a public Open day on these 50 farms to show people the best practices and their solutions to respect biodiversity on working farms.

Download the handbook at www.lpo.fr

For more information contact Sophie Raspail, Responsible for Agriculture and Biodiversity at LPO at sophie.raspail@lpo.fr

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Migratory birds are late!



For the fifth time now participants in BirdLife's Spring Alive Campaign have been spotting the arrival of migratory birds all around Europe. Spring Alive invites people – especially children, their parents and teachers – to record their first sightings of the arrival of four migratory species: Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, Common Swift *Apus apus* and White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*. The campaign is implemented by BirdLife Partners in 36 countries in Europe, Africa and Middle East.

The observations are recorded on www.springalive.net, the special website for the campaign. Spring Alive gives a unique opportunity to deepen the understanding of how our birds and nature are interlinked, even if they live in different countries. The

Campaign also provides an engaging framework for the spring activities of European BirdLife Partners, getting children and their families more actively involved in environmental conservation.

"The arriving birds were spotted later than in the previous years, probably because of the frosty and long winter in Europe", commented Magdalena Chrzanowska, European Spring Alive Coordinator. The initial data show that many White Storks arrived to Europe only in late April, and in some traditional nesting areas, even 30% of nests are still empty.

This could mean that we will finally experience the peak of the arrivals of our four migrants only around mid-May, as happened already in 2008.

For more information please contact Magdalena Chrzanowska, European Spring Alive Coordinator at magdalena.chrzanowska@otop.org.pl

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Malta towards its first Marine SPA



Through the initiative of BirdLife Malta, the RSPB, SPEA (BirdLife in the UK and Portugal), and four Maltese governmental organisations, in 2006, a 4-year LIFE Nature project was launched, with the aim of reversing the decline of Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*, increase awareness about this seabird and undertake much needed research in its marine habitat. Focusing on the Rdum tal-Madonna Special Protection Area (SPA), which hosts the largest colony in the country, the project has created a safe haven for shearwaters, reducing threats that were affecting the colony since its discovery in 1969. Conservation work has focused on controlling rat predation, minimising land and maritime sources of light and noise pollution, curtailing illegal hunting and studying the impact of long-line fisheries. Consequently more Yelkouan Shearwaters are now fledging from the colony proving this to be one of the largest successful conservation initiatives of its kind in Malta.

Conservation work was however only part of the solution needed to protect

Yelkouans. The project has put Malta on the map of seabird research with some ground-breaking discoveries, made possible through the use of cutting-edge technology in seabird tracking. Studying these amazing birds and their behaviour, scientists discovered that they can even travel up to 300km offshore in search of fish, concentrating around fishing grounds in Maltese and international waters.

Satellite tags on Yelkouans' legs revealed that fledged chicks moved independently across the Eastern Mediterranean during their migration, concentrating in the Aegean Sea, but not avoiding the Adriatic, the north African coast, and as far east as the Black Sea.

Thanks to this very successful project BirdLife Malta will soon propose the designation of Malta's first Marine Special Protection Areas for Yelkouan Shearwaters. BirdLife Malta is looking forward for opportunities to expand this research to other internationally important seabird populations such as European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* and Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*.

For more information please contact Nicholas Barbara, Project Manager – EU LIFE Yelkouan Shearwater Project at nicholas.barbara@birdlifemalta.org or visit the website at www.lifeshearwaterproject.org.mt

The EU LIFE Yelkouan Shearwater project is 50% sponsored by the EU Life Unit with additional support from the Malta Environment and Planning Authority and HSBC Cares for the Environment Fund. The project partners are BirdLife Malta, RSPB, SPEA, the Malta Centre for Fisheries and Research, the Armed Forces of Malta, Heritage Malta and Transport Malta.

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Save the unique Slovak Tatra National Park- sign the petition!



The Slovak Tatra mountains, with their wild forests, alpine meadows, glacial habitats and native species, are among the most unique parts of the Carpathians. In the Tatra National park it is still common meeting large mammals such as brown bears and wolves, and spectacular bird species such as Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* and Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*. Aiming to protect this natural treasure, the area was identified as national park already in the '40s and identified as Natura 2000 when Slovakia joined the EU.

Now the Park is threatened by new governmental plans, aiming to decrease its protection level, allowing the development of new touristic infrastructures, such as ski resorts, and introducing intensive forest management practices, such as clear cuts and chemical spraying in core conservation areas. Obviously Slovak NGOs and the scientific community protested against those plans, but their complaints were not taken into account by government officials. Therefore SOS/BirdLife Slovakia (BirdLife in Slovakia) and other environmental NGOs launched a petition to stop those plans and preserve this natural gem.

Please sign the petition at <http://www.ekoforum.sk/peticia/stop-destruction-tatra-national-park/>

For more information please contact Jozef Rizdon at ridzon@vtaky.sk

See how the Tatra National Park looks like now: don't let them change all this!
http://www.tichawilderness.com/flash_3.html

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BirdLife International celebrates biodiversity at the Green Week

From 01 to 04 June 2010 BirdLife International will be present with a stand at the Green Week in Brussels, presenting its latest report on the status of biodiversity and raising awareness on the importance of protecting our nature and our planet.

Come and visit us!

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BirdLife on Air

Following the new tradition, BirdLife provides an answer "on air" to some of our readers' questions related

Mr. Lambertini, welcome to this new edition of "BirdLife on Air". 2010 has been declared by the UN the 'International Year of Biodiversity' and on 22 May we celebrate the International Day for Biological Diversity. Sadly, we know that currently 1 in 8 bird species are threatened with extinction. Why should we be concerned and what does this mean for our future on this planet?



"We continue to ignore, despite the growing scientific evidence, the value of a healthy environment and the crucial eco-services provided by nature for the food, water, health, climate security and even socio-political stability of our future generations. A healthy environment is at the foundation of a stable and sustainable economy, and biodiversity – including birds - is at the foundation of all natural systems. Nature does not function without biodiversity and people cannot survive without nature's services. A simple equation, ignored for too long and at our own peril"

This year has clearly marked the failures of Governments to meet the so-called "biodiversity target", which planned to halt the loss of biodiversity by the end of the year. What is BirdLife's message to Governments and Heads of State for the years to come?

"The exciting success stories across the BirdLife Partnership and other conservation NGOs demonstrate that species **CAN** be saved, habitats and their eco-services to people **CAN** be conserved. We want to remind Governments of the world that it is in reach of this generation, not the previous one, not the next one, to finally acknowledge the value of nature to people, and turn the tide of the global ecological crisis towards a sustainable way of living in harmony with nature. We need a new international set of ambitious but measurable targets and we need Governments to invest in protecting nature, as the return in terms of economic development as well as people's wellbeing will greatly surpass the investment"

As the largest conservation organization in the world, what is BirdLife International doing on the ground to save species and restore the habitats we are currently losing and what needs to be done in the future?

"First of all over the last 15 years we have been investing in developing indigenous capacity at national and local level for conservation. Local impact linked up globally is the foundation of the BirdLife model. The results are stunning, with our network comprising over 100 organisations in respective countries and over half in developing economies where biodiversity is. These organizations have saved species, sites and advocated for sustainable policies achieving disproportionate results compared to their size, providing dramatic impact and cost effectiveness. Globally we have not only identified and mapped over 10,000 Important Bird Areas but greatly enhanced their status of protection; over 60 critically endangered birds would have most likely gone extinct or being even closer to extinction had actions on the ground not been implemented; policy work on agriculture in Europe, tropical forests in South East Asia and seabird friendly fishing methods globally have achieved major shift in legislation and regulations. There is still much to do but we should be excited and confident based on the results achieved"

What can we really learn from this year for our children and future generations?

"That we are integral part of nature, not apart from it!"

Visit http://www.birdlife.org/international_year_biodiversity/index.html

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Events

International events

- January-June 2010: Spanish Presidency of the European Union
- 13-14 May 2010, Toledo, Spain: NATURA 2000 Network: A new opportunity for a Sustainable Rural Economy. For more information, please contact Octavio Infante at oifante@seo.org
- July-December 2010: Belgian Presidency of the European Union
- 7-11 September 2010, Victoria, Canada: 1st World Seabird Conference - Seabirds: Linking the Global Oceans

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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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