

## Farmland birds in Europe fall to lowest levels

**Brussels, 25 August 2011** – Farmland bird populations across Europe are at their lowest levels since records began, new figures reveal.

The Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme has compiled population figures for 145 common and widespread bird species in 25 European countries between 1980 and 2009. Amongst those species covered, farmland birds are the most threatened group, with 20 out of 36 species in decline, and overall numbers at an all-time low, down by 48% since 1980.

Some of the species that have declined the most over the last three decades include familiar farmland birds like Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix* (–82%), Skylark *Alauda arvensis* (–46%), Linnet *Carduelis cannabina* (–62%) and Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra* (–66%).

Conservationists say the results prove the need for urgent reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) so that it rewards and encourages farmers who put conservation measures in place on their land. Proposals for the upcoming reform of the CAP are set to be published in October, but BirdLife Europe is concerned that they do not go far enough. It fears that the proposal does not contain enough support for agri-environment schemes which fund wildlife-friendly farming measures.

**Ian Burfield**, European Science and Data Manager, said: “These shocking new figures confirm that farmland birds have halved in number across Europe since 1980. While the rate of decline may have slowed in recent years, it’s clear that attempts to halt the loss have been insufficient, and that massive efforts are needed to reverse the trend.”

**Trees Robijns**, EU Agriculture and Bioenergy Policy Officer, added: “The CAP is an EU-wide policy tool that has visible effects on the landscape. Until recently however, this policy has helped farmers to produce more food, but the environment and biodiversity have suffered as a result.

“Therefore we need to reorient the policy towards delivering public goods for public money. We need proper targeted funding for wildlife-friendly farming and effective and efficient schemes in place that can reverse these declines and make our countryside richer and healthier for birds, plants, insects and people – as well as producing food, feed, fuel and fibre.”

“We know what the problem is and we have identified a lot of the solutions already. Now we need the decision makers to take up their responsibility and deliver a real green reform. This reform is often dubbed a ‘green reform’ so we should ensure it delivers for the environment. Otherwise, this bad news cycle will continue and this policy will come even more under attack.”

Recent EU Budget announcements have made it clear that decision makers plan to allocate less money to Pillar 2 which contains very valuable environmental payments. A recent leaked CAP document has also revealed that they plan to allow Member States to move money away from agri-environment schemes and into other areas.

The results of the European bird population survey suggest that after missing its 2010 biodiversity conservation target, the EU will go on to miss the 2020 biodiversity conservation target unless decisive and urgent action is taken.

Trees Robijns adds: “The integration of the biodiversity target into other areas like agriculture, where the threats are so evident, is a real must. If we fail to provide the adequate tools to tackle the roots of this problem, we are in fact undermining any possibility of achieving the biodiversity targets.”

The new EU Biodiversity Strategy commits the EU to, "halt the deterioration in the status of all species and habitats covered by EU nature legislation". Although Member States endorsed the new strategy in June this year, they have yet to agree on commitments to deliver the actions needed to achieve its aims.

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**Notes to editors:**

1. The Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme is a joint initiative of the European Bird Census Council and BirdLife International. It is supported by RSPB and the European Commission - <http://www.ebcc.info/index.php?ID=457>
2. Stichting BirdLife Europe  
BirdLife International is a global Partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. The BirdLife Partnership operates in 117 countries and territories worldwide. BirdLife Europe supports the European and Central Asian Partnership for BirdLife International and is present in 45 countries and all EU Member States.  
<http://europe.birdlife.org>
3. The data are derived from annually-operated breeding bird surveys in 25 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.
4. The overall trend of all 145 species covered has been stable since 1980, but the subset of common farmland birds has declined by 48% and that of common forest birds by 13%. A pdf leaflet summarising the latest results and presenting the trends for each species is available here: <http://www.ebcc.info/index.php?ID=469>

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