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Editorial: Happy Birthday Birds Directive, farewell to Brussels

Dear reader,



It was almost nine years ago that I arrived in Brussels to work as Birds Directive officer for the BirdLife European Community Office, as the BirdLife Brussels office was then called. This month the Birds Directive turned 30 (on the 2nd of April), and this month is also my last month in BirdLife in Brussels. The years have gone by very fast, and were fulfilling, interesting and challenging.

The EU Birds Directive which was what brought me to Brussels is still central in BirdLife's work and for good reason. It is a true 'European' law, which reflects what the united EU is all about: reaching a common objective through collaboration. The Birds Directive provides real "added value" to national efforts in conserving nature. It was adopted because Europeans were concerned by the declines of birds and given that birds are such accomplished travellers, they realised that only acting at an international level could make a difference. And it has made a difference, especially for those species that benefit from special protection measures under it.

Very innovative for the time, the Birds Directive, integrated obligations for species and habitat protection with human economic activities, introducing the concept of sustainable development even before the term was coined. Later it was successfully complemented by the Habitats Directive and the Natura 2000 concept.

As its first successes can be measured, because a number of species start to recover, the work is far from finished. Implementation of the Directive and of the Natura 2000 network in general, is too slow, half-hearted, and seriously underfunded. At the same time other policies still undermine the successes of the Birds Directive and harm ecosystems, e.g. agriculture and fisheries. So it is no wonder that the Birds and Habitats Directives could not (yet) realize their full potential.

On its 30th anniversary the Birds Directive is as needed as it was 30 years ago and its future implementation, with climate change becoming a reality every day, takes on added importance in view of the need to have healthy and resilient ecosystems to come through the planetary environmental crisis.

So, as I leave Brussels to start work for BirdLife Cyprus I look forward to having the Birds Directive central to our priorities there too.

Happy Birthday to the Birds Directive – and farewell to Brussels!

Best regards

Dr Claire Papazoglou
Regional Director
European Division

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The EU Birds Directive turned 30!



On 2 April 2009, BirdLife International celebrated the 30th Anniversary of the EU Birds Directive, a key piece of EU nature legislation adopted by Member States in 1979.

More than 100 people attended the birthday party, opened by Dr Claire Papazoglou, Regional Director of the BirdLife European Division in Brussels. In their speeches EU Commissioner for the Environment Mr Stavros Dimas and the Czech Deputy Minister for the Environment Mr Frantisek Pelc stressed the successes and the importance of the Birds Directive.

"The Birds Directive is one of the great success stories of EU environmental policy" stated Dimas. Referring to discussions on the EU's post 2010 biodiversity policy he stressed: "The Birds Directive is as relevant today as it was 30 years ago and has a key role to play in delivering our biodiversity policy for many years to come".

On a video message, Mr. Hamidou Mamoudou, an African conservationist from Burkina Faso conveyed African conservationists' gratitude to the EU for protecting African migratory birds during their summer stay in Europe. Mr Mamoudou, Director of the Oursi Site Support Group, a local group of Naturama, the BirdLife Partner in Burkina Faso said "We wished we could have a Birds Directive too".

At the event, BirdLife also launched its new campaign for the protection of migratory birds, "Born to Travel", the BirdLife Flyways Campaign, showing a short film on the wonder of bird migration.

BirdLife welcomed the strong statements by the Commissioner in favour of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. Misconceptions and attacks by some stakeholders and politicians have to be overcome: Natura 2000 sites are not fenced-off areas, but form "living landscapes" aiming to reconcile nature protection and economic development.

And as in every birthday party, a cake was finally waiting for Mr Dimas, Mr Pelc and Mrs Béguin and Brepoels, Members of the European Parliament. They were invited to blow out the candles and raised their glasses to the EU Birds Directive.

For more information visit:

http://www.birdlife.org/eu/EU_policy/directive_anniversary.html

<http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/04/dimasevent.html>

<http://www.borntotravelcampaign.com/>

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Rospuda Valley finally saved from destructive road works!



On 24 March 2009, BirdLife International and its Partner OTOP (BirdLife in Poland) applauded the decision of the Polish Government to save the famous Rospuda valley in Poland from destruction by road development.

The road development in question forms part of the controversial Via Baltica expressway which would run through several valuable nature areas. This particular section of Via Baltica had been routed through the Natura 2000 site "Augustow Forest" in North-Eastern Poland, which includes the unique mires of the Rospuda valley. BirdLife and other conservation groups all around Europe have been campaigning successfully to halt the road works.

Based on a complaint submitted by the NGO coalition the European Commission referred the case to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in March 2007 claiming Poland has infringed the EU Habitats Directive and asking for an urgent Court order to halt imminent construction works. Following this, the Polish government stopped the works, but the threat for the valley remained until today when the government officially changed its position.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk now announced the construction of an alternative route for an expressway that will relieve the town of Augustow of heavy transit traffic without harming Rospuda. The new bypass will now be constructed close to the nearby village of Raczki.

Unfortunately several other planned sections of "Via Baltica" remain a threat to invaluable habitats – also here

BirdLife urges the Polish authorities to use the existing, less harmful alternative solutions.

For more information please contact Rastislav Rybanic, EU Nature Policy Officer at rastislav.rybanic@birdlife.org

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“Who has to feed the world?”

Last year’s spike in agriculture commodity markets has unleashed a global debate about «food security», which has been widely exploited by different industry lobbies to argue that the EU needs to increase its food production and that environmental concerns are luxuries we can no longer afford. Some have gone as far as stating that the EU has a “moral responsibility” to “feed the world”. Many of these lines of argument ignore basic facts about the world food system, first and foremost that the shameful problem of world hunger is not due to lack of food but to global income injustice and huge inefficiencies in the production and food access in poor countries.

While talking about a food crisis is often a fig leaf for vested interests in the farm and agribusiness sectors, the world does face some daunting challenges. Rapid population growth and exploding consumption (especially of meat and dairy products) are putting an ever bigger strain on the world productive capacity, while water is becoming scarcer in many regions and climate change risks hitting agriculture production across the globe.

To enable a reasonable and intelligent debate about the crucial intersection between food, climate, biodiversity, ecosystem health and social wellbeing, BirdLife International has produced a new document titled “**Food security, climate change & biodiversity - The role of European agriculture in a changing world**”. The document explores the issues at stake, dispels a few myths and tries to reframe the questions in a meaningful, constructive and science driven way. Hopefully it will contribute to a more meaningful debate around some of the most burning issues for our collective future.

For more information contact Ariel Brunner, Senior EU Agriculture Policy Officer at Ariel.Brunner@birdlife.org

You can download the BirdLife’s discussion paper at http://www.birdlife.org/eu/EU_policy/Agriculture/eu_agriculture7.html

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Keeping the Mosaic – campaigning for wildlife-friendly farming in Cyprus



As a result of a groundbreaking partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, BirdLife Cyprus aims to launch the first biodiversity monitoring programme for Cyprus agri-environment schemes. The BirdLife Partner will carry out bird surveys in cereal fields, citrus plantations and vineyards in order to determine the efficiency of the agri-environment schemes in the country. For the first time ever, wildlife conservation and biodiversity are high on the farming agenda and this is a significant step in a country with almost no culture for such direct NGO participation – until now!

According to Martin Hellicar, Executive Manager of BirdLife Cyprus, Cypriot habitats and wildlife are still generally better preserved than in many other parts of Europe, and fortunately Cyprus is not yet faced with the near-impossible task of trying to re-create habitats which have been destroyed.

This is particularly true for farming areas, which are often a wonderful mosaic of groves, vines and small cereal fields with stonewalls and scrub in-between. Excellent habitat for Black-headed Buntings *Emberiza melanocephala*, Cyprus Wheatears *Oenanthe cyprica*, European Rollers *Coracias garrulus* and Little Owls *Athene noctua*, to name but a few of the priority species.

Since its creation in 2003, BirdLife Cyprus (BirdLife in Cyprus) has campaigned to conserve this wildlife-friendly farmland. Closely working with BirdLife International and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), BirdLife Cyprus has pushed for the adoption of rural development measures that will offer effective support for low intensity farming, echoing BirdLife’s call for “public money for public goods”, and arguing that the Common Agricultural policy (CAP) support should go to sustainable, low-intensity farming.

For more information contact Martin Hellicar, Executive Manager at BirdLife Cyprus at

martin.hellicar@birdlifecyprus.org.cy

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Solving the Human Bear Conflict in Turkey



Some human activities can cause habitat loss for biodiversity, which in turn forces animals to look for new spaces and food often closer to humans. As they move closer to people, conflicts can arise. Doğa Derneği (BirdLife in Turkey) is running a project aimed at further analyzing the conflict between humans and Brown bears *Ursus arctos* and its causes.

This conflict arises when for example, bears are attracted to human economic activities such as beehives, crop fields and orchards. Supported by the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and implemented in close cooperation with the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks of the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Doğa

Derneği project takes a holistic approach and analyses the issue from different perspectives. In particular, it aims at understanding the reasons and mechanisms of the conflict, increasing public awareness and ensuring proper restoration of Brown bear habitat.

In 2008, as part of the project, a protocol was signed between Doğa Derneği and the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the latter of which is now actively involved in different activities and shares research and management tools with the BirdLife Partner. For the first time in August the project team successfully trapped and radio-collared two brown bears with a GPS-GSM. Bear-proof beehive platforms and electric fences have also been set up in selected locations in major conflict areas in Rize, Erzurum and Artvin to prevent bear damage to beehives and orchards. As part of the project, international scientists and experts from the IUCN Bear Specialist Group met last October, to discuss the conflict at a global scale and to establish the Human Bear Conflict Expert Team. The international working group is now preparing a resolution which will provide information for decision makers in Governments and specialized NGOs to encourage a better understanding and management of the human-bear conflict around the world.

Doğa Derneği and the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Forestry will continue working together on this issue in 2009 and aim at preparing a comprehensive National Brown Bear Conservation Action Plan.

For more information contact Dr. Ozgun Emre Can, Large Mammal Research & Conservation Coordinator / Turkish Nature Association at emre.can@dogadernegi.org or visit www.humanbearconflict.org

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Spanish Imperial Eagle killed in Portugal



At the beginning of March a Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti* was found shot to death in a private game area in Mértola, within the Castro Verde Special Protection Area in Southern Portugal.

The Spanish Imperial Eagle is one of the rarest bird species in the world, occurring only in Portugal and Spain. As its population was considered extinct in Portugal until few years ago and there are only approximately 230 pairs nesting on the peninsula, this species has the highest conservation status in both the Portuguese and the European conservation law. The male Eagle killed belonged to one of the two pairs who successfully bred in Portugal in 2008.

The death of this Spanish Imperial Eagle is a serious crime against nature and threatens the conservation efforts that have been made in Portugal to save this species. Therefore SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) calls on the Biodiversity and

Nature Conservation Institute (ICNB) to do everything to find the culprit of this action. Unfortunately this is not the only case in Portugal, as birds of prey are often victims of illegal shooting and poisoning, crimes that usually stay unpunished.

SPEA urges the Portuguese Administration to start a new awareness raising campaign which should directly address both hunters and game areas managers and stress the importance of birds of prey and how the public image of hunting areas could benefit from their presence. SPEA is willing to work together with the Administration and other Environmental NGOs, and thinks this unfortunate event could act as the first push for the creation of a new law to increase the responsibilities of Game Areas Managers in safeguarding animals and

plants, especially in protected areas.

For more information contact Domingos Leitão, Coordinator of the Terrestrial Programme / Conservation Dpt. at domingos.leitao@spea.pt

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Venice lagoon in danger

After two written warnings in 2005 and 2007, the European Commission has announced on 14 April that it plans to close an infringement procedure against Italy concerning the "Experimental Electromechanical Module (Mo.S.E.) project", aimed at constructing moving dams in the Venice lagoon to protect the city from the risk of flooding. In its announcement, the Commission has acknowledged the repeated breach of EU legislation but has chosen to accept the Italian government's "compensatory" measures which BirdLife sees as highly insufficient and almost devoid of substance (e.g. reducing disturbance from construction works, monitoring of impacts, publication of data etc).

Situated next to Venice, a city of exceptional cultural and architectural importance, the lagoon is an area of outstanding ecological importance at European level, designated as a Natura 2000 site. Almost 100.000 waterbirds winter in the lagoon and the site plays a key role for herons and terns. Authorizing the construction of the dams, the Italian authorities failed to fulfill the obligations arising from the EU Habitats Directive, including inadequately assessing the impact of the project on the protected areas and failing to propose the necessary mitigation and compensation measures.

Despite several complaints from LIPU (BirdLife in Italy) and WWF Italy and the initial Commission warnings, the Italian authorities have already started construction, and have already caused damage to the site and its biodiversity. LIPU and WWF expressed extreme concern over the European Commission decision to close the case, despite the clear and acknowledged breach of EU legislation. The Mo.S.E. project is causing irreversible damage to one of Europe's most important wetlands but the decision can also set a dangerous precedent and undermine the respect of the EU Nature Legislation in Italy and beyond.

For more information contact Rastislav Rybanic at Rastislav.Rybanic@birdlife.org

And visit

[http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?](http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/553&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en)

[reference=IP/09/553&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en](http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/553&type=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en)

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New project develops biodiversity friendly forest management practices in Belarus

Already since 2005 Belarus has started to identify High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF), as a contribution to the Pan-European Ecological Network (PEEN). This Network ensures the favourable conservation status of Europe's key ecosystems, habitats, species and landscapes and its EU equivalent is Natura 2000. In PEEN, protected areas are linked by ecological corridors to ensure the existence of migration routes, stopover sites and stepping stones for wildlife. Forests with high biological value could play a double role: those that are in or very close to their natural state, and unused by man can be preserved as 'core areas', whereas the larger scale areas which have predominantly natural features and are used by man, can play a role as buffers, surrounding and supporting habitat which links the cores in the Ecological Network. Since Belarus harbours viable populations of many species already extinct or scarce elsewhere in Europe, its forests are particularly important for PEEN as biodiversity reservoirs, wildlife stepping-stones and migration routes.

The new project, which started in Belarus in 2009 and will run for two years, aims to incorporate the HCVF management into standard forestry practice, by carrying out piloting schemes in three regions, covering almost 320 000 ha of forests. On a European scale, the pilot areas have outstanding nature values, which will be duly described and digitized in geographic information systems (GIS). The project will address the need to provide practical guidelines for better management planning in the HCVF in Belarus and will develop a monitoring system, to check how biodiversity will respond to the new forest management. An awareness-raising programme for forest authorities and the public will support these actions.

The project is funded by the Dutch Government and will be implemented by a consortium of Ameco Environmental Services and Bureau Waardenburg, the Netherlands and APB (BirdLife in Belarus).

For more information visit www.ptushki.org

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Red Kite: There must be a better way to treat your fields than spreading deadly poison



Many European birds of prey still suffer from poisoning, but recent Red Kite *Milvus milvus* recoveries in many countries give hope that this problem can be addressed effectively through stricter application of laws.

It has been long known that poisoning is a major threat facing birds of prey. A study in France, for example, confirmed that 80% of the suspected poisoning cases of Red Kites between 1992 and 2002 were caused by ingestion of agrochemicals, such as insecticides and rodenticides (toxic chemicals used to control pests in farming). At an international workshop held in March 2009 in the UK, 20 experts from across Europe have confirmed that there is growing evidence of the deadly impact of poisoning on the Red Kite and other protected

species. In fact, if it wasn't for poisoning in southern Europe, Red Kites could have recovered well beyond their current numbers, as shown in those countries where this threat has been put on check. For example in Sweden and the UK, Red Kites are largely non-migratory to potentially dangerous wintering grounds, thus benefiting from reduced exposure to poison.

There are two main reasons we still (ab)use poisons. Although made illegal by the international legislation such as the Bern Convention and the EU Birds Directive some hunting estate managers still use poisoned baits as a method of predator control.

The second typical threat comes from the use of rodenticides and other toxic chemicals in farming. There, the need to prevent damage from the cyclic explosion of vole populations and the limited knowledge of good alternative methods make farmers rely on poisons to treat their fields, while neglecting the risks of causing indiscriminate death among untargeted wildlife.

On a related case, recently, BirdLife Partners from ten European countries have managed to convince their governments not to approve for external use a highly toxic pesticide, brodifacoum, based on the high risks it poses to protected species, such as the Red Kites. However, there is much more to be done to eliminate the accidental or deliberate use of other similar substances, as their availability through the market chain and large amounts of existing stocks owned by farmers present real risks and potential disasters, looming around the corner.

For more information on the developing Red Kite action plan:

<http://www.birdlifeforums.org/WebX/.2cba6840/>

or contact Boris Barov, European Conservation Manager at boris.barov@birdlife.org

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Meet the BirdLife European Partnership

In every issue you have the chance to meet a staff member from the BirdLife European Partnership and learn more about their key priorities and favourite projects

For this issue, we've teamed up with Giorgia Gaibani, IBA and Natura 2000 Officer at LIPU (BirdLife in Italy).



My name is Giorgia Gaibani and since 2006 I am the IBA and Natura 2000 Officer at LIPU (BirdLife in Italy).

I am a biologist with a PhD in ethology, and before starting work for LIPU I was doing raptor research, especially on Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* and Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. I have always been particularly fascinated by the Red Kites, especially by their behaviour, colours and their elegant flight. Studying these birds, apart from being an extraordinary experience, also strengthened my belief that research and conservation have to go hand in hand.

For many years I took part in anti-poaching campaigns in the Messina Strait, an important bottleneck for raptor migration. During this period, I experienced

contrasting emotions: I saw Honey Buzzards *Pernis apivorus* fall after having been shot by poachers, but also many White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* and Black Storks *Ciconia nigra* flying very close to me and escaping unhurt to the North. I myself also experienced dangerous moments, but I knew that there were other people all over the world sharing the same passion for birds and wildlife and taking the same risks.

Even if over the past years Italians have started to understand the importance of protecting the Natura 2000 network, there are still many IBAs (Important Bird Areas) and protected sites threatened by intensive agriculture, impacting infrastructures and projects.

Since last year, I am also the coordinator of the Marine IBA Programme, which aims at identifying Marine IBAs to protect seabirds in the Italian waters and coasts. Wonderful birds, such as the Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* and the Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*, which cover enormous distances flying over the sea, transmit a sense of freedom to anyone observing and studying them.

So this is my daily work with LIPU and BirdLife International: a challenge and a pleasure at the same time.

For more information please contact Giorgia Gaibani, IBA and Natura 2000 Officer at Giorgia.gaibani@lipu.it

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Aren't Birds Brilliant?

In the frame of a new scheme called "A Date with Nature", previously known as "Aren't birds brilliant", last month the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) organised a workshop for eight BirdLife Partners in Absam, Austria. The main objective of the scheme is to show people the wonders of birds and wildlife. The workshop aimed at sharing experiences gained by Partners who have adopted and implemented the approach of this scheme and helping them plan future activities for nature conservation.

Participants also had the chance to visit the headquarters of Swarovski Optik, the family-owned Austrian company, very committed to nature conservation and species protection. Swarovski Optik part-funded the workshop and provided the Partners with an excellent optical package with binoculars and many accessories which will help them running their own events. Swarovski also actively supports many BirdLife Partners, and since August 2008 has started sponsoring the protection of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, by becoming a Species Champion for the critically endangered species, together with the RSPB. This initiative is part of BirdLife's Preventing Extinctions programme. BirdLife also encourages Partners to continue implementing the new "A Date with Nature" scheme and to show people the beauty of wildlife and nature.

For more information please contact Maria Solernou, Funding Development Manager at

maria.solernou@birdlife.org

and visit the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme at <http://www.birdlife.org/extinction/>

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Events

European events

- January- June 2009: Czech Presidency of the European Union

- 27-28 April 2009, Athens, Greece: European Commission's International Conference on "Biodiversity Protection - Beyond 2010, Priorities and options for future EU policy"

- 27-28 May 2009, Prague, Czech Republic: Conference on Wilderness and Large Natural Habitat Areas in Europe. Visit <http://chm.nature.cz/stories/conference-wildnearly-wild-areas-eu-27-28-may>

- 21-26 August 2009, Zurich, Switzerland: 7th conference of the European Ornithologists' Union (EOU) <http://www.eou2009.ch/>

BirdLife events

- 7 May 2009, Brussels, Belgium: Launch of the study "Could do better" - How is the EU Rural Development policy delivering for biodiversity? Visit http://www.birdlife.org/eu/eu_events.html

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