

GREENING EUROPE

PRIORITIES OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL FOR THE AUSTRIAN PRESIDENCY - JANUARY TO JUNE 2006

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Austria takes over the Presidency of the EU for 6 months on 1 January 2006. At a time when people are rightly concerned about climate change and decline in biodiversity and natural resources the EU Presidency should make every effort to have environmental issues accorded the importance that they actually deserve within EU policies. Being indispensable for the welfare of future generations the environmental dimension must become a key factor of the EU's decision making process. In this regard BirdLife Austria would like to see the Austrian Government take a lead in the following areas:

Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) and Biodiversity Strategy

We urge the Austrian Government to do all it can to have the renewed SDS adopted at the June Summit as well as to urge the European Commission to present its new Biodiversity Strategy. A more ambitious approach is urgently needed to fulfil the European Council's commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010. Establishing the pan-European common bird index as reliable biodiversity indicator on the shortlist of indicators for measuring the progress of the Lisbon Strategy would be one suitable action.

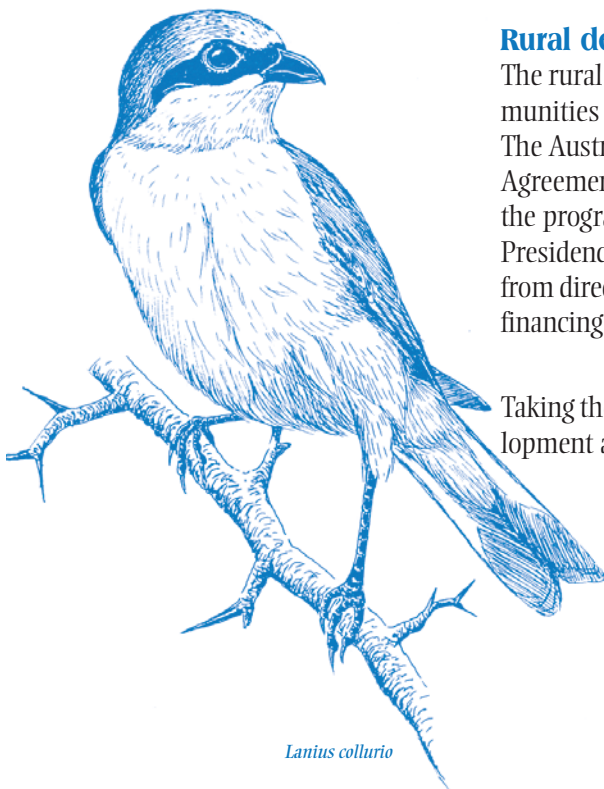
Financial perspective 2007-2013 and Natura 2000 financing

Following the agreement of the financial perspective at the European Council on 15th and 16th December, the Austrian Presidency will play a crucial role in brokering a final Inter-Institutional Agreement (IIA) between the Council, Commission and the Parliament. BirdLife is dismayed by the Council's agreement on the financial perspective, which slashes funds for environmentally-friendly farming under Pillar II of the CAP (rural development) and provides no assurance about funding for the environment (LIFE+). We call on the Austrian Presidency to work towards a final IIA which delivers for the environment and for the citizens of Europe.

Rural development

The rural development programme supports measures that deliver benefits for rural communities and the environment, thereby compensating for the negative effects of the CAP. The Austrian Presidency should work towards the agreement of a final Inter-Institutional Agreement on the financial perspective that significantly increases the funds available to the programme over the period 2007-2013 with respect to the current agreement. The Presidency also has a pivotal role to play in encouraging Member States to shift funds from direct payments and market aid (Pillar I) to rural development (Pillar II) over the next financing period.

Taking the actions outlined in the following document will contribute to sustainable development and nature conservation in the EU.



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Dr. Gerhard Loupal
President of BirdLife Austria

The review of the EU's sustainable development strategy

The Austrian Presidency will take forward the revision of the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) during its six-month term. These discussions are profoundly important because they will determine where the environment sits in the EU decision-making process, particularly in relation to the Lisbon strategy for economic competitiveness. In line with the Bruntland report, BirdLife believes that it is vital that the SDS establishes a framework for "development which meets the needs of the present

without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Much more must be done to ensure the achievement of the crucial targets for action outlined in the Gothenburg Sustainable Development Strategy adopted by European Leaders in 2001. Of particular interest to BirdLife is the commitment "to halt biodiversity loss by 2010", which on current trends the EU will fail to meet.

The Austrian Presidency should:

- Ensure that the renewed EU SDS is adopted at the European Council in June. This renewed strategy should give fresh momentum to the SDS by clarifying its scope and content, as well as by highlighting key milestones for action and indicators
- Promote sustainable development as the overarching goal of all EU policies, strategies and programmes
- Ensure that the target to halt biodiversity loss by 2010 features among the priorities of the renewed SDS and that the intrinsic value of nature, as well as its role in delivering ecosystem services, providing jobs and health benefits, is appropriately highlighted
- Seek to include a biodiversity indicator (the pan-European common bird index) on the shortlist of fourteen indicators that measure the progress of the Lisbon strategy, as called for by the General Affairs and Environment Councils in 2003 as well as in the renewed SDS. This is vital to chart progress towards meeting the target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010 and to give this target the political priority that it deserves
- Improve significantly the Commission's Impact Assessment procedures for major policy proposals to ensure that these assessments adequately consider the environmental dimension

Safeguarding the marine environment

While EU leaders have expressed concern about the status of the marine environment and have made important political commitments to its protection, the European Community has so far failed to take sufficient action to effect real change.

The reform of the Common Fisheries Policy in 2002, by introducing an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, took an important step forward. But the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) – the financial instrument that will support the implementation of the CFP after 2006 – remains under severe pressure from some Member States to fund vessel-building. Such a move would seriously conflict with the recent reforms of the CFP which sought to reduce the EU's fishing fleet capacity.

The eagerly anticipated Marine Strategy Directive presented on 24 October introduces several welcome provisions such as requirements for characterisation, assessment and monitoring of Member States' seas, and for co-ordination within the marine regions. However, it does not contain clear environmental objectives and binding commitments on Member States, and, in its current form, the text could undermine existing legislation and commitments to marine nature conservation. It is therefore essential that the Presidency takes forward work in the Council to improve the Commission's proposal.

We also hope that action will be taken over the course of the Austrian Presidency on two other issues of concern: the implementation of the marine Natura 2000 network and the Community Action Plan on seabirds.

The Austrian Presidency should:

- Ensure that the final text of the European Fisheries Fund regulation does not support vessel-building or modernisation measures that would lead to an increase in fleet capacity. At the same time the Presidency should use its competence to encourage Member States to include in their national programming documents, measures under the EFF to protect the marine environment, support environmentally-friendly fishing methods and benefit local communities.
- Seek to strengthen the Marine Strategy Directive so that it contains clear environmental objectives and binding obligations to achieve them, and does not compromise existing political agreements and legislation aiming at the protection of marine ecosystems
- Take urgent steps to complete the European Community Plan of Action on reducing incidental mortality of seabirds in longline fisheries, under the FAO initiative

The EU's Financial Perspective 2007-2013

Following the European Council's agreement on the Financial Perspective in December, the Austrian Presidency will play a vital role in brokering a final Inter-Institutional Agreement between Commission, Council and Parliament. For too long, major EU budget lines such as the Common Agricultural Policy have failed to deliver public benefits in return for payments from public money. BirdLife believes that the debate on the Financial Perspective presents a crucial opportunity to reverse this trend by ensuring that funds are clearly linked to the EU's sustainable development objectives.

BirdLife is therefore dismayed that the agreement adopted by the Council in December slashes funds for environmen-

tally friendly farming under the rural development budget (Pillar II of the CAP) both with respect to the Commission's proposals and also with respect to existing spending; it fails to allocate a budget for LIFE+ and also omits any reference to Natura 2000 financing.

The discussions on the next Financial Perspective will determine the extent to which key environmental objectives, such as the commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, can be met. Unless significant improvements are made to the Council's agreement over the course of negotiations for a final Inter-Institutional Agreement, Europe's leaders will bequeath an impoverished Europe to future generations.

The Austrian Presidency should:

- Ensure that any change in the budget is accompanied by a review of all the EU spending streams. Any necessary cuts must fall on those budget lines which offer the least value for money and the lowest contribution to Europe's common targets and commitments
- Increase the Council's allocation for the Rural Development programme (Pillar II of the CAP) from budgetary cuts. Rural Development funds provide vital support for measures to protect and enhance Europe's farmed environment. BirdLife believes that Rural Development should be allocated a bigger share of the overall CAP budget in the next financing period, by transferring funds from CAP market expenditure (Pillar I) to rural development (Pillar II)
- Guarantee sufficient financing for the Natura 2000 network of EU-protected wildlife sites from the major funding programmes, particularly the Rural Development programme, the Structural Funds, the LIFE+ environment budget and the European Fisheries Fund. The overall budget for LIFE+ should be increased along the lines of the Parliament's First Reading vote, which allocated EUR 9.54 billion to LIFE+ over the period 2007-2013
- Ensure sufficient funding for global environmental protection measures under Heading 4 (external actions). A thematic programme for environment and natural resources should support the EU's global environmental and sustainable development objectives. This programme should draw funding from across all relevant instruments and amount to at least EUR 450 million per year over the period 2007-2013



Alauda arvensis

Cohesion Policy after 2006

It is essential that the new structural and cohesion funds Regulations for the period 2007-2013 deliver on the Gothenburg agenda for EU sustainable development and offer opportunities for co-financing the Natura 2000 network.

Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG) will be agreed by Member States in order to establish political priorities for EU Cohesion Policy for the period 2007-2013. Responses to the Commission's public consultation on the CSG strongly supported the strengthening of the environmental dimension.

BirdLife International's direct experience of Natura 2000 has taught us that Member States' uptake of measures for Natura 2000 is not sufficient to ensure the ambitious support envisaged by the Commission. Therefore, the

Community Strategic Guidelines must emphasise that biodiversity and the proper management of Natura 2000 are EU priorities – and ensure that this is acknowledged in the preparation and allocation of Funds in the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and Operational Programmes.

The Regulations must also contain safeguards to prevent damage to Natura 2000 sites and species, and extend similar protection to the habitats of endemic and globally threatened species in the outermost regions of the EU.

BirdLife is addressing the wider sustainable development issues as part of a coalition of European environmental NGOs. For further details please visit www.coalition-on-eufunds.org

The Austrian Presidency should:

- Ensure that the General Regulation for the ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund includes a new article laying down the requirement for Member States and the Commission to promote the protection and improvement of the environment in the various stages of implementing the Funds
- Ensure that the ERDF, the ESF and the Cohesion Fund are required to support the proper management of Natura 2000 network
- Ensure that Member States show how they intend to finance the needs of Natura 2000 network, and that the Commission does not approve Member States' National Strategic Reference Frameworks or Operational Programmes or release funds, until it is confident that adequate provision for it has been put in place
- Support the suspension of payments to projects which damage wildlife protected under EC nature legislation

Rural Development

The dramatic and persistent decline in biodiversity, the degradation of habitats, soil, water and traditional landscapes, are among the well known effects of the CAP. Despite the big financial contribution made by EU taxpayers to farming, these negative effects are also matched by depopulation and lack of employment opportunities for those living in rural communities.

BirdLife International advocates that public money allocated to the countryside via the CAP should pay for public goods. Even though the recent budget deal leaves the EU's Rural Development policy severely under funded, if well used it

could still become the primary mechanism for delivering sustainable land management in the EU over the period 2007-2013, for the benefit of natural landscapes, rural communities, EU wildlife and the environment as a whole.

To ensure the most effective outcome, it is important to conclude as soon as possible the adoption of the Implementing Regulation and Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development. It is also important to ensure the adoption of a comprehensive and EU wide system of monitoring, based on sound indicators and including specific biodiversity indicators such as the Farmland birds indicator.

The Austrian Presidency should:

- Ensure the swift adoption of the Implementing Regulation and Strategic Guidelines for Rural Development, as proposed by the Commission
- Promote the adoption, in the Implementing Regulation of a comprehensive system of meaningful baseline and impact indicators; including specific biodiversity indicators such as the farmland bird indicator
- Promote the use of agri-environment and other Rural development schemes as a main tool to halt the decline of biodiversity by 2010

Sitta europaea

LIFE+ and Natura 2000 financing

The European Commission estimates that EUR 6.1 billion per year is needed to finance the management of the EU's Natura 2000 network of protected areas, which covers more than 17 per cent of the EU's surface area.

BirdLife supports the Commission's model of integrating Natura 2000 financing into the EU's major land use and marine programmes: the Rural Development fund, the Structural Funds and the European Fisheries Fund. However, a significant funding gap exists for a number of nature conservation measures that are vital for Europe's most threatened habitats and species, which should be co-financed by the LIFE+ instrument. BirdLife studies suggest that between 2007 and 2013 this gap will amount to EUR 9.2 billion.

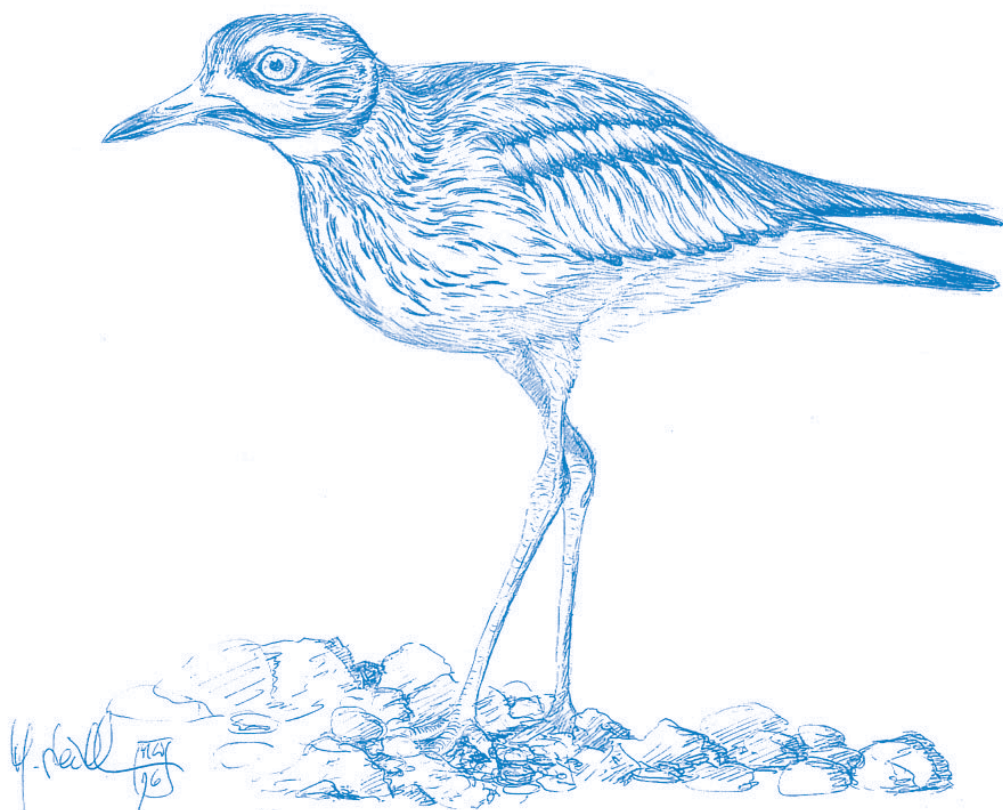
BirdLife therefore strongly supports the European Parliament's First Reading demand to increase the budget for LIFE+ to EUR 9.54 billion from the EUR 2.19 billion proposed by the Commission.

While the major funding programmes over the period 2007-2013 - Rural Development, Structural Funds and the European Fisheries Fund - are likely to present opportunities for Natura 2000 financing, the regulations offer few guarantees that sufficient funds will be allocated to the network. BirdLife believes that EU funds should not be released under each of these policies until Member States can show how they intend to finance Natura 2000. Without such 'conditionality', the Commission's vision for a comprehensively financed Natura 2000 is unlikely to be achieved.

The Austrian Presidency could play a vital role in brokering a final agreement on the Financial Perspective and key funding Regulations for Natura 2000: LIFE+, the Rural Development Regulation, the Structural Funds and Fisheries Fund Regulations. It is vital that these funding regulations, and their associated Strategic Guidelines, reflect Natura 2000 as a priority for funding.

The Austrian Presidency should:

- Ensure that Natura 2000 financing is highlighted as a funding priority in the final deal on the Financial Perspective
- Support the European Parliament's proposal to allocate EURO 9.54 billion to LIFE+, while minimising restrictions on eligibility for co-financing Natura 2000 and species management that are currently proposed in the LIFE+ regulation
- Strengthen the Strategic Guidelines and associated Implementing Regulations for the Structural Funds, European Fisheries Fund and Rural Development Fund to ensure that Member States are required to show how they intend to finance Natura 2000 as a condition for the release of those funds
- Help establish an obligation by the Commission Directorate for the Environment to maintain an overview of Member State spending on Natura 2000 and nature after 2007 from the different funds and take action if spending insufficient or untargetted



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Avian Influenza and wild bird trade

Concern over Avian Influenza has been running high during autumn 2005, especially after the discovery of the highly pathogenic virus in Turkey, Romania, Croatia and the UK. Avian Influenza is a common disease in birds. The current strain of H5N1 in Asia and Europe is highly pathogenic and is thought to have evolved in poultry, and then spread to wild birds, probably in Asia. It is still unclear how the virus is spreading around the globe. BirdLife has stressed repeatedly that evidence that wild bird movements and migrations are spreading the virus is very weak. More likely ways of spreading are movements (legal and illegal) of poultry and poultry products, imports (legal and illegal) of live wild birds or parts of, and movement of mud on vehicles and people. The threat by imports of wild live birds was demonstrated clearly by the case of the mesias (a type of finch) that died in quarantine in the UK.

As a consequence BirdLife has been calling for a series of measures that would limit the risk factors from all these possible sources and thankfully many of those are reflected by Commission action. BirdLife supports the Commission Decisions on increased biosecurity measures, including measures on keeping wild birds and poultry apart, a ban of use of live decoys for hunting, as well as its decision on a ban of imports of captive wild birds until the end of January.

BirdLife also supports swift culls of infected poultry stocks, although it recognises that certain communities dependent on poultry farming can be severely affected by those.

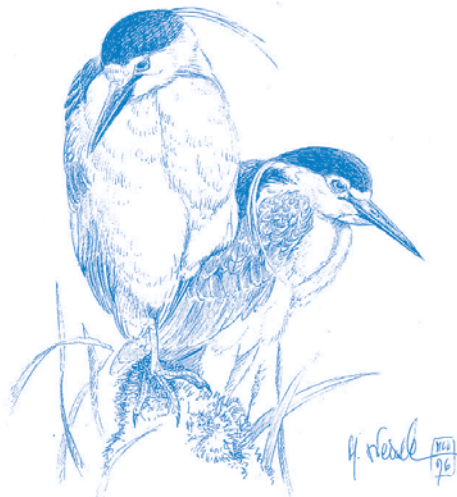
The European Union also has a responsibility to support countries in Africa and Asia to monitor and address the problem. Countries in these parts of the world are much more at risk than Europe, but lack resources and capacity to act.

During the Austrian Presidency Avian Influenza could potentially continue to be a hot issue and for this reason BirdLife urges the Austrian Presidency to call for some measures and to concentrate efforts on actions which are really needed.

BirdLife believes that the temporary ban on imports of wild birds into the EU should be extended permanently for conservation reasons. In the short term it should be extended for health reasons also. The EU, the world's largest importer of wild birds, should follow the example set by other countries such as the USA and Australia and ban this trade that causes harm to many species of rare birds. We would support exceptions to this ban, on a case-by-case basis, if it could be proved that trade were sustainable and provided benefits for the conservation of the bird species concerned.

The Austrian Presidency should:

- Support statements to ensure that culling of wild birds is not used anywhere in Europe or abroad (to the extent possible) as a way of controlling the spread of the disease
- Ensure that all EU borders are secure against unauthorised and uninspected (from the health point of view) poultry and all poultry products, as well as any incorporated into foodstuffs for people and animals, including fish, and in fertilizer
- Ensure that the EU supports countries in Asia and Africa for taking strict biosecurity measures and to establish adequate monitoring
- Discuss the possibility of a permanent ban on imports of wild caught birds on conservation grounds, into the EU at the June Environment Council; furthermore, the Presidency should encourage the Commission to come forward with a study on the sustainability and associated risks of the wild bird trade before that date



Nycticorax nycticorax

EU Biodiversity Strategy and the CBD COP

In 1998, the EU adopted its Biodiversity Strategy in order to implement the requirements of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In Gothenburg in 2001 the Heads of State agreed the target of 'Halting biodiversity loss by 2010'.

Yet, biodiversity continues to decline at an alarming rate in the European Union. Populations of farmland birds – Europe's top indicator on the state of biodiversity – have sharply fallen over recent years. Unless urgent action is taken, the EU will fail to meet its commitment to halt biodiversity loss by 2010.

This is not only worrying in its own right. Preserving nature and functioning ecosystems also brings significant benefits to local economies, our health and education and is fundamental for a good quality of life.

Some time in the first half of 2006, the European Commission is expected to present its new Biodiversity Communication containing a 'delivery plan' on how to meet the 2010 target. This Communication is the outcome of a long consultation, which already produced several important recommendations, such as the conclusions of the Malahide conference on biodiversity, the Environment Council's response to those conclusions and the conclusions of the 'Bergen op Zoom' conference on twenty-five years of the Birds Directive, all of which took place during 2004.

Finally, in 2006 the CBD Convention will have its 8th Conference of the Parties and the EU will be represented there by the Austrian Presidency. The meeting will also review progress towards the achievement of the global 2010 Target agreed by Heads of State at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) to 'significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010'.

The Austrian Presidency should:

- Ensure that the Commission presents an ambitious Biodiversity Communication by May 2006, with clear targets and timetables for meeting the target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010
- Ensure that the Communication is based on the objectives and targets agreed by stakeholders in the 'Malahide Message' and the conclusions of the Bergen op Zoom conference
- Ensure that the EU demonstrates leadership at the CBD COP, especially on the implementation of Articles 20 & 21 of the CBD on Financial Resources and the Financial Mechanism by:
 - a) undertaking to provide adequate financial support and incentives with respect to meeting its obligations as a Contracting Party
 - b) presenting an ambitious target to provide new and additional financial resources to enable developing country Parties to fulfil their obligations to the CBD and especially to meet the target of 'significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss'



Vanellus vanellus

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 Austrian Presidency was produced by the European Community Office of BirdLife International and BirdLife Österreich, the Partner of BirdLife International in Austria. For further information please contact either:

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