

Science first, say 235 experts on the EU Invasive Alien Species policy proposal

Title

A group of 235 individual experts and organisations from 36 countries, including 23 EU Member States, are calling on the European institutions to adopt a more science-based approach to the European Commission's proposal on the regulation of invasive alien species.

Invasive alien species (IAS) are organisms introduced by people outside of their natural habitat whose populations grow out of control and affect native ecosystems. They are one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss globally, and can also affect human health while causing serious economic damage. In the EU alone, the **economic cost** of the damage caused by IAS has been calculated to be at least €12 billion annually.

This autumn, the European Commission published its long-awaited legislative proposal to address the **negative impacts** of IAS. Although it was welcomed by conservation organisations, the proposal nevertheless presents certain failures. A key concern is capping EU action at 50 species, despite the fact that there are at least 1,500 invasive species already present in the EU and the number is increasing every day. Invasive species can only be tackled successfully through a flexible, precautionary approach, because it is impossible to predict which species will cause problems, and where.

Leading experts on IAS in Europe and beyond, from universities, research institutes and conservation organisations, are alarmed by the danger this cap presents for wildlife. They have launched a **joint Call** for a science-based approach on the development of the IAS EU policy. They believe that strategies and policies on invasive alien species should be guided by the latest knowledge to ensure that action is taken where it is most needed.

Invasive alien species predate on native species, compete for resources such as food, hybridize with them, and disrupt and destroy natural habitats. They introduce pathogens, parasites and diseases to other habitats thereby weakening and killing native species. IAS have been partly or wholly responsible for the extinction of at least 68 bird species over the last 500 years.

Failing to effectively address the IAS issue would mean failing to meet the Convention on Biological Diversity and EU targets for 2020, and would represent a missed opportunity to

address a major driver of biodiversity loss.

For more information please contact [Elodie Cantaloube](#), Media and Communication Officer at BirdLife Europe.



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