

Sea ducks in rough water?

Title

The 2012 IUCN Red List for birds released by BirdLife International gave a strong warning message that the risk of extinction has increased substantially for nearly 100 species of Amazonian birds. What are the results for Europe?

Detailed surveys in the Baltic Sea for the period 2007-2009 revealed that almost 3 million Long-tailed Ducks *Clangula hyemalis* have disappeared from the Baltic Sea since the previous survey in 1992-1993. This sharp decline in numbers resulted in the species being uplisted to Vulnerable. The Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri* was already listed as Vulnerable but has decreased by 66% in the Baltic Sea, while the fortunes of another sea duck, the Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca* are even worse, with the species now being listed as Endangered. Overall, the numbers of sea duck species wintering in the Baltic Sea have declined by about 60%.

As these sea ducks feed on bivalves (like mussels, clams and oysters, whose populations are also declining and changing in size and distribution), ecosystem changes and global warming are plausible causes. Factors such as predation, diseases and nutritional deficiencies are also present. But the direct threats identified are caused by human activities, eg degradation of the seafloor life caused by fishing as well as oil pollution, bycatch in fisheries, hunting and pollution by hazardous chemicals. Not all of these factors are the ultimate reason for the decline but their cumulative effect and the fact that they can be contained by targeted management and legislation makes them important for consideration. Read more on <http://seaducks.hgo.se/>

Unfortunately this was not the only bad news about our European breeding birds. The Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* was uplisted to Endangered because a revised population trend analysis indicates that it may be undergoing a very rapid decline. This negative trend is a result of unsustainable capture for the falconry trade, as well as habitat degradation and the impacts of agrochemicals, and the rate of decline appears to be particularly severe in Central Asian breeding grounds. The status revision is based on careful review of the latest available evidence from across the range but the situation is dynamic with still large gaps in the information to be filled.

Surveys are urgently needed to produce more robust and less uncertain population estimates, in particular for China, Russia and Mongolia. Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*, which breeds only in the central and western Mediterranean, was uplisted to Vulnerable as it is estimated to be undergoing a rapid population decline, caused by extremely low breeding success and adult survival owing to fisheries bycatch and predation by introduced mammals. Another European endemic, Rock Partridge *Alectoris graeca* was uplisted to Near Threatened

since the species is likely to be undergoing a moderately rapid population reduction owing to habitat degradation and hybridization in some areas of its range, which is limited to Sicily, Italy, the Alps and Balkans. The involvement of BirdLife Europe doesn't stop at collecting the scientific data for the Red List. We are now promoting the further development and implementation of the species action plans and a better protection for the biodiversity of the Baltic Sea. For more information please contact [Willem Van Den Bossche](#), EU Conservation Officer at BirdLife Europe
