Spring Alive 2011 ready to fly, with some bright and brand new feathers

Title
BirdLife and its Partners have announced the start of Spring Alive 2011: a European-wide project that invites families with young children to communicate their first personal observations of migratory birds arriving near their home. Participants are encouraged to add their observations to the Spring Alive 2011 website, where tens of thousands of sightings will contribute to an online map, allowing visitors to track the arrival of migratory birds across Europe as the season pans out.

Now in its fifth year, Spring Alive tracks five migrant species including the Common Swift *Apus apus*, Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* and a very colourful newcomer in 2011: the European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*!

One of Europe's most colourful birds, European Bee-eaters are doubly conspicuous thanks to their willingness to perch on wires, dead trees and other elevated areas where they spot their insect prey. Bee-eaters are particularly social, often found in large flocks when not migrating and even helping to raise each others' chicks. Migration takes a heavy toll on this species, with scientists estimating that only one out of every three European Bee-Eaters to leave Europe in Autumn will return in Spring.

Aimed at children aged 8-12, Spring Alive is a simple and fun way for parents to involve their children in the wonder of Europe’s spring migration. The website also offers a great source of kid-friendly information for budding ornithologists. Over 30 Birdlife Partners currently participate in Spring Alive events, contributing to enhancing a family-oriented approach to nature education by showing how attractive and engaging outdoor entertainment within family circles can be. #

Spring Alive 2011’s Polish-based International Coordinator, Karolina Kalinowska, explained “What we, the ornithology organisations, are also interested in is to know the day [on which] most people first see each species each year.” Through such observation, which children can communicate in a simple way through the Spring Alive website, ornithologists hope to see whether these five bird species arrive in Europe earlier or later than usual, which might indicate a change in global temperatures.

In this way, Spring Alive may additionally contribute to raising awareness of climate change issues amongst European youth. Spring Alive would not be possible without support from its major sponsor, The Mitsubishi Corporation Fund for Europe and Africa (MCFEA). MCFEA aims to encourage the appreciation and conservation of flora and fauna, with an emphasis on endangered species. The campaign is also financially supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

The Mitsubishi Corporation Fund for Europe and Africa

www.springalive.net