

# Twenty candles for SPEA and a large range of achievements for nature in Portugal

## Title

November was a moment of celebration for the Portuguese Society for the Study of Birds - SPEA. Twenty years of work for the protection of the environment and the study of birds is a special accomplishment, worthy of celebration with founders, members and friends. To mark the occasion, SPEA organised the planting of endemic trees in Azores, birdwatching in Madeira and Alentejo to watch the Great Bustards (our Bird of the Year 2013), and an institutional event in Lisbon, where 20 milestones and remarkable moments for 20 years were shared and remembered.

Among the most relevant milestones is the start of regional representation both in Madeira and in the Azores islands leading to effective local intervention on threatened and critically endangered species. SPEA became part of the BirdLife International family in 1999, and soon after, SPEA's voice echoed at international levels - a crucial turning point for a small organisation that demonstrated willingness and capacity to embrace big challenges.

SPEA's ability to reach and involve a large number of people was strengthened through the Prestige Petroleum spill in Galicia, near Portugal's sea coast. Hundreds of volunteers worked together to save the birds affected by this huge environmental disaster, and although the consequences will never be entirely known, personal engagement with the cause was absolutely astonishing and signalled the true launch of the organisation's volunteer force.

More recently, the protection of Salgados Lagoon has been a true highlight of SPEA's mission and work. This important hot spot for birds in the Algarve has been a target of several damaging developments and the difficulty of having it declared a Special Protection Area (SPA) hasn't helped. The fight against the construction of a big resort is still ongoing and negatively affecting thousands of birds that spend their time eating and breeding in the lagoon.

Projects like LIFE Priolo (which won prizes such as the 'Best of the Best LIFE' in 2009) and the LIFE Marine IBA Programme have attained several national environmental awards. They continue to serve as impressive examples of landmarks that have confirmed SPEA staff's quality of work.

Since 2011, SPEA has worked closely with Cape Verde, Sao Tomé and Príncipe to prevent the extinction of their threatened species. Deforestation, hunting and the introduction of

invasive alien species are some of the region's main threats since some bird species are already near the brick of the extinction.

Nowadays SPEA is striving to take on new challenges and demands by working even further beyond the protection of birds. Fisheries, agriculture, deforestation and illegal hunting are all priorities that need to be addressed in order to make the world a better place for future generations. SPEA believes that its know-how can be a contribution for society, a tribute for a more sustainable country and an example to be followed by many more!

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