

Birds show the way to halt biodiversity loss

Title

Birds and the information we hold about them can be used to focus and track the efforts needed to stem biodiversity loss, according to a new publication launched by BirdLife International. Action is urgently needed to stem the loss of natural habitats and halt human-induced extinction of species, which are undermining the natural processes and services on which humanity depends. Since 1970, animal populations have declined by 30% and the extent and condition of most habitats is in decline. The world's governments have made commitments through the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to tackle the issue, and the CBD has proposed 20 targets for 2020 in order to re-focus action. Concerted action will be needed to meet these targets, and it is vital that we can track our progress towards achieving them. For this, simple and effective indicators are essential. A new BirdLife report, *Meeting the 2020 biodiversity targets: action and monitoring based on birds*, outlines how birds can help to focus effective action towards meeting the 2020 targets. It also shows how the wealth of data available for birds can be used to track the success or failure of our collective response to the unfolding biodiversity crisis. "Having failed to hit the 2010 targets, we cannot afford to fail again", said Dr Leon Bennun, BirdLife's Director of Science, Policy and Information. "Governments, civil society and businesses must all pull together to tackle the pressing issue of biodiversity loss" and birds signpost some very practical ways to make progress. "Birds are very useful for identifying the specific actions required to meet these new targets, and for tracking the implementation and impact of such actions", said Dr Stuart Butchart, BirdLife's Global Research and Indicators Coordinator. "Being widespread, well studied, and highly responsive to environmental change, birds are very valuable indicators." An example is provided by the Important Bird Area (IBA) Protection Index. IBAs represent a core set of about 10,000 of the most important sites for biodiversity conservation across the globe. The index measures the degree to which these priority sites are covered by protected areas and provides a useful guide to judge progress in tackling biodiversity loss. IBA indices show that sites with formal protection are in better and more stable condition than those without. Currently, only 39% of the area of each IBA is protected on average, and only 26% of sites are completely protected. The report also outlines how birds provide compelling evidence of the impact climate change is already having on biodiversity. A recent study shows that for European birds, over the last two decades, three times as many species have been negatively impacted by climate change than positively affected. Information from birds can also help guide efforts to adapt to climate change. Modelling of the future potential ranges of all species within Africa's IBAs, for instance, suggests that, despite substantial shifts in the ranges of many bird species, the continent's IBA network will play a key role in mitigating the worst impacts of climate change on birds. Biodiversity concerns need to be incorporated into

national planning across all sectors of government. Data from birds can be used to ensure this is done effectively, and to monitor the degree to which development is sustainable. For instance, the UK government has adopted an index based on wild bird populations as one of its 15 headline Quality of Life indicators. ?Our wealth of data on birds, their populations and habitats have contributed significantly to our understanding of rate, pattern and drivers of biodiversity loss. They now can also show us the way to halt and reverse this loss, and to track governments? progress in achieving this?, concluded Dr Butchart. To download the report [click here](#)