

Only international action will save migratory birds

Title

Populations of long-distance migratory landbirds are declining so rapidly in the African-Eurasian flyway that a delegation of 20 staff from around the BirdLife International Partnership will be lobbying this week for their plight to be addressed at a meeting focused on conserving the world's migratory species. The decline of these birds is so severe that conservationists believe the only way to save them is through concerted international action.

So far, tropical African countries, including Ghana, have been leading this call. The BirdLife International Partnership hope this plea will be heeded by all countries sharing these birds, and especially the governments attending this week's tenth [Conference of Parties \(COP\) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals \(CMS\)](#). A resolution tabled at the meeting calls for broad-scale action to improve the conservation status of African-Eurasian migratory landbirds which, if adopted, could help halt or reverse the catastrophic decline in numbers of many species of birds which migrate long-distance between Europe and Africa.

African-Eurasian migratory landbirds are not covered by current flyway initiatives and conservation activities, as identified in the existing CMS flyway resolution. "For many of the fastest declining species, the main drivers of decline appear to be away from European breeding grounds", said Dr Leon Bennun, BirdLife International's Director of Science. "Without coordinated action, range states will fail to meet their biodiversity targets", said Dr Bennun, adding "No amount of effort within one country or one region can stop these declines!".

Dr Danaë Sheehan - an RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) scientist who has been studying these species in both Europe and Africa - and who will be speaking for these birds at the Bergen conference. She said: "Migrant birds connect Europe and Africa, crossing our borders, cultures and lives. Millions of birds make this incredible long-distance journey twice each year in spring and autumn. But each year the numbers spanning the two continents are reducing rapidly. "With dramatic land use change in both Europe and Africa, and hazards on migration, such as illegal killing in the Mediterranean, these birds have enormous struggles ahead. Without international co-operation, we're concerned that these species will continue their downward path."

The situation for some birds, including turtle doves, warblers and flycatchers, across Europe has become so severe that the BirdLife International Partnership are urging that these species

should be the focus of co-ordinated international conservation action. The BirdLife International delegation will be calling on Parties present at Bergen to show support for a resolution for action, submitted by Ghana, and supported by other African nations. The resolution urges Parties to the Convention, and other stakeholders, to develop an action plan for the conservation of African-Eurasian migrant landbirds and their habitats throughout the flyway connecting Europe and Africa.

Migratory landbirds nesting in Europe and wintering in Africa (south of the Sahara desert) are showing the most alarming and significant population declines. Unlike waterbirds, they are not restricted to individual sites and they migrate on a very broad front. So, site-based conservation initiatives simply will not be effective in preventing further declines. Instead, conservationists need to work in a broad range of habitats, across wider landscapes, improving the environment for both people and wildlife. For instance in the UK between 1995 and 2008, the populations of four summer-visiting birds declined by more than half: turtle dove (-70 per cent); wood warbler (-61 per cent); nightingale (-53 per cent); and yellow wagtail (-52 per cent).

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