

Red List for Birds 2013: Number of Critically Endangered birds hits new high

Title

The number of bird species listed as Critically Endangered has reached an all-time high with the release of this year's Red List for birds by BirdLife International.

White-winged Flufftail *Sarothrura ayresi*, a secretive and unobtrusive sub-Saharan bird, is the latest species to join the growing list of those on the very edge of extinction. Destruction and degradation of its high altitude wet grassland habitat, including wetland drainage, conversion for agriculture, water abstraction, overgrazing by livestock and cutting of marsh vegetation, have driven it to this precarious state. Urgent action is now needed in both Ethiopia and South Africa to better understand the species' ecology and to address these threats and save it from extinction.

'Almost 200 species of bird are now in real danger of being lost forever', said Dr Leon Bennun, BirdLife's Director of Science, Policy and Information. 'They are being hit on multiple fronts. Habitat loss, agricultural changes, invasive species and climate change are the principle threats. Without these problems being addressed the list will continue to grow.'

Critically Endangered is the highest risk category of the IUCN Red List of threatened species, comprising those that are facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* has declined catastrophically over recent years due to uncontrolled trapping in its wintering grounds in southern China and South-East Asia. This once-common species, which was listed as Least Concern as recently as 2000, has been uplisted three times in the past decade alone, and is now considered Endangered – just one step away from becoming the next addition to the Critically Endangered list.

However, there is also good news and real signs that conservation action works.

How much will it cost to prevent further extinctions?

Two species of albatross - one of the most threatened of the planet's bird families - are now considered to be at a lower risk of extinction after increases in their populations.

Black-browed and Black-footed Albatrosses have both been downlisted to lower Red List categories, said Andy Symes, BirdLife's Global Species Officer. "There is still some way to go, but this gives us great hope for turning around the fortunes of other albatrosses."

Bycatch in fisheries is the main threat, and efforts are underway in many longline and trawl fleets worldwide to reduce the numbers killed. If we can keep this up, there is real hope that the Black-browed and Black-footed Albatross will set a trend for the future.

On the Indian Ocean island of Rodrigues, two species - Rodrigues Fody *Foudia flavicans* and Rodrigues Warbler *Acrocephalus rodericanus* - have also been downlisted as a result of conservation action. Habitat protection and reforestation, spurred by the need for watershed protection, have been key to the recovery of these species, aided by the recent absence of catastrophic cyclones. Although much reforestation has involved exotic trees, native ecosystem rehabilitation has been started at some sites. These are fenced to exclude grazing animals and woodcutters, exotic plants removed and native species replanted, and there has been an accompanying public awareness campaign.

"This year's Red List is a mix of good and bad news, but once again it shows that conservation groups around the globe are succeeding in saving species and preventing extinction - and these committed efforts now need to be greatly scaled up", concluded Dr Bennun.

BirdLife is the Red List Authority for birds for the IUCN Red List. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ (or the IUCN Red List) is the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of plant and animal species. It is based on an objective system for assessing the risk of extinction of a species should no conservation action be taken.

Find out how the BirdLife Partnership is [Preventing Extinction](#)
