

Brussels – 2 October 2015

## EU admits failing own targets on protecting nature

The mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 published today [Friday 2 October] by the European Commission shows only limited progress has been made on many of the key targets set at the start of this decade, with a complete failure to address unsustainable agriculture<sup>[1]</sup>.

The review reveals that the European Union is failing many of its own targets for reversing the decline in biodiversity, keeping many plants and animals under threat of extinction.

There are also failings in targets to restore ecosystems, with only one of the EU's 28 member countries presenting a basic restoration plan.

The Commission's findings match warnings BirdLife Europe itself made with its own report '*Halfway There?*'. The review, released in June, documented massive failings in addressing the ecological crisis facing EU farmland. There have been huge reductions in the number of farmland birds in the EU since 1980 and negative trends show no sign of reversing. Indeed, an alarming wave of grassland destruction is affecting many European countries.

BirdLife Europe's Head of EU Policy, Ariel Brunner, stated: "This review sadly confirms our analysis that the EU is failing on biodiversity, with agriculture as the outstanding disaster zone.

"While overall Europe is not on track, the review confirms that where properly implemented, the Birds and Habitats Directives are delivering recovery of threatened species. During its Fitness Check of these laws, the Commission needs to stand firm against heavy pressure from Member States and industrial lobbies who want to change and weaken them.

"This review shows the EU needs to focus on fixing its broken farm policy and on fully implementing its environmental legislation, not on re-opening laws that are the only parts of the biodiversity strategy that are actually delivering."

The Birds and Habitats Directives are central to the EU Biodiversity Strategy, but are currently lacking the support and funding needed in order to get results.

As a result of the Nature Alert campaign being led by BirdLife Europe and other conservation organisations, more than half a million people, the overwhelming majority of responses, called on the Commission in a public consultation to maintain and fully implement the directives.

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**Notes:**

The European Commission's full report is available to view here:

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/2020.htm>

BirdLife Europe's own mid-term assessment is available to view here:

<http://www.birdlife.org/sites/default/files/attachments/BIRDLIFE%20MID-TERM%20ASSESSMENT%20MID-RES.pdf>

[1] - The Commission gives an overview of the choices that Member States have made within the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (P.17-32 of the Commission Staff Working Document – EU Assessment of Progress in Implementing The EU Biodiversity Strategy To 2020).

A couple of the most problematic points that stand out are:

- It states that for the Ecological Focus Areas (the greening element that is supposed to contribute most to biodiversity) the most popular element chosen by Member States is nitrogen fixing crops (all Member States bar Denmark). Nitrogen fixing crops, with unclear outcomes for biodiversity depending on its management, has been a very controversial element that has been added by the co-legislators.
- Almost half of the Member States have designated less than half of the grasslands within Natura 2000 as environmentally sensitive, thereby denying them the extra protection they need. As grasslands are already very much under threat, this is a crucial measure to protect biodiversity.
- The Commission also admits that the proposed new Cross Compliance Measure to protect wetlands and carbon rich soils has not been retained in the final Common Agricultural Policy, another important measure protecting crucial habitats has thereby not been retained.
- Only 0.7% has been allocated in the Rural Development Programmes (that have so far been approved) to the Natura 2000 and Water Framework Directive measure. Natura 2000 hosts our most important biodiversity.

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BirdLife Europe is a Partnership of nature conservation organisations in 47 countries, including all EU Member States, and a leader in bird conservation. Through its unique local to global approach BirdLife Europe delivers high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.