

The Messengers: what birds tell us about the threats from climate change

A new report, jointly published by BirdLife International and the National Audubon Society, draws on bird science showing that climate change is already affecting life, and that negative effects will increase in the future. The solution? Bank on nature.

Birds are among the best-studied species and they are powerful sentinels for the natural world. They are telling us how climate change threatens nature and people.

The Messengers, the report jointly published today [Friday 27 November] by BirdLife International and the National Audubon Society (BirdLife's Partner in the US), gathers hundreds of peer-reviewed studies illustrating the many ways climate change threatens us and our birds. It is also a collection of examples in which BirdLife Partners, leaders in nature-based solutions, help birds and communities become more resilient in a warming world.

Patricia Zurita, CEO of BirdLife International, and **David Yarnold**, President and CEO of the National Audubon Society, write in their foreword: “*Over time and across cultures, birds have sent us signals about the health of our environment. Miners no longer use canaries as early warning systems, but birds are our closest connection to wildlife on the planet and they still tell us about the health of the places people and birds share. Never before has their message – climate change is here and a threat to the survival of birds and people – been as clear or as urgent.*”

The report identifies the following expected impacts:

- Climate change will result in more losers than winners;
- Most bird species are expected to experience shrinking ranges, increasing the risk of extinction;
- Many species may not shift their distributions as fast as climate changes, resulting in population declines;
- Ecological communities and interactions between species will be disrupted;
- Current threats, including extreme weather and diseases, will be exacerbated;
- People will experience many of the same risks, and their responses could endanger nature.

Despite the severity of these threats, the report also includes a strong message of hope as world leaders gather in Paris to negotiate a global climate change agreement. The report emphasises solutions to build natural resilience for generations of people to come.

The report's final section illustrates how BirdLife Partners around the world are engaging in the following solutions for nature and people:

- Promoting clean energy solutions for people and nature;
- Protecting and restoring carbon-rich ecosystems;
- Conserving, managing, and better connecting key sites to help species adapt;
- Implementing ecosystem-based adaptation to build people's resilience;
- Using birds to engage people with nature, understand climate change and take action.

Dr Stuart Butchart, Head of Science at BirdLife International and lead author of the report, stated: "*The report brings together for the first time striking evidence from around the world that climate change is already causing negative population impacts for many species. It also synthesises many regional studies to conclude that **the number of species expected to do worse is more than twice the number that may benefit.** However, a suite of case studies show that BirdLife Partners are pioneering solutions to help species adapt.*"

Edward Perry, Global Climate Change Policy Coordinator at BirdLife International and co-author of the report, stated: "*Nature has a vital role to play in tackling climate change, but it's often ignored. Healthy ecosystems sequester and store massive amounts of carbon, while providing people with a first line of defence against flood, drought and other climate hazards. From the tropical forests of Sumatra to the drylands of the Sahel, the BirdLife Partnership is working with communities, governments and the private sector to conserve and restore these ecosystems. This report demonstrates that **nature-based solutions not only offer an effective and accessible response to climate change: they also deliver a series of benefits to people and biodiversity.***"

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Notes to the editor:

The BirdLife and National Audubon Society's '*The Messengers*' report is available for download here: <https://goo.gl/wMnngU> (and in high resolution here: <https://goo.gl/xlc5Ba>)

The online version of the report will be viewable from Friday here: <http://climatechange.birdlife.org>

For the duration of COP21, the BirdLife community will be participating in the debate using the hashtag: **#BirdsTellUs**

Examples from the report:



In Europe, Atlantic Puffin has declined at a rate of 50% over 3 generations. Climate change is exacerbating the problem.



The extent of sea-ice has always allowed Adélie penguins to access food-rich areas. Some populations have declined by 50% because the young penguins can't reach food anymore.



An additional 52 million people in 84 countries will be vulnerable to coastal storm surges by 2100.



Lower crop yields from climate change will mean an additional 25 million children will suffer from malnutrition by 2050.

More photos and infographics are available for download here: <https://goo.gl/M71As9>

BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation Partnership. Together we are 119 BirdLife Partners in 117 countries – and growing, with almost 13 million supporters, 7,000 local conservation groups and 7,400 staff.

The National Audubon Society saves birds and their habitats throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education and on-the-ground conservation. Audubon's state programs, nature centers, chapters and partners have an unparalleled wingspan that reaches millions of people each year to inform, inspire and unite diverse communities in conservation action. Since 1905, Audubon's vision has been a world in which people and wildlife thrive. Audubon is a nonprofit conservation organization. Learn more at www.audubon.org and @audubonsociety.