

**BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL WORLD CONSERVATION CONFERENCE AND GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP MEETING 2008:  
REFLECTIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND THANKS FROM BIRDLIFE'S DIRECTOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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Thank you for attending the BirdLife World Conference and Global Partnership Meeting in Buenos Aires last month, it was tremendous to have so many participants. This note summarises my personal reflections on the meeting, lists the main conclusions and expresses our gratitude to the many people and organisations that made the event possible. It also seeks your feedback on the meeting from which we can learn in preparation for future BirdLife gatherings. We ask you now to take a little time to provide your perspectives on the World Conference by filling in the evaluation form on line by clicking the link below, which will help the newly elected Council in their review and subsequent planning for the next conference. We would be grateful if you could complete the questionnaire by 22 November 2008.  
([http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=W\\_2bYk8ngSJIAzg8IAf8pSTQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=W_2bYk8ngSJIAzg8IAf8pSTQ_3d_3d)).

With the human world in financial turmoil this is not a moment to lose our focus on conserving the natural world, much of which provides the key services on which we depend for our own survival, and that of future generations. As shown by BirdLife's latest report on global biodiversity, *State of the World's Birds*, nature continues to decline, often at accelerating rates and, despite greater public awareness of the value of ecosystems and many new government commitments to conserving the environment, the resources desperately needed for conservation have scarcely grown in the last ten years. As we saw so strikingly in Buenos Aires, the BirdLife Partnership, increasingly in collaboration with others, know much more about the state of and threats to biodiversity, knows what needs to be done and how to do it, and has, over the last four years, put an increasing number of practical solutions in place to conserve birds and other biodiversity, improve livelihoods (especially of the poor) and strengthen local and national capacity to sustain such action. The task we faced at this World Conference was how to build on this success to ensure that BirdLife really does contribute to the "millennium challenge". Did we succeed?

For me this meeting marked a major breakthrough in BirdLife's evolution. It combined our core values and traditional strengths - species and science, sites and action, habitats and policy, people and capacity development - with wider perspectives on how the Partnership can make a significant and distinct contribution to issues like human wellbeing, local livelihoods, climate change and energy (especially biofuels). As with most BirdLife meetings, it was intimate, fast moving, exciting and exhausting, but, as I said at the end, the combination of professionalism and passion from across the Partnership was quite amazing and reached a new high. In talking with many of the participants from outside the formal BirdLife Network, I was really pleased to hear them all say they felt it was highly productive, interesting and an inclusive meeting (not just a family gathering, a comment made about some previous BirdLife events).

The active participation of our Honorary President, HIH Princess Takamado, Rare Bird Club Presidents, Margaret Atwood and Graeme Gibson, over 20 RBC members, and a wide range of other conservation champions and supporters greatly enhanced the meeting itself and the publicity it generated in Argentina and worldwide. Aves Argentinas did a remarkable job of utilizing the meeting to raise awareness of local and global conservation issues, increase their own profile and link conservation to economic and social benefits for Argentina.

524 people attended the meeting from 124 nations, including 391 from the BirdLife Network. Between us we took part in and contributed to 169 sessions, giving or viewing over 450 presentations! Several key publications were launched at the Conference, including *State of the World's Birds: indicators for our changing world* (in Spanish, French and English), *Critically Endangered birds: a global audit*, *Birds and people: bonds in a timeless journey*, many National and Regional IBA Inventories, the BirdLife position paper on Climate Change, and a special issue of the BirdLife journal *Bird Conservation International* in memory of Colin Bibby. Following a one-year pilot, supported by the British Birdwatching Fair, the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme was launched to the Partnership, providing a dynamic new way of saving species and raising support and awareness of the looming extinction crisis. The exciting new BirdLife Flyway Campaign was launched, and the Conference was widely reported in the press and media in over 25 countries, 100 newspapers and 200 media outlets.

During the meeting BirdLife International adopted a new strategy, *A Strategy for Birds and People 2009-2015*, which maintains the Partnership's focus on saving species, protecting sites, conserving habitats and empowering people but also sets an ambitious agenda for combating climate change, addressing seabird and marine conservation and tackling flyway conservation. It calls for the recognition of the strong links between biodiversity conservation, mitigating and adapting to climate change and reducing poverty, avoiding

renewable energies that harm ecosystems and the setting of clear targets for keeping temperature rises below 2 degrees C. It highlights the requirement for global coordinated action within BirdLife to reduce fisheries bycatch, the eradication of alien invasive species that threaten marine ecosystems, and improved marine management policies as they affect birds and their habitats, especially on the high seas. The Strategy calls for a 'Birdlife International flyways campaign' pulling together the actions needed to protect the major migration routes that connect birds, habitats, communities and cultures across the globe. Furthermore the new strategy identifies indicators with which to measure our impacts – what we have achieved for conservation – over the period of the strategy.

The meeting brimmed with new ideas. Best practice and effective models for achieving conservation at local, national and regional scales appeared from all over the world and I was especially pleased to see how various contributors were seeking new audiences for our conservation messages through literature, music and the visual arts. Equally exciting was the focus on how we address forest conservation and the threat posed to biodiversity by inappropriate energy policy, especially the production of biofuels. The debates on branding and others ways of strengthening the Partnership again generated a wealth of ideas others can use, and demonstrated the distinctiveness of the BirdLife model, and its potential power.

In addition to adopting the new Strategy, the Global Partnership Meeting has adopted six Regional Programmes for Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe, Middle East and Central Asia, and the Pacific, covering the period 2009 to 2012. All these will be available in final form in the near future, but can already be accessed on the BirdLife Extranet ([www.birdlife.net](http://www.birdlife.net)), along with the draft Global Programme covering multi-regional work. A new BirdLife Global Council has been elected, along with BirdLife Honorary Officers and Regional Committees. A number of the workshops were designed to create specific outputs and these will be developed by those who organised them and distributed as appropriate. Most of the PowerPoint presentations from the meeting will be available very soon on the BirdLife Extranet ([www.birdlife.net](http://www.birdlife.net)). We will shortly be sending round details of how you can access the Conference photographs.

If ever anyone needed reminding of the power, diversity and energy of the Partnership, the Partnership Fair perfectly demonstrated how strong BirdLife is. Congratulations to everyone who participated - it was simply brilliant.

I would like to extend enormous thanks Aves Argentinas for hosting these meetings. It was a great deal of work over the last two years to organise the venue, accommodation, special events, support from the City and National Governments (many Departments and Ministries), local sponsorship and active participation by staff, Board and members in many aspects of the Conference programme. This was done with great efficiency, professionalism and good humour and I know was widely appreciated by everyone. Juan Carlos and his Board deserve special credit for agreeing to host the meeting in the first place and for supporting their staff throughout. The biggest thank you must of course go to Andrés Bosso who was simply fantastic throughout! He was supported by a great staff of whom both Andrés and the Board should be very proud.

Without the enormous amount of financial support provided by a wide range of donors, this meeting would not have happened at all. I would like to express particular thanks to the organizations whose names and logos I have included at the bottom of this report. They provided substantial funding at critical time in the preparation of the meetings, and it is thanks to their support that many of the sponsored delegates were able to attend. Many members of the BirdLife Network found their own support for their attendance, and this is also very important to acknowledge. Vogelbescherming Netherland, SEO/BirdLife, RSPB, BirdLife Switzerland and Audubon all supported other Partners to attend. Ten members of BirdLife International's Rare Bird Club and Loro Parque very generously enabled people from ten developing nations to attend, a first and lifetime experience for each of them. We also received in kind support from La Aguada Polo, Okinawa Centre, the Embassies of Canada, Norway, Japan, the USA and the UK, IBERIA, Shell, Capsa S.A., Toyota Argentina, Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores Comercio Internacional y Culto, Reserva El Bagual – Alpamaris S.A., Administración de Parques Nacionales, Tango Porteño, Impresora del Plata, Diario La Nación, Reserva Ecológica Constanera Sur. Seriema Nature Tours, so skillfully and charmingly led by Hernan and German not only took many of us out for excellent early morning bird watching, but also organized a wonderful set of post conference excursions which reminded many of the participants of why bird and biodiversity conservation is so important and worth all the hard work, and on which many new friendships were forged. (Please remember to help Aves Argentinas by adding your birding lists to <http://www.worldbirds.org/v3/argentina.php>) All the staff from Ana Juan Congressos worked fantastically hard with our own team to ensure the conference administration went smoothly, and we are very grateful indeed to James Lowen and Hernán Pablo Barrios for volunteering their excellent skills as our conference photographers.

No World Conference would occur without strong support from the BirdLife Secretariat. The Conference Programme was developed through wide consultation across the Network and the Secretariat, but much of

the fine tuning and turning good ideas into practical plenaries and workshops was led by the Programme Committee comprising Ali Satterfield, Stu Butchart, Lincoln Fishpool, David Thomas, Richard Grimmett, Melanie Heath, John Fanshawe, Adrian Long, Leon Bennun, Marco Lambertini, me and, of course, Gilly Banks who held it all together and linked us up between meetings. Each of these individuals led a group of staff in the planning of a section of the programme very effectively. The other WC Committee dealt with the vast array of logistical and organisational aspects of the Conference and comprised Trish Aspinall, Gilly Banks, Lisa Canessa, Chris Spreadbury, Leon Bennun, Marco Lambertini and me. They were a tower of strength. Ian Davidson and his staff in Quito made extra efforts to support Aves Argentinas in their hours of need and this was vital in maintaining organisational and fundraising momentum. Lisa Canessa did a remarkable job in organising a stunning Partnership Fair, a Conference highlight for everyone. Throughout the Conference all Secretariat staff worked very hard to support the meeting in a wide variety of ways. I thank them all for this, and would especially like to single out the STAR team (affectionately known as Ian's Angels). This dedicated team (Ian Fisher, Sue Patterson, Bev Childs, Lisa Canessa, Gina Pfaff, Amanda Tapia, Gilly Banks and Ian May) were heroic in supporting the needs of everyone. Thanks to the great efforts of our Communications Team, Ade Long, Martin Fowlie and Nick Askew, the Conference generation a high level of global press and media interest which is so important if our message is to be heard and acted on. Finally again I would like to say the largest 'thank yous' to Trish and Gilly for driving forward so many of the administrative aspects of the meeting with such energy and determination. Without Trish, we would not have had the meetings in Buenos Aires. Equally, without Gilly - who worked miracles in more ways than anyone can imagine - we would not have had a Conference at all!

In conclusion, can BirdLife rise to the subtitle of the Conference 'Taking on the Millennium Challenge'? I think we have shown from this meeting we can. The task is to help create a world that links the conservation of biodiversity to addressing climate change and sustaining livelihoods. BirdLife's fundamental structure and approach, when combined with the strategy and programmes we have adopted and the practices that we carry out, equip us to rise to this challenge. However, we cannot do it alone. In my view we need more innovation still (we shared much of it in Buenos Aires, but we need a lot more), we need to secure sustainable finance for BirdLife and biodiversity (we made modest progress on this), we need to improve our communication, both within BirdLife and externally, and we must strike new relationships and collaborations. Who would have predicted ten, or even four, years ago that an indicator that BirdLife led the development of would have been adopted by the UN to measure progress towards the Millennium Development Goals earlier this year? Perhaps in four years from now, we can have played a major role in the creation and delivery of new targets integrating biodiversity conservation, human development and climate change.

Do please take time to provide with your own feedback, and thank you for coming to the meetings. It's you we run them for.

Dr Michael Rands  
Director and Chief Executive

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**RioTinto**



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