

To Members of the Press

BirdLife asks Commission to take legal action over loss of farmland birds

3 April 2014, Brussels - Today BirdLife Partners DOPPS (Slovenia) and NABU (Germany) submitted three formal complaints to the Commission, asking for legal action against their respective governments. In both countries, evidence shows widespread loss of farmland birds [1], even in protected areas such as Natura 2000 sites. This is part of an EU wide crisis involving the massive conversion of biodiversity rich grasslands to maize fields and the ever more intensive use of grasslands for fodder. Heavy subsidies for biogas production drive this crisis and subsequently increase the further intensification of livestock production.

“We all know about the clearing of rainforests in the tropics, but we are still allowing a similar ecological catastrophe right here in Europe”, said Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy at BirdLife Europe.

He continued “Member States have an obligation under the EU Birds Directive to maintain bird populations at an adequate level in their territory and preserve their habitats. The European Commission must act to ensure that Member States take the necessary measures to halt the on-going destruction of grasslands and decline of the birds that depend on them.”

Member States can for example ban the ploughing up of environmentally sensitive grasslands and design agri-environmental measures to compensate farmers for a delayed mowing dates. Several EU funds, such as the LIFE Fund and the Rural Development Fund are there to help Member States and farmers implement these measures.

“With the birds of wet meadows, including well-loved species as Lapwing and Snipe, a whole group of bird species is heading towards extinction in Germany” said Lars Lachmann, Bird Conservation Officer of NABU/ BirdLife Germany. “It is known, how to stop this from happening as some local examples prove, but so far public action is too little and late – but hopefully not too late”.

“Slovenia is well known for its amazing biodiversity and still well preserved nature, but when it comes to our grasslands we are allowing the wanton destruction of centuries old ecosystems and the extermination of the birds that depend on them” said Tomaž Janar, Conservation Officer at DOPPS/ BirdLife in Slovenia.

Sadly, in many other EU Member States farmland birds are facing similar threats. In Bulgaria the Common Agricultural Policy has had disastrous impacts, causing the BirdLife Partner BSPB (Bulgaria) to submit a complaint last year. Several other BirdLife Partners may also need to file similar complaints to the Commission in the coming months.

Brunner concluded “When Member States fail to take measures which are mandatory under EU law to prevent bird species from going extinct, the Commission should take legal action.”

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BirdLife Europe is a Partnership of nature conservation organisations in 49 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.

Notes to the editor:

[1] In Germany, NABU (BirdLife in Germany) has collected evidence showing widespread loss of grasslands and of grassland birds such as lapwing and common snipe, even in protected areas such as Natura 2000 sites. In Slovenia, birds such as Corncrake and Whinchat are in steep decline across the country, again due to the systematic destruction and deterioration of grasslands.



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