

## **After 10 years of debate, Europe stands up to growing alien species threat**

16/04/2014, Brussels - After 10 years of research, discussion and debate, the EU institutions are finally taking legal action to address the damages caused by non-native species. The EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species [1] was approved today by the European Parliament and should be rubber-stamped by the Council in May. Once implemented, it will allow for significant improvements to environmental protection across the European continent.

“The introduction of invasive non-native species is one of the key drivers of biodiversity loss in Europe – and we know the problems are intensifying [2]. This new regulation, the first major piece of EU legislation on biodiversity in 20 years, is very positive news”, commented Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy at BirdLife Europe. “It delivers the coordinated, common biosecurity framework the EU and its Member States need to tackle invasive species which do not stop at national borders.”

The agreed text brings significant improvements to previous proposals, including the removal of a 50 species cap for EU action, the establishment of provisions for species that are native to some parts of the EU but invasive elsewhere, and the creation of a scientific advisory body. Pressure from certain industries for lifting the regulation for economic interests – notably mink farming – was also resolved, and controlled licensing for certain activities using invasive species will be overseen by the Commission. However, some glaring gaps remain, such as the removal, under pressure from shipping interests, of any obligation to manage the dumping of ships’ ballast water at ports - a prime source of invasive non-native species in the marine environment.

Carles Carboneras, Species Policy Officer at RSPB (BirdLife in UK) concluded: “All in all, we are happy with the result, which should allow the EU to tackle a problem that carries a huge environmental and economic bill [3]. Now we must all work towards effective implementation. Firstly, the lists of species to which it will apply must be constructed - this will be our focus in the coming months.”

The same text, agreed upon earlier this year by the three institutions, will be put to vote in the Council of the European Union during its May meeting. Once fully adopted, the Regulation will enter into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015, with a list of Invasive Species of Union Concern due by 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016.

### **ENDS**

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] The legislation is based around the three-stage hierarchical approach recommended by the Convention on Biological Diversity, focusing on:

1. The prevention to avoid new introductions in the first place;
2. Early detection and eradication of newly introduced arrivals, before they become well established;
3. Long term management of populations as last resort.

[2] Alien species are one of the principal causes of biodiversity loss. They have been partly or wholly responsible for the extinction of at least 68 bird species over the last 500 years. Alien species eat native species, compete with them for resources such as food, hybridize with them, disrupt and destroy their habitats or weaken and kill them by introducing pathogens, parasites and diseases in their environment.

[3] More than 12,000 alien species have gained a foothold in Europe, from Asian tiger mosquitoes to North American ragweed, and at least 1,500 are considered to be harmful by the European Commission. Alien species cause some 12.5 billion Euros worth of damage each year in the European Union alone. Their impact is expected to be further exacerbated by climate change, habitat destruction and increased global trade and travel.

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