

# STAKEHOLDER SURVEY



*©Magda Bou Dagher Kharrat*

Mid-term 2015

Mediterranean Basin

Feedback from stakeholders as part of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund's mid-term assessment of the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot investment.

# Stakeholder Survey

## MID-TERM ASSESSMENT

### CEPF IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

The Mediterranean Basin is the second largest biodiversity hotspot in the world and the largest of the world's five Mediterranean-climate regions. Many of the ecosystems reached an equilibrium long ago with human activity dominating the landscapes. However, this delicate balance is in a precarious state as many local communities depend on remaining habitats for fresh water, food and a variety of other ecosystem services.

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund's (CEPF) niche will be to work with all actors engaged in conservation and development activities in Mediterranean Basin countries to foster partnerships in priority corridors and sites. Such partnerships will seek to reduce impacts of these developments on natural resources and systems that the local communities are dependent on. The grants awarded to civil society organizations from CEPF will work towards safeguarding globally threatened species and critical sites in the Mediterranean Basin.

### MID-TERM EVALUATION

CEPF investment in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot began in 2012 and the mid-term of the programme occurs in 2015. To assess the investment to-date a mid-term evaluation will be undertaken comprising of a series of participatory exercises to gather feedback from all stakeholders within the programme. These include a stakeholder survey, national assessments and a regional meeting. These different platforms will give the opportunity for all CEPF grantees and other stakeholders to feedback on areas such as CEPF granting processes, challenges faced by civil society and conservation priorities in the region.

Information gathered through the different exercises will feed into the mid-term evaluation report. The outcomes from this report will provide CEPF with recommendations for changes to processes, targets or the overall strategy for the Mediterranean Basin where appropriate.

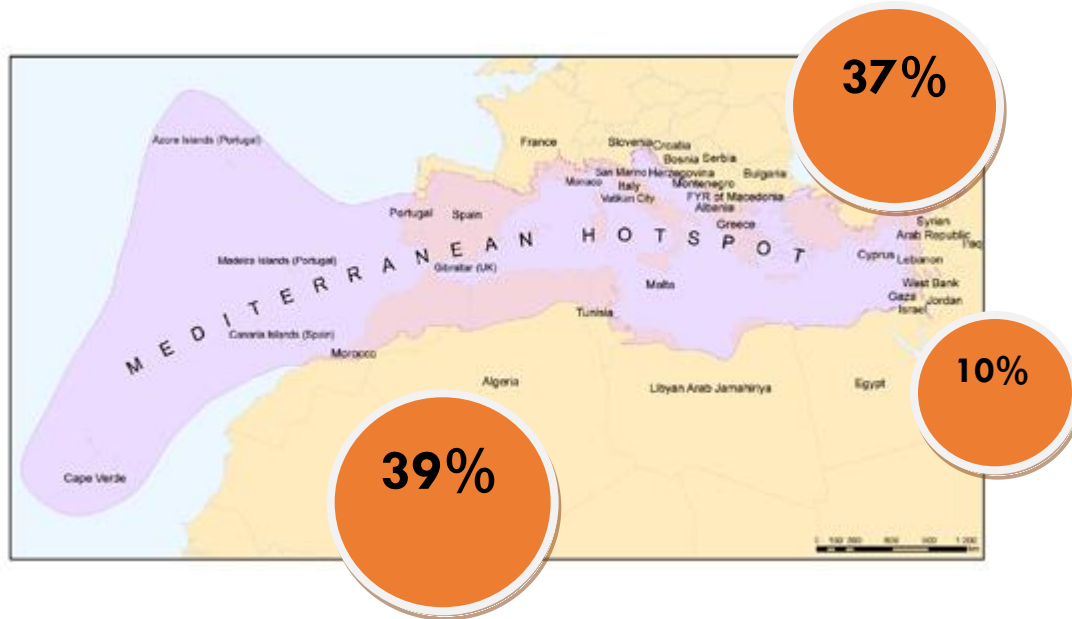
### STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

An anonymous online questionnaire was created to gather feedback from stakeholders. It was available in the four main languages of the Mediterranean Basin programme to encourage as much participation as possible; French, Arabic, Montenegrin and English. The survey was shared via email to all contacts in the CEPF Mediterranean Basin distribution list, and also shared via Facebook and Twitter.

The answers from this survey will enable CEPF to refine and improve processes where it's needed most, so that applying for funding will be made easier in the future. This report summarizes the findings.

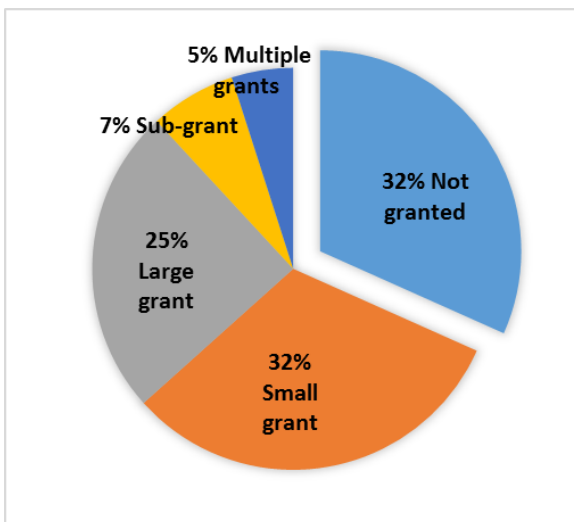
## SURVEY FINDINGS

Feedback was received by **116 stakeholders** throughout the Mediterranean Basin.



More responses from North Africa and the Balkans reflect the number of eligible countries in those sub-regions (5 each) compared with the Middle East (2). 14% of respondents represented the Mediterranean region as a whole.

Almost half, 48%, were more comfortable responding in their regional language (French, Arabic and Montenegrin), signifying the importance of making documents available in these languages to ensure fair and wide participation.



### Survey respondent's relationship with CEPF:

77% of the 116 respondents had applied for a CEPF grant; meaning a significant 33% were other stakeholders interested in the programme beyond funding opportunities.

Out of the 89 respondents who applied for a grant, 32% did not receive one; indicating that despite not receiving funding, this high number of organisations were still engaged with the CEPF programme, and wanted to feed back on the investment to make their voice heard.

## COMMUNICATION IN THE HOTSPOT

### Understanding the CEPF Strategy

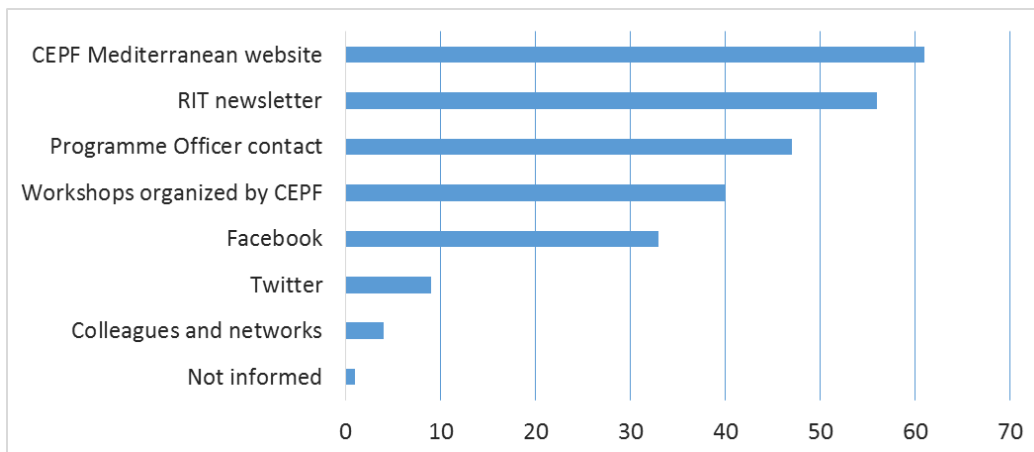
**81%** of respondents stated that they had read the Ecosystem Profile (42% of these read it in detail), and 6% had not read any of the documents.

**70%** of respondents stated that it should be updated (20% had no opinion/did not know, 10% stated there is no need for update)

**Survey finding: The majority of respondents read the Ecosystem Profile and so are familiar with the CEPF strategy in the Mediterranean; and most people think the Ecosystem Profile should be updated.**

### Communication tools

How respondents kept updated with **news stories** in the CEPF Mediterranean programme:



**Survey finding: Newsletters and the website are the most important communication tools used by stakeholders to find out about news updates and funding opportunities, social media is a less affective communication tool.**

### Important areas of communication

#### Reoccurring themes:

The importance of **face-to-face communications**: workshops, local contact points in the region

*“It will be good that the CEPF organize workshops in the region involving people receiving grants as well as potential partners to get to know what people are doing in the region; and staff from CEPF regional team should try to participate to events organized in the framework of funded projects”*

The importance of **sharing information**: Regular newsletters, promoting CEPF projects, mailing lists, Google Groups

*“Communications of CEPF can be improved by encouraging networking amongst all partners, document best practices and share experiences of the different regions.”*

*“It is important to form a CEPF grantees e-mail group, so we could be able to strengthen our cooperation and spread news about project activities”*

*“Webinars on success stories, challenges and solutions could be a useful communication tool.”*

The importance of reaching a **wider audience**: broaden the spectrum of partner associations and individuals interested in conservation in the Mediterranean, the general public and authorities.

*“CEPF is little known, and its projects are not very visible. We should organize conferences in the country to present the CEPF and actions, disseminate materials of information with stakeholders and the public”*

*“Improving communication with the Ministry of Environment of each country”*

**Survey finding: Stakeholders would benefit from more regular knowledge sharing, tools to aid collaboration within the grantee network, and support on engaging with stakeholders**

## Feedback on funding applications

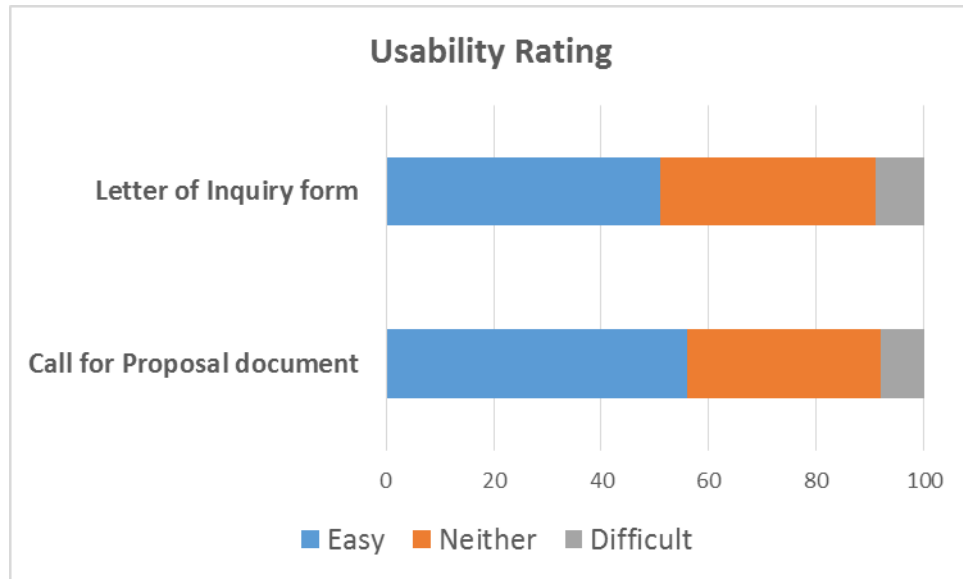
**78% of people received their response letter within the targeted time** of 10 weeks (most receiving them within 4-6 weeks), and the majority (56%) of respondents found the response letter **‘Very helpful’**

**Survey finding: response letters were constructive and sent within an acceptable time frame, although there is room for improvement in the content and speed of responses**

## PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

### Understanding and using documents

Areas which presented challenges varied between large and small grant applicants, where some forms and processes differ. Small grantees felt the Call for Proposal document needed most improvement, whereas large grantees indicated the Letter of Inquiry template needed revision. Support in completing finance documents however was the second most important area of improvement for both.



**Survey finding:** *Very few respondents found the documents difficult to understand or complete, however it is clear that improvements are required to make forms and documents easier such as including additional guidance notes and examples*

*“It would be good to give an example of a well-crafted budget, the relevance of the project, generally more examples of good practice.”*

*“For next calls it will help a lot to know how the evaluation is done, what aspects are taken in consideration and given more priority (e.g. strong partnership, availability of co-financing, etc). I also suggest to include some guidelines about what is required in terms of full proposal once the LOI is accepted, so that this can be prepared at least partially in advance”*

## Reporting

**Only a few people found reporting ‘difficult’** (<10% of respondents). There was a similar pattern about the usability of the reporting process for both finance and project performance reporting, with the majority of respondents indifferent (49%), finding them neither easy nor difficult to complete for both. This relatively high percentage may be due to the fact that reporting is often carried out by different people in a project and so the respondent may not be directly involved in this process, and as both reporting processes are very different, this aspect will be taken into consideration in the results.

Comparing responses from large and small grantees, there was a pattern where more large grantees selected that both types of reporting were ‘easy’, compared with small grantees. This may indicate a capacity issue, and so suggests that improved guidance and support for smaller grantees would be beneficial.

**Survey finding: the reporting process, although not overwhelmingly difficult, could be made easier.**

*“Perhaps the activity related reporting forms should be revised in order to allow an easier reflection of difficulties/delays/etc. encountered”*

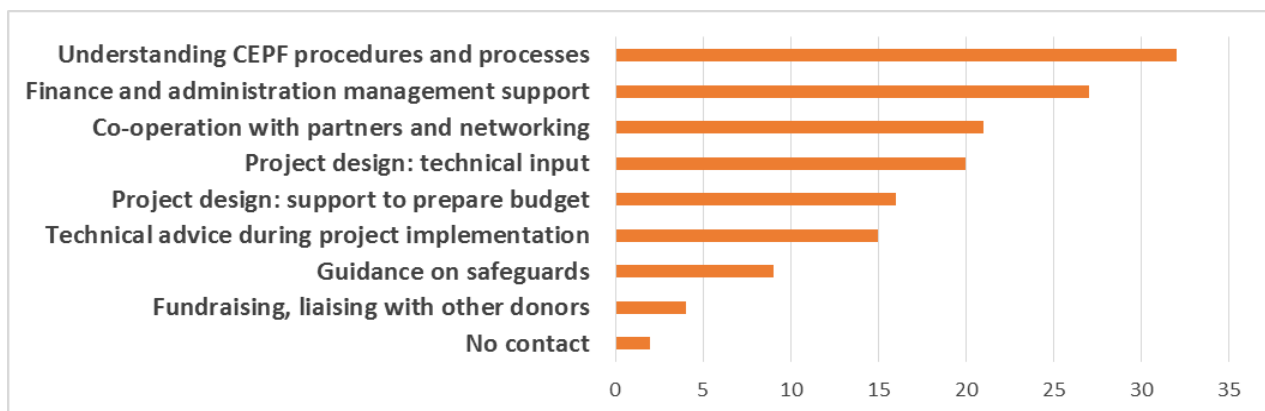
*“The CEPF report is a kind of evaluation that requires a lot of competence”*

## YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CEPF-RIT TEAM

### Support needed

The majority of contact happens **‘During Calls for Proposals’** and **‘During the life of the project’**

The key areas of support that grantees sought are below:



**Survey finding: the majority of respondents need support in understanding procedures and processes, and in finance and admin management. This could be solved through additional guidance tools at the key times of contact.**

## Support received

Majority of respondents (46%) stated the support received was **'Very helpful'**.

However **timeliness** was mentioned in the qualitative feedback, with the speed of responses slower than expected, indicating a need for improvement

*"We are very satisfied with understanding, help and support from CEPF RIT team"*

*"There are continuous communications between the team and the leader of the project"*

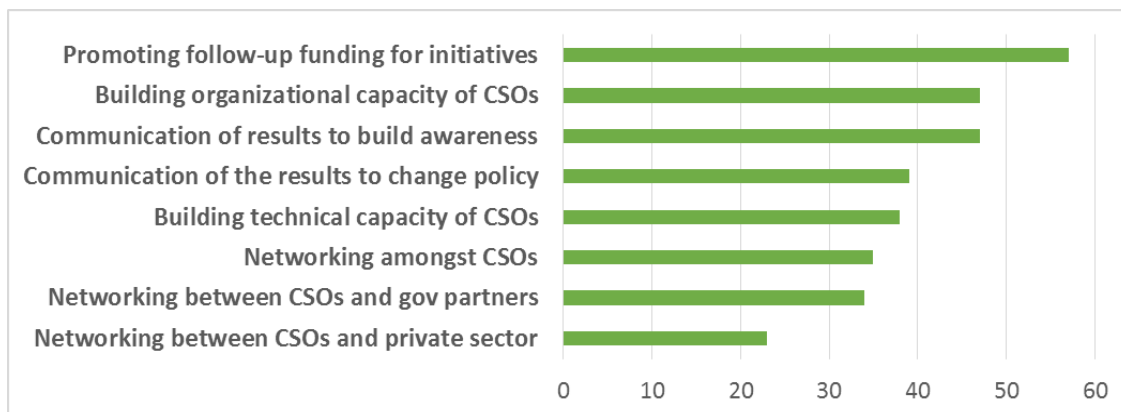
## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

### Sustainability

Question asked:

***"What do you think is needed to ensure that the results of the CEPF Mediterranean programme are likely to remain sustained beyond the end of the programme in December 2016?"***

Respondents selected areas they felt were most important:



There was a relatively even spread of responses to this question, two overarching themes were apparent:

***Raising the profile of CSOs*** and ***Capacity building*** are essential for sustainability

Networking is valued, however the focus should be directed to other methods as a priority.

There is call for longer term commitment and support of CEPF in the region



*“The conservation of critical ecosystems is not a question of a program that starts and ends in a given period. CEPF must register in the long term if we want a real impact on the world natural heritage. CEPF must remain, in my view, a permanent international institution”*

*“CEPF is one of the few mechanisms that finances activities of civil society in the field of biodiversity. This first call has led to a first emergence association dedicated to the preservation of biodiversity, but its maintenance is absolutely necessary to strengthen this participation”*

## Impacts from the programme

Question Asked:

***“What do you think has been the most significant change (positive or negative) in terms of engaging civil society in biodiversity conservation due to the CEPF Mediterranean programme?”***

A large number of qualitative response were gathered and fit into a number of themes. The most significant changes due to the CEPF programme:

***Empowerment and ownership of civil society*** – giving organizations the responsibility of protecting their nature has improved their standing in society, and also given CSOs a louder voice in showcasing their expertise and knowledge to the international community

*“It has given smaller grass roots biodiversity organisations a greater voice, showcasing what they can do.”*

*“I believe that the civil society gets a more powerful voice not only by the funding but also by who CEPF is with its strong global leaders”*

***Engagement of decision makers*** – the relationship between CSOs and governments is changing; governments are under more pressure to become involved in environmental issues and are beginning to recognize the importance of grassroots knowledge, so CEPF funding is enabling these conversations to starting and continue, so trust is built up

*“This programme has enabled NGO’s to implement very important projects and this makes their position stronger with local governments”*

*“In my opinion, in Albania the work done by the civil society is helping very much implementing the government policy. Having no human and financial resources in the government institutions, in many cases the work of CEPF projects is substituting the work of the government.”*

**Awareness of biodiversity conservation** – CSOs have mobilized local populations and media, enhanced involvement, and made more information on biodiversity available in the public eye

*“Increased confidence of local people and their willingness to engage in activities”*

*“The problem is that to change the behaviour of many people takes time, with the CEPF program communications people are beginning to speak about the problem of the conservation of biodiversity”*

**Capacity of CSOs has increased** – the opportunity to manage funds by an international donor has developed capacities, and given the opportunity through learning by piloting innovative project methods

*“Provided a bridge to small but promising NGOs to overcome difficulties in order to reach middle size funding and therefore providing leverage, experience and reference for further growing”*

*“CSOs have had an opportunity to run projects contributing to environment protection and to enhance their managerial and communication skills.”*

**Strengthening networks and co-operation** – connecting different users involved in the protection of biodiversity, and learning how to preserve and improve conservation

*“The positive is that there is an increasing awareness & mutual cooperation of all associations  
“I am in an area where there are many conflicts of interests between CSOs, and the conflict with the project has been well managed and CSOs have created a platform for communicating”*

It is important to note that some **challenges** to CSOs were highlighted, and a couple of people stated **difficulties** to implement projects through to the end.

*“Difficult to work in the long-term with civil society and country governments, it is not always appropriate”*

## Ideas and suggestions

Respondents had the opportunity to suggest any other recommendations, ideas or comments to the CEPF Mediterranean Basin programme team. Many suggestions were made about areas currently ineligible for funding. These have all been recorded and will be referred back to during the amendment of the Ecosystem Profile is hoped to occur in 2016.

The majority of other comments and ideas were mainly around how CEPF can support with two themes:

### **Government authorities:**

*“Ensure greater visibility of the program to national authorities and associations. Take into account national priorities, and have formal agreements with the government”*

*“Please make an effort and meet with National Governments to urge them to make reforms which help CSOs working in the territory”*

*“Strengthening the link between government institutions and local authorities with the CEPF program and results of the activities”*

### **Sustainability**

*“Involve more governments and agencies in the project implementation to strengthen collaboration with CSOs and ensure sustainability of the project impact and results.”*

*“I suggest we work on a reduced number of sites nationally across the Mediterranean to increase the chances of success of projects with impacts on the ground and serve as role models politically, socially and sustainably”*

## CONCLUSIONS

### Survey respondents

The majority of people who responded had applied for a grant, however a significant number were non-grantee stakeholders in the Mediterranean with different roles. This meant the input received was richer and more varied, from people with differing outlooks and expectations. Continued care will be taken in future surveys to encourage the participation of a wide base of stakeholders.

### CEPF Processes and support

The support given by CEPF has been positively acknowledged, and it is clear that a support team providing direct contact is needed. A number of areas have been highlighted which could benefit from adaptation or improvement; and numerous ideas have been suggested to help solve problems and guide the process. The key themes identified were:

**Guidance** – Processes would be made easier with best practice examples and more detailed guidance notes.

**Frequency of communications** – Stakeholders would benefit from more frequent news updates, sharing of project stories and faster response times to enquiries

### The role of CEPF

It has been important to understand how stakeholders perceive the role of CEPF, how they evaluate the presence of CEPF in the Mediterranean so far, and how they believe CEPF can continue to support the region.

Some common themes on CEPF's niche in the region:

**Giving CSOs a voice** – the position of CEPF can be used more to raise the profile of CSOs nationally; giving them a platform with relevant authorities and more awareness to a wider audience

**Capacity building** – CEPF can use funding or internal expertise to provide capacity building across areas needed most such as financial and administration management.

**Coordinating collaboration** – bringing individuals and organizations together, identifying and providing the opportunity for collaborations and knowledge sharing across the region

*“CEPF is an important lever for a more efficient involvement of CSOs in conservation”*

It should be highlighted that many comments were given about country-specific challenges; logistical, financial and implementation obstacles. These have all been noted by the CEPF and RIT teams and will be referred back to in future grant management. Conservation updates and comments on specific key biodiversity areas have also been noted in a similar way and will be taken into account with any amendment to the Ecosystem Profile in the future.

The Stakeholder Survey produced insightful thoughts from different partners throughout the region, and for CEPF it has been a valuable tool to extract feedback from the first years of the CEPF Mediterranean Basin investment.

*“After a long time CEPF has encouraged concrete actions for biodiversity”*

## FURTHER INFORMATION

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement (AFD), Conservation International (CI), the European Union, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Government of Japan, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank. Additional support in the Mediterranean Basin is provided by the MAVA Foundation. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. More information on CEPF can be found at [www.cepf.net](http://www.cepf.net).

BirdLife International - including its Middle East office and the BirdLife Partners [DOPPS/BirdLife Slovenia](#) and [LPO \(Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux, BirdLife in France\)](#) - is providing the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) for CEPF in the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot.

Find out more at [www.birdlife.org/cepf-med](http://www.birdlife.org/cepf-med); [www.lpo.fr/cepf/cepf](http://www.lpo.fr/cepf/cepf); [www.facebook.com/CEPF.MED](https://www.facebook.com/CEPF.MED) and [www.twitter.com/CEPFmed](https://www.twitter.com/CEPFmed).

For more information about this report please email: [liz.smith@birdlife.org](mailto:liz.smith@birdlife.org)



AGIR pour la  
BIODIVERSITÉ