



## Opening Address for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner delivered by Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado

Ladies and gentlemen, partners and friends of BirdLife,  
Good evening.

It was with tremendous sadness that I watched the news of the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II last Thursday. I join all the members of the Royal Family, and people the world over, to mourn her passing and respectfully celebrate her remarkable life and reign.

But despite the collective sorrow at Her Majesty's passing and my sadness that I cannot be with you in person, I am delighted that the BirdLife family has come together this week to celebrate 100 years of BirdLife.

The first century of the organisation has been rather like the growth of a rainforest tree, the first sixty years putting down roots and growing taller to reach the light; then, especially in the past three decades, bursting into leaf and flower.

But the last thirty years have also seen the growth of threats to the planet on a new and alarming scale: global heating (not just 'warming'), biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and marine plastic pollution have become pressing dangers afflicting all humankind.

In order to overcome them in BirdLife's second century, we will need tenacity and intelligence, strength and strategy.

Over this past week, many of you have been immersed in serious discussions about these very issues and more. Indeed, I, too, have added to it all with my address to the Global Partnership Meeting and a keynote speech at this morning's The Future of Our Planet conference.

But you can have too much of a 'good thing', so I am not going to say any more about conservation, or our planet.

Instead, I am going to talk about some fundraising efforts that we have been making in Japan. They have been quite successful and led to the establishment of the Japan Fund for Science, commemorating my 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary as Honorary President of BirdLife.

As you know, I have long believed that BirdLife's strength lies in its high-quality

science, which sets so many conservation agendas, and I wanted, as much as possible, to ensure that the Science Team at BirdLife remains fully enabled.

In Japan, we have two gala dinners every year, one in Tokyo in autumn, and one in Osaka in spring. The key seems to be in forming a steering committee that consists of the same sort of people that you want to have as your guests, people who are successful and influential in different fields. Some of them are already members of the Rare Bird Club. At the galas, we have raffles, live auctions, silent auctions and door prizes, and, of course, good food and excellent wine. We have entertainment, too. Everyone likes a fun time, and if you can enjoy it AND do something good for the environment, whyever not?

It does, however, require a huge amount of work, and the BirdLife office in Tokyo needs always to employ some extra staff, but everything else is run by volunteers.

At each gala we raise particular conservation issues, and try to inspire our guests about the importance of birds, their role in ecosystems, and how they act as indicators for the environment. No amount of advertising space is as effective as a roomful of people, all educated opinion leaders, being told about birds each year!! I could go on, but then it would not be fair on you, as you would not have a fun time, so if any of you are interested, I invite you to check the BirdLife International Tokyo website.

Of course, what we are doing in Japan is nothing new in concept, and merely one example, but I hope that I will be able to inspire our partners to do something in their various regions as well. I am deeply proud of the generosity and commitment of my countrymen and -women, but I am sure that they are not the only sources of support that can be 'tapped' for BirdLife.

To the BirdLife Partners I say, please do not think that we are doing something special in Japan. Our galas are now quite grand affairs, but they started smaller. The important thing is to involve people, and to get them to fundraise in any way that they feel comfortable. Doctors, lawyers, businessmen...they are often busy. It is not that they do not want to donate to environmental causes, it is more that they do not have the time to check whether particular calls for donations are worthy or not.

The more people feel they are doing something for BirdLife and for the environment the better—we have found that after 5 to 10 years, they will start spreading the message themselves.

Today, we have in this room some of our most important benefactors, sponsors

and patrons, and I would like to take this opportunity to personally convey my heartfelt thanks to you all for your generosity.

I am well aware that there are many worthy causes that need support, and we cannot thank you enough for choosing us, for 'sticking' with us, and, if I may be so bold, for continuing to move forward with us.

Finally, yes, a 100th birthday is time for celebration and reflection, but the future is already trying to get in and spoil the party. The security of our beautiful planet depends on the relentless hard work and deep expertise of organisations like BirdLife (if there are any organisations quite like BirdLife). Now is the time for us all to rise to the challenge.

I strongly believe in the uniqueness of the partnership. We have an ambitious and bold new strategy that will harness the power of our science, and, above all, we have the power and the magic of birds on our side.

Birds make us smile, and bring us deep happiness; they are also the inspiration behind many a poem, piece of music, artwork, or items of jewellery.

And, holding that thought, ladies and gentlemen, that birds are an inspiration to us all, I invite you to enjoy your evening, and pray that our paths will cross again, well before our next centennial celebrations.