BirdLife
THE MAGAZINE
JANUARY-MARCH 2021

IT ALL BEGINS HERE

The Secretarybird is one of 40 birds uplisted in our latest Red List report – find out why its road to recovery starts now

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Partnership for nature and people

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BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation partnership. Through our unique local-to-global approach, we deliver high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of nature and people

P.21 HOW DID THE RED KITE RETURN TO ENGLAND AFTER 100 YEARS?

Photo Scott M Ward/Shutterstock

IT ALL BEGINS HERE

BirdLife means different things to different people. For some, we're defined by our fearless policy and advocacy work. Others find inspiration through our work to empower local communities and develop sustainable livelihoods. But peel away at the layers of our work like an orange, and you'll find that data and research has always lied at the core of everything we do. Whether it be IBAs, flyways or our annual Red List update, the insight gathered by our science team has always provided the spark for further action. So while there is plenty we still need to learn about the reasons driving the declines of Africa's savannah raptors [p. 12], hope springs eternal that their road to recovery begins here.

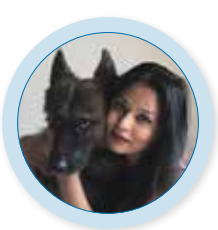
But for me, it's the end. After five wonderful years, I am leaving my post as BirdLife's Head of Communications to explore new horizons, and this is my final magazine. As a lifelong birder, it has been a dream come true, and an absolute privilege, to share this incredible Partnership's achievements with you. Always remember, as you browse this issue's contents, that everything we do is only possible because of your gracious and greatly appreciated support. It all begins with you.

Alex Dale, Editor

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

STUART BUTCHART

In a ten page special that begins on page 38, our Chief Scientist, Dr Stuart Butchart, is among the experts to contribute to our four-step guide to building a better world. Stuart urges governments to commit to halting human-driven extinctions, and explains why it is a safe investment.



NEHA SINHA

India is one of the world's 17 megadiverse countries, so our oldest BirdLife Partner, the Bombay Natural History Society, always has a full plate. However, they are already alert to the threats facing the recently-uplisted Indian Skimmer, as BNHS' Policy Officer Neha reports on page 28.

ALAN MUNRO

Alan is the International Marine Policy Project Officer for the Royal Society of the Protection of Birds (RSPB, BirdLife in the UK). The RSPB's impact spans further than British waters of course, and on page 56 Alan reports on an outstanding albatross conservation success in Namibia.

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FRONT COVER Secretarybird *Sagittarius serpentarius* / Mattieu Gallet

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REGULARS

COVER STORY

FEATURES

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ALL THE LATEST NEWS, INSIGHT AND SUCCESS STORIES FROM 116 PARTNERS IN 114 COUNTRIES

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- BIRDLIFE PARTNER
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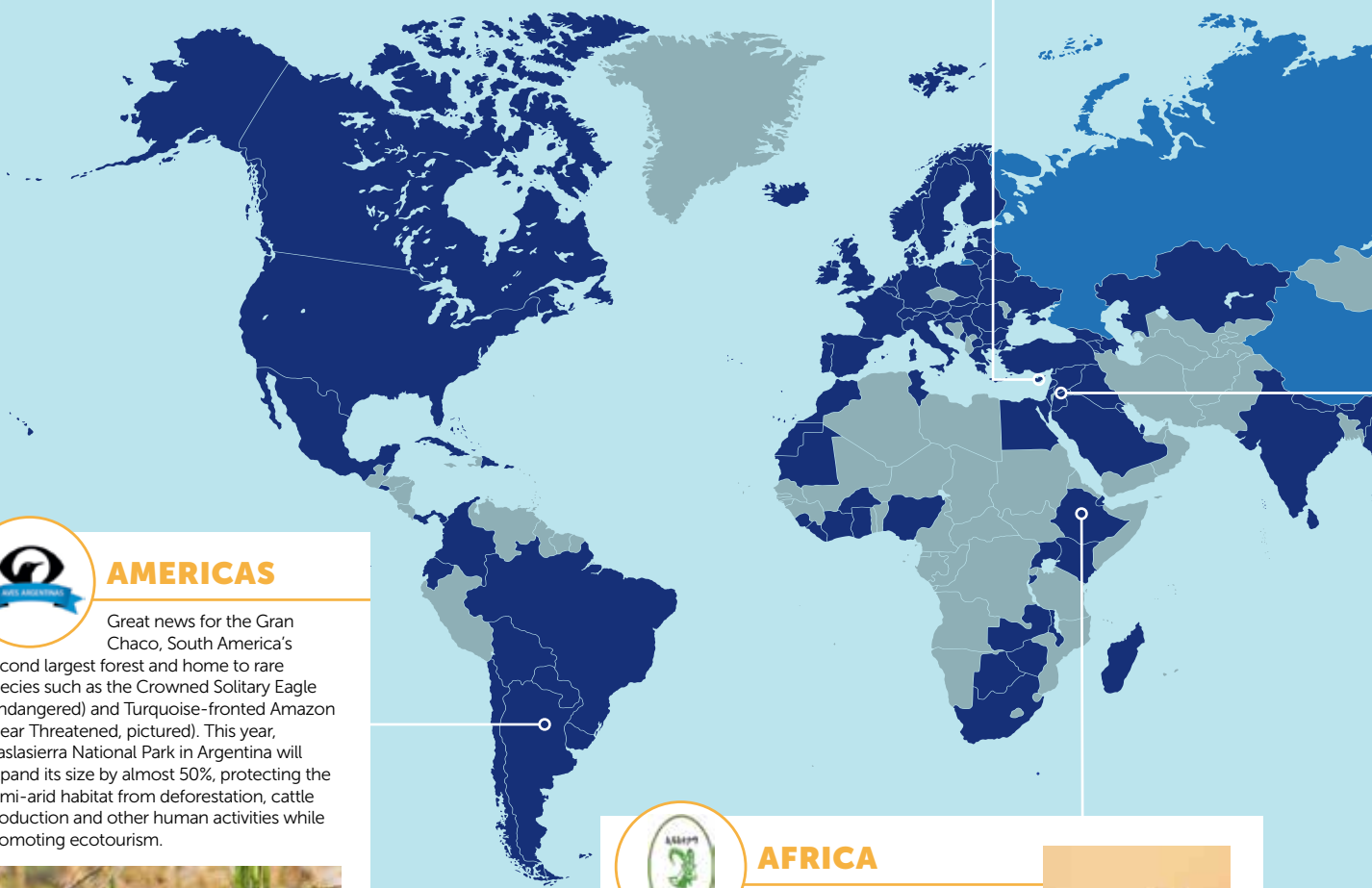


EUROPE

In early December, Cyprus' government relaxed anti-poaching laws for 14 songbird species often used in the illegal dish *ambelopoulia*. The on-the-spot fine was reduced from €2000 to just €200, undermining a 20-year effort to protect migratory songbirds from illegal killing in the country. BirdLife Cyprus has launched a petition calling for this amendment to be cancelled: lend your voice to the cause at: **change.org/ampelopouliaSOS**

via Birdlife Europe & Central Asia

AMERICAS

Great news for the Gran Chaco, South America's second largest forest and home to rare species such as the Crowned Solitary Eagle (Endangered) and Turquoise-fronted Amazon (Near Threatened, pictured). This year, Traslasierra National Park in Argentina will expand its size by almost 50%, protecting the semi-arid habitat from deforestation, cattle production and other human activities while promoting ecotourism.

Tony Morris/Flickr

AFRICA

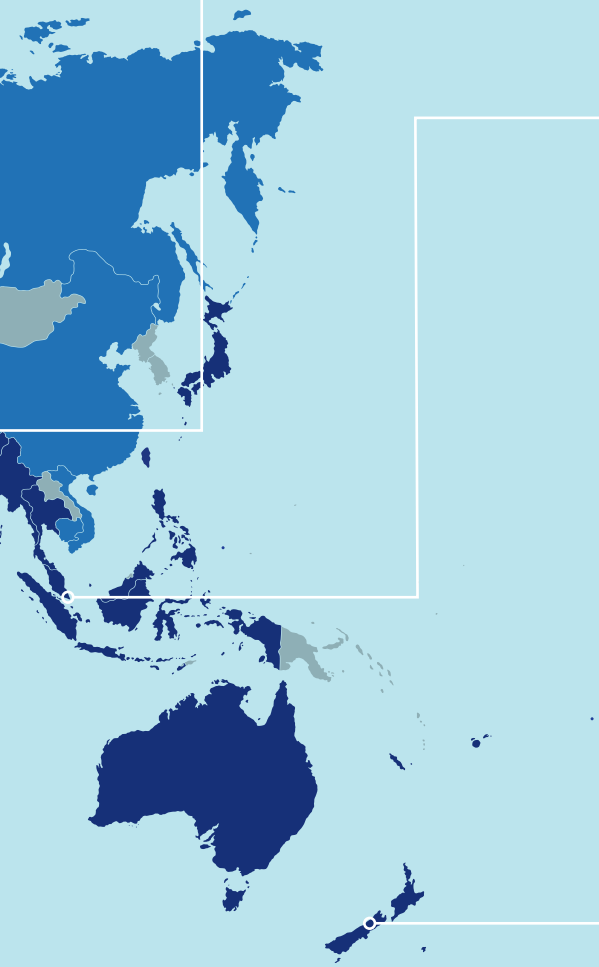
Under the National Electrification Program, Ethiopia is set to build thousands of new power lines in the next five years. The EWNHS (BirdLife Partner) is campaigning to ensure these structures are designed in a bird-safe manner to prevent collision and electrocution. In November, they achieved a major milestone by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with national energy producers, agreeing to balance development with protecting birds.

Laurentiuss/Shutterstock

MIDDLE EAST

El Ekaider landfill site in Jordan is an unlikely but important stopover site for migratory soaring birds along the Red Sea flyway. A recent increase in fatal electrocutions and collisions with power lines prompted the RSCN to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Irbid District Electricity Company, as part of the Egyptian Vulture New LIFE project, to develop bird-friendly energy action plans.

RSCN



ASIA

The annual Singapore Bird Race attracted a record number of participants in December. Almost 250 people entered the nationwide citizen science event, which included three new categories: novice, family and youth. This year's theme focused on bird species threatened by the pet trade. For COVID safety, teams were limited to four members and all observations recorded remotely via the eBird app.

PACIFIC

While the US elections kept the world in suspense, New Zealand was hosting an equally contentious vote: the Bird of the Year competition. After fierce campaigning, the Kakapo (Critically Endangered, pictured) was crowned victorious for the second time in the competition's history, narrowly beating the Antipodean Albatross (Endangered) amid allegations of election rigging, with hundreds of votes coming from a single IP address.

NZ Department of Conservation

BIRD BULLETIN

WELCOME TO OUR LATEST PARTNER

We are delighted to welcome NatureLife Cambodia to the BirdLIfe Partnership. Established in 2017, this Cambodian-run NGO has built enough strength and impact to become a fully-fledged BirdLife Partner. Their immediate priority is to continue BirdLife's work at Lomphat Wildlife Sanctuary (see page 48), along with some key wetland sites in Lower Mekong Delta and Tonle Sap. They will also coordinate Cambodia Vulture Working Group.

For the time being, Western Siem Pang forest will continue to be overseen by the BirdLife Cambodia Programme. However, BirdLife is working to eventually hand over the running of the site to its project partners. Vorsak Bou, who led the BirdLife Cambodia Programme for over a decade, will take over as Chief Executive of NatureLife Cambodia, and most Cambodia Programme staff will also make the transfer.

In Cambodia, where conservation projects tend to be led by international organisations, the presence of an independent Partner is an positive and important step towards becoming self-sufficient.

Double trouble

The Double-banded Plover *Charadrius bicinctus*, which was uplisted from Least Concern to Near Threatened in this year's Red List update, is one of the more unusual migratory shorebirds of the south Pacific. Instead of migrating to Australia for their summer, flying south each year from breeding grounds in the Northern Hemisphere, it is unique in that it breeds in New Zealand during the southern summer and then flies west across the Tasman Sea to visit Australian shores in the autumn and winter months.

At least, part of the population does that; those birds that breed in the upland rivers of New Zealand's South Island, while those that breed elsewhere in the Shaky Isles make local movements, and do not cross the Tasman.

Like most shorebirds, Double-banded Plovers nest on the ground, laying their eggs in a scrape in the sand on coastal beaches or, further inland, among pebbles on so-called shingle banks in braided streams. Birds which breed in either habitat eachface their own set of threats. Those plovers which nest on coastal beaches face the threats faced by so many beach-nesting birds, with disturbance near the top of the list. Incubating birds are readily disturbed by beachgoers or their dogs walking too close by; the eggs are often inadvertently crushed by being stepped on or run over by recreational vehicles, and even if they're not crushed, the eggs or chicks may be left unattended for too long, and left to the mercy of the elements or predators, such as gulls and domestic cats. Upland-nesting plovers are subject to lower levels of disturbance, but experience more predation, mainly from introduced mammalian predators, including hedgehogs, stoats and cats. In addition, their breeding areas may become overgrown with invasive weeds, such as marram grass on beaches and lupins on river banks, making these sites unsuitable for breeding. The bird is a target species in the Australian Migratory Shorebird Action Plan, which promotes the protection of wetland habitats.

DOUBLE-BANDED PLOVER *Charadrius bicinctus* (Near Threatened)
Photo Agami via Shutterstock

Barr Al Hikman

Al Wusta Governorate, Oman

Barr Al Hikman is a wetland paradise of outstanding importance for migratory birds and other biodiversity in the West Asian–East African Flyway. It is well known for its biodiversity, with enormous numbers of invertebrates hidden in the sediments, offering good food resources for the hundreds of thousands of migratory waterbirds that depend on this coastal oasis as they pass over the Arabian peninsula during their travels. Indeed, in 2017 a team from Wetlands International found more than half a million birds wintering in Barr Al Hikman, and they recorded a total of 63 waterbird species on the site in 2017-2019. The shorebird density on the intertidal mudflats in Barr Al Hikman is among the highest globally, making it one of the most important coastal wetlands in the world.

Barr Al Hikman is a rocky limestone peninsula of 900 km 2, with the longest natural sand bar in the Middle East. The most important habitats are extended gravel plains, coastal and inland sabkha (a mixture of sand, mud, and salt), intertidal mudflats and shallow lagoons which are connected to sea bays and straits. Abundant populations of fish within the bay and straits attract whales and dolphins, while no less than four threatened species of sea turtle nest on its shores.

Barr Al Hikman has been identified by BirdLife as a Important Bird & Biodiversity Area (IBA) and is a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). Moreover, the site qualifies as internationally important wetland under the criteria of the Ramsar Convention as it regularly supports more than 20,000 waterbirds and/or at least 1% of the individuals of a population of waterbird. Recent surveys show that Barr Al Hikman meets these criteria for no fewer than 21 species.

An estimated 35% of all wetlands globally have been lost since the 1970s, leading to increased risks of extinction for many species. Coastal wetlands in many parts of the Arabian Peninsula are under pressure. Studies show that human activities are increasingly leading to degradation and loss of important sites in the region. The formal protection of Barr Al Hikman would mean securing a crucial, truly irreplaceable, hub for migratory birds at the centre of West Asian–East African Flyway. ■

Photo Wirestock Creators/Shutterstock

Photo Agami Photo Agency/Shutterstock

CURLEW SANDPIPER

Calidris ferruginea

REST STATION Due to the decline of its population globally, this small shorebird is categorised as Near Threatened. It breeds on the tundra of Arctic Siberia and migrates 6000 kilometres to Bar Al Hikman in winter, because of the wetland's exceptional food availability. After replenishing its energy, the species continues its journey with another 6000 kilometres towards South Africa.

Photo Damsea/Shutterstock

RED-EYED ROCK CRAB

Eriphia sebana

VITAL NURSERY The mudflats of Barr Al Hikman are nursery grounds for wildlife, including numerous crab species. Red-eyed Reef Crab lives in the massive tangles of interwoven calcareous tubes made by colonial serpulid tube worms. It feeds on small crabs and snails, to which end it has evolved master claws with molariform teeth that can crack thick shells.

Photo Rock Ptarmigan/Shutterstock

GREAT KNOT

Calidris tenuirostris

REFUELLING STOP Barr Al Hikman is crucial for this wader, classified Endangered as a result of rapid declines due in part to reclamation of non-breeding stopover grounds elsewhere. It swallows small prey, such as bivalve molluscs, by rapidly jabbing their bill into the soft mud of intertidal mudflats. Its strong stomach can crush the shells of molluscs.

ICONS OF THE SAVANNAH

IN DECLINE

There are some encounters with species that are unforgettable. New data reveals that three captivating African raptor species are declining alarmingly fast due to multiple threats, following their vulture cousins. Urgent action is needed to ensure these icons of the savannah don't only exist as memories

Shaun Hurrell

Photo Matthieu Gallet/Shutterstock

Photo Michael Potter/Shutterstock

Photo Albert Beukhof/Shutterstock

↖ Martial Eagles *Polemaetus bellicosus* are heavily persecuted, but their taking of livestock is considerably over-exaggerated
Photo Coulanges/Shutterstock

↑ The Secretarybird is now Endangered
Photo Johan Swanepoel/Shutterstock

A panorama of African sun-burnt savannah and far-reaching grassland is a gaze shared through deep time with our human ancestors. Interspersed with rolling ungulate herds and rumbling prides of large predators, the classic vista would not be complete without the heavy thump of elephant footprints on dry dirt, reptilian eyes peering from watering holes, or the rustle of termite legs in the leaf litter. And up in the skies? Soaring birds of prey, of course. However, as reported in the 2020 Red List update, Africa's raptors are certainly not something to take for granted.

Not only are African vultures extremely threatened with extinction as a result of poisoning and persecution, but related avian icons of the savannah are increasingly imperilled. On 15 December, BirdLife announced that three once-common and wide-ranging African raptors have all been uplisted to Endangered owing to seriously alarming rates of decline – as detected by the monitoring work of BirdLife Partners, other ornithologists and citizen scientists across Africa and analysed by the BirdLife science team for the IUCN Red List.

The Secretarybird *Sagittarius serpentarius* – a striking species famed for its unmistakeable head feathers resembling 'a secretary with quills tucked behind their ear' – is one of three species now considered to face a very high risk of extinction, along with Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus* and Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*. Habitat loss and degradation, poisoning, poaching and disturbance are all likely factors in these declines, but more research is needed to identify the root causes and the most efficient way to address them. Action is needed, faster than a Secretarybird stomps its long legs on prey.

UNFORGETTABLE

Whether it's their sheer size, intriguing characteristics or exciting behaviour traits, these birds have always captured people's imaginations. "Encountering a Secretarybird in the wild can only be described as a captivating experience", says Dr Melissa Whitecross,

Photo Joney/Shutterstock

Landscape Conservation Programme Manager, BirdLife South Africa. "For me, it sparked my love of birds, birdwatching and ultimately my conservation career, and I am yet to meet someone lucky enough to see one and not walk away in awe. Watching them stride and strike at dangerous snakes with pin-point accuracy and extreme force will impress even the most hardcore of us. Or if you are able to get up close with these majestic birds, one can only marvel at the intricate beauty of their long eyelashes and crest of feathers that surrounds soul-piercing eyes. Their uplisting should be taken as a serious warning sign that our fragmentation and mismanagement of open grassland and savannah ecosystems is having disastrous effects."

Dr Kariuki Ndang'ang'a, Head of Conservation for BirdLife Africa, will never forget undertaking bird surveys in the remote parts Mau Narok in Kenya's Rift Valley in 2003: "Suddenly a pair of huge raptors emerged from the sky – held together by their talons, swinging each other in loops, and tumbling until they were on the ground. I can still imagine the strong swoosh of air ruffling their feathers as they swung. Each of us in the small team, including local guys who were showing us around, had stopped to look – no need for binoculars because of their size. This is when I came to appreciate how big and powerful the Martial Eagle is. This pair had been playing and enjoying the large expanse of untouched wooded grasslands, but I doubt that these grasslands still stand in the same condition."

↖ Secretarybird's scientific name *Sagittarius serpentarius* means 'snake archer'. They strike with pinpoint accuracy
Photo Graham Purse

↗ The Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus* is named for its tumbling aerial manoeuvres
Photo Tobie Oosthuizen/ Shutterstock

↓ Lack of wild prey is an issue for Martial Eagles
Photo Dennis Stuart/ Shutterstock

Bateleurs, too, are famed for their behaviour. Meaning 'tumbler' in French, their name refers to how the birds rock and tilt their wings from side to side when gliding, as if catching their balance like a street performer. Jonathan Onongo from Nature Uganda (BirdLife Partner) recalls his first encounter in western Uganda: "I remember noticing the unmistakable unique shape of this majestic bird of prey in flight over the grasslands of the Semliki Wildlife Reserve. It saddens me to think that this iconic grassland raptor is now globally Endangered."

They are just as beautiful up close, says

Nicci Wright & Melissa Whitecross releasing a tagged Secretarybird
Photo Caroline Howes

Temidayo Osinubi, Conservation Programmes Coordinator, BirdLife Africa, recollecting a juvenile Bateleur sighting in Kruger National Park: "Without the unique black and red colouration of the adults, I could appreciate just how distinct their wings and body shape is when perched." But did that juvenile survive long enough to breed? With electrical powerlines increasingly crossing flight paths, tempting carcasses laced with poison, and suitable nesting trees more difficult to find, the modern life of a Bateleur is a balancing act – and one not made any easier by their size; species with long gestational periods are often hit hardest.

All three species have a huge range throughout sub-Saharan Africa, yet declines have been so severe (up to 80% overall) in recent decades that ornithologists are struggling to spot them, especially outside protected areas. For example, over three bird generations, Bateleurs are reported to have declined by 99% in Northern Cameroon outside protected areas, and 79% within. Whitecross has experienced these data in real life: "Having grown up frequently encountering Secretarybirds on the backroads of South Africa, their notable absence from many a modern road trip is devastating but also motivating to sit-up and do something to stop their demise."

MULTIPLE THREATS

The myriad of threats faced by these birds are almost too many to list, but habitat loss and degradation stands out as a prime suspect. These raptors require vast open habitat to seek out prey and trees to nest in, so the development and transformation of natural environments into agricultural fields, plantations, mines and buildings make the areas unsuitable, and also makes them vulnerable to collisions with infrastructure.

But even those raptors that do nest in protected areas aren't safe. For many years, Ernst Retief, Spatial Planning and Data Manager from BirdLife South Africa, has followed Secretarybirds that he fitted with tracking devices. He's seen what caring parents they are through camera trap photos, enduring blazing sun and intense storms with ease. "I experienced extreme lows when picking up dead birds under powerlines or stuck in fences. But then there were fantastic days, for example when finding chicks on a nest of an adult bird we had tracked from his days as a nestling." A recent analysis of this tracking data found high juvenile mortality rates of 46% within the first three years, as well as the lack of support offered by the protected area network: only 4% of tracked points fell within formally protected areas. This is reflected

FROM CONNECTION TO ACTION

FADZAI MATSVIMBO, BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE

"The decline of large raptors in Africa is a stark reminder of the mountains we need to climb in conservation. Of how nature is struggling against the onslaught of human activities. The time for action is always yesterday. Let's come together to preserve the iconic species of the African skies."

JONATHAN ONONGO, NATURE UGANDA

"I first saw a Bateleur in 2019. I remember noticing the unmistakable unique shape of this majestic bird of prey in flight over Semliki Wildlife Reserve. It saddens me to think that this iconic grassland raptor is now globally Endangered. Save the Bateleur, save Africa's grasslands."

MELISSA WHITECROSS, BL SOUTH AFRICA

"We must focus on reconnecting people with nature and reconnecting the fragments of nature that remain across our highly transformed planet. Only then can we truly save wide-ranging apex predators like Secretarybirds that require intact ecosystems to survive and thrive."

Photo Michael Potter/Shutterstock

BIRD OF THE YEAR

BirdLife South Africa nominated the Secretarybird as Bird of the Year in 2019 and ran a successful awareness campaign educating thousands of children and adults about the plight of this species and the conservation measures in place to help them. Free to download educational materials and webinars are available at **birdlife.org.za**. In the same year, they ran a monitoring challenge using the Birdlasser app and received over 800 sightings of Secretarybirds from across South Africa which will help them to identify areas of remaining strongholds going forward. They are also managing a breeding database and a further six tracking devices have been deployed on Secretarybirds since 2018. All of these data will be pulled into a workshop which will help set the baseline for a Species Conservation Action Plan to be developed.

in Kenya, where the majority of protected areas are reportedly too small for even one pair of Martial Eagles; the size of their territory means that birds will generally forage far outside them, making them more vulnerable to other threats.

The Martial Eagle is one the most persecuted birds in the world. Both Martial Eagles and Bateleurs will sometimes take poultry, livestock and regionally valuable game, meaning local farmers and game wardens frequently seek to eliminate them, although their effect on this prey is almost certainly considerably exaggerated. A compounding factor is also the general loss of wildlife: with less wild prey around, raptors are more susceptible to taking livestock. Unfortunately, persecution often occurs in the form of poisoning, because these birds of prey are also opportunistic scavengers.

While tribal farming communities do use poisoned baits, recent evidence suggests the usage is much higher on commercial farms. For example, in Namibia, communal farms are often on state-owned land, and in addition to struggling to acquire the poison, farmers fear retribution from the state, as using poison is illegal. These farms are also unfenced, and the laying of bait poses a risk to other residents, pets, and livestock. By contrast, commercial farms are often freehold and fenced, with large numbers of livestock spread over large areas, meaning the use of poisoned bait is rife. Whether bird or mammalian predators are being directly targeted across sub-Saharan Africa, scavenging raptors will still die collaterally.

This of course links to Africa's vultures, also savannah species, but which rely entirely on scavenging. For the Martial Eagle, Bateleur and Secretarybird to follow their vulture cousins' precipitous declines towards extinction is harrowing, but it also means that tackling the root threats will benefit both.

FUTURE SAVANNAH SKIES

"While any species being listed as threatened is obviously bad news, it doesn't have to be

KBA FACTFILE

NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK

LOCATION: Nairobi, Kenya

TYPE: Grassland, savannah, forest

SIZE: 11,896 hectares

TRIGGER SPECIES: Secretarybird, Martial Eagle, White-backed Vulture

Nairobi skyline. Photo Mkirnemia

WHAT MAKES IT A HOME? The three featured Endangered raptors, vultures, Grey-crowned Crane, Madagascar Pond Heron, many more. Jackson's widowbird have few areas of such natural grassland left to nest in. Vital for large mammals such as rhino, cheetah.

ANY THREATS? Only 7 km south of Kenya's capital city, this KBA is surrounded by encroaching urban housing, industry, roads and airports, and also highly threatetend by agricultural expansion, quarrying and pollution. Only the southern side allows mammal migration. It is considered an IBA in Danger.

CONSERVATION ACTION? KBA 89% covered by Protected Areas; management plans implemented, but outdated. Major awareness & outreach.

a tragedy", says Ian Burfield, Global Science Coordinator (Species), BirdLife International. "For many, the road to recovery begins here, as listing brings visibility to their plight and helps to raise their conservation priority. The issues flagged by the Red List should form the focus of further research and action."

For the Secretarybird, BirdLife South Africa are one step ahead with a public campaign in 2019 for the species as 'Bird of the Year' [see box]. Also, they are working hard with private landowners to conserve remaining grassland habitats through 'biodiversity stewardship', i.e. securing private properties for conservation in addition to the formal protected area network. Secretarybirds are able to coexist with landowners who farm domestic livestock and wild game if landowners manage their land in a way that provides space for biodiversity.

Whilst Protected Areas and Key Biodiversity Areas will be crucial strongholds, we'll also need to work outside them. This kind of approach is key across Africa, says Ndang'ang'a: "Conservation and policy measures, such as participatory land-use planning, Strategic Environmental Assessments for infrastructure, agriculture, energy and other projects need to be inclusive, especially outside protected areas. This will require the deliberate application of species-based sensitivity tools by developers, and will be key to reversing the plight of raptors in the long term."

Thinking back to our human ancestors observing African grasslands, its land-use that is perhaps the big elephant in the room (or, should we say, savannah). "The Secretarybird is a symbol of wide-open horizons, vistas that humans are relentlessly narrowing", says Whitecross. "Humans are fragmenting the natural world and this loss in connectivity between natural spaces and between people and the environment is a very concerning trajectory – with the loss of wide-ranging apex predators the symptom." Let's not let those unforgettable encounters with African raptors be some of the last. ■

↖ Juvenile Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus* in Kruger National Park
Photo Temidayo Osinubi

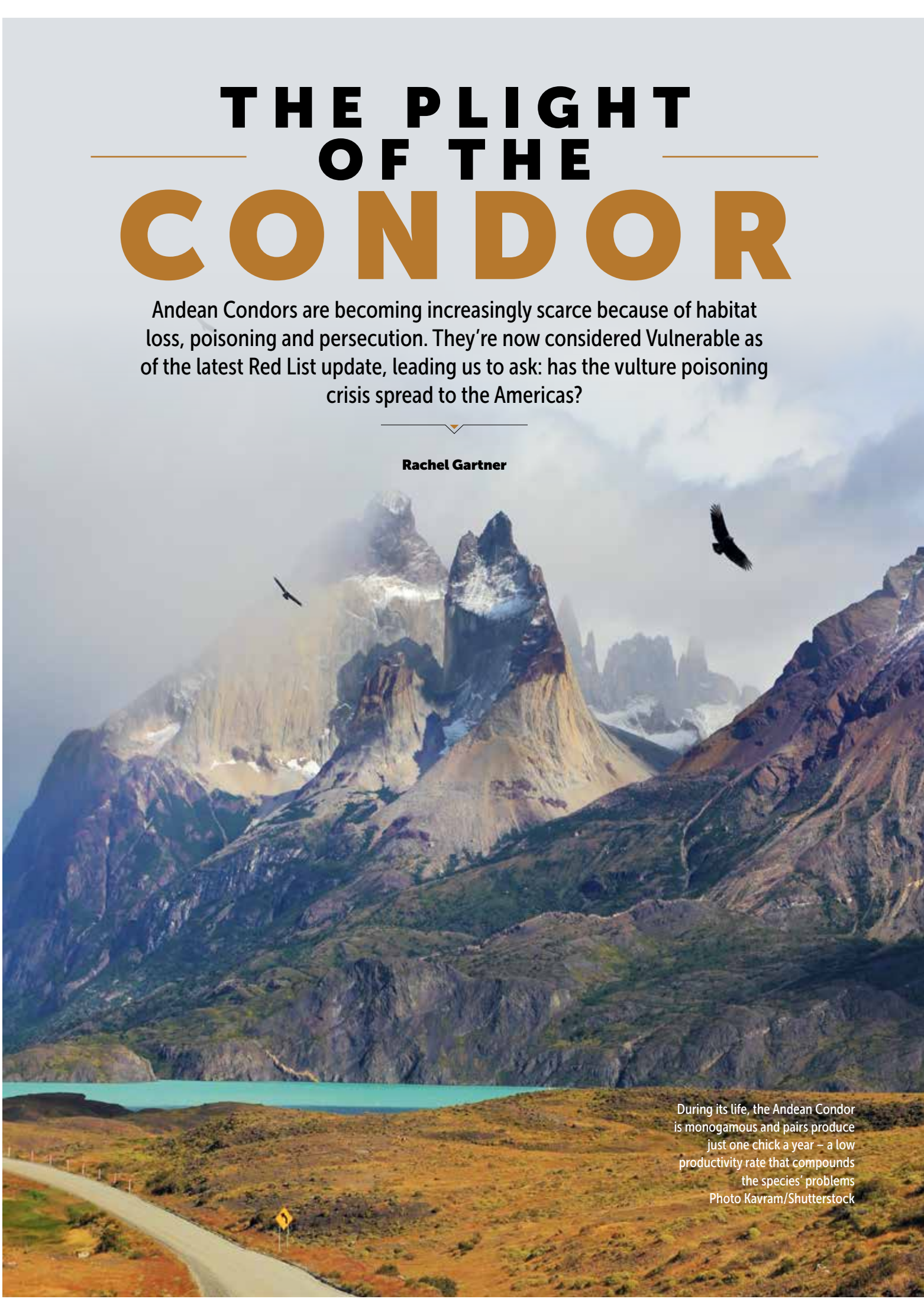
↑ Adult Bateleurs in full colour
Photo Villiers Steyn/ Shutterstock

↑ Melissa Whitecross with Secretarybird
Photo Craig Nattrass

THE PLIGHT OF THE CONDOR

Andean Condors are becoming increasingly scarce because of habitat loss, poisoning and persecution. They're now considered Vulnerable as of the latest Red List update, leading us to ask: has the vulture poisoning crisis spread to the Americas?

Rachel Gartner



During its life, the Andean Condor is monogamous and pairs produce just one chick a year – a low productivity rate that compounds the species' problems
Photo Kavram/Shutterstock

← Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus*
Photo Reisegraf.ch / Shutterstock

BIRD FACTFILE

ANDEAN CONDOR
Vultur gryphus

RED LIST STATUS: Vulnerable

THREATS: Poisoning, illegal hunting, habitat loss, collisions with energy infrastructure

FUN FACT: Can travel over 100 miles without needing to flap its wings

There are many things that assault your senses when you visit Southern Patagonia. First the wind, vicious and constant, which blows your glasses off your face, the hat off your head and, if you're not careful, blowing you off the narrow path you happen to be walking along. Then there is the landscape. Grassy, dry, treeless plains that stretch for miles, until they hit the Andes, which seem to appear out of nowhere and take your breath away with their craggy, snowy peaks. Finally, there is the wildlife. Guanacos (a close relation to llamas) grazing, skittish rheas with their young trailing behind them in an orderly line, scaly armadillos vacuuming insects from the ground. In the distance, Patagonian foxes sniff the air intently in search of their next snack, and pumas silently stalk. But perhaps most striking of all, the condors, soaring high above you, circling for carrion. If you're really lucky, you might get to see them on the ground, hopping around a guanaco carcass, their intelligent and surprisingly handsome bald faces poking up above their feathery shoulders.

Like seeing the Andes for the first time, witnessing an Andean Condor *Vultur gryphus* in its natural habitat is a breathtaking experience. And one that may soon be denied to many. Unfortunately, our recent Red List update shows that the fate of the Condor across its entire range is looking increasingly bleak. If we don't act soon, these majestic birds, who are so much a part of the Andean landscape, might be lost forever.

While the number of Condors is decreasing across the entire continent, populations are smallest in the northern part of their range. There are fears that the species is now extinct in Venezuela, and there are only around 7,000 adults left across its range. "The Andean Condor is built to last. But humans are ruining its natural 'live slow, die old' life strategy, causing high death rates from which it is hard to recover," says Ian Davidson, our Director in the Americas. For anyone who has been following our coverage of the vulture crises affecting Asia, Europe and Africa, the threats facing condors will no doubt sound eerily familiar. Poisoning (both intentional and accidental) is at the top of the list, but condors are also being affected by habitat loss, illegal hunting and wildlife trade, competition for food from feral dog populations and collisions with energy infrastructure.

Most concerningly, there have been several mass poisonings reported in the last few years. Many ranchers across the region coat livestock carcasses in illegal organophosphate pesticides and other chemicals to ward off potential

With a wingspan that can top ten feet, Andean Condor is one of the world's largest flying birds
Photo Don Mammoser

Lesser Rhea *Rhea pennata*
Photo Rachel Gartner

The Andes stretches through seven South American countries
Photo Matthew Midgley

predators like pumas, foxes and feral dogs. In 2018 alone, over 120 Condors were confirmed to have been killed by poisoning, with one event in Argentinian Patagonia accounting for 23 deaths. This practice is not just harmful to condors, but all wildlife.

The impact of these combined threats on Old World vultures has been significant and serious. In Asia, vulture populations plummeted by 99% over a 20-year period because of the use of NSAIDs – drugs which are deadly to Old World vultures – in cattle farming. In Africa, seven vultures are threatened with extinction. If a similar pattern emerges in the Americas, the result would be catastrophic.

There is hope though. Our work to protect Old World vultures has shown that decisive and targeted action can be successful. Following a blanket ban on NSAIDs and the implementation of vulture safe zones in several Asian countries, vulture populations in the region are now showing signs of stabilising. In addition to banning harmful drugs and chemicals (and effectively enforcing these bans), the best tools in our arsenal to protect condors are increased habitat protection, awareness raising and education. And encouragingly, there are already a number of Condor conservation programmes up and running in South America.

The Andean Condor Working Group, established in 2012, brings together the efforts of a number of organisations focused on protecting condors in the region. Aves y Conservación (BirdLife in Ecuador), as a member of the Ecuador Working Group, has been participating in monitoring populations through a nationwide census and building awareness. A dedicated reserve was also set up by the Jocotoco Foundation in 2014, and there have been several successful releases in the country. Asociación Armonía (BirdLife in Bolivia) has also been actively engaged in monitoring condor populations and building awareness through education programmes in the community.

The Condor's change in Red List status to Vulnerable provides us with a clear message that we need to scale up these conservation activities, and do more work to protect the species across its entire range. Acting quickly, we have the opportunity to avoid the same scale of crisis that has affected Old World Vultures.

At the crack of dawn on a typically chilly Patagonian morning a few years ago, your writer gathered with a number of other excited onlookers to watch the sun rise over the Fitz Roy mountain range in Argentina. As the sunlight coloured the mountains in a bright pink glow, the group was distracted by a condor taking flight, soaring higher and higher until it vanished out of view. The thought that this spectacle might become increasingly rare, or disappear altogether, is unspeakably sad – but not inevitable. ■

Q&A

TATIANA SANTANDER
Project Coordinator, Aves y Conservación

When did the condor's plight first appear on your radar?
We were the first organisation to launch a campaign to save the condor in Ecuador in the 1990s. We've been involved in helping to monitor Condors through the national census.

What measures have been instrumental in helping you gauge the extent of the situation?
Radio tracking – led by the Peregrine Fund and Fundacion Condor – has been crucial to building a better understanding of the species within Ecuador. For example, this tracking has shown us that the majority of condors are not within protected areas.

What are the next steps for condor conservation?
Environmental education is probably one of the most important activities that we need to focus on. In addition to building awareness with students and local communities – which we've done very successfully – we need to educate governments and decision-makers, since they have the power to make significant changes to help protect this species. In the future, we would like to create a Condor booth, a mobile education unit that can be easily taken into communities around the country.

KITE COUNTRY

In more positive raptor news, the Red Kite has been downlisted to Least Concern, thanks in part to a wildly successful reintroduction program that saw the species return to England and Scotland after a century's absence

Shakespeare wrote of Red Kites – but not to praise them. In *King Lear*, the eponymous monarch dismisses his deceitful daughter as a 'detested kite', and later makes remark to the raptor's habit of stealing laundry to line their nests with the line: "when the kite builds, look to your lesser linen." Far from having an irrational hatred of raptors, however, the world's most famous bard was simply capturing the mood of the time.

"In the 1600s, the Red Kite was probably the commonest raptor in the British Isles", says Duncan Orr-Ewing, Head of Species and Land Management, RSPB Scotland (our UK Partner).

Alex Dale

↑ Duncan Orr-Ewing, Head of Species and Land Management, RSPB Scotland, has worked to restore the Red Kite to British skies for 30 years Photo RSPB

"This was a species that thrived on the poor sanitation of the time, and we know they were common even in central London."

There is a line of thinking that the 'city of kites and crows' mentioned in the play *Coriolanus* is a reference to the medieval London Shakespeare knew in life. A London where the streets were paved not with gold, but with rotting food and carcasses – perfect conditions for an opportunistic scavenger such as Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. The species was widely dismissed as vermin, and indeed, King James of Scotland once decreed that they be "killed wherever possible", but the species remained protected by

↑ Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, North Yorkshire, England, Photo Scott M Ward/ Shutterstock

→ Red Kite in flight Photo Syds Pics/ Shutterstock

law because – followers of the vulture crisis can stop us if this sounds familiar – they were prized for their efficiency in keeping the streets free of disease.

Times change – and sometimes for the better. Throughout the various lockdowns in 2020, the graceful overhead circling of Red Kites proved to be a daily highlight for members of the Cambridgeshire-based BirdLife magazine team. You would not dare imagine that these fork-tailed raptors had, at one point, disappeared from England entirely. For over 100 years.

"In the 1800s, Red Kites disappeared very quickly", says Orr-Ewing. "Public attitudes changed as sporting estates emerged, the rise in popularity of taxonomy and specimen-collecting brought their own pressures, and bounties were paid out for raptor control". The 1870s saw the last recording of a breeding pair in England and Scotland, and in Great Britain, by the turn of the 1900s the species only persisted as five breeding pairs in central Wales, growing slowly to just over 50 pairs in the 1980s . Even then, concerns abounded about the low rate of chick production by the Welsh kites. Although the RSPB and local people had been working on the species since 1905, primarily to protect nests from egg collectors, it was clear a bigger vision was needed to ensure the species could thrive in the UK. Enter stage left what would become the world's longest continuous conservation project.

In the eighties, the Red Kite was one of only three native UK species to be considered globally threatened, thus making it a priority species for the RSPB. In 1986, the RSPB and the Nature Conservancy Council (now Natural England and Scottish Natural Heritage) began to discuss the possibility of reintroducing the species back to England and Scotland. Such an effort could only be considered if a species met the IUCN guidelines on translocation, which state, among other criteria, that the human-created factors leading to the local extinction had been addressed, and that the birds chosen to be introduced were as genetically similar as possible to the former indigenous population. Ultimately, the proposal met these criteria, and the first birds were released in 1989, in north Scotland and Buckinghamshire.

Orr-Ewing joined the RSPB shortly after these releases, and recalls that the project yielded swift results. "For the Scottish end of the project, and for the first year in England, the birds was sourced from a healthy and expanding population in Skåne, Sweden. One of the reasons this group was chosen was if you look latitudinally, Malmo is roughly on the same line as Inverness", says Orr-Ewing. "These birds were flown over by the RAF, which was momentous in itself – it was the first time any RAF plane had landed in Sweden since the end of World War II."

BIRD FACTFILE

RED KITE
Milvus milvus

RED LIST STATUS: Least Concern

THREATS: Poisoning, persecution, change in land use

FUN FACT: Primarily a scavenger, but also hunt small rodents, worms and fish

"WE ESTIMATED THE KITES WOULD BEGIN BREEDING IN THEIR THIRD CALENDAR YEAR. MOST BEGAN AFTER TWO – AND SOME AFTER JUST ONE"

The team estimated that they needed to introduce at least twenty birds annually to the chosen sites across England and Scotland if the populations were to establish themselves, with later birds imported in from Navarra, Spain. This happened sooner than expected. "We estimated the kites would begin breeding in their third calendar year, but actually most began at two years of age – and some at one, which was unprecedented", says Orr-Ewing. "As soon as the population was reproducing, we could see it was on an ever-increasing trajectory."

Indeed, the populations established themselves so rapidly, particularly in south England, that small numbers of English kites were used to establish populations in other parts of the country. Today, there are an estimated nearly 6,000 breeding pairs in Britain – around 15% of the world's population – and growing. Attention now turns to addressing the species' decline in parts of continental Europe. Orr-Ewing is an advisor to the LIFE EUROKITE project, which advances the EU species Action Plan for Red Kite by using telemetry technology to identify the species' movements, and document the main causes of mortality for the bird across the European Union, which hosts the vast majority of the species' global breeding population. The main drivers will be familiar to long-term followers of our work in Europe – intensive agriculture, and illegal killing. Big-scale issues with no quick-fix solution. The species' downlisting to Least Concern is resolutely not a reason for the conservation world to cruise along as carefree as gliding kite.

However, translocation can help give a species a fighting chance, and Orr-Ewing highlights a reversal of fortunes that drives the point home. "There is a proposal to reintroduce the species to Extremadura and Andalusia, where they are now locally extinct. So, we have the bizarre situation where Red Kites are going to be taken from south of England and reintroduced to Spain – the country where the majority of the English population originate".

In any case, while the conservation world remains vigilant about the long-term prospects of the Red Kite, in Great Britain, at least, the future is bright for the species. London is a city of kites once again – and that truly is something to crow about. ■

↑ Eurasian Buzzard *Buteo buteo* is another species that has rebounded in the British Isles, thanks to shifting attitudes among gamekeepers
Photo Coatesy/ Shutterstock

PARROTS IN PERIL

One of the planet's most beleaguered avian groups, the neotropical parrots, took another hit in the 2020 Red List, with a further four species moved to a higher threat category. However, success stories from our American Partners show that hope remains

James Lowen

Red-lored Parrot, *Amazona autumnalis*
Photo Ondrej Prosicky

As one of BirdLife's Red List researchers, Claudia Hermes has the inside track on the avian trends that are cause for most concern. And there's one group in particular that keeps her awake at night. "I'm really worried about parrots in Latin America and the Caribbean."

Judging by the 2020 IUCN Red List update, her concern is warranted. A further four parrot species from the new world tropics were uplisted to a higher threat category in the update, meaning that now, over half the region's parrots are classified as Near Threatened, globally threatened or extinct – a proportion double the global figure. And this may represent only the tip of the iceberg: Hermes already envisages that further parrots from the Caribbean and Central America will be uplisted next year.

This year's uplisted quartet – comprised of two amazons, a macaw and a parakeet – are essentially facing the same set of threats, which Hermes describes as a combination of habitat loss and direct persecution or trade. But their uplisting also reflects improved understanding of avian ecology. Ornithologists recently recalculated generation lengths for all birds, prompting BirdLife's Red List team to re-evaluate species against the IUCN criterion governing the rate of population decline across three generations. "For many amazons and macaws, generations transpire to be longer than we understood," says Hermes, "so a species' population decline over, say, a revised duration of 50 years, is more profound than when we thought three generation lengths were a decade shorter."

This impact of this ostensibly technical point is particularly perturbing when combined with new information revealing populations are lower than assumed. This is the case for Great Green Macaw *Ara ambiguus*, now uplisted to Critically Endangered. Alarm bells were already ringing following calculations of a 34% decline over three generations in Ecuador and a 99% crash over the same period in Nicaragua/Costa Rica – the consequence of pressures such as habitat disturbance, including selective logging of a favoured nest tree, and trade. But the game-changer was a shocking revelation that numbers in the presumed stronghold of Colombia were just one-tenth of the previous reckoning.

The second newly Critically Endangered parrot is a relative new kid on the block. Lilacine Amazon *Amazona lilacina* appeared on conservationists' radar as recently as 2014, when BirdLife judged the Ecuadorian endemic to be a different species from the widespread Red-lored Amazon *Amazona autumnalis*. Although surveys over the past couple of years suggest there are more Lilacine Amazons than thought, data also suggest that numbers have declined by at least 80% over three generations. The main threat is illegal hunting for domestic pets: research published in 2020 predicts that the majority of local communities keep captive Lilacine Amazons. The problem is all too common. Sadly, the birds' beauty – and human weakness for colourful creatures – is intrinsic to their downfall.

This is also true of Orange-fronted Parakeet *Eupsittula canicularis*, which occurs from Mexico to Costa Rica. One of Central America's most abundant parrots, with an ability to adapt to deforestation and even tolerate urban areas, this wasn't an obvious candidate for globally threatened status. Awareness of the scale of trapping changed all that. An estimated 570,000 individuals were illegally captured across the 25 years to 2019, particularly during the first half of that period. This suggested a population

Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis*
Photo via Shutterstock

Blue-throated Macaw in an artificial nest box
Photo Asociación Armonía

decline of up to 41% over three generations. Little wonder that our researchers catapulted this attractive parrot from Least Concern to Vulnerable.

At the margin, trade also affects Black-billed Amazon *Amazona agilis*. Endemic to Jamaica, this parrot has been uplisted from Vulnerable to Endangered. The impact of poaching has exacerbated the principal pressures of habitat destruction (notably a bauxite-mining concession), predation by invasive species such as rats and snakes, and, above all, climate change. "Climate change messes up everything", says Hermes. "As an example, changes in rainfall patterns affect fruiting trees, which makes it harder for breeding adults to find food." Sometimes this forces birds closer to villages – which heightens the risk of being captured.

For species imperilled by the climate crisis, it can be hard to know what tangible conservation actions to suggest. Tentative proposals for Black-billed Amazon include protecting forest, implementing environmental-education programmes and captive breeding. For other uplisted species, the way forward is a little clearer. In pockets of its range, Great Green Macaw is being helped – by Costa Rica's Macaw Recovery Network, Colombia's Fundación ProAves and Ecuador's Fundación Jocotoco – through research, habitat protection, community engagement and reintroductions. More such action is needed, and more widely.

Meanwhile, thanks to enforcement of Mexican legislation banning trade, the deleterious impact of harvesting wild Orange-fronted Parakeets seems to be a thing of the past. Nevertheless, it will take years to ascertain whether the moratorium is sufficient to return the species to a lower category of threat. For Lilacine Amazon, the solution – alongside initiatives such as the reserve expansion with which the American Bird Conservancy (ABC, a BirdLife Partner in the US) is supporting Fundación Jocotoco – may lie in helping local communities convert their love of parrots into efforts to keep wild birds safe.

↑ Orange-fronted Parakeet *Eupsittula canicularis* Photo Wollertz / Shutterstock

> **"THE YELLOW-EARED PARROT'S RECOVERY OFFERS HOPE WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE EVEN IN GREAT ADVERSITY"**

This all seems a lot to hope for particularly when, as Hermes admits, "time is running out to find solutions for these species". But experience from BirdLife's Americas Partnership and beyond suggests that positivity in justifiable.

In Bolivia, BirdLife Partner Asociación Armonía – again with ABC backing – has long strived to rescue remnant populations of the Critically Endangered Blue-throated Macaw *Ara glaucogularis*. Armonía's Barba Azul Nature Reserve protects seasonally important foraging and roosting sites for over a hundred macaws. In November 2020, the Bolivian government declared the protected area a 'Private Natural Heritage Reserve' – the first designated anywhere in the country in nine years. "Our next challenge is to get macaws breeding there, so we protect their entire lifecycle", says Tjalle Boorsma, Armonía's Conservation Programme Director. There are strong grounds for hope: at Armonía's Laney Rickman reserve, a nest-box programme has fledged 93 birds since 2005. Just as excitingly, Armonía's discovered three previously unknown Blue-throated Macaw breeding site during a 2020 survey of remote savannah grasslands. The resulting moderate population increase, to 312–455 birds, is building confidence in a sustained recovery.

As well as Blue-throated Macaw and Lilacine Amazon, Dan Lebbin (ABC's vice-president for Threatened Species) says that twelve globally threatened or Near Threatened parrots have

↑ Blue-throated Macaw chicks, Laney Rickman reserve
Photo Asociación Armonía

↖ The discovery of a new breeding site has given our Bolivan Partner new insights into the Blue-throated Macaw's nesting preferences
Photo Asociación Armonía

↗ Great Green Macaw *Ara ambiguus*
Photo Martin Mecnarowski

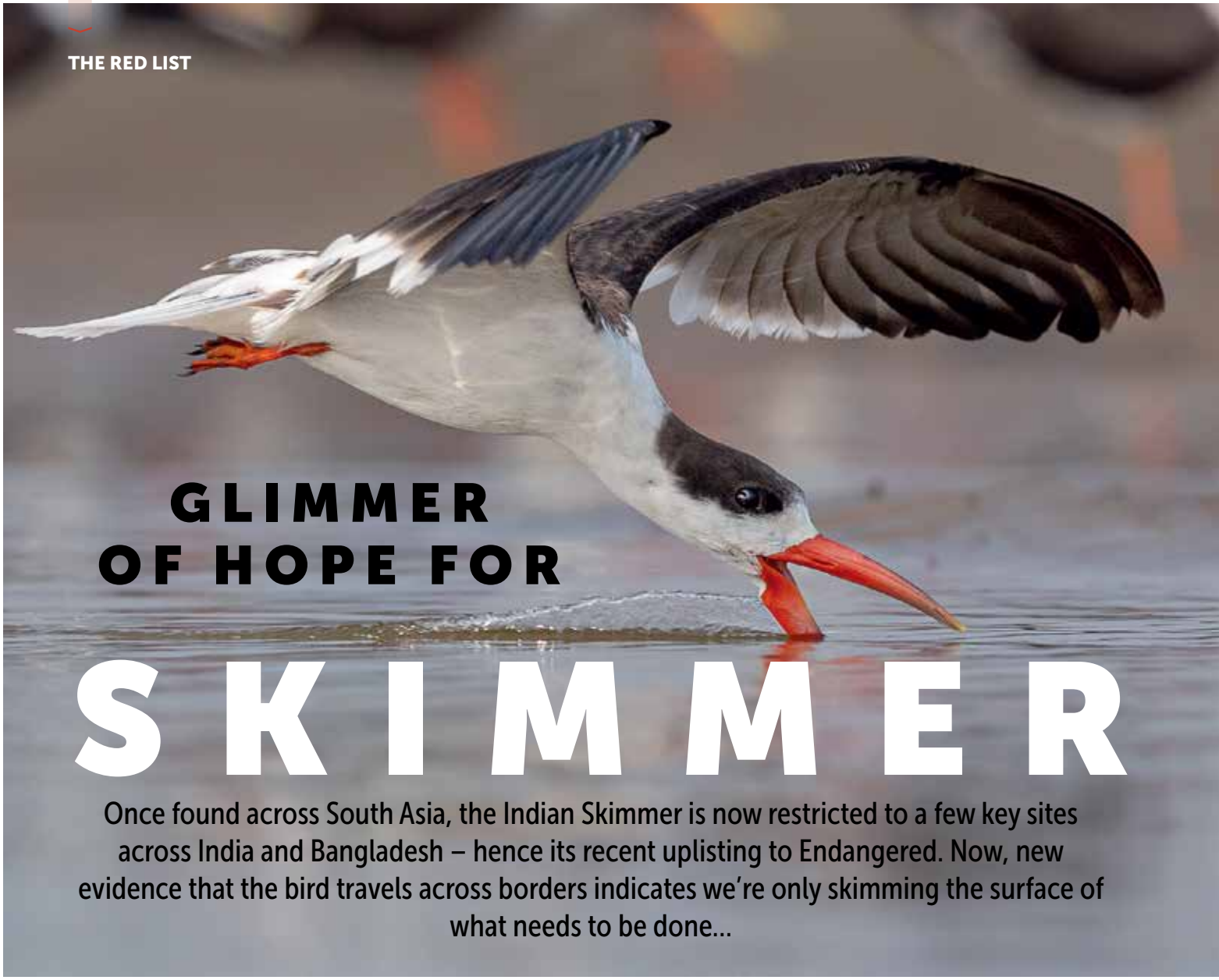
been the focus of targeted ABC conservation projects and programmes across Latin America and the Caribbean. These include helping Fundação Biodiversitas protect the most important colony of Lear's Macaw *Anodorhynchus leari*. Thanks to conservation efforts, this Brazilian endemic recovered sufficiently to be downlisted from Critically Endangered to Endangered in 2009.

Roughly 80 other species have benefited from habitat protection across ABC and partners' reserve network, including those of BirdLife Partners SAVE Brasil, Bahamas National Trust and Grupo Jaragua (BirdLife in the Dominican Republic). In 2019, ABC also established the Parrot Conservation Alliance, bringing together animal-rescue sanctuaries with environmental organisations to support wild-parrot conservation programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean. ABC's experience, Lebbin says, "proves that conservation can reverse parrot declines".

Lubbin could equally have lauded another ABC-supported parrot success story brightening the latest Red List update. The fifth New World parrot to feature does so, thrillingly, because it has been downlisted. No longer is Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis* Endangered, a remarkable feat given that barely 20 years ago, just 81 birds were left, all in Colombia. Subsequent work, led by Fundación ProAves (whose logo features the parrot) and Loro Parque Foundation, has returned spectacular dividends. By 2019, the parrot's population had reached 2,601 birds, prompting its new categorisation as Vulnerable. For a species deemed Critically Endangered until 2010, this is an extraordinary turnaround.

Habitat protection and restoration, plus a ban on using wax palms in Palm Sunday celebrations and a successful public-awareness campaign, have all contributed to preventing this parrot's extinction. Paul Salaman, who initiated the project, is particularly proud of the strength of community involvement, saying that "the dire plight of the Yellow-eared Parrot unified a nation to work collaboratively to save the species". So resounding is the turn-around in this parrot's fortunes that Salaman believes the Yellow-eared Parrot's recovery "offers hope that we can make a difference even in the face of great adversity."

However unsettled she may be about the parlous status of New World parrots, Salaman's sentiment is one that Claudia Hermes can share. "As long as we react and get things done, all is not yet lost. There remains hope." ■



GLIMMER OF HOPE FOR SKIMMER

Once found across South Asia, the Indian Skimmer is now restricted to a few key sites across India and Bangladesh – hence its recent uplisting to Endangered. Now, new evidence that the bird travels across borders indicates we're only skimming the surface of what needs to be done...

This January, researchers in Bangladesh discovered Indian Skimmers on a survey in Nijhum Dwip National Park. Three of the birds had colour bands, tagged by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS, BirdLife in India). This confirmed what many had long suspected – that Indian Skimmers move between India and Bangladesh, and thus conservation of this globally threatened, tern-like bird must be coordinated at the flyway level.

The Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* is a black-and-white bird with a bright orange beak: an unmissable lower mandible that's longer than the upper portion of the beak. This is a tool for the bird to skim the water surface, picking up small aquatic prey on the way. It nests on the ground, specifically on sandbars in rivers. It is an unforgettable bird, once you see it. Yet, the breeding grounds are shrinking from beneath the Indian Skimmer's feet.

The species faces a bundle of threats. Sand mining, much of it illegal, is decimating skimmer habitat in India. Illegal sand mining has not just ravaged rivers, but also law and order – with forest department staff losing their lives to speeding sand mining trucks. Another threat is irrigation projects and dams – which can reduce water to a level that encourages other species to damage skimmer nests, or can flood nesting sites altogether. Chambal river, known to be India's cleanest, is suffering a lack of ecological flow because of hydro projects. When water levels are very low, predators like free-ranging dogs can easily raid skimmer eggs and chicks.

Neha Sinha

↑ Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* Photo Sriram Bird Photographer/Shutterstock

In Bangladesh, the bird faces intrusion through agriculture, cattle, and direct human presence. Once found in Pakistan, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, the bird now appears to be mostly restricted to India and Bangladesh. The results of the first ever Indian Skimmer count, held on 19-20 January 2021 by BNHS and Bird Count India, found 1,609 birds from 45 locations. In India, 1,159 birds were counted, and a further 450 were counted in Bangladesh.

"In India, the fact that water is a contested resource has really affected the species", says

← Gharial *Gavialis gangeticus* depends on the same riverine ecosystems as Indian Skimmer
Photo Pramod CL

→ Skimmers nest on sandbars
Photo Ken Donaldson/ Shutterstock

↙ Indian Skimmer in flight
Photo Sriram Bird Photographer/Shutterstock

↓ Black Bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda*
Photo Aman Raghuwanshi/ Shutterstock

Parveen Shaikh a research fellow for BNHS. "Habitats on the Ganga basin are majorly impacted- there are hardly any good breeding sites left for the Indian Skimmer." BNHS has been working on nest protection of the species in Chambal sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh. Using a mosaic of sticks and fences, and using community members as nest protectors, the idea is to ensure the bird has nesting and recruitment success. The skimmer count shows us the most important congregation landscapes for the bird today in India: Phaphamau (on the river Ganga in Uttar Pradesh), Tikarpara, Satkosia and Badmul (over River Mahanadi in Odisha) Rozi Port, Jamnagar and Dhinchada in Gujarat, Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh, National Chambal Sanctuary over Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, and Nijhum Dweep National Park in Bangladesh.

Saving Indian Skimmers will conserve riverine ecosystems, which support many other sympatric species, such as the Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* (Endangered). Present breeding records are noted from Pong Dam, River Chambal, River Son, River Ganges, Tawa Reservoir near Satpura Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and River Mahanadi.

"Anthropogenic activities in riverine ecosystems and overall habitat loss are causing population declines of many riverine breeding birds", says conservation biologist Sayam U Chowdhary, who works in Bangladesh. "The dwindling Indian Skimmer numbers throughout the Indian subcontinent is a stark example of what is happening to other river dependent species."

According to the Convention on Migratory Species' information on the Central Asian Flyway, of which India and Bangladesh are a part, the flyway's action plan should include the Indian Skimmer among species of 'great significance'. This urgency is reflected in the Indian Skimmer's recent uplisting to Endangered, and there is an urgent need to protect the last habitats left for it. To this effect, a concerted action plan under the CMS, and state-level actions would go a long way. ■

Neha Sinha is the Conservation and Policy Officer for BNHS. Her book on Indian wildlife, 'Wild and Wilful' (HarperCollins), is out now. She tweets at @nehaa_sinha.

7 THINGS YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED FROM THE 2020 RED LIST

The carol "The Twelve Days of Christmas" may soon need to become one verse shorter as a European partridge is listed as Near Threatened. Meanwhile, paradise is restored for one flycatcher, proving that conservation can achieve great things. Explore these and more in our round-up of fascinating under-the-radar findings from this year's Red List update...

Jessica Law

HORNBILL OF PLENTY?
Native to western India, the Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros griseus* was one of 40 species to be uplisted to a higher threat category in the 2020 Red List. In this instance, deforestation across its range was a leading driver
Photo Sunil Onamkulam

Red-legged Partridge / Pierre Dalous

1 RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE LOSES ITS PEAR TREE

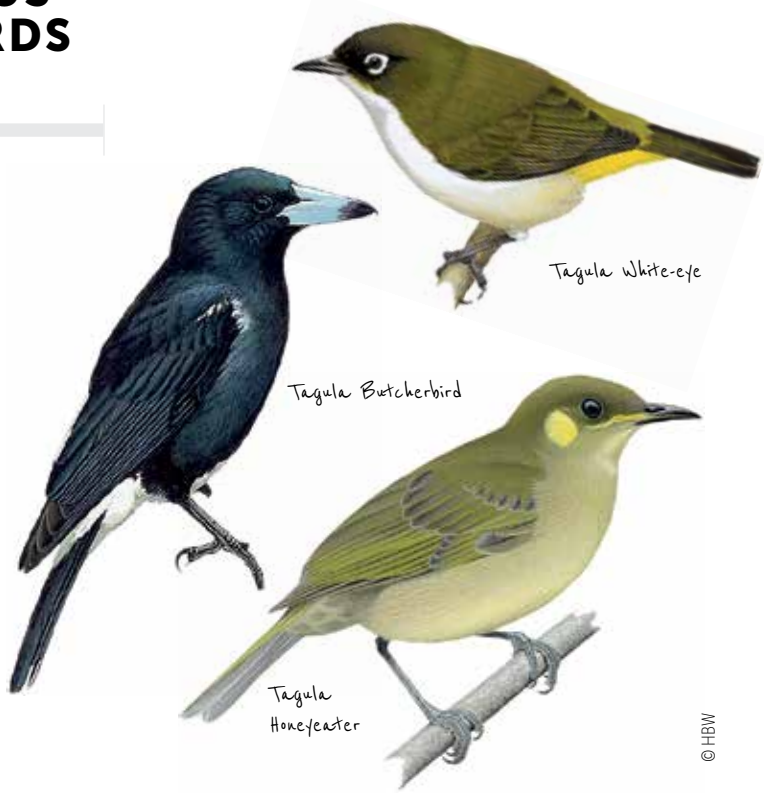
This wasn't the Christmas news anyone wanted to hear, especially in 2020. But this year, another bird species from the popular carol "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was reclassified to a higher threat category on the Red List. The Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*, a colourful, instantly recognisable gamebird, has been classed as Near Threatened in this year's update. The other bird named in the carol is the European Turtle-dove *Streptopelia turtur*, listed as Vulnerable since 2015. Both species are thought to be declining for similar reasons, including agricultural intensification, habitat loss and unsustainable hunting.

Although the Red-legged Partridge is commonly seen on farmland across southwest Europe, agricultural practices are becoming more and more intense, homogenising the mosaic of different habitats it needs to nest and feed. These include field margins, hedgerows and orchards (including pear trees!). Over-hunting probably had a hand in this, too: according to recent research, over 60% of its estimated population may be shot each year – just another sign that we desperately need to make both farming and hunting practices more sustainable.

2 STATUS OF MYSTERIOUS VOLCANIC ISLAND BIRDS REVEALED

Vanatinai Island, also known as Tagula, is a remote volcanic island in the southwest Pacific, 360 km southeast of Papua New Guinea. With its dense wooded mountain range jutting through smoky wisps of cloud, it resembles Jurassic Park, and for many years its bird species were as mysterious as the dinosaurs they evolved from. Due to the island's remote, inaccessible landscape, little scientific research had been conducted, and until now some species have been classed as "Data Deficient" on the Red List.

This year, for the first time, we now know enough to properly assess the status of three species: the Tagula Honeyeater *Microptilotis vicina*, Tagula Butcherbird *Cracticus louisiadensis* and Tagula White-eye *Zosterops meeki*, with the latter two deemed Near Threatened. Logging, agricultural expansion and commercial gold prospecting are destroying their rainforest habitats. These vital new discoveries came in large part from research lead by one scientist, William Goulding, whose ambition is to improve knowledge of all the endemic bird species of Tagula and the wider Louisiade Archipelago.



3 JUNÍN GREBE SWIMS AGAINST TIDE OF EXTINCTION

Junin Grebe / Gunnar Engblom, Kolibri Expeditions

Another species came off the Critically Endangered list this year thanks to the hard work of scientists, government agencies and local people. The Junín Grebe *Podiceps taczanowskii* is a unique, flightless diving bird found only Lake Junín in the Peruvian highlands. Sadly, in the 20th century, the home it had adapted to so perfectly became a polluted prison, degraded by runoff from mining activities and sewage. Worse, its nesting areas would suddenly and fatally dry out as water was extracted to supply hydroelectric plants. By 1993, just 50 birds survived, and the fate of the entire species hung in the balance.

Thankfully, its plight did not go unnoticed. The lake was designated a Ramsar wetland of international importance and an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area, and in 2002 the Peruvian government passed an emergency law to clean large areas of water and place greater restrictions on water extraction. As part of BirdLife's High Andean Wetland project, we helped Peruvian conservation group ECOAN to set up long-term research and community education programmes. The species has become a flagship for High Andean Wetland conservation, and while the tide hasn't completely turned – it is still Endangered – it is definitely heading in the right direction.

Audouins Gull / pintaforites

4 AUDOUIN'S GULL IN SUDDEN COLONY COLLAPSE

Following a population increase and range expansion in recent decades, nobody expected that Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*, a well-known Mediterranean seabird, would again become Vulnerable to extinction. Alarm bells began ringing when researchers reported the collapse of its largest breeding colony, at the Ebro Delta in northeast Spain, after several years of very low breeding. Although some birds are relocating and forming new colonies, overall numbers have been in steep decline since 2010 – which is what you might expect when the site that hosted two-thirds of its global population becomes unliveable.

So, what happened at the Ebro Delta? It seems to be a combination of factors, all of them manmade. On land, the loss of suitable habitat meant that, when predators started to naturally increase around the breeding site, the gulls had nowhere else to flee to. Indeed, many of the relocated colonies are in suboptimal habitats such as shipping ports. Problems also persist out at sea. Unusually for large gulls, Audouin's Gull is a specialist fish eater rather than a scavenger, so is threatened by overfishing. The species is also a common victim of accidental "bycatch" by fishing vessels.

Seychelles Paradise-flycatcher / Martin Pelanek/Shutterstock

5 SEYCHELLES PARADISE-FLYCATCHER: PARADISE RESTORED

Great news for the Seychelles Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone corvina*, a stunningly iridescent songbird, whose name, Terpsiphone, means "delightful voice" in Greek. As of this year, the species is no longer considered Critically Endangered. Formerly confined to La Digue island in the Seychelles, its population has steadily increased over the past two decades and has been successfully reintroduced to another part of its former range, Denis Island. The new colony is growing and thriving, and the flycatcher's melodious, whistling call can be heard throughout the island's forests, which are now predator-free thanks to an ongoing habitat restoration programme. A third population was introduced to Curieuse Island in 2018-2019, and has already started breeding successfully.

This heartening success is the result of years of hard work by Nature Seychelles (BirdLife Partner) and its collaborators. Together, they established a nature reserve from scratch, together with an education centre and a large-scale public awareness campaign. This included a drive to set up water baths at schools and community centres, to help all birds survive the dry season. The flycatcher is still classed as Vulnerable, and much of its habitat is still threatened by development projects, but its home is at least one step closer to paradise.

6 LOCAL LOVE OF CRANE AIDS ITS RECOVERY

The Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* has moved one category closer to safety this year, from Vulnerable to Near Threatened – a shining example of the power of protected areas and habitat restoration. This majestic waterbird makes its home on the wetlands of the Tibetan plateau in western China, as well as adjacent parts of northern India and Bhutan. Over the years, this habitat has been encroached on by intensive agriculture and urbanisation.

Fortunately, there is already a lot of love for the bird in the community. It is revered in Buddhist traditions, and culturally safeguarded across much of its range. And while the birds are wary of humans, they sometimes become accustomed to local people who do not disturb them. In fact, according to findings from the BNHS (BirdLife in India), the cranes appear to be able to distinguish people in traditional dress, and are especially wary of others. This presented an opportunity to engage local people in the bird's protection. Every year in November, Bhutan holds a festival to raise awareness of crane conservation, and the Black-necked Crane is the state bird of Jammu and Kashmir. With a recovering population and nature reserves being respected, the future looks bright.

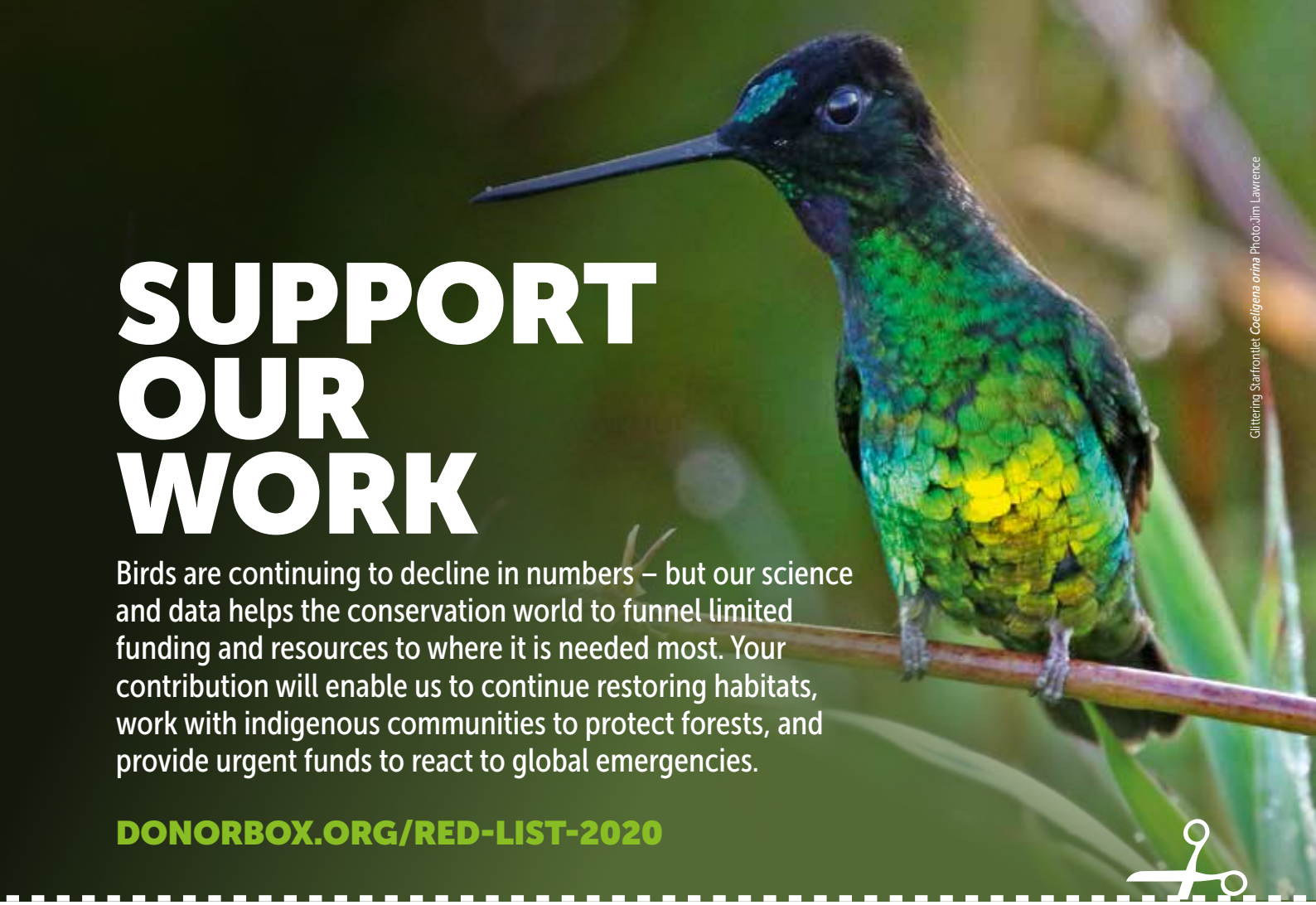
Black-Necked Crane / Candle Tree

Campbell Island Teal at Auckland Zoo / Kimberley Collins

7 CAMPBELL TEAL: HOME AT LAST

This year, the Campbell Teal *Anas nesiotis* becomes another success story in New Zealand's ongoing ambition to control invasive species and restore its habitats' natural equilibrium. Unusual in that it is both flightless and nocturnal, this small, iridescent dabbling duck has been reclassified from Endangered to Vulnerable. This is particularly impressive since it was thought extinct for many years after being wiped out by Brown Rats on its native home, Campbell Island, 700 kilometres south of mainland New Zealand. However, in 1975 it was rediscovered on Dent Island, a tiny nearby islet that had remained rat-free. The race was now on to restore this small population to its former range.

After much trial and error, conservationists successfully got this choosy bird to breed in captivity. An 'insurance population' was released on Codfish Island, which was already pest-free and intensively managed for Kakapo. Restoring the remoter and more rugged Campbell Island was a more ambitious affair, with thelicopters to drop bait across the whole island. whole island. In 2004, after almost a century away, the species was brought back home. ■



Glittering Starfrontlet *Coeligena orina* Photo:Jim Lawrence

SUPPORT OUR WORK

Birds are continuing to decline in numbers – but our science and data helps the conservation world to funnel limited funding and resources to where it is needed most. Your contribution will enable us to continue restoring habitats, work with indigenous communities to protect forests, and provide urgent funds to react to global emergencies.

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RED LIST 2020
EVERY BIRD CATEGORY CHANGE

THREAT LEVEL INCREASED
(SPECIES UPLISTED TO A HIGHER THREAT CATEGORY)

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	2019 RED LIST CATEGORY	2020 RED LIST CATEGORY
Henst's Goshawk	*Accipiter henstii*	NT	VU
Madagascar Jacana	*Actophilornis albinucha*	NT	EN
Kabobo Apalis	*Apalis kaboboensis*	NT	VU
Namuli Apalis	*Apalis lynesi*	NT	EN
Martial Eagle	*Polemaetus bellicosus*	VU	EN
Secretarybird	*Sagittarius serpentarius*	VU	EN
Bateleur	*Terathopius ecaudatus*	NT	EN
Dupont's Lark	*Chersophilus duponti*	NT	VU
Audouin's Gull	*Larus audouinii*	LC	VU
Black-billed Amazon	*Amazona agilis*	VU	EN
Lilacine Amazon	*Amazona lilacina*	EN	CR
Great Green Macaw	*Ara ambiguus*	EN	CR
Santa Marta Sabrewing	*Campylopterus phainopeplus*	EN	CR
Santa Marta Foliage-gleaner	*Clibanornis rufipectus*	NT	VU
Perija Starfrontlet	*Coeligena consita*	VU	EN
Jamaican Crow	*Corvus jamaicensis*	LC	NT
Orange-fronted Parakeet	Eupsittula canicularis	LC	VU
St Lucia Oriole	*Icterus laudabilis*	NT	EN
Costa Rican Ground-sparrow	*Melozone cabanisi*	LC	NT
Bahama Warbler	*Setophaga flavescens*	NT	EN
Barbuda Warbler	*Setophaga subita*	NT	VU
Andean Condor	*Vultur gryphus*	NT	VU
Galapagos Dove	*Zenaida galapagoensis*	LC	NT
Brown-cheeked Bulbul	*Alophoixus bres*	NT	EN
Grey-cheeked Bulbul	*Alophoixus tephrogenys*	LC	VU
Great Argus	*Argusianus argus*	NT	VU
Chestnut-capped Thrush	*Geokichla interpres*	NT	EN
Bornean Crested Fireback	*Lophura ignita*	NT	VU
Malay Crested Fireback	*Lophura rufa*	NT	VU
Malabar Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros griseus*	LC	VU
Aceh Bulbul	*Pycnonotus snouckaerti*	VU	EN
Sumba Hornbill	*Rhyticeros everetti*	VU	EN
Indian Skimmer	*Rynchops albicollis*	VU	EN
Naga Wren-babbler	*Spelaeornis chocolatinus*	NT	VU
River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	NT	VU
Scarlet-breasted Lorikeet	*Trichoglossus forsteni*	VU	EN
Red-legged Partridge	*Alectoris rufa*	LC	NT
Caroline Ground-dove	*Alopecoenas kubaryi*	VU	EN
Double-banded Plover	*Charadrius bicinctus*	LC	NT
Micronesian Imperial-Pigeon	*Ducula oceanica*	NT	VU

OTHER CHANGES

DECLASSIFIED			
Dusky Tetraka	*Crossleyia tenebrosa*	VU	DD
Javan Oriole	*Oriolus cruentus*	LC	DD
NEWLY CLASSIFIED			
Western Yellow-spotted Barbet	*Buccanodon dowsetti*	–	LC
Eastern Yellow-spotted Barbet	*Buccanodon duchaillui*	–	LC
Whistling Long-tailed Cuckoo	*Cercococcyx lemaireae*	–	NT
Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo	*Cercococcyx mechowi*	–	LC
Great Blue Heron	*Ardea herodias*	–	LC
Great White Heron	*Ardea occidentalis*	–	EN
Andre's Swift	*Chaetura andrei*	–	VU
Vaux's Swift	*Chaetura vauxi*	–	LC
Purple-chinned Starling	*Aplonis circumscripta*	–	NT
Metallic Starling	*Aplonis metallica*	–	LC
Spectacled Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum dayakorum*	–	DD
Blue-backed Parrot	*Tanygnathus everetti*	–	EN
Azure-rumped Parrot	*Tanygnathus sumatranus*	–	LC
RECLASSIFIED			
Maranon Antshrike	*Thamnophilus shumbae*	DD	VU
Tagula Butcherbird	*Cracticus louisiadensis*	DD	NT
Tagula Honeyeater	*Microptilotis vicina*	DD	LC
Tagula White-eye	*Zosterops meeki*	DD	NT

BirdLife INTERNATIONAL

RED LIST

Santa Marta Hummingbird (Photo Martin Mecnarowski)

Galapagos Dove (Photo JT Platt)

Sumba Hornbill (Photo Riza Marlon)

IUCN Red List Categories

EXTINCTION RISK (+ / −)

EX Extinct
EW Extinct in the Wild

THREATENED

CR Critically Endangered
CR (PE) Critically Endangered (Possibly Extinct)
CR (PEW) Critically Endangered (Possibly Extinct in the Wild)
EN Endangered
VU Vulnerable

NT Near Threatened
LC Least Concern
DD Data Deficient
— Not Recognised

Gold-ringed Tanager (Photo Christopher Becerra)

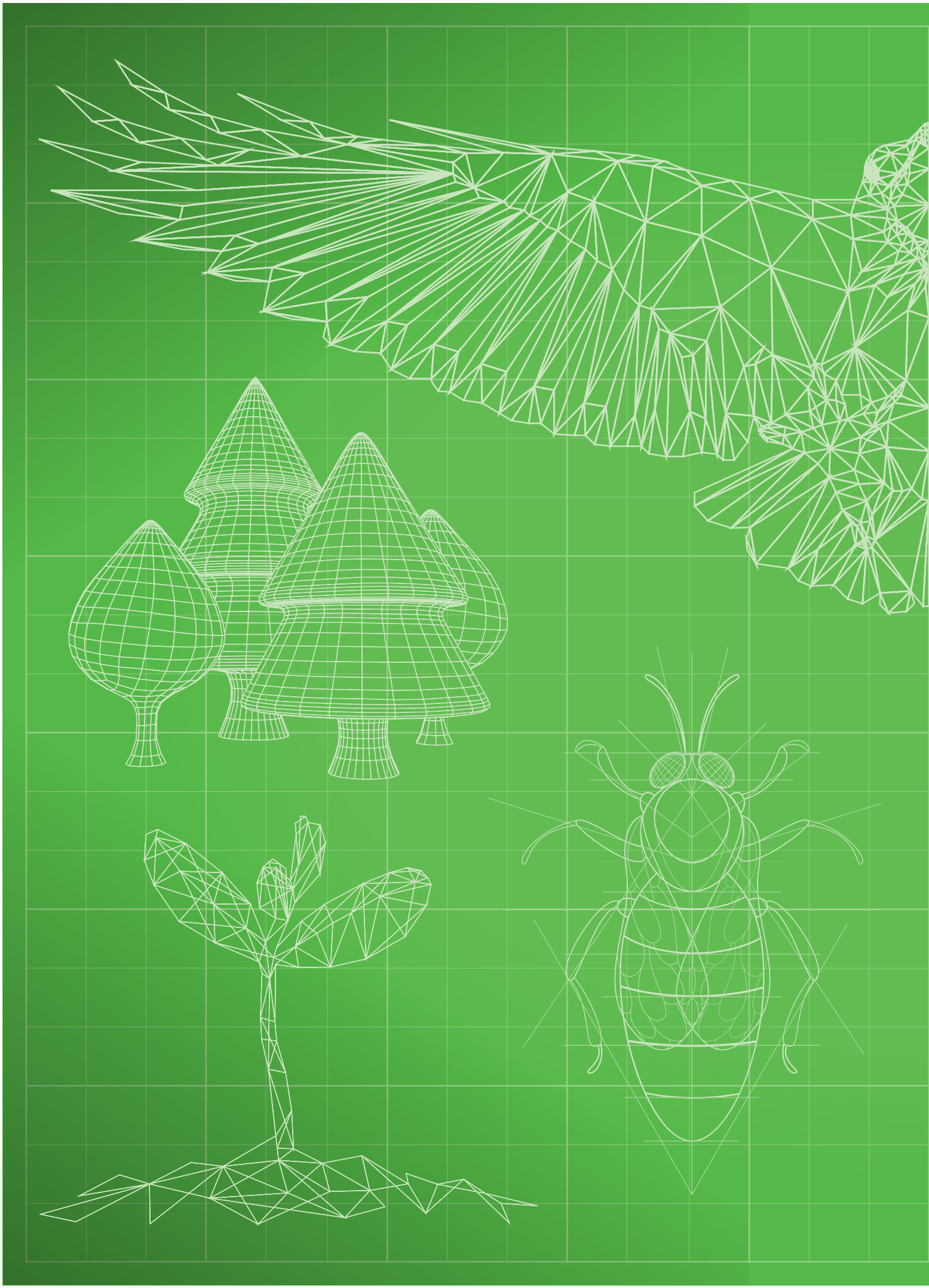
Plumbeous Hawk (Photo Rafael Goes)

Fiordland Penguin (Photo John Yunker)

THREAT LEVEL DECREASED

(BIRS DOWNLISTED TO A LOWER THREAT CATEGORY)

COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	2019 RED LIST CATEGORY	2020 RED LIST CATEGORY
Bangwa Warbler	*Bradypterus bangwaensis*	NT	LC
Seychelles Paradise-Flycatcher	*Terpsiphone corvina*	CR	VU
Red Kite	*Milvus milvus*	NT	LC
Semi-collared Hawk	*Accipiter collaris*	NT	LC
Purple-backed Sunbeam	*Aglaeactis aliciae*	EN	VU
Honduran Emerald	*Amazilia luciae*	EN	VU
Diademed Amazon	*Amazona diadema*	EN	LC
Forbes's Blackbird	*Anumara forbesi*	EN	VU
Yellow-headed Brush-finch	*Atlapetes flaviceps*	EN	NT
Gold-ringed Tanager	*Bangsia aureocincta*	EN	VU
Selva Cacique	*Cacicus koepckeae*	EN	NT
Five-colored Barbet	*Capito quinticolor*	VU	NT
Orange-fronted Barbet	*Capito squamatus*	NT	LC
Pink-headed Warbler	*Cardellina versicolor*	VU	LC
Red-and-black Grosbeak	*Caryothraustes erythromelas*	NT	LC
Bananal Antbird	*Cercomacra ferdinandi*	VU	NT
Esmeraldas Woodstar	*Chaetocercus berlepschi*	EN	VU
Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner	*Clibanornis erythrocephalus*	VU	NT
Glittering Starfrontlet	*Coeligena orina*	CR	EN
Tamarugo Conebill	*Conirostrum tamarugense*	VU	LC
Coiba Spinetail	*Cranioleuca dissita*	NT	LC
Marcapata Spinetail	*Cranioleuca marcapatae*	VU	LC
Vilcabamba Spinetail	*Cranioleuca weskei*	NT	LC
Plumbeous Hawk	*Cryptoleucopteryx plumbea*	VU	NT
Black-capped Tinamou	*Crypturellus atrocapillus*	NT	LC
Grey-legged Tinamou	*Crypturellus duidae*	NT	LC
White-streaked Antvireo	*Dysithamnus leucostictus*	VU	LC
Black-breasted Puffleg	*Eriocnemis nigrivestis*	CR	EN
Blue-cowled Barbet	*Eubucco steerii*	NT	LC
Black-polled Yellowthroat	*Geothlypis speciosa*	EN	VU
Pale-billed Antpitta	*Grallaria carrikeri*	NT	LC
Wood Thrush	*Hylocichla mustelina*	NT	LC
Three-toed Jacamar	*Jacamaralcyon tridactyla*	VU	NT
Golden-plumed Parakeet	*Leptosittaca branickii*	VU	LC
Tolima Dove	*Leptotila conoveri*	EN	NT
Greater Crescent-chested Puffbird	*Malacoptila striata*	NT	LC
Bearded Screech-owl	*Megascops barbarus*	VU	LC
San Cristobal Mockingbird	*Mimus melanotis*	EN	NT
White-lined Antbird	*Myrmoborus lophotes*	NT	LC
Amazonian Parrotlet	*Nannopsittaca dachilleae*	NT	LC
Hooded Tinamou	*Nothocercus nigrocapillus*	VU	LC
Piura Chat-tyrant	*Ochthoeca piurae*	NT	LC
Chestnut Wood-quail	*Odontophorus hyperythrus*	NT	LC
Yellow-eared Parrot	*Ognorhynchus icterotis*	EN	VU
Peruvian Diving-petrel	*Pelecanoides garnotii*	EN	NT
Chestnut-backed Thornbird	*Phacellodomus dorsalis*	VU	NT
Serra do Mar Tyrannulet	*Phylloscartes difficilis*	NT	LC
Black-capped Piprites	*Piprites pileata*	VU	NT
Junin Grebe	*Podiceps taczanowskii*	CR	EN
Slaty-backed Hemispingus	*Poospiza goeringi*	VU	NT
Bare-throated Bellbird	*Procnias nudicollis*	VU	NT
Peruvian Martin	*Progne murphyi*	VU	NT
Rufous-bellied Mountain-tanager	*Pseudosaltator rufiventris*	NT	LC
Black-capped Parakeet	*Pyrrhura rupicola*	NT	LC
Masked Saltator	*Saltator cinctus*	NT	LC
Grey-tailed Piha	*Snowornis subalaris*	NT	LC
Azure-rumped Tanager	*Tangara cabanisi*	EN	VU
Sira Tanager	*Tangara phillipsi*	NT	LC
Greater Prairie-chicken	*Tympanuchus cupido*	VU	NT
Long-whiskered Owlet	*Xenoglaux loweryi*	EN	VU
Magellanic Penguin	*Spheniscus magellanicus*	NT	LC
Bristle-thighed Curlew	*Numenius tahitiensis*	VU	NT
Apo Sunbird	*Aethopyga boltoni*	NT	LC
Grey-hooded Sunbird	*Aethopyga primigenia*	NT	LC
Asian Woollyneck	*Ciconia episcopus*	VU	NT
Kai Cicadabird	*Edolisoma dispar*	NT	LC
Red-eared Parrotfinch	*Erythrura coloria*	NT	LC
Japanese Night-heron	*Gorsachius goisagi*	EN	VU
Black-necked Crane	*Grus nigricollis*	VU	NT
Luzon Water-redstart	*Phoenicurus bicolor*	VU	NT
Narcondam Hornbill	*Rhyticeros narcondami*	EN	VU
Iberian Green Woodpecker	*Picus sharpei*	NT	LC
Tahiti Reed-warbler	*Acrocephalus caffer*	EN	VU
Campbell Teal	*Anas nesiotis*	EN	VU
Golden White-eye	*Cleptornis marchei*	CR	EN
Fiordland Penguin	*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*	VU	NT
Black-billed Gull	*Larus bulleri*	EN	NT
Spiny-faced Antshrike	*Xenornis setifrons*	VU	NT



A GREENPRINT FOR A BETTER FUTURE

We're all too familiar with the doom and gloom headlines. The world has failed to meet previous goals for nature. Biodiversity is collapsing at an unprecedented rate. Without action, it is inevitable that further pandemics will rip through our population. But scratch beneath the headlines and you'll rarely find the answer to the big question: what can we do about it?

With the next UN Biodiversity Conference happening this year – a crucial meeting that will convene the world's governments to agree upon a new set of targets for nature – *BirdLife: the Magazine* has brought some of the biggest and brightest names in the BirdLife Partnership together to brainstorm a four-step plan to turn around the biodiversity crisis.

Our call to action outlines the four key actions world leaders need to agree and commit to in the next set of biodiversity targets, to both conserve nature, and address the causes of its decline.

Here are our findings...

SITES

1: RETAIN AND RESTORE ECOSYSTEMS

Put important areas for nature at the core of spatial planning and conservation

A first goal of the new global biodiversity framework must be to increase the area, integrity and connectivity of the world's natural ecosystems – whether terrestrial, freshwater, coastal or marine. Focusing on the areas of most importance for biodiversity, Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) must be a core component. Using criteria developed by BirdLife, 16,000 such sites have been identified worldwide that are vital for the persistence of nature (and are now viewable on a new interactive, open-access KBA website - head to keybiodiversityareas.org).

There are many different ideas about what qualifies as an important site for nature. Should we focus on globally threatened species on the IUCN Red List? Should we be concerned about those species with small ranges, which are more susceptible to extinction due to habitat loss? Should we instead focus on untouched wildernesses or threatened ecosystems? What about places where hundreds or even millions of animals come together for breeding or for food, often creating an incredible spectacle? Or the most irreplaceable and unique sites? These are all important targets for conservation, but until recently were not considered collectively. In 2016, all that changed when the global conservation community agreed on a common approach to identifying important sites for nature: KBAs, whose criteria capture all of the different ideas mentioned above.

Once this approach had been developed, 13 of the world's leading conservation institutions, including BirdLife International, came together to form the KBA Partnership. Its aim is simple: to map, monitor and conserve the most important places for life on earth. To date, there are over 16,000 KBAs in the World Database, which is managed by BirdLife on behalf of the KBA Partnership, and is accessible on the KBA website, with information on their location, boundaries, and the species and biodiversity for which they are important.

↑ All IBAs identified up to the launch of the KBA standard qualify as global or regional KBAs. Pictured: Ethiopian Wolf *Canis simensis* (Endangered) All photos Andrew Plumptre

AUTHOR
Andrew Plumptre
Head of the Key Biodiversity Areas Secretariat

Crucially for the day-to-day practical application of KBAs, the website explains how they are being used by governments, business, donors and the conservation community. It also provides guidelines on how businesses should act when working in or near KBAs, and how KBAs are being recognised as critical habitat, as well as how people can propose new KBAs using the criteria for identification. With at-a-glance summaries or more detailed search options, the website has been geared to ensure these data are as accessible and useful as possible, so governments and businesses can more easily incorporate KBAs into their institutional plans and operations.

Global assessments of biodiversity patterns are useful, but most political decisions for nature conservation take place nationally, and this is why vital habitats need to be identified at a national level. If sites are to be protected by law and recognised as important, they need to be

Virunga volcanoes , East Africa

Sally Lightfoot Crabs *Grapsus grapsus*, Galapagos

Stinkhorn fungus

incorporated in their country's policies. KBAs are identified using local data through a bottom-up process. KBA National Coordination Groups, typically led by or involving BirdLife Partners, are currently being established in countries around the world and are undertaking national assessments of their KBAs. There is a growing interest in establishing these groups thanks to the advantages of using a globally-recognised standard for identifying important sites for biodiversity. Our challenge is to support them to identify and conserve their country's KBAs.

Meanwhile, groups that focus on particular species are updating KBA assessments around the globe. For example, the Amphibian Survival Alliance is currently assessing numerous KBAs for amphibians, while IUCN is identifying sites for freshwater species in different parts of the world. The website provides useful information to support national KBA assessments, along with tools to help KBA proposers map and assess potential sites online.

The recent UN Summit on Biodiversity provided an unprecedented opportunity for governments, business and conservation leaders to shine a spotlight on KBAs, which were presented at a key side event on spatial mapping for nature, climate and sustainable development on 28 September 2020 as part of the 'Nature for Life hub'. Going forward, KBAs must form a core component of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, both in terms of focusing conservation action towards KBAs and ensuring development activities avoid or otherwise do not negatively impact them. Over the next decade, every government should make it a priority to ensure KBAs are identified, mapped and conserved in order to complete a blueprint of the world's most important sites for nature. Such a blueprint would not only provide a useful guide on where to prioritise conservation action, but should also guide infrastructure development, urban and agricultural expansion, and where businesses operate. The new KBA website will ensure it is all compiled in one place and made freely available to guide planning and investment at global, regional and national levels. ■

FACTFILE

KBA STATS

NUMBER OF KBAS: 16,315

TOTAL AREA OF KBAS: 20,356,799 km^2

AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF EACH KBA COVERED BY PROTECTED AREAS: 46%

FIND OUT MORE: www.keybiodiversityareas.org

SPECIES

2: SAFEGUARD & RECOVER THE ABUNDANCE OF LIFE

Action to prevent species extinctions and recover wildlife populations must be targeted

The new framework must feature goals and targets that halt human-induced extinctions and start to recover wildlife populations, in order to safeguard the diversity of life on our planet (which also underpins human life). A recent BirdLife study illustrates that conservationcan successfully prevent extinctions, calculating that at least 28 bird and mammal species would have been lost since 1993 without intervention – positive encouragement for governments to commit to a robust global biodiversity framework.

In a news cycle full of environmental doom and despair, it's uplifting to see proof that the hard work of conservationists has a tangible impact. Knowing how and when conservation succeeds is the roadmap we so desperately need to guide us through the coming years. In September 2020, a study led by Newcastle University and BirdLife International estimated the number of bird and mammal species that would have disappeared forever without conservation action in recent decades.

Our international collaboration calculated that 21-32 bird and 7-16 mammal species extinctions have been prevented since 1993, the year the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) came into force. The wide ranges reflect the uncertainty that comes with gauging what might have happened under different circumstances. Nonetheless, even the minimum – 28 bird and mammal species – is remarkably encouraging news, showing that extinction rates in these groups would have been around three to four times greater with no intervention.

The BirdLife Partnership is proud to have been involved in conservation efforts for more than half of these bird species: ten through direct involvement in species management, and six through indirect routes such as advocacy and funding. Species benefiting from direct BirdLife action include the Echo Parakeet *Psittacula eques* (Vulnerable), Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita* (Endangered) and Fatu Hiva Monarch *Pomarea whitneyi* (Critically Endangered).

↑ Przewalski's Horse mare and foal, Khomyn Tal, Mongolia
Photo Association TAKH and Sarah R.B.King

AUTHOR
Stuart Butchart
BirdLife's Chief Scientist

To arrive at our conclusions, we convened a panel of experts to analyse data on population size, trends, threats and actions taken for the planet's most threatened birds and mammals. The experts then estimated the likelihood that each species would have gone extinct under a hypothetical scenario in which no action was taken. The study highlighted the most frequently successful conservation approaches for these species: 21 bird species benefited from invasive species control, 20 from conservation in zoos and collections, and 19 from site protection. Fourteen mammal species benefited from legislation, and nine from species re-introductions and conservation in zoos and collections.

Professor Phil McGowan of Newcastle University's School of Natural and Environmental Sciences, one of the other leading authors of

Iberian Lynx *Lynx pardinus* is one of at least 28 species that would have gone extinct without conservation action, our study finds
Photo Nathan Ranc

the study, sees cause for hope: "We usually hear bad stories about the biodiversity crisis, and there is no doubt that we are facing an unprecedented loss in biodiversity through human activity – but the loss of entire species can be stopped if there is sufficient will to do so. This is a call to action."

One success story is the Puerto Rican Amazon *Amazona vittata* (Critically Endangered). Once abundant, this small parrot's population hit a low of just thirteen wild birds in 1975. In 2006, conservationists started reintroducing the species to Rio Abajo State Park – a decision that would prove crucial. In 2017, hurricanes wiped out the original population. Without reintroduction to Rio Abajo, the parrot would have gone extinct in the wild.

Even when only captive populations remain, all hope is not lost. The Przewalski's Horse *Equus ferus* went extinct in the wild in the 1960s. In the 1990s, reintroduction efforts started, and by 1996, the first foal was born in the wild. Now, 760 Przewalski's horses roam the steppes of Mongolia. This provides hope for other species currently surviving only in zoos and collections.

However, some species included in the study, such as the *Vaquita Phocoena sinus*, a Mexican porpoise, have been reduced to tiny populations that are still rapidly declining. Such species require substantially greater resources, action, and political will to recover their populations to secure levels.

The study has come at a good time, as it will provide valuable evidence to back up current global discussions on biodiversity. The results show the world that despite the overall failure to meet the targets for conserving nature set through the UN a decade ago, significant success in preventing extinctions was achieved. This should encourage governments to reaffirm their commitment in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework currently being negotiated. Such a commitment is both achievable and essential to sustain a healthy planet.

These success stories are truly something to build on – but they are not part of a comprehensive plan to save and recover species. That's why BirdLife is calling for an ambitious, outcome-orientated goal for species conservation containing three elements: to halt human-induced species extinctions from 2020, reduce the overall risk of species extinctions by 20% by 2030 and to zero by 2050, and increase the average population abundance of native species by 20% by 2030 and recover to 1970 levels by 2050. Achieving this goal will require focused action for species as well as the wider set of targets in the post-2020 plan. ■

Puerto Rican Amazon
Photo Tom MacKenzie/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southeast Region

SPECIES FACTFILE

PUERTO RICAN AMAZON
Amazona vittata

RED LIST STATUS: Critically Endangered

RANGE: Endemic to Puerto Rico

THREATS: Deforestation, hunting, invasive mammals

FAST FACT: Since 2001, almost all wild birds have bred in artificial nest cavities

How many bird and mammal extinctions has recent conservation action prevented? was published in Conservation Letters on 9 September 2020

SYSTEMS

3. TRANSITION TO A NATURE-POSITIVE ECONOMY

Redirect financial flows away from nature destruction and ensure biodiversity is mainstreamed into business

Transformational change is needed within the systems that underpin our economies for them to benefit nature. Ahead of the UN Summit on Biodiversity in September 2020, NABU (BirdLife in Germany) and Boston Consulting Group published the report The Biodiversity Imperative for Business – Preserving the Foundations of our Wellbeing, which highlights that biodiversity provides over US $ 170 trillion in yearly benefits on top of its inherent value, and provides sector-specific recommendations for businesses to integrate biodiversity into their economic decisions and processes. Here are the main conclusions:

Biodiversity is the basis of human wellbeing and of our economic activities

Many of nature's vital services, such as the pollination of crops, pest control, the provision of medicines, greenhouse gas sequestration, flood protection and air pollution control, directly depend on functioning and diverse ecosystems.

A key finding of the study is that biodiversity provides a value of up to at least US $170-190 trillion per year – at least twice as much as the world's gross domestic product (GDP). Sixty-five percent of this value is derived from the regulatory functions of ecosystems, such as CO^2 regulation, waste recycling and avoiding erosion. However, this represents a lower bound as only a small part of biodiversity can be expressed in monetary terms. Values such as well-being or joy are difficult to quantify as they are perceived individually and can vary across cultures. On top of this, the intrinsic value of biodiversity – its own value beyond that which it provides to people – can hardly be given a price-tag.

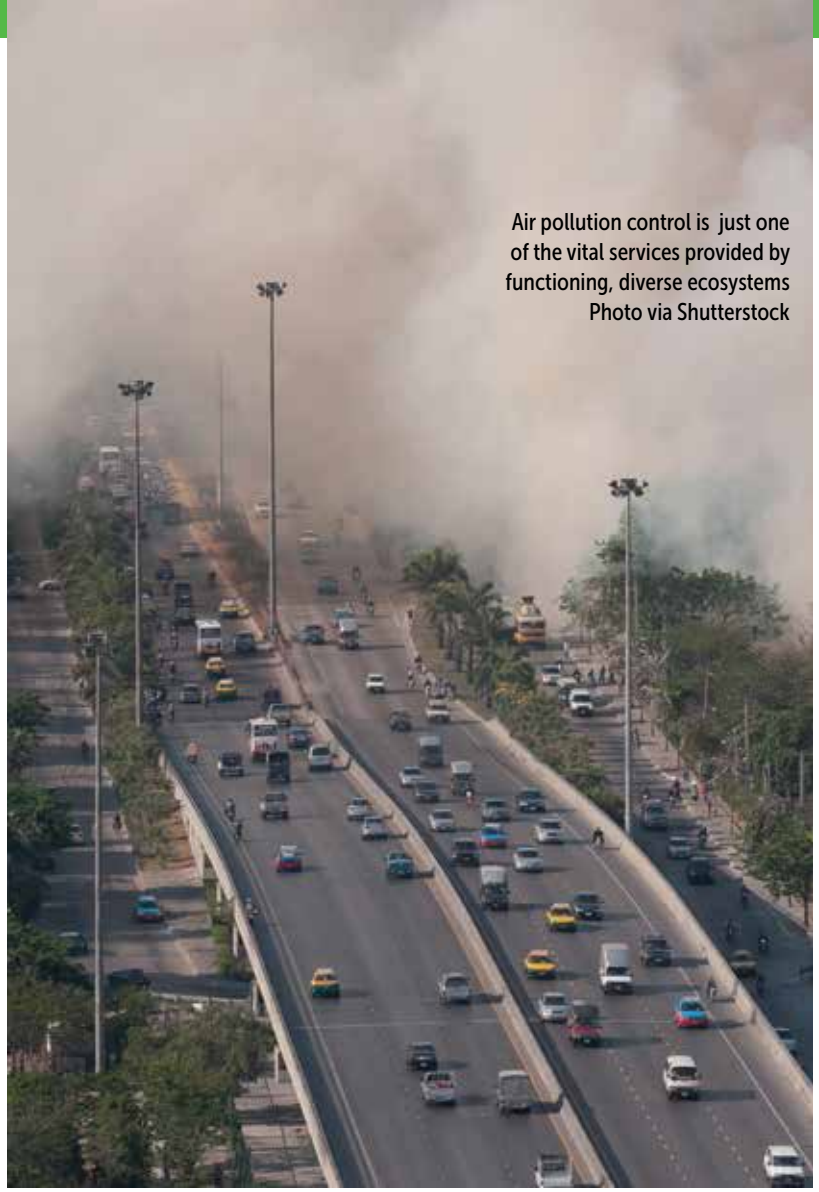
↑ NABU's latest report highlights the financial value of biodiversity – on top of its inherent value. Image via NABU

AUTHOR
Magdalene Trapp
Biodiversity Poliy Officer, NABU (BirdLife in Germany)

Economic activities fuel global biodiversity decline. At the same time, they crucially depend on biodiversity and ecosystem services

Agriculture, forestry and fisheries, the expansion of infrastructure, raw material extraction and industrial production are the strongest contributors to the alarming loss of global biodiversity. They contribute via land use change, direct overexploitation of organisms, greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, and the spreading of invasive species. Production and consumption patterns fuel this development. Estimations show that in monetary terms we lose US $6-30 trillion per year due to biodiversity loss. At the same time, the added value of the agriculture, forestry and fishing

Industries such as fishing contribute to the loss of biodiversity – but also depend on it
Photo Sura Nualpradid



Air pollution control is just one of the vital services provided by functioning, diverse ecosystems
Photo via Shutterstock

sectors – currently being at US $3.5 trillion – depends to a large extent on ecosystem services and biodiversity. When we lose these nature's services, the economy loses as well.

Transformational change is necessary to solve the planetary emergency. Biodiversity needs to be mainstreamed into all political decisions and economic processes

Systemic challenges require systemic solutions. An economic paradigm shift is necessary, in the course of which all stakeholders – governments, businesses and society – understand the protection of nature as a prerequisite for long-term success and wellbeing. Economic value creation needs to be in line with the conservation and restoration of biodiversity. Likewise, the impact of all political decisions on biodiversity needs to be assessed and considered. Governments, business and society need to act in concert to make the progress needed to achieve the new biodiversity targets and bend the curve of biodiversity loss.

This must be based on a landscape perspective: we need a well-connected network of protected areas which focus on key areas for biodiversity as well as integrated land use models to enhance biodiversity in production areas. The latter is characterised by diverse structures and space for nature, for example for trees, hedges or flowering areas from local seeds, by a large variety of cultivated plants as well as reduced pesticide and nutrient inputs. Joint action on nature and climate is also critical, requiring synergies between the biodiversity and climate agendas.

The time to act is now. Business as usual is not an option. It is clear what we need to do

The study provides a large number of recommendations for different stakeholders, makeing it clear that the time to act is now. Politicians have a responsibility to enable the necessary transformative change. They must implement clear rules and incentives to set the framework for the protection and restoration of biodiversity while ensuring transparency and fair competition. This 'levels the playing field' and thus enables the corporate sector and consumers as a whole to achieve the goal of nature-positive and climate-neutral production and consumption.

Companies themselves should also proactively and urgently integrate biodiversity issues into all economic decisions and processes, in a number of ways. They can collect and disclose data about their ecological footprint and commit to voluntary biodiversity standards. They can build up circular economies to reduce resource requirements and land use to a minimum. They can also get involved in nature restoration projects. And they not only have a responsibility to educate and inform their consumers, customers and employees about the impacts of their products on biodiversity, but will ultimately benefit from the ensuing demand for greener, environmentally sustainable products, as part of a new, nature-positive economy. ■

FACTFILE

THE VALUE OF NATURE

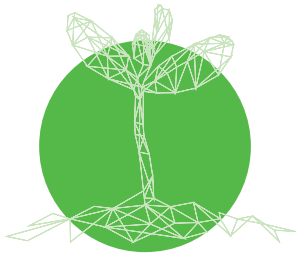
ECONOMIC VALUE OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES: US $ 170-190 trillion per year (2x global GDP!)

VALUE OF NATURE'S REGULATORY SERVICES 65%

MONETARY COST OF THE LOSS OF NATURE: US $ 6-30 trillion per year

SHARE OF PRESSURE ON BIODIVERSITY LOSS FROM AGRICULTURE: 26%

INTRINSIC VALUE OF NATURE: priceless



4. ENSURE A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT FOR HEALTHY SOCIETIES

Recognise the universal right to a healthy environment and the rights and role of indigenous peoples and local communities in conservation

Healthy economies and societies need a healthy environment, so conserving nature is good for people – but for it to be both equitable and effective, conservation has to be done with (and for) local people. Key to this is recognising and implementing the universal right to a healthy environment, including the rights and role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and embedding these provisions in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Calling for an equitable, carbon-neutral, nature-positive future

There is increasing recognition from the conservation community of the importance of rights, equity and justice within conservation and, specifically, the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The concept of equitability came out very clearly from a series of multi-stakeholder Virtual Biodiversity Dialogues we held back in June/July, sessions of the Nature for Life hub we co-hosted on the edges of the UN General Assembly in September, and our joint call to action to world leaders meeting at the UN Summit on Biodiversity – which stated that, "Actions for nature cannot be met without addressing both the climate emergency and social inequalities," and called for an equitable, carbon-neutral, nature-positive world.

Recognising the universal right to a healthy environment

One of BirdLife's top priorities and a really key opportunity right now is working to ensure a healthy environment for healthy societies, through the universal right to a healthy environment and integration of this right across the UN and multilateral environmental agreements, including the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. This is the aim of the BirdLife Partnership's 1Planet1Right campaign.

As part of the campaign, BirdLife joined forces with 975 civil society organisations, Indigenous Peoples, social movements and local communities in a global call for the UN Human Rights Council to recognise the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. There is considerable and growing support for this, backed by a wealth of evidence and consultations from the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, and in September, during the Council's 45th meeting, Costa Rica led a joint call with the Maldives, Morocco, Slovenia and Switzerland for this right to be recognised.

This is just the first step. Next we need this right to be recognised by the UN General Assembly, and to be better integrated across the UN and into wider environmental treaties and national implementation, such as through the UN climate convention's Paris Agreement and, critically, in the targets, indicators and enabling conditions of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework currently under negotiation. This should include formal recognition of the customary rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs), protections for environmental and human rights defenders, and the enshrinement of fair and equitable access and benefit sharing.

AUTHOR
Dr Noëlle Kümpel
BirdLife's Head of Policy

Our local-to-global approach to conservation and human rights

As one of the founder members of the Conservation Initiative on Human Rights, established in 2009 by seven international NGOs, BirdLife has long been working around the world to support these rights on the ground as well as at policy level. Examples of BirdLife Partners' work around the world include:

- supporting indigenous women forest defenders in the Philippines to engage in forest governance

processes,
- developing Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in the Canadian boreal forests,
- reviving the traditional 'Hima' conservation areas approach in Lebanon,
- supporting community associations to manage forests in Madagascar, and
- restoration of the Iraqi marshes for the indigenous Marsh Arab tribes.

Indigenous people transporting their harvest along the Agos River, Philippines
Photo Haribon Foundation

Addressing the challenges

As shown in our recent Birds and Biodiversity Targets report, one-fifth of the entire area of the IBA network (the majority of which, as Andrew explains, are also KBAs) falls within lands managed by Indigenous Peoples or for which they have tenure rights. This means there are considerable opportunities for traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of IPLCs to be integrated into the conservation of these sites. We are therefore working to ensure that the role and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities as stewards and defenders of nature is recognised, protected and supported. This is important both to ensure conservation outcomes – which should also benefit IPLCs, who rely on a healthy natural environment – and to safeguard IPLCs from any potential adverse impacts of conservation policies.

This is not always straightforward, however. In some places there is a lack of national provisions to support IPLC rights, and/or government policy has tended towards fortress-style conservation that excludes IPLCs. Such policies can be both ineffective and inequitable (and in some cases have resulted in major human rights abuses), so, following the logic above and as studies have shown, are bad for conservation as well as people. This is why we're working at three levels: (1) globally, to ensure much stronger universal recognition of IPLC rights, (2) nationally, to build our Partners' capacity generally to understand and influence national policies and legal frameworks, and (3) locally, helping Partners then support other stakeholders such as IPLCs to engage in these (such as in our Asia-Pacific Forest Governance project) – to stand up for both their rights and the rights of nature on the ground, which ultimately are one and the same (see last issue for more on our capacity building work via Hatch).

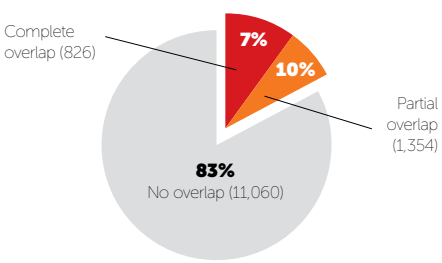
Working with local people to protect and conserve more nature, better

To address rights-based concerns regarding the push for '30 by 30' through the post-2020 global biodiversity framework – the conservation of 30% of the land and sea that is most important for biodiversity by 2030 (up from the current target of 17% of land and 10% of sea by 2020) – we need to be quite clear about how we should achieve this target. As recognised in the current draft of the proposed target in the framework, for such an expansion to be effective and feasible in terms of cost, space and equitability, the focus must encompass not only government-protected areas, which in some cases may exclude people, but also indigenous and community protected areas and 'other effective area-based conservation measures' (OECMs), often implemented by and for people. Local people must have a stake in ensuring conservation outcomes, and be supported to manage and monitor these areas accordingly.

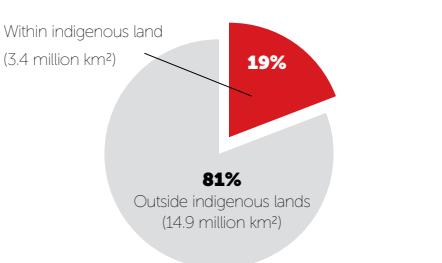
In our Birds and Biodiversity Targets report (see last issue), we also outline recent BirdLife research showing that potential OECMs such as community reserves and other community-based approaches appear to cover a high proportion of Key Biodiversity Areas outside protected areas, and so there seems huge potential to recognise the role of OECMs in achieving any post-2020 expanded site-based conservation target.

While the right to a healthy environment can seem a rather obscure legal concept, you can read more about how BirdLife Partners are standing up for this right all over the world on our website. For example, as we challenge Portugal's proposed Tagus estuary airport expansion, call for government responsibility for preventing wildfires such as those in the Brazilian Pantanal, and support indigenous women forest defenders in the Philippines. ■

For more on our 1Planet1Right campaign, see www.birdlife.org/healthyplanet



NUMBER OF IBAS OVERLAPPING INDIGENOUS LANDS



AREA OF IBAS OVERLAPPING INDIGENOUS LANDS

A SECOND CHANCE FOR CAMBODIA'S BIG BIRDS

For a suspenseful three years, Lomphat Wildlife Sanctuary seemed doomed. But now, changed policies, changed hearts and a new organic rice scheme promises hope for the forest landscape's villagers, businesses and giant birds

Cressida Stevens

What's happening to my home? - if birds think rationally (and there's evidence to suggest they can) then this thought may have been in the heads of a family of Sarus Cranes as they stood, powerless, watching monster machinery tear up their habitat. Sovannarith Thol was at the scene a few years ago: "Many people know that habitat loss is the biggest cause of extinction, but they are distanced from the reality", says Thol, the Lomphat Wildlife Sanctuary Project Manager from the BirdLife Cambodia Programme. "Seeing birds witness this destruction in front of their eyes made it painfully real."

Sarus Cranes *Antigone antigone* (Vulnerable) are spectacularly impressive; reaching up to six feet tall with a wingspan of about eight feet, they are the world's tallest flying birds. And at Lomphat Wildlife Sanctuary in Cambodia, they're in good company: birds here are big. Also stalking through the marshes are Greater and Lesser Adjutants *Leptoptilos dubius* and *Leptoptilos javanicus,* (Endangered and Vulnerable respectively) and Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* (Endangered), imposing in their own foreboding and beautiful ways and all standing at over a metre tall. Other hefty birds such as the White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni* (Critically Endangered) and the Giant Ibis *Thaumatibis gigantea* (Critically Endangered) – Cambodia's national bird – perch implausibly in the surrounding trees. At such gargantuan

↑ White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni* Photo Jonathan Eames

Working with local communities in Lomphat
Photos Bryna Griffin

Sarus Crane *Antigone antigone*
Photo Jonathan Eames

sizes you'd think they'd be easy to spot but, as you've likely noticed, all of these species are threatened and their numbers low.

At 250,000 hectares, Lomphat Wildlife Sanctuary is one of Cambodia's biggest protected areas, thus able to cater for these bumper-size birds, and consists of largely intact forest dotted with *trapaengs* (seasonal water holes), a favourite spot for species such as the Giant Ibis, White-shouldered Ibis and Sarus Crane to find food. The local people too, depend upon the forests for all that they need. There are 26 villages in and around the landscape, reliant on rain-fed rice, water from the forest's rivers and its fish for their protein. So long as the human population here is stable, people and nature live in harmony. But recent changes have disturbed the equilibrium.

In 2010, the government of Cambodia introduced a new land-use policy known as an Economic Land Concession (ELC), a recurring threat across the country that allows private sector companies to convert native forests into industrial plantations of banana, rubber and other cash crops. Soon, the tranquil rustling of rice paddies in the wind and gurgle of Lomphat's life-sustaining rivers was torn through by the rip of chainsaws, screech of diggers, and boom of trunks surrendering to the forest floor. And as large chunks of forest fell, so did Lomphat's bird populations. Thankfully, that's not where the story ends. A turning point came in 2013 when the Cambodian government agreed to throw a lifeline to Lomphat and give BirdLife the mandate to protect it in the long-term.

A key to this has been 'zoning' the sanctuary into a mosaic of areas. A core zone and conservation zones have ranger patrols to protect especially crucial areas, and in community zones, people are supported to use natural resources sustainably. The land converted by private companies under the ELC represent about 20% of the landscape, where they are permitted to continue producing commodities like dragon fruit and bananas but with much stricter limits.

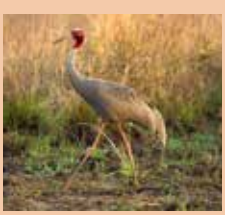
BirdLife's Cambodia Programme [see annoucement p. 7] now works to safeguard the remaining biodiversity, with a focus on three priority species: Giant Ibis, White-shouldered Ibis and Sarus Crane. But they cannot achieve this alone. To ensure Lomphat's survival, BirdLife Cambodia is working with local people and the government so resources are used sustainably and forest degradation can be ended.

A priority was working with the concession workers. The existing private sector farms brought an influx of workers who initially, having migrated from lowland Cambodia, didn't have an innate connection and concern for the land. Many carried out illegal activities such as placing traps and snares to hunt wildlife, and combatting this has not been easy. "When we ask the concession workers not to enter the habitat, some follow and respect the advice but others understandably say 'we need to find food'", explains Thol. "The problem is that although they mostly want to catch small birds,

PRIORITY SPECIES AT LOMPHAT

GIANT IBIS
The Giant Ibis is the largest species of ibis, twice the size of the one next in line. At just 250 individuals globally, it is so rare now that it has taken on an almost mythical persona. In 2005, it was made Cambodia's national bird, to raise its profile and bolster conservation support.

WHITE-SHOULDERED IBIS
The White-shouldered Ibis has an unearthly scream-like call, perhaps apt since it is considered Southeast Asia's most endangered waterbird. With up to 40% of the known population, Lomphat is the second most crucial site for this bird, after Western Siem Pang.



SARUS CRANE
Sarus Cranes are the world's tallest flying birds. They are found in the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and even northern Australia but they have suffered rapid declines. In the 2020 census, BirdLife recorded about 11 cranes around the ELC, but didn't find any successful nests.

All photos via Jonathan C Eames

the snares are not discriminate."

A few years after the ELC was ended, Lomphat's biodiversity suffered another heavy blow. Lomphat used to host three species of Critically Endangered vulture: Red-headed *Sarcogyps calvus*, Slender-billed *Gyps tenuirostris* and White-rumped *Gyps bengalensis*. However, in 2016, an ELC worker was found responsible for a poisoning event near the 'vulture restaurant' (where carcasses are brought for the birds to feed on). Since then, only Red-headed have been recorded in the area. Still, despite such a devastating setback, there is so much left to protect at Lomphat.

With his team, Thol has been working with the companies' managers to educate the workers including holding events screening a video showcasing the unique biodiversity of the landscape. Many have changed their ways, with ex-trappers now working with BirdLife and the police to report snares in the forest.

Around the villages, encroachment upon the forest to expand agricultural activities is a major problem, but the communities here are among the poorest in all Southeast Asia so they need support and incentives to change their lives and wellbeing. They grow crops to sell such as rice, mango and cashew, but market prices fluctuate and cannot provide a secure income. Over the years, more and more have resorted to illegal activities such as logging and poaching. BirdLife's work therefore aims to account for the needs of both nature and people by putting sustainable livelihood alternatives high on its agenda, such as incentivised forest-friendly farming techniques like IBIS Rice [see below].

Local people are beginning to see the benefits of biodiversity
Photo BirdLife International Cambodia Programme

"PEOPLE KNOW THAT HABITAT LOSS IS THE BIGGEST CAUSE OF EXTINCTION, BUT THEY ARE DISTANCED FROM THE REALITY"

Now, through persistent environmental education, local people have come to see the benefits of biodiversity and become passionate about the cause for themselves. The Cambodian government approved a Community Protected Area (CPA), in which communities monitor, patrol and manage access to the land's resources sustainably. BirdLife works closely with them: "Before we worked with the community, a lot of illegal activity happened in the CPA but now there is almost none", says Sovannarith. "They protect their forest well; they find nests and roosts, they take part in bird censuses, they join us for every activity."

Communities are spreading the word on their own accord and even going into local primary and secondary schools to educate the next generation on the value of nature and conservation – something not yet on the school curriculum in Cambodia. Additionally, farmers have direct contact with BirdLife and willingly report nesting and sightings of the three priority bird species in their rice fields.

It's the people-positive work that gives hope for Lomphat and will enable its big birds to rebound across the landscape. The future of our planet depends upon people understanding our connection to nature: looking around, confronting each other and asking "what's happening to our home?" ■

*This work is part of the Trillion Trees vision. Find out more at **birdlife.org/accelerator** and **trilliontrees.org***

IBIS RICE

Farmer and feather friendly

To improve the income of local people whilst having a positive impact on the local environment, BirdLife invited IBIS Rice to Lomphat after seeing its success in another of BirdLife's priority sites in Cambodia, Western Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary. IBIS rice is a wildlife-friendly rice project whereby farmers agree not to hunt, log or encroach upon the forest and grow their crop organically, in return for receiving a premium price for their rice. Originally developed in 2009 by WCS (now a Trillion Trees partner with BirdLife), the scheme is now operated by the IBIS Rice Conservation Co. Ltd, who have carried out a feasibility study in partnership with BirdLife (using funding from the BirdLife Forest Landscape Sustainability Accelerator) and are now introducing it at Lomphat Wildlife Sanctuary, with continued support from the Accelerator.

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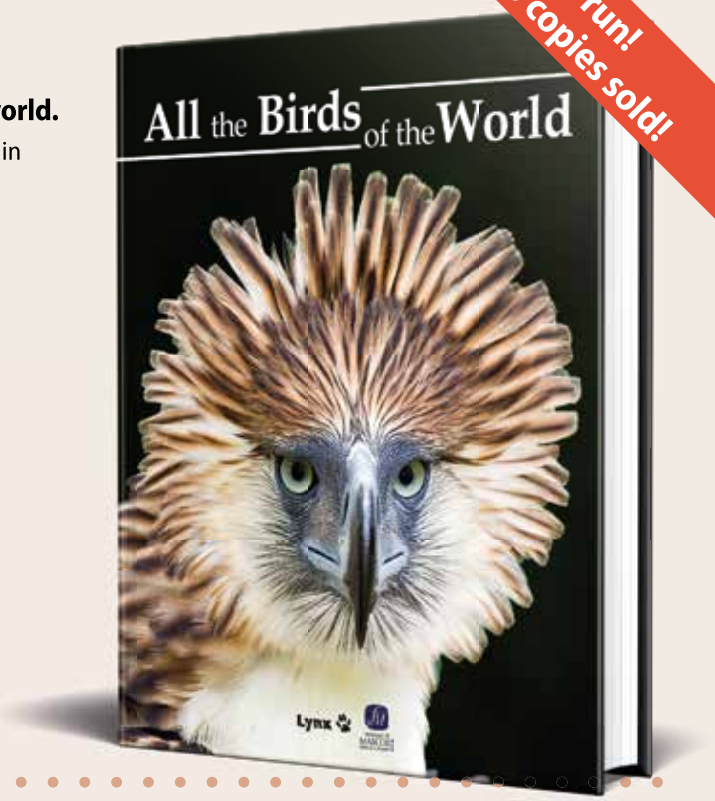

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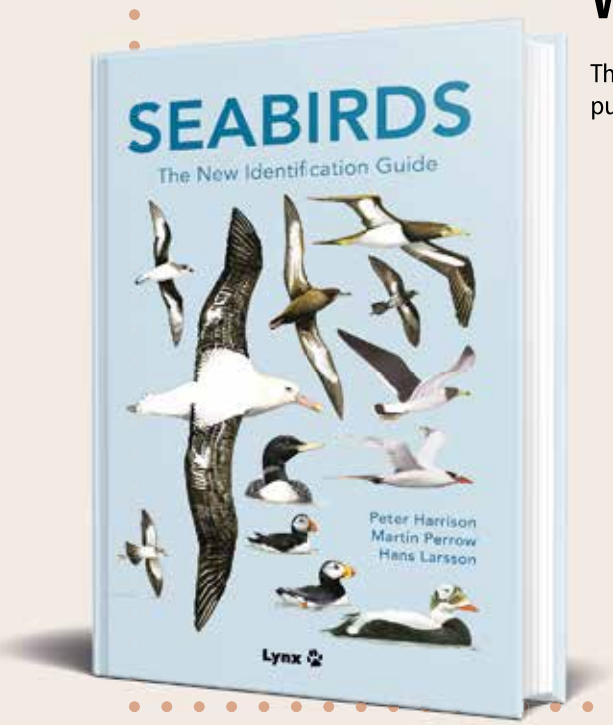
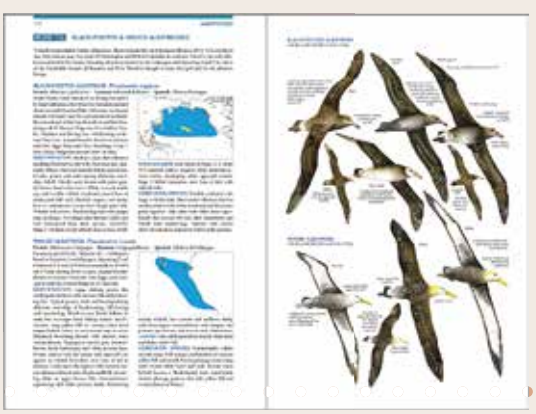


By Peter Harrison
Martin Perrow
Hans Larsson

Due late March 2021



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THE NEW WAVE OF PLANT CONSERVATIONISTS

Move over bearded botanists: a new generation of young expert plant scientists are scaling remote Balkan mountains to save extremely rare plants found nowhere else – some with ranges smaller than a football field

Shaun Hurrell

At 1700 m altitude, on a jagged limestone ridge often used for training by alpinists, a group of young researchers are clinging to tufts of grass and sharp rock as they scramble straight down the steep mountainside of Mount Orjen, which straddles the border of Montenegro and Bosnia & Herzegovina. What brings them here, with no ropes, one misplaced step away from tumbling to peril? In a word: plants. In practical terms, they're undertaking a transect, recording population, habitat and threat data, and collecting vital seeds. But the underlying reason they're here: pure passion and enthusiasm for conservation.

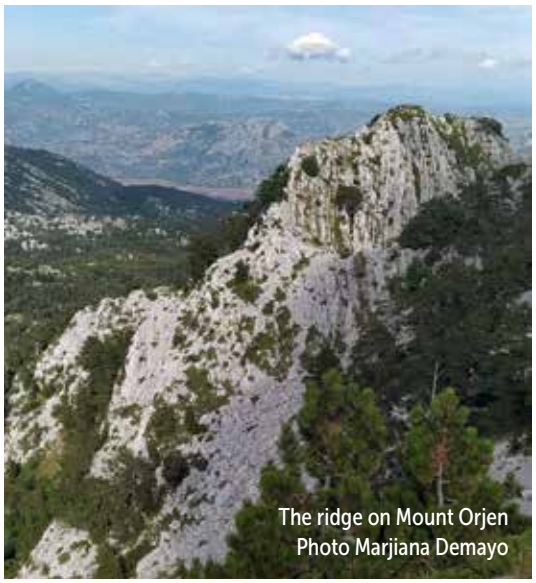
Such is the new wave of plant conservationists in the Mediterranean, and particularly in the Balkans. Stereotypically, the study of plants has been seen as a niche domain of aging, bearded botanists with a focus on scientific research and natural history. Whilst such a botanist could well be found on a steep mountainside, there's a fresh generation of plant experts that use research as one tool of conservation. Driven by local NGOs like EnvPro and E-grupa on Mount Orjen, they will do what it takes to see threatened endemic plants protected.

↑ Team members from EnvPro and E-grupa` Photo Mihailo Jovićević

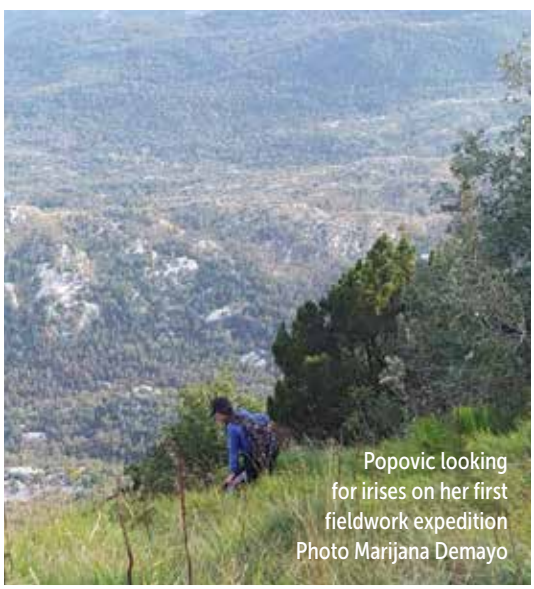
With many straight out of University, it's not easy to begin a career in conservation. But BirdLife (through its role as Regional Implementation Team for the Mediterranean hotspot of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)*) has been able to provide small grants to local NGOs, which can allow them to employ and train such eager, talented people. In total, 14 small grants (and one large grant) have supported 15 civil society organisations in four Balkan countries since October 2018.

Not only is plant conservation new-school, it's important. Plants underpin the food chain, endemic plants support endemic insects, and the Mediterranean region biodiversity hotspot is

Edraianthus tenuifolius
Photo Emina Zecic



The ridge on Mount Orjen
Photo Marjiana Demayo



Popovic looking for irises on her first fieldwork expedition
Photo Marijana Demayo

Centaurea soskae growing near Lake Ohrid
Photo Vlado Matevski (MASA)

ranked third-richest in the world in terms of its plant diversity. Some remote areas of Balkans are not properly surveyed and Mount Orjen is the only place where some endemic plant species are still found, such as the beautiful Orjen Iris *Iris orjenii* which hangs on in just a few sites, nestled within patches of long grass.

It was here that EnvPro and E-grupa revealed additional sites of the iris and confirmed its presence on the Bosnian side. The data gathered also allowed them to assess the species on the IUCN Red List as Endangered, as well as an endemic short-toothed sage *Salvia brachyodon* as Critically Endangered, and capture important habitat data for other endemics such as *Edraianthus serpyllifolius*.

EVERY SEED COUNTS

Perhaps taking inspiration from the way the roots of the endemic Bosnian 'munika' pine trees grasp bare rock, newly-employed Marija Popovic holds on tight as she peers over an edge looking for any signs of seeding plants. EnvPro are collecting seeds from all target species for a seed bank kept at the University of Primorska, but it's especially vital for the iris because the team are working with the Natural History Museum in Rijeka to grow seedlings (ex-situ conservation) which will be planted back in the wild.

Collaboration is a major theme in this movement, which aims to build a network of plant conservationists in the region, leading to better conservation management overall. Throughout the project, EnvPro (from Montenegro) have been helping build the skills and expertise of the Bosnian-based E-grupa, skills that have already led to a major success: plant data submitted helped form the basis of the case for a new protected area on the Bosnian side of Mount Orjen (declared in September 2020), which will help secure a

4 COUNTRIES 15 PROJECTS FOR PLANTS

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INNOVATIONS ACROSS THE BORDER

The first ever seed bank of wild flora in North Macedonia was collected by MASA, with 90% from rare and endemic species; whilst ILIRIA (from Albania) used a drone to record focal species growing on steep cliffs. These two grantees are working in the National Parks of Galicica and Prespa in a collaborative project.

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LARGE GRANT FOR RARE PLANTS

MES (BirdLife in North Macedonia) are assessing threatened plants in the Jablanica and Dojran Lake areas and setting up a monitoring system. They're also supporting protected area managers and local organisations, and work with biology students on chestnut distribution (incl. using a drone).

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EX-SITU PONDS

Macedonian Biological Society is also assessing endemic plants with restricted habitats from Galichica – including collecting seeds, which they've planted in newly updated facilities in the Botanical Gardens of Skopje (including a lake for a rare water lily). Meanwhile, they're training local students and young experts and raising awareness in the local community.

Photo Dijana Muminović

safe future for the plants surveyed there. The Montenegrin side is already officially protected, but the EnvPro project is also aiming to improve the management of Orjen Nature Park for plants. They've also worked with the local mountaineering club to redirect a portion of a hiking trail that was heading through a patch of irises.

BALLOONS FOR BELLS

This kind of work is also featured in another plant project in Montenegro, where the Lovćen Bell *Edraianthus wettsteinii* subsp. *lovcenicus*, a small perennial plant with tufts of grassy leaves and fine, blue, bell-shaped flowers, has its entire range restricted to an area smaller than a football field. Here, on Mount Lovćen, just outside the border of Lovćen National Park, young plant conservationists aren't just becoming effective experts, they're also bringing new and creative ideas.

Living Green, a local NGO, has found an innovative way to protect the plant from the threat of fires: water balloons. They've installed biodegradable water bags to ensure the plants get an instantaneous dousing, and water canisters coupled with workshops with the local fire brigade, park rangers and local landowners allow for a quick reaction to fire in this dry area, eight kilometres from any other water source. There have been no fires since, and Living Green continue to work on the other aspects of their project: raising awareness of the importance of the plant and work with the National Park to see its range increase.

Elsewhere, in Albania, a stunning fire-red-and-yellow native tulip species *Tulipa albanica* is restricted to an extremely small range in a landscape rife with mining activity. The Institute for Environmental Policy (IEP) have been working to discover all of the remaining plants – yes, all of them (the population is so small it's possible to count them all) with the aim of protecting its habitat, whilst nurturing a new generation of skilled and professional botanists to work on the protection of other endemic plants in the future. Despite the species only being discovered in the last decade, the tulip is now the official emblem of the local town of Kukës – testament to IEP's outreach work, and in April 2020 the Municipal Council approved the formal protection of the Albanian Tulip at the local level. Meanwhile the energetic team have been digging their spades into scientifically selected soil to create four new terraces a few kilometres away from the original locality and planted tulip bulbs – giving great hope for the future of one of the region's rarest plants.

From Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and North Macedonia [see sidebar p.53], the new generation of plant conservationists are now equipped with expertise in data collection, fruitful collaborations across borders and with institutions, and great awareness-raising skills. And above all, a passion and love for plants. With all that supporting them on a remote mountainside, who needs ropes? ■

Marija Popovic and Mihajlo Jovicevic (EnvPro) Photo Marjiana Demajo

PLANT FACTFILE

ORJEN IRIS
Iris orjenii

RED LIST STATUS: Endangered

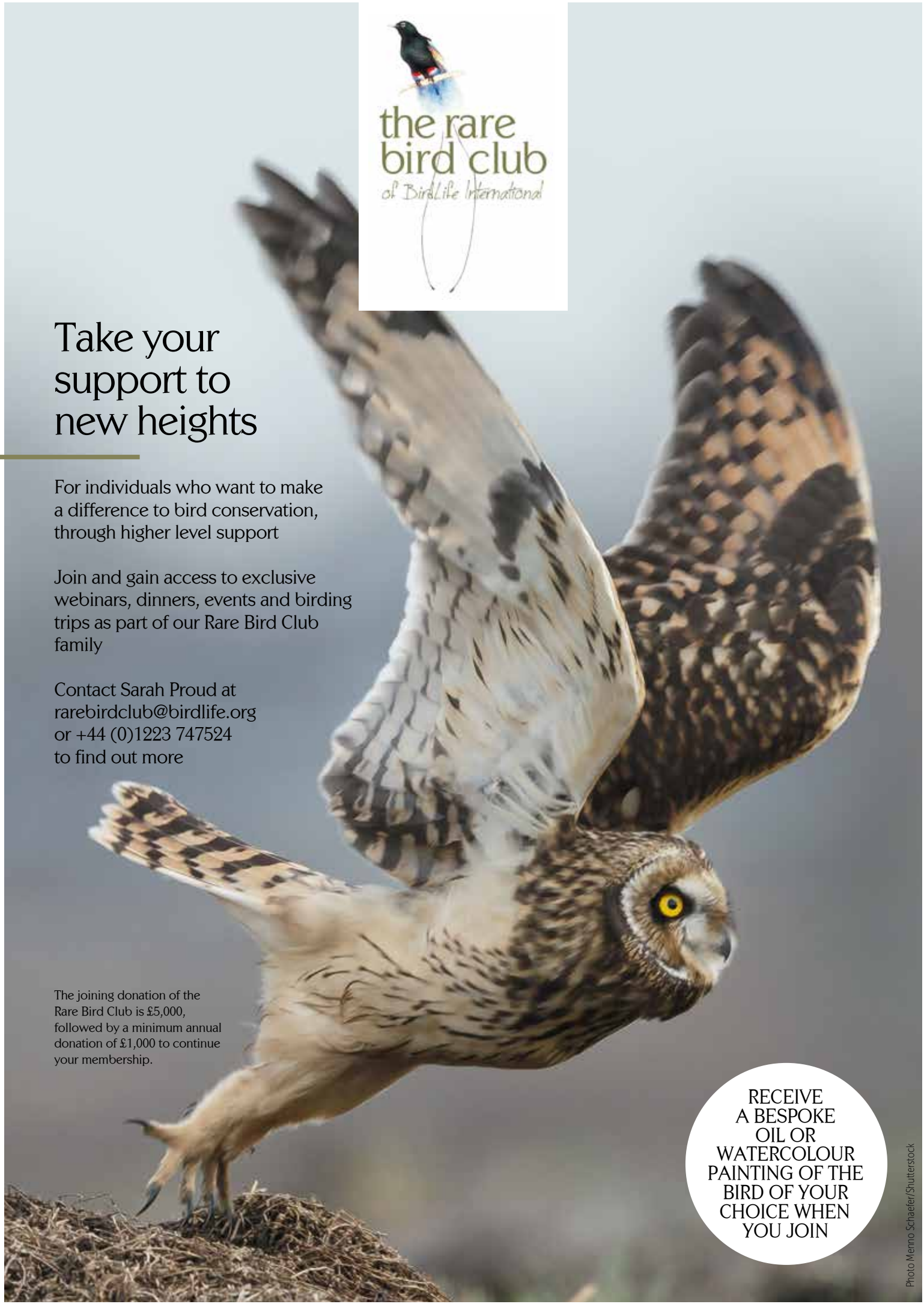
RANGE: 2 km²

THREATS: Limited area of distribution, invasive plants, fire, possibly climate change

FAST FACT: Grows 30-50 cm tall on grassy slopes at 1500 to 1700 m in sunny or semi-shaded locations within Bosnian Pine communities

Plant factfile credit: © Mihailo Jovićević

For more information:* ***birdlife.org/cepf-med*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OFF THE HOOK

BirdLife's Albatross Task Force is celebrating a major conservation success after a decade of work with the Namibian fishing industry. A new paper shows that seabird deaths in the Namibian demersal longline fishery have been reduced by a whopping 98%

We're all in need of a good news story at the moment, and fortunately, the Albatross Task Force has one. A new paper published in the journal Biological Conservation has revealed that seabird deaths in the Namibian demersal longline fishery have been reduced by 98%. That equates to an astonishing 22,000 birds saved every year. This fantastic achievement is thanks to effective government regulation and grassroots engagement with the industry by our team of instructors – the culmination of ten years of research, engagement and advocacy.

One of the task force's first jobs was to establish the scale of seabird 'bycatch' in Namibia. The results were shocking. Namibia's hake fisheries were found to be among the world's deadliest fisheries for seabirds: an estimated 30,000 birds were killed each year. Even more concerning was that this included threatened species like the Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche chlororhynchos* (Endangered) and White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis* (Vulnerable).

"It's hard to envisage so many birds being killed in individual fisheries on an annual basis – not least for the fishers themselves, who see lots of birds gathering behind their boats and perhaps might only bring up one or two in a haul," says Rory Crawford, Bycatch Programme Manager for the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK). "But the cumulative effect for albatrosses in particular has been devastating – 15 of 22 species are threatened with extinction. Mercifully, this is a

Alan Munro
International Marine Policy Project Officer, RSPB

↑ **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche chlororhynchos* Photo Ben Dilley**

White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*
Photo Alistair J King

Samantha Matjila and Titus Shaanika aboard a freezer trawler, on which fish are processed into frozen fillet within hours
Photo Albatross Task Force

problem for which there are simple and elegant solutions."

Since establishing the scale of the issue, the Namibian Albatross Task Force has worked with fishers on board their vessels to demonstrate mitigation measures such as bird-scaring lines: simple 'scarecrow' ropes stretched out behind the vessel, that scare birds away from baited hooks or dangerous trawl cables. The task force formed a partnership with local women's group Meme Itumbapo to build and sell bird-scaring lines.

After many thousands of hours at sea and in ports building support for these measures and the importance of protecting seabirds, in 2015 the team successfully advocated for fishery regulations requiring the use of mitigation measures by law. These new laws meant that bird-scaring lines were widely adopted across the fleets, and the new study demonstrates just how effective the potent combination of grassroots engagement and solid regulations has been.

Samantha Matjila, the Namibia Albatross Task Force Team Leader with the Namibia Nature Foundation, reflects: "It's truly wonderful to see bycatch drop by such a huge amount in Namibia. Our waters are crucial for many globally threatened seabirds – to think that our collaborative efforts with all the vessels and the fishery managers has resulted in more than 22,000 birds being saved every year is something special. With the right levels of government investment and support, we hope that low levels of bycatch can be sustained long into the future, and that Namibia can serve as a marine conservation inspiration at a time when it is sorely needed."

The next step is to make sure that the approaches developed by the Albatross Task Force are hard-wired into the long-term management of the fishery. Albatrosses are very long-lived birds (some species breed into their 60s), so conservation efforts need to be sustained over time. Titus Shaanika, Senior Albatross Task Force Instructor in Namibia, says: "The industry has done a remarkable job to reduce seabird bycatch so substantially over such a short period. The big challenge now is to keep up those hard-earned reductions, and to wear them as a badge of honour – we can and we must do more of this across the world if we want turn the tide on biodiversity loss."

Encouragingly, the Namibian hake fishery recently secured Marine Stewardship Council sustainable seafood certification, with bird bycatch forming an important consideration in the assessment. The certification came with some conditions – including the need to improve the uptake of bird-scaring lines in the trawl fleet, and to ensure that effective bycatch monitoring continues. The Namibia task force team will continue to work closely with industry to help carry out these conditions.

The Namibian team is the second of five Albatross Task Force teams across the world to have achieved a more than 90% seabird bycatch reduction, hot on the heels of similar success in South Africa in 2014, where albatross bycatch was reduced by 95% in the hake trawl fishery. In the next two years our aim is to demonstrate similar reductions in Argentina and Chile, and to have made a major contribution to the conservation status of some of the world's most remarkable – yet threatened – birds. ■

BIRD FACTFILE

ATLANTIC YELLOW-NOSED ALBATROSS
Thalassarche chlororhynchos

RED LIST STATUS: Engangered

RANGE: South Atlantic ocean

THREATS: Bycatch in fisheries, nest predation by invasive house mice

FAST FACT: Can fly at 40 kmph, with bursts of up to 100 kmph

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Photo Harpy Eagle *Harpia harpyja* / Shutterstock

With your support, BirdLife will keep protecting and campaigning for birds and nature across the world; saving species, protecting the most precious sites, and preventing habitat destruction. By leaving a legacy, you can help ensure that generations to come can continue to enjoy our planet's incredible nature.

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Ruth Ward explains why she and her late husband John are leaving a legacy gift to BirdLife: *"John loved birdwatching, using his ears as much as his eyes. The gift of impersonating bird calls, especially waders, enabled him with help from friends Bryan and Alan to produce the record 'Big Jake Calls the Waders'. John enjoyed passing on his birdwatching knowledge especially to youngsters. He used to say we have to be the voice for birds to ensure their habitat is conserved.*

With today's pressures upon the planet it is important organisations like BirdLife are supported in their work. Birdwatching gave John so much pleasure and he would help in any way to ensure birds are around for future generations."

BirdLife thanks Ruth and John for their kind donation, which will help us preserve the natural world which has brought them so much joy.

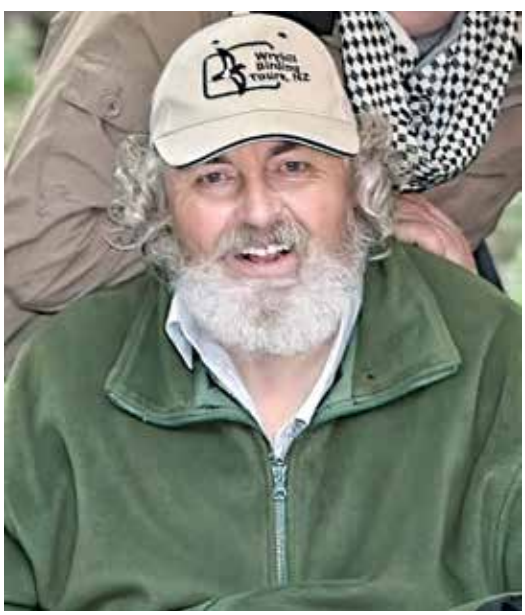

Photo Rudmer Zwerver/Shutterstock

Learn more

We've put together a guide that will help you prepare before visiting your solicitor.

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HOT OFF THE PRESS

The latest scientific breakthroughs from BirdLife's quarterly peer-reviewed journal

HIGHLIGHTS

SOUTHERN GROUND-HORNBILL: TAUGHT TO BE WILD

We've all felt like the new kid at school at some point in our lives. But imagine what it must feel like to be a captive-reared Southern Ground-hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri* released into a wild population with a social hierarchy just as complex as any high school. Reintroduction programmes have been trialled for this Vulnerable species – the world's largest hornbill – since 1995. But for such a long-lived, intelligent, gregarious species with delayed sexual maturity, little changes can make a big difference. This latest study analysed various reintroduction programmes across Africa and found that adult survival was strongly influenced by the season in which the birds were released, and how much socialising they had done with fellow captive Southern Ground-hornbills beforehand. The most successful birds had been placed into 'bush schools', where social learning was led by an experienced, wild alpha male. It turns out humans aren't the only ones who benefit from a good mentor. ■

Photo Bernard Dupont

EUROPEAN TURTLE-DOVE HUNTING IS UNSUSTAINABLE

It seems hard to believe that the European Turtle-dove *Streptopelia turtur*, once common across its range, is now Vulnerable to extinction. So how did it go from a widespread symbol of love and fidelity, famous in the popular carol 'The Twelve Days of Christmas', to one of the fastest-declining birds in Europe? The threats are double-edged: habitat loss due to intensive agriculture, and over-hunting. In this new paper, researchers calculated that current levels of hunting along the bird's western migratory flyway are more than double the sustainable level. Presently, the species can be legally hunted in ten European countries, but even without counting illegal poaching, it's clear governments need to modify their regulations if this species is to survive. Otherwise it may soon exist in stories alone. ■

Photo Birdlife Europe

Photo Butterfly Hunter/ Shutterstock

CRITICAL MOULTING SITE FOR "SPOONIE" IDENTIFIED

Having a bad hair day is stressful enough, but for birds, moulting is one of their most vulnerable times of year. Shedding feathers after the breeding season can affect a bird's ability to fly and keep warm and dry – not to mention the energy it takes to grow sleek new plumage. It's therefore vitally important that birds can go through this unglamorous life stage in peace, with plenty of food and places to rest. Now, scientists have found that the southern Jiangsu coast in eastern China is a critical moulting site for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* (Critically Endangered) and Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* (Endangered). Since mudflats in the Yellow Sea region have been rapidly drained for development over recent years, this finding reinforces the timely decision to designate this area a World Heritage Site. ■

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

AND MUCH MORE...

SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT

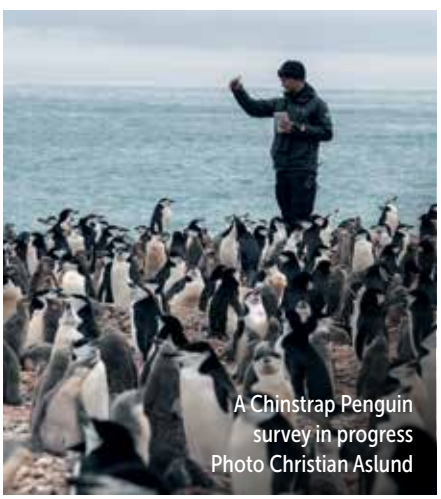
How a proposed network of Marine Protected Areas would help penguins

Since explorers first set eyes on Antarctica over 200 years ago, human activity has been impacting its wildlife. A new study co-authored by BirdLife's **Jonathan Handley** used tracking technology to pinpoint some of the most important sites for penguins in Antarctic waters

What threats do penguins face in Antarctic waters?
As the number of people and activities continue to increase in Antarctica and its surrounding waters, including research, tourism and fishing, there is some concern about the local impacts of pollution, human intrusion and disturbance. One of the biggest worries is the overharvesting of krill, as this is a primary food source for most species of Antarctic penguins. Coupled to all these threats is the added pressure of climate change on the penguins and the habitats these birds depend on.

How has modern technology helped us to identify important areas for penguins?
Advances in satellite imagery and drone technology have allowed us to find unknown penguin colonies and better determine how many birds there are at different breeding colonies across the continent. A myriad of efforts by researchers from around the world – primarily through the use of tracking devices – have helped uncover how these birds typically use the waters surrounding Antarctica. Combining these sources of information allows scientists to identify globally important areas for penguins at sea.

How would penguins benefit if the proposed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) were approved?



A Chinstrap Penguin survey in progress
Photo Christian Aslund

Several recent studies have shown that the krill fisheries operating in Antarctic waters may be directly competing with certain penguin populations for one of their primary food sources. The MPAs could therefore reduce overlap by defining where fishing vessels can – and cannot – go. This is critical, because even though we do not fully know how climate change will alter Antarctic ecosystems in coming years, preventing overexploitation can help safeguard the future of penguins and other Antarctic wildlife. If the proposed MPAs were approved, the area of high-quality penguin habitat under permanent protection would increase by 49% – 100%, depending on the species.

What are the next steps in getting important areas for penguins officially protected?
The body responsible for managing the marine environment of Antarctica is the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR): a group comprised of 25 countries and a European Union delegation. CCAMLR holds an annual meeting where formal decisions must be agreed unanimously. While the majority of members have approved the MPAs, two of 26 members argue insufficient evidence has been provided. To address this, the BirdLife Marine Programme, supported by the British Antarctic Survey and a team of scientists from seven countries, are providing additional evidence to upcoming CCAMLR meetings. Given the decisiveness CCAMLR has already shown in marine conservation issues, in the upcoming meeting in 2021 they again have an unprecedented opportunity to further their position as leaders in marine conservation by designating some of the largest MPAs on earth. ■

Marine Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas for penguins in Antarctica, targets for conservation action is published in Frontiers in Marine Science. Support for this project was provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

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