



BirdLife
INTERNATIONAL

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



HIGHLIGHTS 2016



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**TOUS POUR LA NATURE,
LA NATURE POUR TOUS!**



#NATUREALERT

INTRODUCTION

“ *Tous pour la nature, la nature pour tous!* ”

“All for One, One for All”, the famous motto of Alexandre Dumas’ rip-roaring masterpiece *‘The Three Musketeers’* (1844), was one we happily adapted for our brightest moment of 2016, and one of our greatest victories in decades – the safeguarding of the EU’s signature nature laws, the Birds & Habitats Directives.

“All for nature, nature for all” perfectly captures the essence of BirdLife, this wonderful, diverse, eclectic and loyal band of 48 devoted national partners here in Europe and Central Asia – and a further 75 partners around the globe – who join forces daily in the valiant defence of nature conservation, in our back yards and across oceans and continents.

#NatureAlert: In 2015, the European Commission seemed determined to water down the world’s most effective nature protection laws, the Birds & Habitats Directives, in pursuit of an agenda of supposed ‘Better Regulation’ and economic efficiencies. BirdLife and our EU national partners, together with other international NGOs, quickly organized #NatureAlert, a Europe-wide public response to show the Commission that Europeans love nature and wholeheartedly support the laws that protect it. Indeed, the response broke the record books for EU public consultations, with over 520,000 citizens demanding that environmental safeguards not be weakened.

After a two year battle, the Commission finally listened – to the public outcry, the facts and figures provided by BirdLife and others, as well as their own

experts – and announced in December 2016 that they would not only preserve the nature directives but strengthen and better fund them.

This was a great high for many, especially in a European landscape suffering from the blow of the Brexit vote, and the rise of populism in a range of countries. This political environment, in which facts and free debate are stifled by the emotional exploitation of anxieties and fears, strikes at the very heart of what we do at BirdLife.

Against daunting odds, many of our partners withstand growing financial restrictions and even government challenges to provide world class scientific research on which passionate advocacy and conservation work is based to protect our natural environment. So at BirdLife, we are redoubling our efforts to strengthen civil society and to engage our partners, supporters, the public and governments in fruitful conversation.

The work we do together must be multilateral, continental and collaborative, and all while being locally-driven by the communities we serve. The BirdLife model embraces this challenging duality, and we hope that the birds-eye overview of our ‘2016 Highlights’ offers an inspiring insight into what the power of many can achieve.

As we look to 2017 and beyond, determined to win more victories for nature, I find myself returning once again to the words of Alexandre Dumas for inspiration – *nothing* is impossible for those who truly love...nature.

“ *‘Ah, no difficulties can ever daunt me,’
replied d’Artagnan: ‘my only Fear is, of impossibilities.’
‘Nothing is impossible,’ said the lady, ‘to the one who truly loves.’
‘Nothing, Madame?’
‘Nothing’ she replied.* ”

Angelo Caserta

Regional Director BirdLife Europe & Central Asia

BirdLife Europe & Central Asia

KEY FACTS

4,100 staff

2,000,000 members

Tens of thousands of skilled volunteers

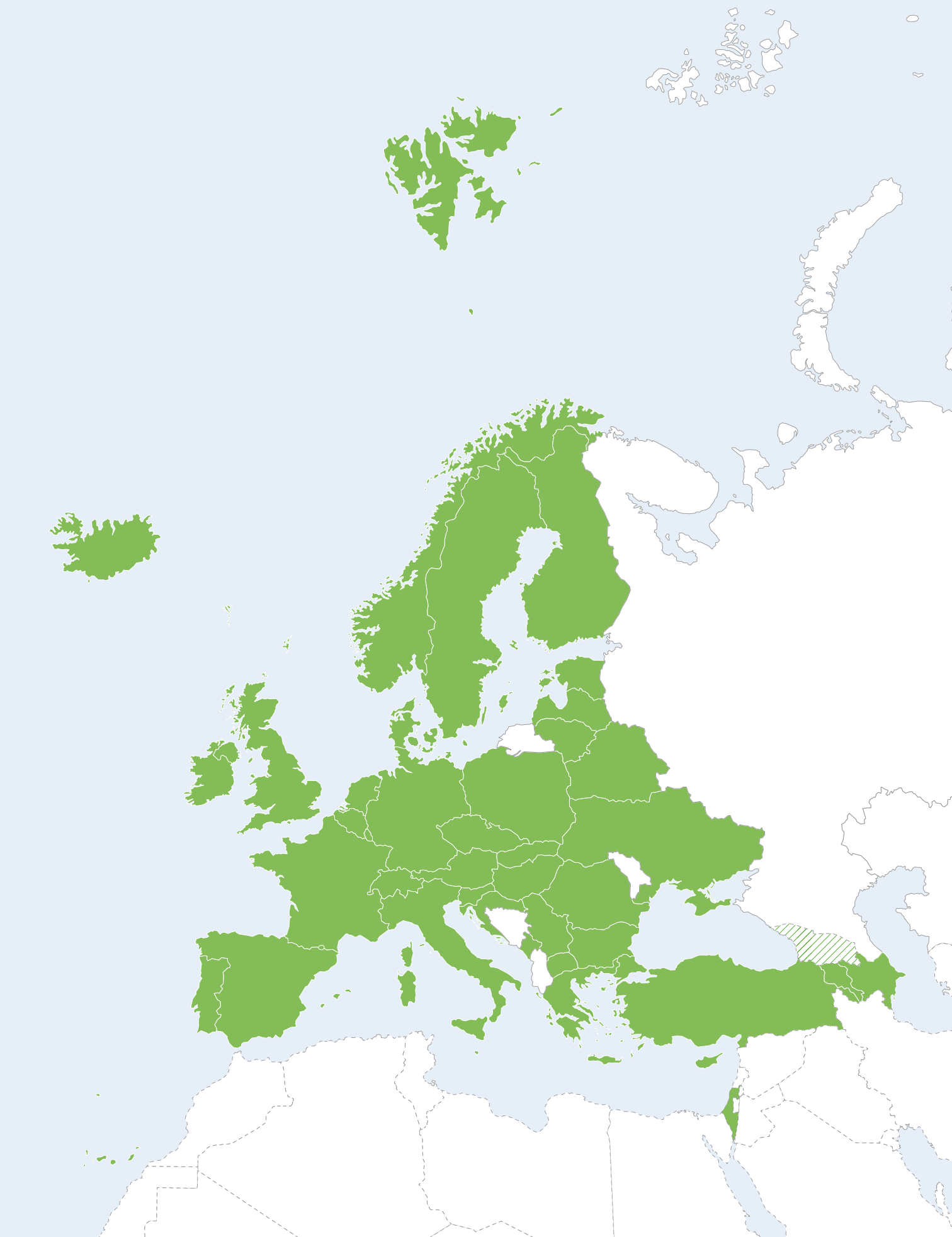
Partners own or manage more than

6,000 nature sites totalling

320,000 hectares

BirdLife Europe and Central Asia is one of six regional secretariats that compose **BirdLife International** – a world leader in bird conservation and the largest nature conservation partnership in the world. Our unique **local-to-global** approach enables us to deliver high-impact and long-term conservation for the benefit of **nature and people**. Our secretariat, based in Brussels, supports a **regional partnership of 48 national conservation organisations** across 47 countries, including all EU Member States. With more than **4,100 staff** in Europe, **two million members** and tens of thousands of skilled volunteers, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, together with its national partners, owns or manages more than **6,000 nature sites** totalling **320,000 hectares**.





BIRDS OF A FEATHER SOME OF OUR PARTNERS' 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

2016 was a busy year for the BirdLife Europe & Central Asia family – a partnership of 48 national NGOs in 47 countries. As the old proverb goes, 'birds of a feather, flock together' and, together, our local-to-global approach to nature conservation shows just what the power of many can achieve. We ended the year with a stunning victory – the safeguarding of the EU's flagship nature laws, but there are so many other stories to tell. Here follows the briefest of glimpses into just some of our partners' achievements in 2016!

SCIENCE: THE BIRDLIFE GOLD STANDARD

Science is our Gold Standard; year on year, our partners raise the bar for ornithological knowledge and 2016 was no exception. In Kazakhstan, **ACBK** conducted the country's most extensive census of rare geese to date; **MES** welcomed international experts to its 5th 'Congress of the Ecologists of Macedonia'; while in Croatia, **BIOM** completed its benchmark study of national bird distribution, establishing a new baseline for bird atlases.

Meanwhile, in Uzbekistan, **UzSPB** celebrated the inclusion of Lakes Mashankul and Khozhakul on BirdLife's

IBA list – the internationally recognised benchmark for scientifically identifying important bird and biodiversity sites. Many partners have also developed innovative data-collection techniques, with **DOPPs** equipping a White-backed woodpecker in Slovenia with a telemetric logger – a first in Europe! And in neighbouring Hungary, **MME** launched a Bird ID mobile app that has been downloaded by 50,000 users.

TAKING FLIGHT: OUR RESEARCH IN ACTION

Many partners are engaged in long-term ecological restoration and sustainable management projects,



working closely with local communities, government agencies and businesses to find innovative ways for birds and people to peacefully coexist. In 2016, **SOS/BirdLife Slovakia** completed work with local farmers in Medzibodrožie to pump water back into the drying wetlands of the region. Great bitterns began to return, several pairs of the very rare Ferruginous duck were spotted, and a whole new colony of waders – Purple heron, Great White egret, Black-crowned Night Heron – was established!

Their success is encouraging for those pursuing equally ambitious projects. In the Mediterranean, **BirdLife Cyprus** will soon complete its restoration of the Akrotiri Marsh, while **BirdLife Malta** will take up land-management responsibility for the historic, and biodiversity-rich, Salini Salt pans.

Further north, **OTOP** will develop the eco-tourism potential of Poland's Beka nature reserve, while **EOS** continues its work on Sand Martin conservation in Estonian quarries. Meanwhile, our German partner **NABU** is entering the second year of an ambitious five-year project to restore 5,300 ha of peatlands in Central Europe.

FLIGHTS OF IMAGINATION: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Throughout the year, young and old alike came out in full force to enjoy and defend nature. Our French partner **LPO** continued its fight to strengthen France's Biodiversity Law by collecting a 669,102 signatures against the use of neonicotinoids – a type of bee-killing pesticide.

Successful new events have popped up, with **BirdLife Suomi's** Finnish Bird Fair joining established events such as **SPEA's** Sagres Birdwatching Festival in Portugal and **SOF/BirdLife Sweden's** national Garden Bird Count – all attracting tens of thousands of people. In Romania, **SOR's** popular Bucharest Got Wings project saw members of the public place home-made bird feeders and nest boxes all around the capital's parks. And, who says politics can't be fun? **APB BirdLife Belarus** organized elections for 'Bird of the District', won by the noble Kingfisher.

Several partners have been breaking a sweat to raise money: in Turkey, **Doğa** volunteers ran the Istanbul Marathon to raise funds for the Imperial Eagle. While in Belgium, our Flemish partner's two-day challenge of hiking, biking and canoeing – 'Expeditie

Natuurpunt – raised €133,000. And over in Israel, **SPNI's** Champions of the Flyway competition raised funds for our Greek partner's (**HOS**) efforts to tackle illegal bird killing.

Many partners have found inspiration in art, like **LOB's** successful Bird of the Year drawing competition in Latvia. In Montenegro, Gregor Subic's poignant documentary '*The Endangered Treasure of Ulcinj*' told the story of **CZIP's** efforts to save Ulcinj Salina – a critical bird wintering site – from being turned into a tourist resort. On Spanish television, 5 million viewers tuned into **SEO/BirdLife's** stunning documentary series, '*Red Natura 2000*'. And BirdWatch Ireland filled the radio waves with birdsong, collaborating on the award-winning '*European Dawn Chorus*' broadcast.

Numerous activities have focused on inspiring the next generation: the Caucasus are leading the way with both **AOS' Bird Camp Besh** in Azerbaijan and **ASPB's** Dsegh Eco-club in Armenia running birdwatching, activities for young students. And in Belgium, our Walloon partner **Natagora** has developed an educational video game about biodiversity for schools. After all, if children can memorize 500 different types of Pokémon, then why not 500 species of birds?

"HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS"

Our finest moments come when we finally see species protection measures rewarded. In 2016, **BirdLife Austria** celebrated its most successful breeding season for Imperial Eagles and in Georgia, an adult pair was spotted performing diving flights near an artificial nest built by **SABUKO** – a remarkable sighting in a country with only 40 breeding pairs.

Over in Bulgaria, after years of efforts from **BSPB**, a second colony of Dalmatian pelicans began breeding on Belene Island. In Serbia, **BPSSS** advanced its decade-long struggle to save the Turtledove by securing a moratorium on its hunting for another year. In Lithuania, **LOD** stopped plans to start peat extraction on the Juodymas raised bog – breeding place of Capercaillie and Black grouse. **SVS/BirdLife Switzerland** has also observed a record 153 breeding pairs of the endangered Little Owl.

Going north, after concerted efforts by **NOF**, the Norwegian government will start its seabird Action Plan in 2017. Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, the **RSPB** has seen Bitterns bounce back from local extinction to near full recovery!



THE #NATUREALERT CAMPAIGN VICTORY AT LAST!

In 2016, BirdLife continued its relentless #NatureAlert campaign to prevent the seemingly inevitable weakening of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. Protecting over 1,000 species and over 27,000 natural sites across Europe, the directives are justly recognized as some of the strongest nature laws in the world. As a result, the EU is home to Natura 2000, the world's largest coordinated network of protected areas; and iconic native species, such as the Grey Wolf or the White-Tailed Eagle have been brought back from the brink of extinction.

FROM 'FITNESS CHECK' TO 'FIT FOR PURPOSE'

In 2015, the European Commission began an in-depth 'Fitness Check' of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. The reopening of these benchmark nature laws and their weakening was almost universally considered to be a battle lost from the start. But when the European Commission opened its public consultation on their future, we mobilized an unprecedented half a million Europeans to speak out in their defense. Vindication came in July 2016, when the Fitness Check's findings proved the laws to be unequivocally '*fit for purpose*'. Nevertheless, the Commission continued to silently scrutinize the directives for months on end.

ALL FOR NATURE, NATURE FOR ALL!

Meanwhile, BirdLife continued the #NatureAlert campaign, enthusiastically calling on the EU to '*Free the Nature Directives!*' With a cacophony of squawks, chirps, cheeps and tweets (of the digital variety), our national partners gave sustained echo to the massive citizen mandate that had been issued loud and clear the year before.

We campaigned alongside three other NGOs – WWF, Friends of the Earth, and the European Environmental Bureau – and were joined by countless groups and individuals, with significant support from business, MEPs, environment ministers and scientists. And so, borrowing from Alexandre Dumas, we adopted the heroic refrain '*All for Nature, Nature for All!*'

VICTORY!

On 7 December, the EU College of Commissioners finally met to deliberate the fate of the directives. When the clock struck 12 noon, Karmenu Vella, EU Commissioner for the Environment, tweeted his thanks to '*all colleagues for full support of Birds & Habitats fitness check*' – and in a heartbeat, anxiety transformed into elation. This was not just a win for nature, it was a victory for democracy and for Europe.

While this success was a huge step forward, it is only half the battle. We must now focus on better implementation. When these laws have been put more effectively into action, then – and only then – can we give nature the victory it deserves.





PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

Birds are often indicators of overall ecosystem health – like the ill-fated canary in the coal mine that would warn miners of dangerous gas. It is therefore vital to monitor the health of bird populations. The BirdLife network does this by mapping and recording the diverse threats that European bird populations face.

ON TRACK WITH LIFE EUROSAP

The LIFE EuroSAP project aims to halt the population decline of sixteen species of iconic European birds on a continental scale. This three-year project tackles one of the recurrent problems in species-conservation: the deficiencies in national and international coordination and implementation of Species Action Plans (SAPs). In October 2016, Birdlife launched the Species Action Plan Tracking Tool (SAP TT). The platform ensures effective coordination, transparency and broader consensus among the LIFE EuroSAP partners and key stakeholders, namely governments, NGOs and research institutes.

SAVING EUROPE'S VULTURES

Vultures are declining world-wide, but they used to have a safe home in Europe. Three years ago this changed radically when approval was given to the commercialisation of veterinary diclofenac – an anti-inflammatory drug, harmless to humans, but potentially lethal for thousands of carrion-feeding birds. On the Indian subcontinent in the 1990s, veterinary diclofenac in cattle wiped out 99% of four species of vultures in less than ten years.

Throughout 2016, Birdlife continued to call for a ban on the use of veterinary diclofenac in Europe. Its use

in treating livestock is entirely unnecessary, since there are equally effective (and similarly priced) alternatives available. In April 2016, our partners presented the results of a new study that showed that the number of vulture deaths caused by diclofenac in Spain is somewhere between 715 and 6,389 per year. In 2017, BirdLife, together with our partners SEO-BirdLife (Spain) and SPEA (BirdLife Portugal), and along with the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) and WWF Spain, will launch the 'Ban Vet Diclofenac' campaign in Spain, Italy and Portugal.

RED ALERT!

In December 2016, BirdLife coordinated a reassessment of the conservation status of all bird species for the latest update of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. In total, 11,121 recognised bird species were recorded worldwide, including 742 newly 'discovered' bird species – mainly 'splits' previously treated as subspecies. Alarming, 11% of these are already threatened with extinction. For example the Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch *Fringilla polatzeki*, newly-split from the Blue Chaffinch (now Tenerife Blue Chaffinch, *Fringilla teydea*) may now be Europe's rarest perching bird, with just 250 individuals occupying a tiny range on its titular island.





ADVOCATING FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Farmland covers 45% of the EU's total land area. Due to unsustainable agricultural practices, these critical habitats are rocketing towards biodiversity oblivion; populations of farmland birds – an important indicator of an ecosystem's overall health – have fallen by a staggering 55% in the last three decades. For many years, BirdLife has been advocating for a smarter food and farming system in Europe; one that is not only more sustainable, but also healthier and fairer for consumers, farmers and nature alike.

CALLING FOR A 'FITNESS CHECK' OF THE CAP

The main driver behind unsustainable land management practices in Europe is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), one of EU's oldest, most influential, most debated and most costly policies – accounting for almost 40% of the EU budget. In March 2016, BirdLife joined more than 100 NGOs (active in farming, development, environment, climate, animal welfare, food and public health) in signing a joint letter to President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, calling for a comprehensive review of EU's food and farming system. The letter explicitly called for a 'Fitness Check' of the CAP in the context of the European Commission's Regulatory Fitness and Performance (REFIT) programme, in which the CAP would be assessed on the basis of its effectiveness, efficiency, coherence with other EU policies and its EU-added value.

Though the Commission failed to include a CAP 'Fitness Check' in its 2017 Work Plan (announced in October), the Commissioner for Agriculture, Phil Hogan, did announce that the spring would see an EU-wide Public Consultation on the future of the CAP.

ECOLOGICAL FOCUS AREAS (EFAS), GREEN OR GREEN-WASHED?

In an effort to make the CAP more environmentally sustainable, the EU has stipulated that Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) should be established to improve biodiversity on farmland. However, the regulation's list of what is permissible to grow on such areas includes controversial elements that have no proven ecological value. Together with the European Environmental Bureau, BirdLife commissioned the Institute for European Environmental Policy to carry out a review of the biodiversity impacts of the so-called 'greening options' available to farmers on EFAs. The study, published in November found that nearly 75% of EFA areas are comprised of crops that are shown to have negligible positive effects on biodiversity, and are in some cases harmful. In 2017, BirdLife will continue to reiterate its position that the benefits of current greening measures are widely overstated and do not justify the allocation of direct payment subsidies.

THE 2nd CORK DECLARATION ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In September, twenty years after the first Cork Declaration on Rural Development 'A Living Countryside', EU Agriculture Commissioner Phil Hogan announced its long-awaited sequel – a new declaration entitled 'A Better Life in Rural Areas'. This was the culmination of a two-day conference in Cork where some 300 representatives (from farming unions, the food sector and NGOs) were invited to develop a common vision for the future of European agriculture and rural communities. BirdLife commends the new declaration for its good intentions, notably its focus on climate action, protecting natural resources such as air and water and a new focus on broad consultation. Indeed, these were welcome echoes of calls issued at our own conference on rural development 'The Hidden Truth' back in February. However, BirdLife warns that these proposals will be rendered useless unless the CAP's unbalanced two-pillar structure, and its distorted system of subsidies, is reformed.





IMPORTANT BIRD & BIODIVERSITY AREAS

BirdLife's inventory of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) is an internationally recognised benchmark for identifying sites of global significance for the conservation of our planet's birds, animals and habitats. More than just a collection of individual sites, our IBAs form a global network of 12,000 sites which, if sufficiently protected and managed, is designed to provide suitable breeding, stop-over and wintering places for threatened migratory birds and thereby ensure their survival. Here in Europe and Central Asia, some 5,385 IBAs have been identified, spanning almost 200 million hectares.

IBAs IN DANGER

Since 2013, BirdLife has been publishing 'IBAs in Danger' – a list of the world's most critically endangered sites. The most common threats to IBAs are agriculture, water management, fires, hunting, logging, collecting animals and plants and disturbance. In 2016, BirdLife launched the list of IBAs in Danger in the new form of an interactive Story Map. Examples from Europe include wind energy development at Kaliakra and Dorankulak Lake in Bulgaria; forestry in Sumava in the Czech Republic; a liquid natural gas terminal building at Pakri, Estonia; a tidal barrier at Venice Lagoon in Italy; and the development of a hotel and golf course complex at Ulcinj Salina in Montenegro.

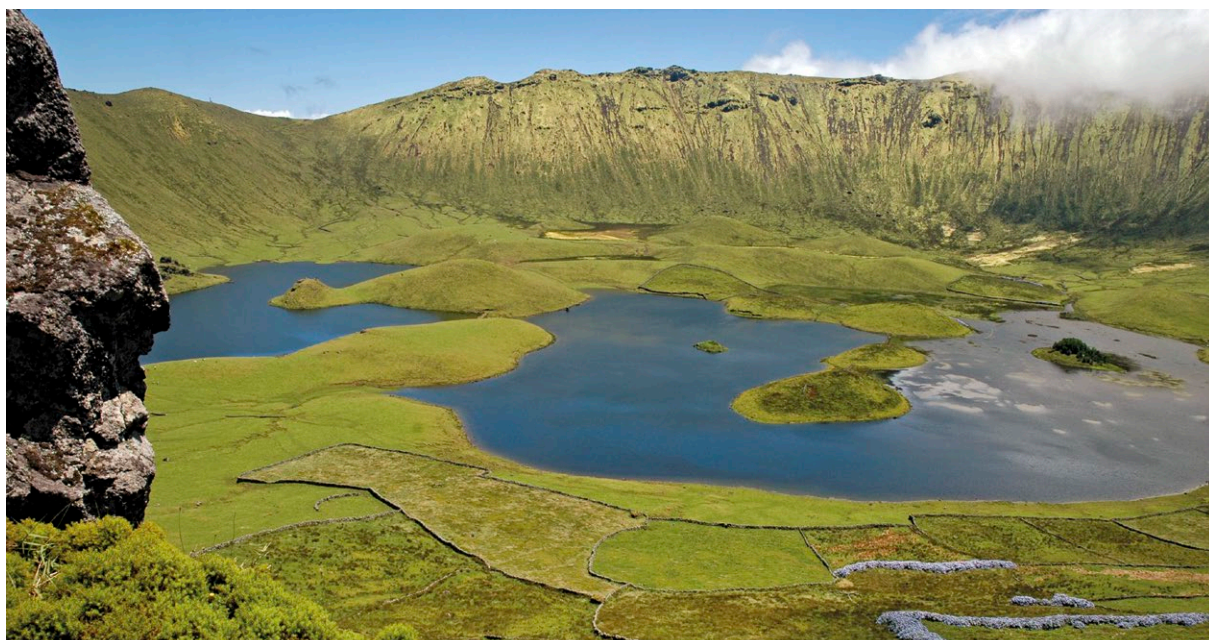
KEY BIODIVERSITY AREA (KBA) PARTNERSHIP

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) are sites that contribute significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity. In April 2016, the Global Standard for the identification of KBAs was adopted by the IUCN. In September, an ambitious initiative was launched to identify, document and promote a global list of KBAs identified using this

new Global Standard. The KBA Partnership is formed by 11 of the world's leading conservation organizations, including BirdLife. IBAs form the largest subset of KBAs, identified using birds as qualifying species. It is expected that many IBAs will also qualify as KBAs for other species groups, as well as for ecosystems of concern, under the KBA Standard.

THE LANDSENSE CITIZEN OBSERVATORY

The LandSense engagement platform was launched in 2016 and aims to aggregate innovative EO (Electro Optics) technologies, mobile devices, community-based environmental monitoring, data collection, interpretation and information delivery systems to empower communities to monitor and report on their environment. Data provided by volunteers will help to monitor IBAs, Natura2000 sites and KBAs. BirdLife is responsible for the stakeholder inclusion and citizen engagement approaches of the project and our partners SEO/BirdLife (Spain) and Burung Indonesia are leading the cases in forest and habitat monitoring.



© Pedro Geraldes



PROTECTING MIGRATORY BIRDS

Bird migration is one of the world's most spectacular natural phenomena, with hundreds of millions of birds travelling thousands of kilometres to and from their breeding and wintering grounds. The journey is a perilous one, and BirdLife strives to safeguard migrating birds along their flyways by addressing human-induced threats such as illegal bird killing and poisoning, protecting critical 'stopover' sites, and mitigating the danger posed by energy sector infrastructure.

POWERING PEOPLE, EMPOWERING NATURE

BirdLife and several national partners are collaborating on an important project to protect migratory birds in the Mediterranean. The 'Med Flyway Project', funded by the Mava Foundation, has a strong emphasis on mitigating the threats from energy sector infrastructure, such as possible collision and electrocution with powerlines – this is particularly problematic when pylons and network routes are built along ecologically sensitive areas such as flyways, which see massive bird 'traffic' during migrating season. Through this work, BirdLife is expanding its development of a Soaring Bird Sensitivity Mapping Tool to cover the full Mediterranean region.

ILLEGAL TRAPPING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

With the generous support of the Oak Foundation, three of our partners – BirdLife Cyprus, BirdLife Malta and LIPU (Italy) are working closely with BirdLife to reduce illegal trapping at key sites in Sardinia, Sicily, Malta and the Farmagusta and Larnaca areas of Cyprus. The initial phase of this three-year project (launched in January 2016) has already seen some promising accomplishments: from successfully identifying and mapping critical locations of criminal activity to directly removing traps and releasing birds. The three BirdLife partners have also managed to gather high quality intelligence which has been directly useful to law enforcement agencies in the identification and prosecution of law-breakers. These actions have also been complemented by popular education and outreach activities, reflecting an increasing public support for nature conservation. It is hoped that this focus on engaging young people will provide the cultural change needed to successfully address this issue in the long-term.

PROTECTING THE EAST ATLANTIC FLYWAY

The East Atlantic Flyway (part of the Africa-Eurasia Flyway) is a migration route used by approximately 90 million birds every year. Many species have undergone substantial declines over the past few decades, with several now regarded as globally threatened. The goal of the East Atlantic Flyway Initiative (EAFI) is to design and implement a far-reaching programme

that will improve the conservation status of threatened migratory birds on a flyway scale. The initiative, led by VBN (BirdLife Netherlands) and RSPB (BirdLife UK), harnesses the collaborative power of the BirdLife partnership along the flyway through the coordination and implementation of targeted local solutions in both Europe and Africa. Since its launch in early 2016, critical sites and landscapes have been identified for initial actions focused on the recovery of biodiversity-rich saltpan habitats.



© Márton Horváth



SEABIRDS & MARINE

With marine ecosystems facing pressure from a wide range of human activities, seabirds have become the world's most threatened bird group. In Europe, many majestic seabirds are severely threatened, notably Yelkouan Shearwater, Monteiro's Storm petrel, and the Balearic Shearwater which, with little over 3,000 breeding pairs remaining, is Europe's most threatened bird. BirdLife strives to mitigate adverse human impacts by ensuring that marine habitats are better protected, fisheries are managed sustainably and seabird bycatch is reduced.

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

With our partners, BirdLife has identified some 917 'Marine IBAs' (Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas) across Europe and Central Asia (670 of these sites are in the EU). This is an internationally recognised benchmark, and in the EU it is routinely used as the scientific basis for designating the Natura 2000 SPAs (Special Protection Areas). In 2016, we enjoyed some major successes: 75 new marine sites were added to our regional network; the Maltese Government committed to designating all eight of its new marine IBAs as EU SPAs; and in Portugal, the mainland overlap between the BirdLife IBA and European SPA network was more or less completed.

DISCOVERY ON THE HIGH SEAS

Following rigorous analysis by over 60 scientists, BirdLife has identified an important seabird area on the Atlantic high seas – the 'Evlanov Seamount and Basin'. Bird data-tracking shows the site – located where the North Atlantic current crosses the mid-Atlantic ridge – to be the area of the North East Atlantic with both the highest number of bird species and of individual birds (an estimated 2.9 million per annum). It is an important area for 12 seabird species, including the threatened Atlantic Puffin, Bermuda Petrel and Northern Fulmar. The area is also believed to be important for dolphins, whales and turtles. In 2017, BirdLife will present the site to the OSPAR Commission (The 'Oslo-Paris' Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic) and propose that it be classed as a Marine Protected Area (MPA).

WHAT'S THE CATCH?

It is estimated that every year, more than 200,000 seabirds die as 'bycatch' in fishing hooks and nets across European waters. It is principally due to this that the critically endangered Balearic shearwater faces extinction within 40 years. To turn the tide of the problem, BirdLife works closely with governments, fishermen and scientists.

In 2016, BirdLife's Seabird Task Force continued to make excellent progress in researching and trialling bycatch mitigation solutions. Working closely with our Portuguese (SPEA) and Lithuanian (LOD) partners, we

tested the use of high contrast panels attached to fishing nets. Meanwhile, our Polish partner (OTOP) began testing net lighting methods, and our Spanish partner (SEO-BirdLife) began working with fishermen on demersal longline vessels. Preliminary results from the Lithuanian trials indicate that Velvet Scoter bycatch was potentially reduced by one third. This is encouraging, but further research is needed across the board.

On the policy front, March 2016 saw a historic moment for European seabirds. After years of dialogue, the European Commission proposed legislation making it mandatory for EU fishing vessels to implement concrete measures to prevent seabird bycatch. This followed recent proposals on data collection from fisherman, indicating a positive sea change amongst policy-makers. However, in April, EU National governments removed these minimum standards, effectively rendering the regulation useless. In 2017, the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament will vote on this issue, and BirdLife will advocate strongly for MEPs to support better rules to tackle seabird bycatch.



© Nicky Souness



CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is the greatest long-term threat to our environment and our society. BirdLife advocates for the swift reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and for an ambitious deployment of renewable energies. These efforts must be managed in harmony with nature and be verifiably 'green'; they must not result in further emissions – either directly or indirectly – through the growing use of unsustainable bioenergy or the destruction of carbon-rich habitats such as forests and wetlands.

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD...

In 2016, BirdLife continued to highlight the dark side of bioenergy – the burning of organic matter for energy – and the policies driving its growing use in the EU. Bioenergy currently makes up 65% of the EU's renewable energy mix and has been presented as the answer to our 'clean dream'. But 'all that glitters is not gold' and, similarly, all that is renewable is not sustainable: the burning of biomass still results in CO₂ emissions and, in some cases, it even makes global warming worse. While bioenergy can play a role in the EU's renewable energy transition, its production must be sustainably regulated and kept to a relatively small contribution compared to wind and solar power.

'THE BLACK BOOK OF BIOENERGY'

In November, together with Transport & Environment, we published *'The Black Book of Bioenergy'* – a graphic visualisation of eight case studies exposing the great carbon con of bioenergy right here in Europe. Following extensive on-the-ground investigation, and consultation with local sources, we presented shocking new evidence of environmental destruction wrought in the name of meeting (subsidised) renewables targets: from the mass clearing of whole trees from environmentally critical forests in Slovakia, Italy and Russia to the ploughing of biodiversity-rich peatlands and grasslands in Germany to support giant maize fields for biogas production. 2016 also saw BirdLife commence filming and production of our first feature-length documentary *'The Burning Issue'*. The documentary will expose cases of 'bioenergy gone bad' and will be premiered in early 2017.

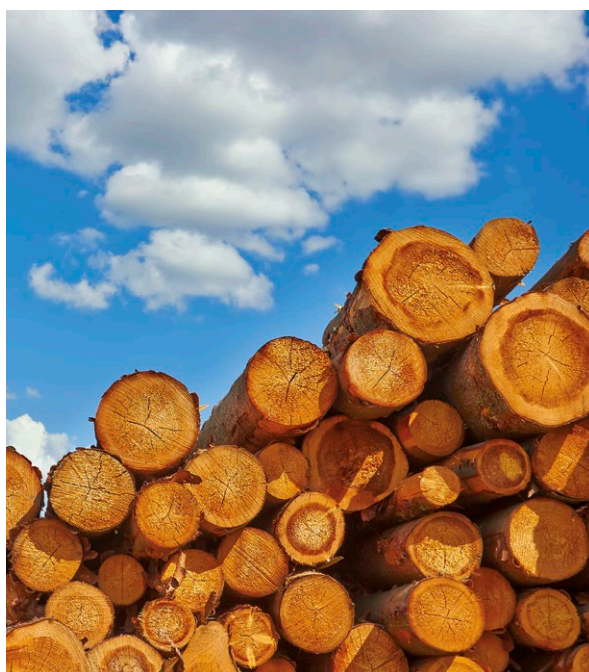
CLIMATE ROULETTE

Also in November, the European Commission unveiled its much-hyped 'Clean Energy package'. This unequivocally failed to come clean on the climate impacts of bioenergy – effectively a rigged casino game of 'climate roulette'. The sustainability criteria proposed by the Commission only measures emissions from the processing of bioenergy – such as from transporting, drying and compressing of the biomass – and ignores the carbon that is released from forests, soils and agricultural fields, as well as emissions from indirect land use change. In 2017, BirdLife will continue to call on the

EU to recognise that the best potential for sustainable bioenergy lies in different kinds of biomass residues and wastes that do not have other existing uses.

POINTS FOR EFFORT? LULUCF & ESR

In July, the European Commission published a new set of climate policy proposals to regulate emissions after 2020. BirdLife immediately raised concerns that the LULUCF (Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry) proposal lowers ambitions for emission reductions in sectors such as agriculture, livestock and transport by allowing them to off-set emissions through activities without environmental safeguards, notably afforestation. Then, in October, BirdLife joined 28 European organisations in co-signing an open letter, calling on environment ministers to ensure that the EU delivers its commitments in the Paris Agreement by making concrete improvements to the LULUCF regulation, as well as the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) which covers the majority of the EU's total emissions: increasing ambition, including safeguards for nature, closing loopholes and strengthening compliance.





INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

Invasive Alien Species (IAS) are non-native plants and animals that provoke serious negative consequences to local ecosystems when introduced into an environment where they are not naturally found. As one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss, IAS have been an essential factor in most bird extinctions over the past century and have contributed to the current plight of 44% of the IUCN's Red List of critically endangered species. Many carry a Molotov cocktail of diseases with severe implications for native wildlife, livestock, domestic pets and even humans. The European Commission estimates that IAS cause €12.5 billion worth of damage to the union's economy annually.

WE ARE NOT ALONE

The EU harbours up to 1,800 different invasive alien species, along with their rapidly growing populations. Notable examples include the pesky South American coypu *Myocastor coypus* troubling Germany and the incorrigible North American grey squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* infesting Italy, to the burrowing Chinese mitten crab *Eriocheir sinensis* that has aggressively spread from the Kowloon Peninsula to the banks of the Thames in London. Since first docking in France in 2004 as a trade stowaway from Southeast Asia, the deadly Yellow-legged hornet *Vespa velutina* has spread to neighbouring Spain, Portugal, Germany and, more recently, Italy.

THE EU 'BLACKLIST'

Nature knows no borders: the failure of any one Member State to tackle IAS puts our shared ecological homeland at risk. A solution has to be found at a pan-European level – a common market needs common biosecurity. Throughout 2015, BirdLife engaged MEPs and senior European Commission officials, successfully advocating for the listing of species considered most immediately

threatening to European biodiversity. After working closely with policy-makers to ensure the best outcome, we welcomed the EU's publication of its initial black list of 'Invasive Alien Species of Union Concern', regulating the importing, selling and breeding of 37 named species.

NEOBIOTA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

As good as the new laws are, they urgently need to be extended to cover many more, equally threatening species. In September 2016, leading European scientists and environmental managers gathered in Vianden, Luxembourg for the biennial NEOBIOTA (European Group on Biological Invasions) Conference. Here, BirdLife successfully encouraged and supported the academic community in passing a resolution calling for greater action on the EU IAS Regulation. Notably, the resolution urgently called on the EU to add hundreds more species to the current black list, including controversial contenders such as the Raccoon dog *Nyctereutes procyonoides*, an increasingly popular exotic pet that is poised to become one of the most numerous, widespread and disease-ridden predators in Europe.





LOCAL EMPOWERMENT & EDUCATION

Across the globe, BirdLife's national partners invite their local communities to connect with nature through dynamic outreach projects, often including educational events and activities for young and old alike. In both Europe and Central Asia, our annual flagship events bring the magic of migration to the wider public; in spring and in autumn, when birds migrate to and from Africa, our partners organise simultaneous birdwatching events and activities in the frame of the 'Spring Alive' and 'EuroBirdwatch' projects.

SPRING ALIVE

Spring Alive, coordinated by our Polish partner OTOP, is BirdLife's international project to foster children's interest in nature and inspire them to take action for the conservation of migratory birds. By posting their first sightings of five easily-recognised migratory birds – Barn Swallow, White Stork, Common Cuckoo, Common Swift, and European Bee-eater – on the Spring Alive website, children from Europe, Central Asia and Africa create a real-time map of the incredible journeys these birds take every year.

Additionally, the project also involves many other indoor and outdoor events, to engage children, schools and the wider community in the conservation of migratory birds. In 2016, Spring Alive was even bigger and better, with the participation of 2,400 schools, nearly 115,000 children and adults, and over 300 conservation actions organized by BirdLife partners in 55 countries.

EUROBIRDWATCH

Since its launch in 1993, EuroBirdwatch has become a beloved fixture on the BirdLife calendar. Every October, our partners host hundreds of local birdwatching events. Experienced birders, inquisitive newcomers and all generations turn out in their droves to observe, identify and count passing birds during the nature-lover's event of the season – the great autumn migration where millions of birds make their epic journey southwards to wintering areas in the Mediterranean and in Africa.

There is something for all: fun activities designed for children, public bird ringing, ornithological excursions, and photo exhibitions. But the stars of the show are the birds: from Barn swallows, Dunlins, Sand martins and Ringdoves to Cory's shearwaters, Great cormorants and many, many more. The 2016 edition of the event gathered 40 partner organisations, 1,070 events, 24,115 people and 5.8 million birds.



© Ela Stepnowska



CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

One of BirdLife's signal programs and accomplishments is its Capacity Development Programme. In keeping with our local-to-global approach, the program and its different initiatives rely on a mix of partner-to-partner and secretariat-to-partner support. Our flagship programme in this area is the Caucasus Initiative, launched in 2015.

THE CAUCASUS INITIATIVE

Two years ago, we launched the Caucasus Initiative to support and further develop our national partners in Armenia (ASPB) and Azerbaijan (AOS), as well as SABUKO, which is currently a candidate to become our partner in Georgia. All three organisations face challenging local operating conditions, affecting funding and staffing capacity. With funding support from BirdLife partners in Austria, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, the initiative provides seed funding to help our Caucasus partners stabilise, improve their governance, find additional resources and increase local engagement with nature conservation in their countries.

SABUKO DIRECTOR WINS 2016 WHITLEY AWARD

In Georgia, SABUKO – founded and directed by Alexander Rukhaia – works tirelessly on preserving what is known as the Batumi bottleneck. Rukhaia was awarded the prestigious 2016 Whitley award, given to conservationists in resource-poor, biodiversity-rich countries, in honour of his work to reduce the number of birds of prey killed on their migration path through the Ajara region of Georgia.

BIRD CAMP BESH, AZERBAIJAN

In September, AOS organised Bird Camp Besh, a new youth conservation initiative in Azerbaijan. With support from SOF (BirdLife Sweden), 27 young naturalists from Azerbaijan, Germany and Sweden camped by the shores of the Caspian Sea at Besh Barmag – one of Europe's most spectacular migration bottlenecks. The camp had a jam-packed program: from bird studies, nature walks and workshops to mist netting demonstrations and meeting with AOS members. Youth nature conservation is enjoying a surge in popularity in Azerbaijan and we seek to continue this great momentum in 2017.

DSEGH NATURE VISITOR CENTRE, ARMENIA

With support from SVS (BirdLife Switzerland), ASPB opened a Nature Visitor Centre in Dsergh, one of Armenia's most biodiversity-rich IBAs (Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas). The centre will support nature-based tourism in a remote natural corner of Armenia, hopefully stimulating the local economy and benefitting local people through community-based tourism (bird-watching, hiking, horse-riding, sightseeing and more). It will also serve as a hub for various education programs school groups, NGOs and other stakeholders.



© Tomas Axén Haraldsson



BirdLife has long engaged with businesses to promote sustainable use of natural resources and responsible environmental practice across key industrial sectors. We work with leading companies who are committed to addressing their impact on biodiversity and follow specific targets for nature conservation. Through our partnerships with HeidelbergCement and CEMEX, we have helped mineral extractive industries change the way they see themselves relative to sustainable development and we work with them to enhance their positive contribution to biodiversity through habitat management and ecological restoration activities.

BIRDLIFE & HEIDELBERGCEMENT: PUTTING OUR PARTNERSHIP ON THE MAP

In September 2016, our partnership launched a new joint website: The BirdLife – HeidelbergCement Partnership Project Map. This interactive map provides a sweeping visual narrative of our partnership projects to date, which aim to improve local biodiversity at mining sites by working in concert with local communities, environmental authorities and scientists. Our successes across Europe clearly demonstrate how partnerships such as ours, between NGOs and businesses, can deliver profit while bringing economic activities into harmony with our planet.

AND THE WINNER IS...

The Quarry Life Award is a bi-annual competition launched by HeidelbergCement in 2011. It aims to promote understanding of the ecological value of mining sites and share best practices by calling on students and researchers to submit innovative biodiversity projects set in quarries. The 2016 Grand Prize was awarded to a Spanish team led by Dr. Rocío de Torre Ceijas. Using otters as a bio-indicator, the project – *'Linking quarries and surroundings by restoration ecology for semi-aquatic mammals'* investigated the ecological

connectivity of waterbodies in gravel quarries, and how to enhance this connectivity to the quarry's surroundings for a positive effect on biodiversity.

CEMEX & BIRDLIFE: MAKING A CONCRETE CONTRIBUTION

The CEMEX-BirdLife global partnership works towards global biodiversity policy development and best practice conservation action on the ground. Our partnership has guided the development of many successful business and biodiversity-focussed projects and collaborations with BirdLife partners in over ten countries across Europe, Asia and the Americas, with an emphasis on threatened species and habitats conservation.

In Europe in 2016, CEMEX, played an important role in BirdLife's #NatureAlert campaign to preserve the EU's vital nature protection laws, the Birds & Habitats Directives. Looking to 2017, CEMEX now joins with BirdLife to call on the EU to improve the implementation of the directives. This commitment demonstrates that nature conservation organisations and businesses that integrate long-term considerations into their business model, can not only work together but speak a common language to policy makers about biodiversity and the green economy.



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A BIG THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Our work across Europe and Central Asia is made possible through the generous support of our donors, including BirdLife national partners and the donors that support them. Together we are truly making a difference.

THANK YOU.

European Commission, MAVA – Fondation Pour la Nature, Fondation Segré, UNEP/CMS, A.G. Leventis Foundation, Arcadia Fund, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Persephone Charitable Environmental Trust, Oak Foundation, Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund

MAVA – FONDATION POUR LA NATURE

The MAVA Foundation supported BirdLife's successful #NatureAlert campaign to defend the EU's flagship nature laws, the Birds and Habitats Directives, from being 'reopened' and possibly weakened by the European Commission. In December 2016, after two years of relentless campaigning, the European Commission committed itself to preserving the directives and put them more effectively into action.

MAVA also supported BirdLife's continued work to address the appalling carnage of birds illegally killed, through trapping, shooting and poisoning, that takes place each year in particular hot spots in the Mediterranean. Through this support, BirdLife worked with governments, international NGOs and national partners – for example in Italy, Cyprus and Malta as well as across the Balkans and North Africa – to develop a comprehensive strategy to address this issue through public education, monitoring and enforcement.

MAVA provided match funding for an EU funded LIFE project, LIFE EuroSAP. This project, led by BirdLife International but involving BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, is delivering key updates and improvements to Species Action Plans for threatened species.

OAK FOUNDATION

In response to BirdLife's reporting of the shocking loss of migratory birds through illegal killing, Oak Foundation supported on-the-ground action in Italy, Cyprus and Malta. The work is yielding valuable intelligence, reducing incidents of illegal behaviour, upskilling local law enforcement and educating the next generation about the value of this rich wildlife.

FONDATION SEGRÉ

Fondation Segré has strengthened BirdLife's marine

conservation efforts through its continued support of a dedicated Seabird Task Force. The task force is working successfully with fishermen to collect baseline information on seabird bycatch in Europe and determine effective mitigation measures to reduce the number of birds caught unintentionally in fishing gear.

THE DAVID AND LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation continues to support BirdLife's leading work on EU bioenergy policies, which strives to ensure that they effectively contribute to climate change mitigation while minimising adverse effects on biodiversity, ecosystems and vulnerable human populations. Through this multi-year support of BirdLife and Transport & Environment, we have been able to raise greater awareness of environmentally damaging bioenergy policies through thought-provoking publications such as *'The Black Book of Bioenergy'*. We have also been able to commence filming and production on BirdLife's first documentary, *'The Burning Issue'* – a powerful exposé of 'bioenergy gone bad' for release in 2017.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION DIRECTORATE GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

The European Commission, through the NGO Operating Grant of DG Environment, supported Stitching BirdLife Europe¹ in its advocacy and conservation work on biodiversity protection and nature conservation. This grant enabled BirdLife to strengthen its European Partnership both on governance and policy related issues. Other European Union funds, through the Horizon 2020 science funding (and through a number of competitive contracts) also supported BirdLife's work in 2016.

THANK YOU ALSO TO THOSE DONORS
WHO WISHED TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS
YOUR SUPPORT IS MOST GRATEFULLY APPRECIATED.

¹ BirdLife Europe & Central Asia – a regional secretariat of BirdLife International – is a Dutch Foundation, Stichting BirdLife Europe, and its operating office is located in Brussels.

GOVERNANCE & FINANCES

The European and Central Asian Committee, elected by the European partners, guides and advises and the BirdLife Europe and Central Asia Division (BirdLife Europe) and reports to the Global Council. The members of the Europe and Central Asia Committee 2016 are: Fred Wouters (VBN; BirdLife in the Netherlands), Gergő Halamos (MME; BirdLife in Hungary), Harry Mardulyn (Natagora; BirdLife in Belgium, Wallonia), Luis Costa (SPEA; BirdLife in Portugal), Nada Tosheva (BSPB; BirdLife in Bulgaria), Sergey Sklyarenko (ACBK; BirdLife in Kazakhstan), Tim Stowe (RSPB; BirdLife in the UK).

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Uccelli (LIPU); *Lëtzeburger Natur- a Vulleschutzliga* (LNVL); *Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux* (LPO); *Natagora*; *Naturschutzbund Deutschland* (NABU); *Natuurpunt*; *Ogólnopolskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Ptaków* (OTOP); The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB); *Schweizer Vogelschutz* (SVS); *Slovenská Ornitologická Spoločnosť/BirdLife Slovensko* (SOS); *Sociedad Española de Ornitología* (SEO) – BirdLife in Spain; *Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves* (SPEA); *Societatea Ornitologica Romana* (SOR); Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI); *Sveriges Ornitologiska Forening* (SOF); *Vogelbescherming Nederland* (VBN); *Norsk Ornitologisk Forening* (NOF); *Lietuvos Ornitologu Draugija* (LOD).

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE (€)

INCOMING RESOURCES		RESOURCES EXPENDED	
Partners	803,855	Staff Cost	1,290,40
Grants and Donations	1,000,354	Travel Conference Events	61,727
EU Commission Funding	621,233	Rental Equipment & Premises	98,646
Grants from Corporates	331,664	Support Grants	655,537
Other Incomes	1,804	Professional Services	342,316
		Other Costs	215,964
		Overheads	94,317
TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES	2,758,910	TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED	2,758,910

* The BirdLife International European Division is a Dutch Foundation, Stichting BirdLife Europe, and its operating office is located in Brussels.

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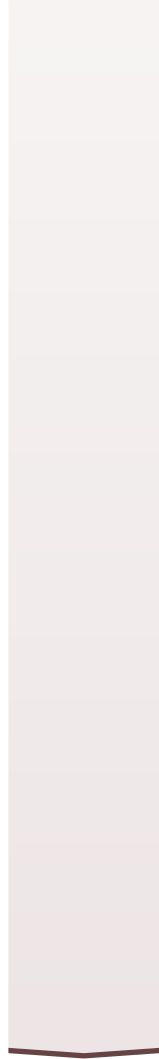
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COVER PHOTO
ATLANTIC PUFFIN *Fratercula arctica*
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BirdLife Europe & Central Asia is one of six regional secretariats that comprise BirdLife International, the world's largest nature conservation Partnership

Together we are BirdLife International



The global Partnership for **nature** and **people**