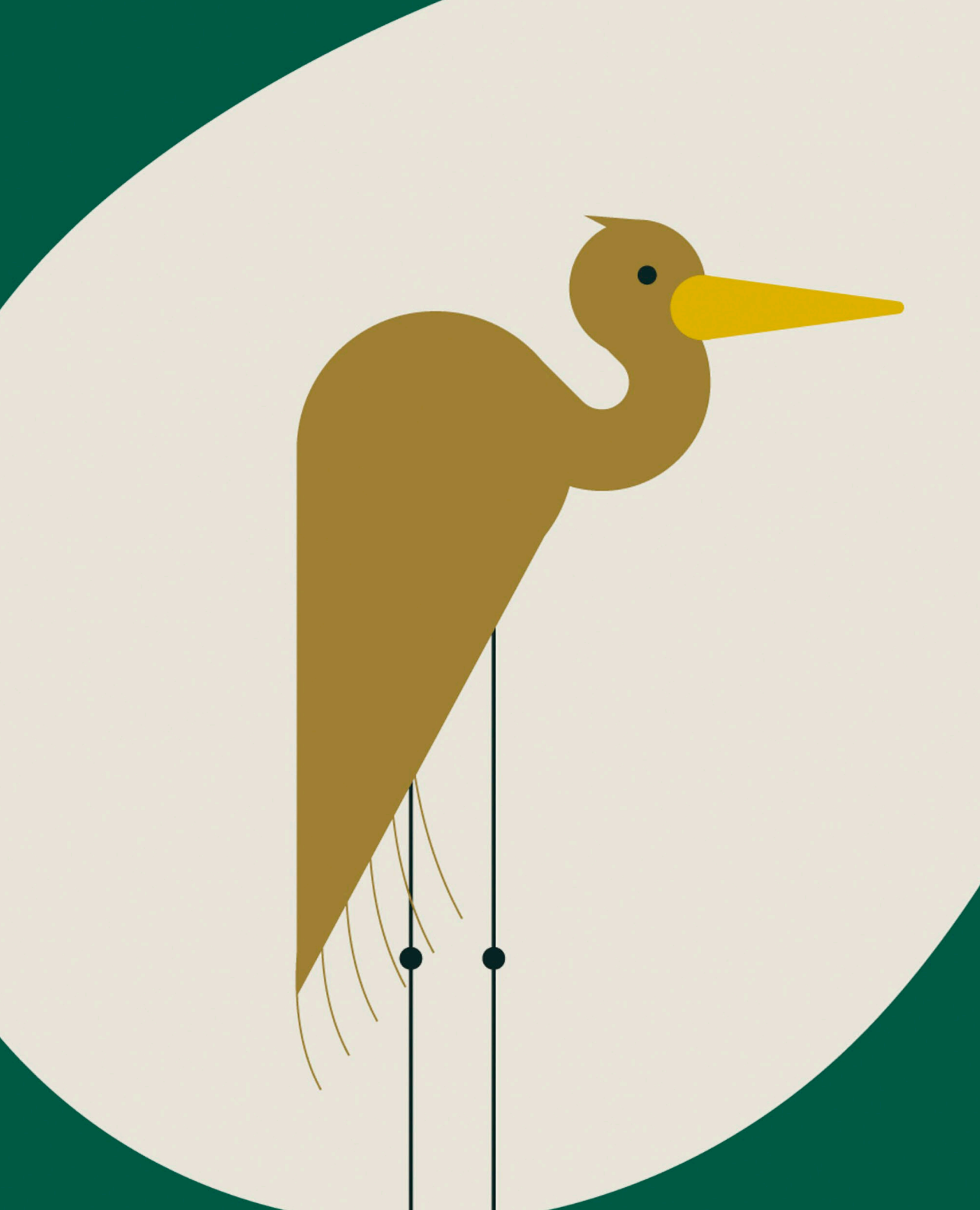
BirdLife INTERNATIONAL

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Annual Report 2021



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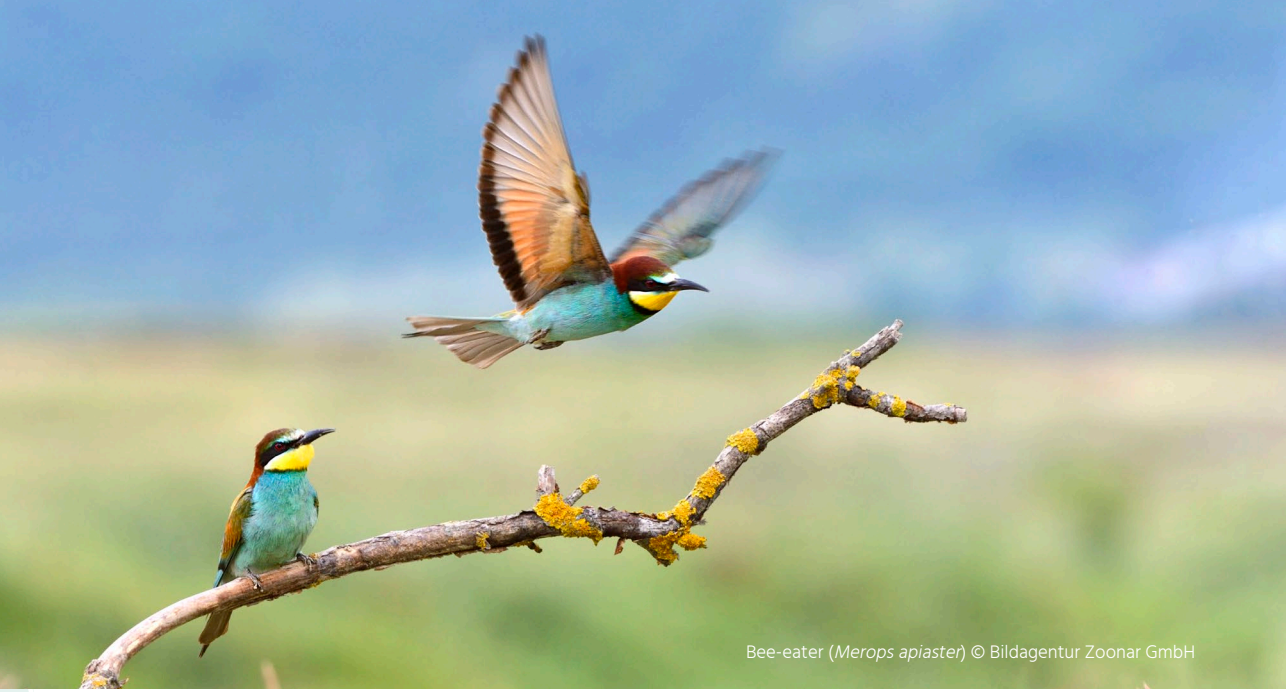
Introduction

2021 was a deeply challenging year. While the Covid 19 pandemic continued to cause enormous suffering, summer floods and fires across our continent showed that the climate crisis is already biting hard.

The scale of threats nature is facing was illustrated by two BirdLife reports confirming that one in five European bird species are at risk of extinction and 600 million fewer birds are flying in European skies compared to 40 years ago.



Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) © Bildagentur Zoonar GmbH

Sadly, the political response is falling short. The Glasgow Climate Pact was probably the best deal that was politically achievable. But based on national commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, projected warming by 2100 could still be as much as 2.4°C above pre-industrial levels. A worrying prospect when you think about the catastrophic consequences that are already predicted at the exceedance of a 1.5°C warming. The negotiations to secure a new global biodiversity framework were once again delayed. These delays were compounded by a failure to adequately address the primary driver of biodiversity decline – agriculture – by once again missing the opportunity to radically reform the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.

Against this backdrop, it is easy to despair. Yet, despite everything, BirdLife's Partners in Europe and Central Asia continue their battle for birds, nature and people, and not without results. Thanks to BirdLife's fantastic #1Planet1Right campaign, the UN Human Rights Council voted unanimously in favour of introducing a new human right: the right to a healthy environment. The power of many was emphasised when the Partnership mobilised over 100,000 people in just four weeks to tell the European Commission that our grasslands, wetlands, peatlands, forests, rivers and seas should be restored now. We will continue our efforts to make sure legally binding targets for nature restoration in the EU become reality. Finally, thanks to an amazing collaboration led by BirdLife, a major seabird hotspot in the North Atlantic high seas used by up to 5 million birds was discovered. The North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Seamount, as the area is called, is now a Marine Protected Area about the same size as France.

We could not have brought about all these successes in 2021 without our BirdLife partners, their supporters and our donors. We remain optimistic for the future, built on the confidence of our track record of improving the natural world and intend to do more in 2022 to tackle the nature and climate emergency.

Martin Harper
Regional Director, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia

Common birds are becoming uncommon

European Red List of Birds 2021: 1 in 5 bird species in Europe threatened by extinction

The third edition of the European Red List of Birds was released in October 2021. It reviewed the regional extinction risk of 544 bird species in over 50 countries and territories in Europe, following the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria applied at a regional level. The risk of extinction of each species is evaluated from 'Least Concern' to 'Extinct'. Birds are the perfect indicator to understand how our planet is doing as they are very sensitive to any changes in their environment. All life on this planet is connected, so when birds are in danger, by extension, we're all in danger.

The main findings of the study include:

- 1 out of 5 bird species in Europe is Threatened or Near Threatened by extinction
- 1 out of 3 bird species in Europe has declined over the last few decades
- Seabirds, wildfowl, waders, and raptors are the most threatened and fastest declining groups of birds in Europe
- Marine habitats, as well as farmlands, wetlands and grasslands are the habitats with most threatened and/or declining species
- The majority of larks, buntings and shrikes are now declining; other major taxonomic groups with significant declines are ducks and waders
- 71 species (13%) are Threatened (CR, EN, VU) in Europe
- Another 35 species (6%) are Near Threatened
- 5 species are still Regionally Extinct

The main drivers of declining bird populations observed in European habitats include:

- Large-scale land-use change
- Intensive agricultural practices
- Over-exploitation of marine resources
- Unsustainable and commonly used forestry practices
- Pollution of inland waters
- Infrastructure development

House Sparrow (*Passer domestica*) © Rollin Verlinde

While the headlines in the new European Red List are stark, there is also some good news. The improved status of the Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*) and the Azores Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula murina*) – two remarkable conservation success stories – show that targeted approaches to species recovery can work; while interventions such as well-designed agri-environment schemes can provide a lifeline to declining species like the Corncrake (*Crex crex*).

New BirdLife study reveals one out of every six birds has been lost in the past 40 years

Complementing the Red List, a new study on breeding birds in the EU was conducted by a team of European scientists from our UK and Czech Partners, the RSPB and the Czech Society for Ornithology, and BirdLife Europe and Central Asia. The study shows that over nearly a 40-year period one out of every six birds has been lost. Overall, we have lost around 600 million breeding birds in the EU since the 1980s. A significant proportion of these losses are a result of massive decreases in the more common and abundant bird species. The largest drop in population is seen in the house sparrow with 247 million fewer individuals, followed by the Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) with 97, the Common Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) with 75, and Eurasian Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) with 68 million fewer individuals.

Importantly, the loss of common and abundant species is a concern because it implies damage to our ecosystems and their function, and potentially to the delivery of ecosystem services upon which humanity depends. The dominance of common species means that changes in their populations may have large implications for the health of our ecosystems. It shows that further broader-scale conservation work is still required.

When comparing populations by habitat, the highest total losses were seen amongst farmland and grassland birds. It is widely recognised that policy-driven changes in farming practices are responsible for a precipitous decline in wildlife. It must be noted that much of the decline in bird numbers occurred during the 1980s and 1990s and in the last decade the rate has slowed down. In the EU, the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive provide legal protection of priority species and habitats have been shown to benefit bird species, as well as enhancing habitat protection.

Ocean conservation

The EU has pledged to fully protect 30% of the ocean, shift to low-impact fishing, remove pollution from seas, and restore marine ecosystems by the year 2030. We strive towards making significant progress towards this goal and protect our seabirds that wander across land, sea and sky.

Little Auk (*Alle alle*) © Yves Adams

Newly discovered seabird haven in the North Atlantic becomes protected area

"This is a big win for the seabirds, and a huge step for our collaborative science influencing conservation policy."

Tammy Davies, Senior Marine Science Officer

When BirdLife's Marine Team set up the Seabird Tracking Database – a collaboration between scientists around the world, bringing together information on thousands of satellite-tagged seabirds – they had absolutely no idea that the birds would lead them to a new discovery. These seabirds revealed a major feeding site previously unknown to science at the heart of the Atlantic Ocean. The site covers an area as large as France and has become the first Marine Protected Area in the high seas to be identified by remote tracking data.

The North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Seamount – or NACES for short – is a treasure trove of species richness and abundance. Bounded on the west by the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and to the east by the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, this is a place where sea currents swirl and stir up nutrients from deep in the ocean. Plankton and fish are bountiful here, so it's no surprise that the area was found to be a foraging hotspot used by up to five million birds from 21 species from more than 56 colonies across the North and South Atlantic, many travelling thousands of kilometres to spend the winter there.

This stretch of the ocean has it all: Endangered Bermuda Petrels (*Pterodroma cahow*) from their eponymous tropical island, Little Auks (*Alle alle*) from the High Arctic, South Polar Skuas (*Stercorarius maccormicki*) from the frozen wilds of the Antarctic, Great Shearwaters (*Ardenna gravis*) and other globe-spanning ocean wanderers from their scattered breeding islands.

Proper management can safeguard these waters from the increasing human pressures on the high seas, including fisheries, disturbance and deep-sea mining – benefiting not just birds, but the host of other marine animals found to frequent the waters, such as the Sei Whale, Leatherback Turtle and Blue Shark.

Boo! 'Scarybird' saves seabirds and helps fishers

Across European waters alone, every year more than 200 000 birds are incidentally caught in commercial fishing gear such as hooks and nets. To reduce this enormous threat to seabirds, a bird scaring devices was developed through the MedAves Pesca project, in which researchers from SPEA (BirdLife Portugal) worked closely with fishers in the Peniche region with simple, yet effective, means. The 'scarybird' device can be fixed to fishing vessels and is a kind of kite, warning seabirds to stay away. This helps save the lives of birds, which either drown or sustain life-threatening injuries when they get caught in fishing gear. It also reduces the risk of damage to fishing gear. On top of that, the scaring decoy is cheap and easy to produce, assemble and repair. A win-win solution for people and nature!

"Fishermen like the 'scarybird' because it's easy to use, doesn't affect their catch, and reduces seabird bycatch."
"No fisherman wants to catch birds, so having an easy and efficient way to prevent that from happening is an excellent result."

Ana Almeida, Marine Conservation Officer, SPEA

Agriculture and Land Use

The conversion of natural habitats to agricultural land is currently the most important threat globally threatened birds face. In Europe alone, we have lost 57% of farmland birds in just 40 years. At BirdLife, we seek to reverse this decline and take action to prevent environmentally unsustainable agricultural practices and environmentally destructive land-use climate mitigation measures.

Eurasian Skylark (*Alauda arvensis)*
© Yves Adams

Our fight for a better Common Agricultural Policy continues

Following almost three years of negotiations, in December 2021, the agreement on the reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was formally adopted, setting the legal framework for new CAP strategic plans (CSPs). It will come into force at the start of 2023. The CAP, which makes up around a third of the total EU budget, will cost EU taxpayers roughly 54 billion euros per year between 2023-2027.

Following the CAP regulation proposal in 2018, we worked with other NGOs and BirdLife Partners to influence negotiations by the EU institutions. Despite our efforts, it became clear that the CAP would not deliver for nature and the climate. So together with other NGOs, BirdLife asked the European Commission to withdraw the legislative proposal through the #WithdrawTheCAP campaign and come up with a new proposal that would be compatible with the Green Deal. When this call was ignored, we turned to the European Parliament to tell them to #VotethisCAPdown. But the Members of the European Parliament chose to ignore the science and ignore the demands of citizens. The "reformed" CAP will continue to fund an intensive agriculture model that directly leads to biodiversity loss, water and air pollution, over-extraction of water, and fuels the climate crisis.

The EU's own auditor service and over 3600 scientists have condemned the CAP, and numerous studies have confirmed that the intensive farming the CAP promotes is pushing many species towards extinction. Since 1980, the EU has lost 57% of its farmland birds. Butterflies, bees and flying insects are also in serious decline. The most effective solution for reversing the decline of farmland species is to make space for nature on farms, by introducing hedgerows, flower strips and ponds. At least 10% of farmland spaces must be dedicated to nature to be effective. The little progress made regarding this compared to the previous CAP is negligible and will not bring biodiversity back, nor comply with the targets of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy.

The two most important changes in this new CAP are the shift to implementation through national CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs), which were due for submission by the EU countries to the Commission by 1 January 2022, and the addition of a new form of direct payments for environmental-friendly farming: the eco-schemes. These schemes for the climate, the environment and animal welfare will be fully funded by the EU and take the form of yearly payments to farmers who voluntarily enrol. The aim of eco-schemes is to reward those farmers who manage land in a nature- and climate-friendly way, and to incentivise the adoption of specific farming practices with higher environmental and animal welfare benefits.

In light of the European Green Deal, many expectations for a greener CAP have been pinned on eco-schemes. Together with EEB and WWF, BirdLife published an assessment of draft eco-schemes proposed by Member States 'Will CAP eco-schemes be worth their name?'. The assessment catalogues eco-schemes from across the EU (covering 21 Member States) and as such offers ground-breaking insights into how approximately €48.5 bn of EU funding will be spent over 5 years in the post-2022 CAP. The report concludes that Member States' proposed eco-schemes will fall very short of expectations.

Despite this disappointment, we continue to support BirdLife Partners and provide expertise to help improve the national CSPs and closely watch how Member States will develop them.

No land left to burn – BirdLife report hits back at International Energy Agency proposal

In May 2021, BirdLife published its report 'Burn or Restore: Meeting competing demands for land in the best way for nature, the climate, and human needs'. It investigates the competing pressures on land in light of the climate and biodiversity crises and presents crystal clear findings. Governments and industry must stop burning trees and crops for bioenergy, and instead urgently set aside land for nature. Bioenergy is a false climate solution that adds emissions to the atmosphere and wipes out wildlife habitats. The report hits back at the International Energy Agency's (IEA) report "Net Zero in 2050: A roadmap for the global energy sector", which proposes to convert more of the world's cropland to bioenergy. But there is no "spare" land left to burn.

The BirdLife report showcases how current land use is already unsustainable and why it is urgent to set aside land for nature now. We cannot afford to encourage false climate solutions and use more land for producing biomass that ends up being burned for energy. More and more of the world's habitable land is taken up by agriculture, to feed a growing population. The vast majority of this land is in turn used to feed livestock. In recent times, renewable energy incentives have added new pressures on land, in particular through the large-scale growth of bioenergy feedstocks. Not only is there no "spare" land available, but bioenergy adds emissions to the atmosphere, fuelling the climate crisis and wipes out wildlife habitats, accelerating the biodiversity crisis.

"The IEAs proposal to convert more of the worlds' cropland to bioenergy is not just insanity, but will actually put people's lives at risk – either through starvation and land conflict or through ecological degradation, if not both. At the same time, it would accelerate the climate crisis. The science is clear, we must be working towards reducing CO_2, and in this day and age, you would hope that everybody knows that the best way of doing that is to protect forests and other natural habitats – not burn them for energy."

Kenneth Richter, Bioenergy Consultant, BirdLife Europe

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos minor*)
© Yves Adams

BirdLife and 90+ NGOs call on MEPs to halt approval of the 'green' finance list

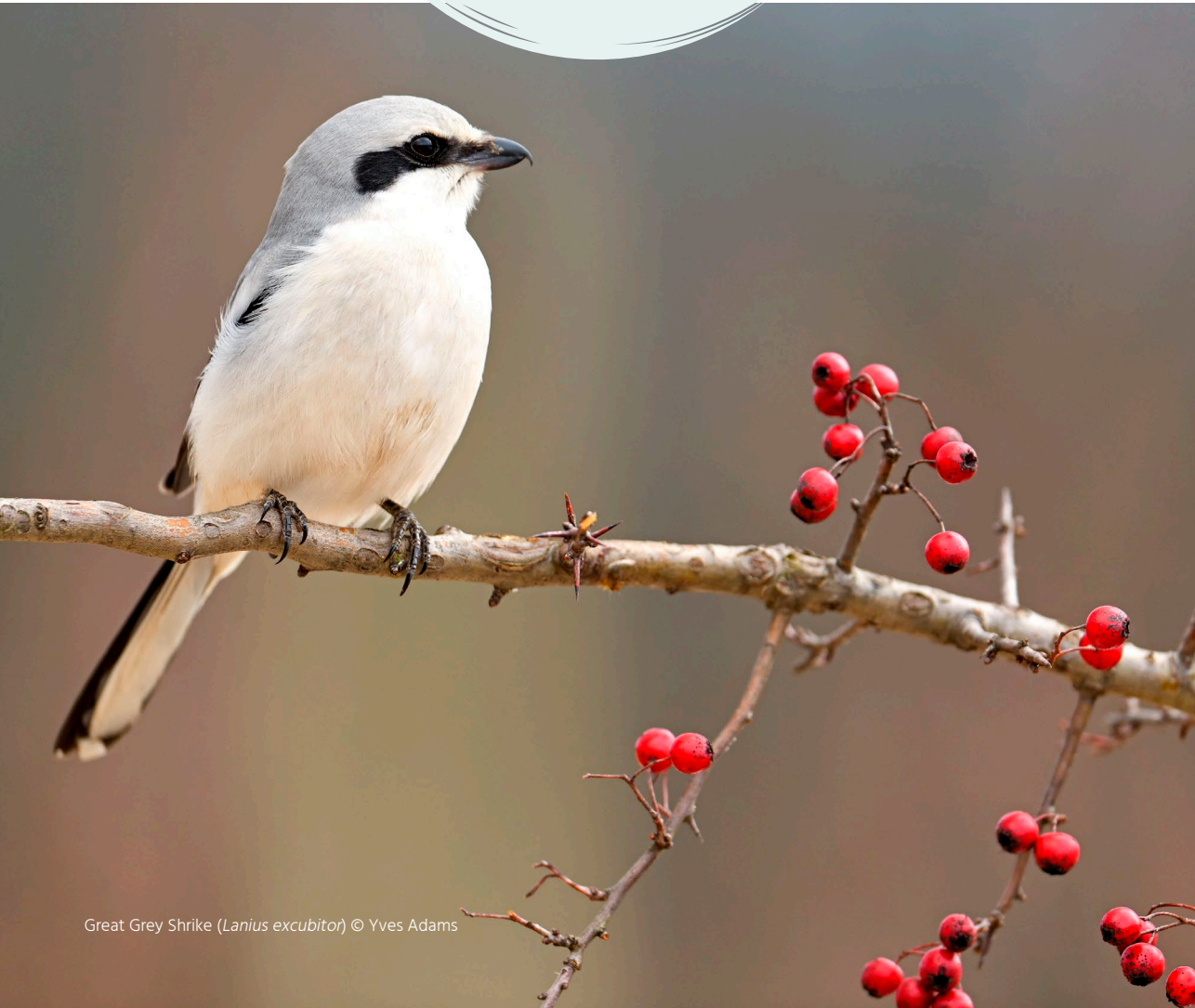
The EU's 'Taxonomy of sustainable investments', the list of investments the EU considers as environmentally sustainable, is an essential tool to inform consumers and investors about the sustainability of the financial products they invest in. It helps drive private capital to economic activities that will deliver the objectives of the European Green Deal on the ground. The presented Taxonomy was expected to provide the gold standard of environmental criteria in the industry. However, although the proposed Climate Taxonomy Delegated Act in April 2021 did include several positive elements, such as solar wind power generation and zero emission vehicles, it also included provisions that are unacceptable.

The Delegated Act greenwashes unsustainable logging and bioenergy by stating that forestry (logging trees) and bioenergy (burning trees and crops for energy) make a "significant contribution to climate mitigation" and do "no significant harm" to biodiversity. A statement that that clearly lacks a scientific basis. In an open letter, more than 90 environmental and consumer groups organisations including BirdLife Europe, WWF, Greenpeace, and BEUC called on the European Parliament to postpone their judgement on sustainable finance rules that would allow logging and the burning of trees to be counted as green investments.

With the letter, we called on the 705 MEPs to suspend scrutiny of the EU Commission's 'Taxonomy of sustainable investments' until other crucial policies and pieces of legislation – the Renewable Energy Directive and the EU Forest Strategy, in particular – were disclosed later in 2021. As many criteria in the EU Taxonomy are linked to existing legislation on forestry and bioenergy, the NGOs urged MEPs to use upcoming reviews of these policies and laws to strengthen the laws' provisions, align them with climate science, and restore the Taxonomy's scientific credibility.

Nature and Climate

To have any chance of tackling the nature and climate emergency, we need to take transformative action this decade. Global greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by 43% by 2030 to stay within the 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The land, freshwater and sea that is actively protected, must be increased to as much as 44% by 2030 to safeguard biodiversity.



Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) © Yves Adams

Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) © Yves Adams

The people have spoken: it's time to #RestoreNature

After decades of attempts to convince governments and businesses to stop the exploitation and degradation of nature, there is so little of it left that conservation alone cannot undo the damage that has been done. Once carefully balanced ecosystems are now at the mercy of climate change and natural habitats are vanishing. Ultimately, the disaster happening in the natural world affects humans too. Not only do we depend on nature for the food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink, disasters and pandemics are more likely to be recurrent if these destructive practices aren't stopped. We must usher in the era of nature restoration: we need to bring nature back.

Through the #RestoreNature campaign, BirdLife showed citizens and decision-makers that nature restoration is imperative to fight the climate and biodiversity crises. In less than one month, 104,188 citizens from the EU and beyond took part in the EU's public consultation on nature restoration; demanding the European Commission for a law that would bring deep, transformative change in the way our lands, rivers and seas are used.

If well designed, this law could be one of the most impactful tools we have to halt biodiversity loss in Europe. For real impact, the law needs to set binding targets to restore at least 15% of the EU's land, seas and rivers back into their natural habitats. At BirdLife, we will continue to be at the forefront of these discussions to make sure the EU doesn't just make a new law but makes history.

Lead shot will finally be banned in wetlands

The long-awaited ban on the use of lead shots in wetlands finally came into force on the 25th of January, 2021. European countries have until 15 February 2023, or 2024 if the country's surface consists of more than 20% of wetlands, to implement the ban. This law will prevent the death of roughly one million waterbirds annually and halt the extreme poisoning of wetland wildlife.

Lead shot consists of tiny round bullets that hunters spray out of their rifles to kill animals. They use it to hunt waterbirds and other small animals, in wetlands and elsewhere. It is estimated that hunters pollute our wetlands with more than 20,000 tonnes of lead shot every single year, despite the existence of alternatives. Lead shot is particularly problematic for waterbirds that ingest lead pellets, mistaking them for grit: small particles of stone or sand. The grit helps break down hard foods, such as seeds. Beyond birds, this new law will improve the general health of our natural environment, by preventing lead from poisoning wetlands and other wildlife.

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) © Yves Adams

New Species Protection Code of Conduct guides EU businesses towards nature protection

Over the past decade, BirdLife and Heidelberg Cement have worked together to better protect and bring back biodiversity at extraction sites. But integrating biodiversity into active quarries can be challenging and presents several risks. Current EU law can result in quarries operating as sterile environments stripped of flora and fauna with no benefit to biodiversity.

To provide guidance for the management of temporary habitats linked to the extractive sector, on the 28th of October 2021, BirdLife, HeidelbergCement, CEMBUREAU, Eurogypsum, and UEPG released the "Extractive Sector Species Protection Code of Conduct".

The Code of Conduct builds on the provisions of the EU's Birds and Habitats Directives and suggests a manageable approach for the extraction sector to protect species and fully respect the Birds and Habitats Directives by conserving nature through the implementation and management of temporary habitats. The concept of temporary habitats as defined in this Code of Conduct mitigates this situation and creates a win-win for business and nature. Through a collaboration with the European Commission, the Code of Conduct will become a reference guide for EU countries, on how to manage biodiversity in extraction sites in harmony with the species protection provisions.

This a fruitful example of how nature conservation organisations and the business community can collaborate to come up with lasting solutions to meet the needs of biodiversity and people – ultimately helping to create a nature positive future.

"Given that change in land use is one of the major drivers of biodiversity loss, we need to think differently about how to maximise the opportunities for wildlife in these changing landscapes."

"The Code of Conduct is an ideal example of a productive collaboration between different stakeholders aiming at the best result for biodiversity conservation."

Martin Harper, Regional Director, BirdLife Europe and Central Asia

Kazakh people's fight to preserve the natural lakes of Nur-Sultan

While wetlands make up only 6% of the planet's land, their conservation is vital for arid regions like Kazakhstan, where 70% of its territory is affected by desertification, and wetlands are a source of very needed freshwater. In Nur-Sultan, the capital of Kazakstan, our Partner ACBK together with residents and experts have been fighting to preserve the Taldykol natural lakes system in the new city centre. The Taldykol lake system consists of lakes Bolshoi Taldykol, Olmes, Maly Taldykol (group of lakes) and Tassuat. The territory hosts 168 species of birds, including 86 species of waterbirds nesting around the lakes and stopping there during the seasonal migration period.

However, the city authorities are quickly developing the area whilst neglecting the importance of the lake system as a biodiversity hotspot and fresh water source. In 2016, a major land reclamation project was conducted that reduced the water surface in the lake system by three times its historic size – from 1500 ha to 500 ha. The authorities proudly presented the results, labelling the lake system as a green zone in the city's development plans.

BirdLife's Partner, the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK), had been advocating for the creation of an urban nature park in the capital city for the preservation of the whole Taldykol lake system since 2012. In 2017, the park project for the conservation of the whole Taldykol lakes system was finally included in the city's environmental health plan.

However, the city kept growing, with constructions reaching the lake system and fragmenting the Maly Taldykol lake into seven sections. This meant that, isolated from the other lakes, the water level started to drop. Companies and the city administration wasted no time and started actively backfilling the cavity to further build residential blocks.

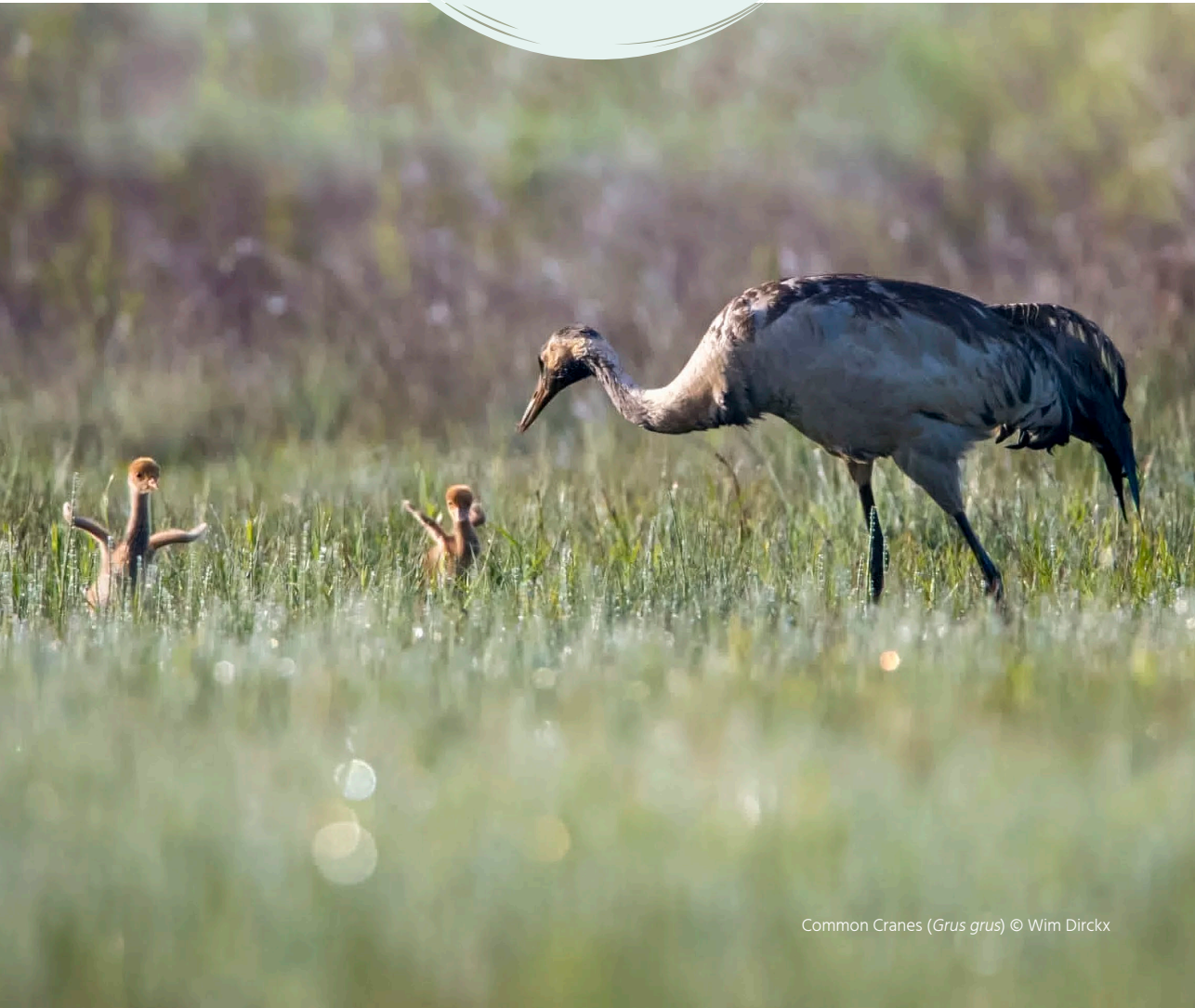
As soon as the residents became aware of the backfilling action against the Maly Taldykol lake in the summer of 2020, they kicked off the 'SOS Taldykol' initiative to establish an open dialogue between experts, the public, and the city administration. The demand couldn't be clearer: preserve natural lakes. During the very attempt to kickstart this dialogue, however, one more site was covered in construction and household waste, further threatening the lake system. The city government proposed to create artificial lakes, instead of preserving the lakes at their natural state, deeming them as too heavily polluted. What the authorities were missing is that lakes are alive and have the potential to recover and function as healthy wetlands. The diversity of bird populations in the area is the proof.

In 2020, the number of birds nesting on all lakes and adjacent steppe areas was estimated between 1 600 and 5 000 pairs of various species, like Dalmatian Pelicans (*Pelicanus crispus*), Whooper Swans (*Cygnus cygnus*), Common Pochards (*Aythya ferina*), Little Bustards (*Tetrax tetrax*), and Black-winged Pratincoles (*Glareola normani*). On the 11th of September 2021, the lake was visited by Greater flamingos (Phoenicopterus roseus), which drove even more momentum to the importance of preserving the lake. In just 37 days, the petition against any further construction around the Maly Taldykol group of lakes saw a flock of 12,000 more signatures, a great achievement for a country whose population is about 19 million people.

With civil society and conservation NGOs advocating hand in hand, the fight to save the historical landmark of the Taldykol lakes system is still ongoing. It can still be saved, and nature in Kazakhstan is counting on it.

Birds and Habitats

Amid the nature crisis, the list of threatened species and habitats around the globe appears to be endless. The BirdLife Partnership continues to work together to identify and protect the places of greatest significance for the conservation of the world's birds.



Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) © Wim Dirckx

Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) © Yves Adams

First Crane chicks born in Belgium!

On the 30th of April 2021, two crane chicks were born in Belgium, the first breeding case ever in the country. Although Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) can be seen in Belgium every year, as they travel by the thousands during their summer and winter migrations, there is no record of them ever nesting and breeding in Belgium before. We do have hints from the distant past, such as a local swamp named 'Craenengoor', where cranes are said to have been observed in the 16th century, but we have no real evidence of any cranes breeding there. The two chicks, named Gru and Dru, were born in the valley of the Black Brook, a nature reserve run by Belgian BirdLife Partner Natuurpunt in north-eastern Belgium.

For cranes to breed, they need the right circumstances at the right time: it needs to be sufficiently contiguous (not fragmented by roads), it needs to be calm, and it needs to provide shelter, water and food. The valley of the Black Brook simply ticks all the boxes! This was made possible by the restoration efforts of Natuurpunt in the last 20 years in this swamp and peat area. The cranes had actually landed in the valley for the first time in 2019, but they didn't stay long. In 2020, they came back, built a nest, mated – but no breeding ensued. Then, in 2021 (third time's the charm), they felt comfortable enough to mate immediately after their arrival, and laid two eggs, out of which would later come Gru and Dru.

A new nesting colony of the endangered Dalmatian pelican has settled in Bulgaria

The Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) is the rarest member of the pelican family, breeding in just three EU countries: Greece, Romania and Bulgaria. In Bulgaria, due to the destruction of floodplains where the species would originally have bred, the pelican population had been restricted to only one breeding site, the Srebarna Lake, hosting 80 breeding pairs. Since 2012, our Bulgarian Partner BSPB has fought to increase the population of these pelicans and expand their breeding sites. To achieve this, they first used artificial breeding platforms at the Kompleks Belenski Ostrovi Natura 2000 site.

In 2021, the globally innovative idea of using decoy pelicans was successfully tested at the Kompleks Kalimok Natura 2000 site near the city of Tutrakan. A team of experts from BSPB, Nature park Persina Directorate, Nature park Rusenski Lom Directorate and Kalimok Brashlen Ltd. installed three life-size models of pelicans upon a wooden platform. The decoys attracted the interest of the birds, which then easily adopted the platform as their home. After more than 60 years of absence from these regions, this led to the return of the pelicans to the two sites. The new breeding sites counted 91 breeding pairs, doubling the number of Dalmatian Pelicans in Bulgaria!

A brighter future for the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing

The Talimarzhan reservoir in Uzbekistan is a vital area for over 26% of the global population of the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) during its autumn migration, our Uzbek Partner UzSPB has discovered. For years, UzSPB has been fighting hard to strengthen the protection of this bird species as well as the Talimarzhan reservoir, an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) in the Southeast of the country. In 2021, the victory: a brand-new protected area will make the Sociable Lapwings life a little easier.

During the two-year project, UzSPB developed and tested the first ever Sociable Lapwing Monitoring Programme at the species migratory stopover Talimarzhan reservoir in Uzbekistan. This project adds to many years of work to protect and restore the population of the globally threatened Sociable Lapwing, supported by Swarovski Optik KG and the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme.

The programme included daily counts in the coastal area of Talimarzhan and route counts to the east of the reservoir with a length of 33-55 km each. The monitoring allowed UzSPB to collect data on Sociable Lapwing numbers, distribution and threats at the migratory stopover site. At the peak of the species migration in autumn 2020 and 2021, the project team recorded over 4,200 Sociable Lapwings at the reservoir. This equals to 26% of its global population, and effectively making the Talimarzhan reservoir the most important stopover site in Central Asia and one of the most important globally for this rare species.

However, the monitoring showed that at the same time thousands of sheep and goats are present along the shoreline of the reservoir, causing uncontrolled overgrazing in the most favorable areas for the birds. The disturbance caused by the unregulated movement of the grazing animals, the deteriorated quality of the habitat, as well as the fishing nets abandoned in places of this species' concentration were recorded as the obvious threats to the species at Talimarzhan.

The evidence from the Sociable Lapwing Monitoring Programme in 2020-2021 and the assessment of the species habitat couldn't have been clearer: the Talimarzhan reservoir needed to urgently kickstart conservation actions if we want this species to thrive.

Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) © Jim Lawrence

After engaging with the local administration and scientific evidence going back and forth, UzSPB and Sociable Lapwing caretakers managed to bring the Species Action Plan for Sociable Lapwing at Talimarzha to the hokim's, or mayor's, table. The action plan will help reduce disturbance and improve conditions of the species feeding and resting places in the coastal zone of the wetland, introduce control over the livestock grazing and watering during the species autumn migration, conduct regular monitoring, and raise awareness about the species and site conservation.

In December 2021, the new protected area of 4,142ha of the Talimarzhan sanctuary opened its natural doors. Thanks to the work of the UzSPB, the Sociable Lapwings future is now a little bit brighter.

Thank you to our supporters!

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

Baltic Sea Conservation Foundation
The Foundation is supporting our efforts to address seabird bycatch in the Baltic Sea, in particular by providing support to our Lithuanian Partner (LOD – Lithuanian Ornithological Society) to test measures with fishers to reduce this problem.

Cambridge Conservation Initiative (CCI)'s Endangered Landscapes Programme (ELP) funded by Arcadia, a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin.
ELP generously supports a restoration project to improve conservation and landscapes management in the Iori River Valley in Georgia, in collaboration with our local Partner Sabuko. Initially planned for two years, the project has already been extended for an additional two years to continue the important work we and Sabuko are carrying out in this key biodiversity area in the Caucasus. ELP has also supported a study on restoration actions at EU level, implemented in collaboration with the UN World Conservation Monitoring Centre. This programme is funded by Arcadia, a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin.

European Climate Foundation – ECF
The ECF has continued to support our work on the Common Agricultural Policy to produce an environmentally and climate responsible CAP. With the start of the works of the European Commission Platform on Sustainable Finance, of which BirdLife Europe and Central Asia is a member, ECF also awarded us a new grant to support this engagement. Support has also been provided to ensure the sustainable deployment of renewable wind energy in the North Sea and the reduction of risks for biodiversity, in collaboration with Renewable Grid Europe.

European Commission – Directorate General Environment
Through the NGO Operating Grant of DG Environment, the European Commission supported BirdLife Europe and Central Asia in its advocacy, conservation and communication work on biodiversity protection and nature conservation. This grant enabled us to strengthen our European Partnership both on governance and policy related issues as well as providing an effective conduit between the European Union and citizens. Other European Union funds, including the LIFE Against Bird Crime project and the European Red List of Birds, as well as a number of competitive contracts also supported our work in 2021.

HeidelbergCement
In completing our ninth year of collaboration, the HeidelbergCement-BirdLife partnership continues to drive impactful change in the extractives sector with innovative conservation actions and

best practice commitments. With our assistance, HeidelbergCement has continued its road to reduce its impacts and strive towards a biodiversity net gain as one of the industry's leaders. Thanks to HeidelbergCement's generous sponsorship, our education programme, Spring Alive, was revamped, connecting children and teachers across Europe and Africa through fun events and educational materials on migratory birds.

MAVA – Fondation Pour la Nature

MAVA supported our Partners and us in delivering a concerted effort to address the multiple risks migratory birds face across the Mediterranean, from the appalling carnage of illegal killing, trapping and poisoning, to incidents with energy infrastructure. MAVA also provided match funding for an EU funded LIFE project, LIFE Against Bird Crime. Other key areas of work addressed in partnership with MAVA in the region aimed to improve the functioning of priority wetlands, including the successful campaign to save Ulcinj Salina in Montenegro, and international efforts to tackle bycatch of birds, cetaceans and turtles in fishing gears. Some of these projects are led by BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, others by BirdLife International, and others by various NGOs.

Oak Foundation

The Oak Foundation continued its support for on-the-ground action in Italy, Cyprus, and Malta against the illegal killing and trapping of wild birds. The three-year project is providing valuable data, reducing incidents of illegal behaviour while also saving trapped birds, upskilling local law enforcement, and educating the next generation about the value of threatened birds.

Rewilding Europe

WWF Nederland Working in partnership with Rewilding Europe, other NGOs and research agencies, this funding supported the introduction of rewilding principles in the EU restoration agenda to ultimately create a coherent Ecological Network in Europe.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation supported BirdLife Europe and Central Asia's work on EU bioenergy policies, in partnership with Transport and Environment (T&E), to effectively contribute to climate change mitigation while minimising adverse effects on biodiversity, ecosystems, and vulnerable human populations. A new 3-year grant was awarded in April to support the core work of our climate change and land use programme, in collaboration with our German Partner, NABU.

Thank you also to those donors who supported our campaigns and those who wished to remain anonymous. Your support is most gratefully appreciated.

Governance & Finances

The European and Central Asian Committee, elected by the European Partners, guides and advises the BirdLife Europe and Central Asia Division (BirdLife Europe) and reports to the Global Council. The members of the Europe and Central Asia Committee made up of senior figures from BirdLife partners until December 2021 were: Asunción Ruiz (SEO/BirdLife, Spain), Damijan Denac (DOPPS, Slovenia), Vera Vorona (ACBK, BirdLife Partner in Kazakhstan), Philippe Funcken (Natagora, Wallonia, Belgium), Gergő Halmos (MME, Hungary), Katie-Jo Luxton (RSPB, BirdLife in the UK), Natia Javakhishvili (Sabuko, Georgia) until September 2021, and Lieven de Schamphelaere (Natuurpunt, Flanders, Belgium) from November 2021.

Eurasian blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)
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Acknowledgements
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Association BIOM, BirdLife Austria, BirdLife Cyprus, BirdLife Suomi-Finland, BirdLife Malta, BirdLife Norge, BirdWatch Ireland, BirdLife Sverige, BirdLife Schweiz, Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), Czech Society for Ornithology (CSO), Dansk Ornitologisk Forening (DOF), Drustvo za Opazovanje in Proucevanje Ptic Slovenije (DOPPS), Estonian Ornithological Society (EOS), Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS), Magyar Madártani és Természetvédelmi Egyesület (MME), Latvijas Ornitologijas (LOB), Biedriba Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli (LIPU), Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO), Lietuvos Ornitologu Draugija (LOD), Natagora, natur&ëmwelt, Naturschutzbund Deutschland (NABU), Natuurpunt, Ogólnopolskie Towarzystwo Ochrony Ptaków (OTOP), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), SOS/BirdLife Slovensko, SEO/Birdlife (SEO), Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves (SPEA), Societatea Ornitologica Romana (SOR), Vogelbescherming Nederland (VBN).

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE (€)

Incoming Resources		**Resources Expended**	
Partners	232.221,97	Staff Cost	1.488.223,65
Grants and Donations	2.916.560,51	Travel Conference Events	2.462,55
EU Commission Funding	421.653,99	Rental Equipment & Premises	56.736,27
Grants from Corporates	299.347,00	Support Grants	1.583.376,00
Other Incomes	14.702,36	Professional Services	253.406,23
		Other Costs	297.386,83
		Overheads	47.728,14
Total Incoming Resources	**3.884.485,83**	**Total Resources Expended**	**3.729.319,67**

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

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COVER PHOTO
Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) © David Dillon

BACK COVER PHOTO
Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) © Yves Adams

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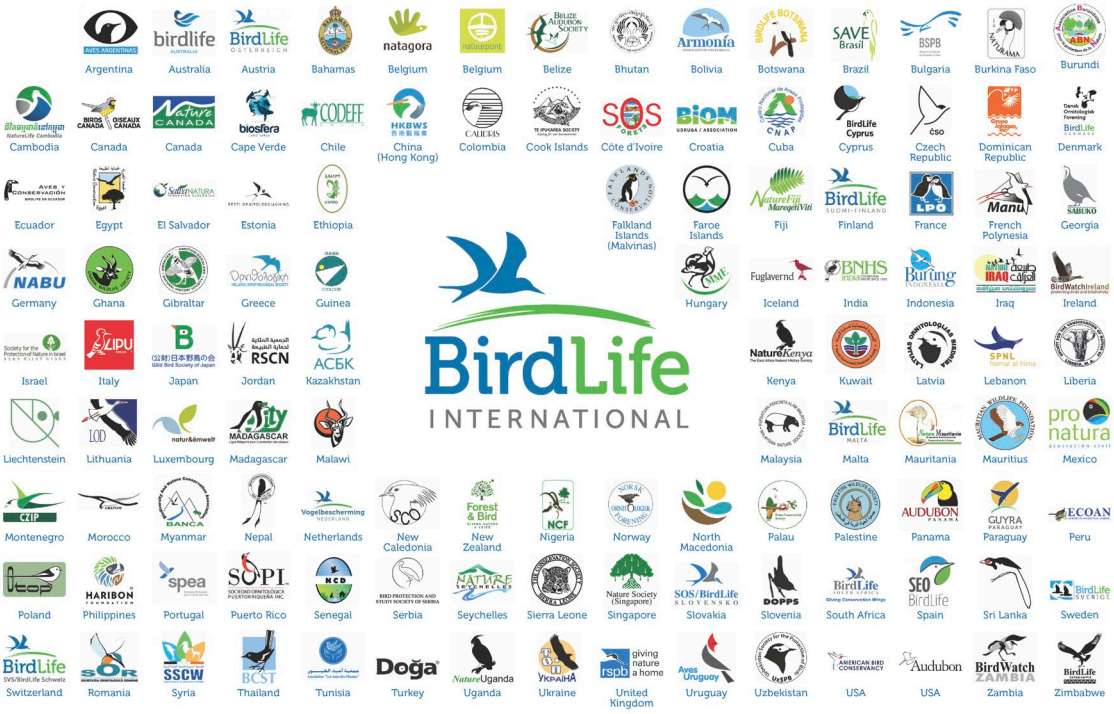

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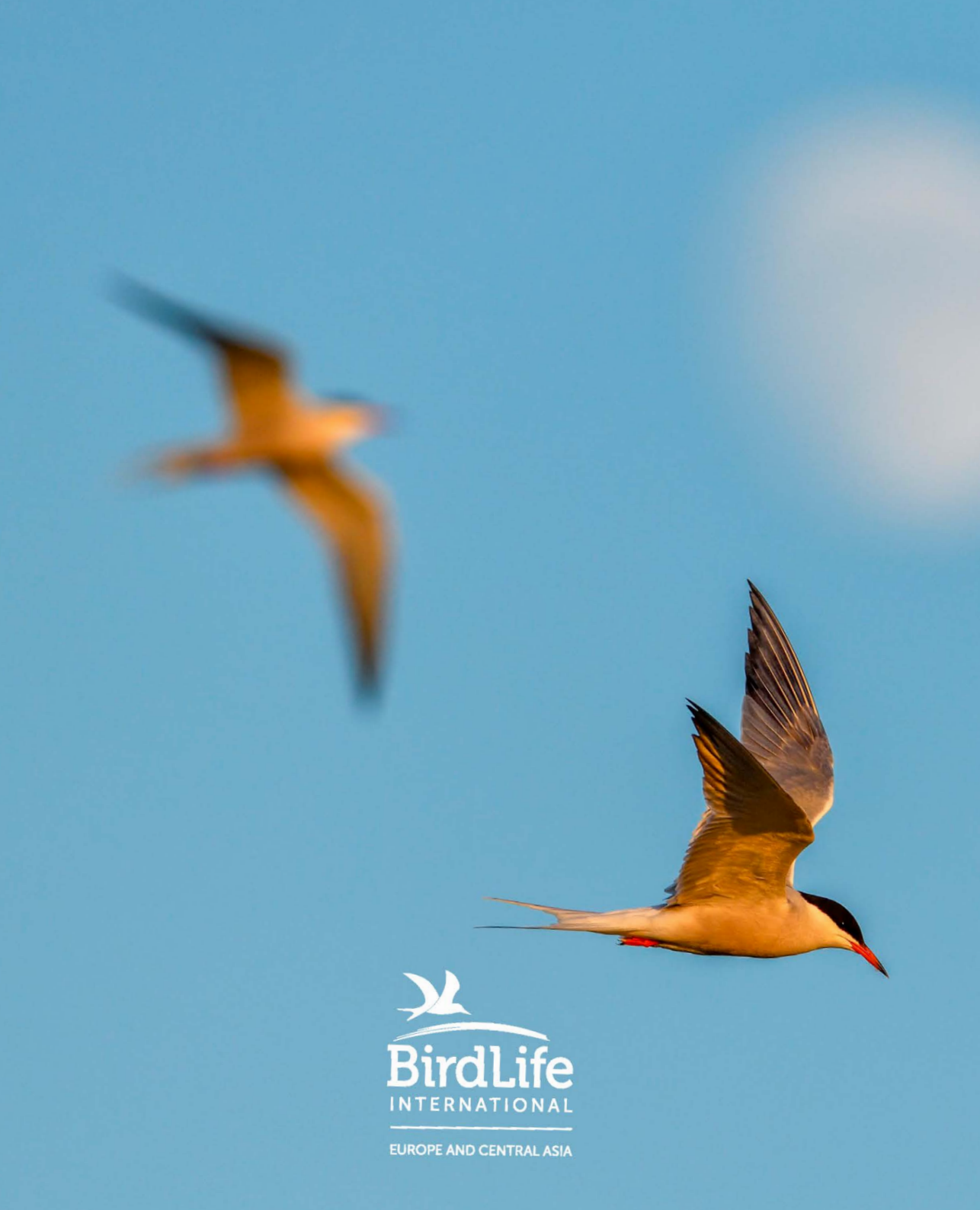

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