

# BirdLife

T H E M A G A Z I N E

APRIL-JUNE 2020

# OUR *(Post)* 2020 VISION

**This year, everything changed.  
Our CEO Patricia Zurita explains why we can't go back to  
the way things were before.**

# Together we are BirdLife International

## Partnership for **nature** and **people**



**[www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)**

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





## THE YEAR EVERYTHING CHANGED.

**At the time of writing, half of all humanity is under some form of lockdown;** billions of us are experiencing restrictions to our liberties that would have been unimaginable just a few short months ago. The ongoing pandemic has shown us just how fragile the social structures we humans assumed were unbreakable truly can be. And the horrific toll the pandemic has taken on us – on our livelihoods and life – has laid bare how our systems often fail to put people first. Our thoughts are with everyone affected by this unfolding tragedy.

**And yet even in these times, there is cause for optimism.** Our news feeds have been filled with countless uplifting stories of generosity and kindness. And we have seen in full force our species' remarkable capacity to adapt, as we alter our lifestyles and habits to fit this 'new normal'. On page 14, our CEO Patricia Zurita assesses the changes we need to make post-pandemic, and how we can harness our ability to change to tackle longer-term threats to nature and people. Aside from this, I hope the rest of this issue serves as a welcome distraction from the news cycle.

**Alex Dale**, Editor

### CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE



**TILEN BASLE**

Tilen is a conservation ornithologist at DOPPS-BirdLife Slovenia, where he focuses primarily on birds of riparian ecosystems and urban environments. On [page 32](#), he looks at a scandalous situation in neighbouring Albania, where a planned 'tourist city' threatens a crucial section of the Adriatic coast.



**LIV GRANT**

Liv is a conservationist and film-maker, with a speciality for remote island locations. She formed part of the BirdLife-led team during a successful expedition to the Marquesas in French Polynesia, and relays her experience of researching unique birds threatened by invasive species on [page 36](#).



**DING LI YONG**

During these trying times any good news is welcome. And good news has come fourfold for migratory birds in Myanmar, where one of the country's most important protected areas has just quadrupled in size. On [page 54](#), Ding Li, BirdLife Asia's Advocacy and Policy Manager, reports...

## SHARE THE LOVE

Give the gift of birds with a yearly subscription to  
***BirdLife: The Magazine.***

Delivering the latest conservation breakthroughs,  
discoveries and insights, straight from the field to your door,  
it's the perfect gift for the bird lover in your life.

[www.birdlife.org/sharethelove](http://www.birdlife.org/sharethelove)

Photo Ray Hennessy/Shutterstock

**BirdLife**  
THE MAGAZINE

**APR-JUN 2020**  
**NUMBER 1**  
**VOLUME 42**  
**ISSN 2519-4658**

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Rachel Gartner, Liv Grant, Jessica Law, Lewis Kihumba, Dima Obeidat, Mireia Peris, Cressida Stevens, Emilia Ulloa, Tatsuya Ura, Ding Li Yong, Patricia Zurita

**SCIENCE CONSULTANTS** Tris Allinson, Ian Burfield, Stuart Butchart, Steve Cranwell, Mike Crosby, Richard Grimmett, Jono Handley, Melanie Heath, Claudia Hermes, Noelle Kumpel, Jenny Lau, Rob Martin, Ashley Simkins, Roger Safford, Cleo Small, Wim Van den Bossche, Samantha Vine, Zoltan Waliczky, Hannah Wheatley, Itala Yepez

**FRONT COVER** via Shutterstock

**EDITOR** Alex Dale [alex.dale@birdlife.org](mailto:alex.dale@birdlife.org)  
**DEPUTY EDITOR** Shaun Hurrell

The views expressed are those of the contributors  
and not necessarily those of BirdLife International.

**ART EDITOR** Richard Hood  
Printed by On Demand Print Services Ltd  
Printed on processed chlorine-free paper made from at least 80%  
post-consumer waste recycled fibre.

To advertise in BIRDLIFE please contact Jim Lawrence,  
Mobile: +44(0) 7831 187 057  
Email: [jim.lawrence@birdlife.org](mailto:jim.lawrence@birdlife.org)

To subscribe to BIRDLIFE please email [membership@birdlife.org](mailto:membership@birdlife.org)

BIRDLIFE is available by subscription from BirdLife International  
at the above address and from some Partner organisations.

### OFFICERS OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

*President Emeritus* Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan  
*Honorary President* Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado of Japan  
*Honorary Vice-Presidents* Baroness Young of Old Scone (UK), Gerard A Bertrand (USA), A. P. Leventis (UK), Ben Olewine IV and Peter Johan Schei  
*Chief Executive* Patricia Zurita, *Chairman* Bráulio Ferreira de Souza Dias *Treasurer* Nick Prentice

### COUNCIL OF BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL

*Africa* Achilles Byaruhanga (Uganda), Claudia Feltrup-Azafzaf (Tunisia) and Mark Anderson (South Africa); *Asia* Sarath Wimalabandara Kotagama (Sri Lanka) and Shawn Lum (Singapore); *Americas* David O'Neill (USA), Rosabel Miró (Panama) and Alberto Yanosky (Paraguay); *Europe* Gergő Halmos (Hungary), Vera Voronova (Kazakhstan) and Philippe Funcken (Belgium); *Middle East* Yehya Khaled (Jordan) and Assad Adel Serhal (Lebanon); *Pacific* Kevin Hague (New Zealand) and Paul Sullivan (Australia)

### GLOBAL ADVISORY GROUP TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

*Chair* Susan Orr, *Former Chair* Wendy Paulson, John S. Adams, Jane Alexander, Geoff Ball, Nathalie Boulle, Nick Butcher, Appy Chandler, Christie Constantine, Sean Dennis, Scott Dresser, Joe Ellis, Warren Evans, John Gregory, Daniel Gauthier, Piyush Gupta, Richard Hale, Pamela Isdell, James Kushlan, Tasso Leventis, Hector Morales, Ben Olewine, Nick Prentice, Deb Rivel, Terry Townshend, Kurt Vogt, Barbara Young

BIRDLIFE is published quarterly by BirdLife International, The David Attenborough Building, Pembroke Street, Cambridge CB2 3QZ, UK  
Tel. +44 (0)1223 277318 | Fax +44 (0)1223 277200 | Email [birdlife@birdlife.org](mailto:birdlife@birdlife.org) | UK registered charity n. 1042125  
BirdLife International is a worldwide partnership of conservation organisations working to protect the world's birds and their habitats.



The production of BIRDLIFE is generously  
supported by the A. G. Leventis Foundation.

**BirdLife**  
INTERNATIONAL

Partnership for  
**nature and people**



## REGULARS

**6** AROUND THE PARTNERSHIP  
**The latest news from every region**

**8** ONE TO WATCH  
**Great Indian Bustard**

**60** BCI  
**The latests from our Bird Conservation International science journal**

**62** SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT  
**New research shows sustainable fishing and conservation can coexist**  
*Jono Handley*



## COVER STORY

**10** OUR POST-2020 VISION  
**Conservation in the time of coronavirus**  
*BirdLife International*

**14** OUR POST-2020 VISION  
**We are all connected - for better and for worse**  
*Patricia Zurita*

**18** OUR POST-2020 VISION  
**Ensuring the new targets for nature go far enough**  
*Noelle Kumpel*

**22** OUR POST-2020 VISION  
**Five vital projects that will continue in 2020**  
*Jessica Law*



## FEATURES

**24** FORESTS OF HOPE  
**Action stations - an update on our work in Madagascar**  
*Cressida Stevens*

**28** BEST PRACTICE  
**Protecting the forest giants of Sao Tome**  
*Jessica Law*



6



10



18



40



52



56

**30** PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS  
**Dying in droves - the mystery of Guinea-Bissau's vulture deaths**

*Lewis Kihumba*

**32** IRREPLACEABLE  
**Touching the untouchable - protecting Albania's vital coast**  
*Tilen Basle*

**34** FORESTS OF HOPE  
**Leaps and bounds - saving Papua New Guinea's tree kangaroos**  
*Cressida Stevens*

**36** INVASIVE SPECIES  
**One big leap for the Marquesas**  
*Liv Grant*

**40** IRREPLACEABLE  
**From the ashes: the birds affected by Australia's bushfires**  
*Cressida Stevens*

**44** BEST PRACTICE  
**Meet Don Jose: Mr Organic**  
*Emilia Ulloa*

**46** IRREPLACEABLE  
**Mar Chiquita - a wildlife haven fit for a goddess**  
*Jessica Law*

**48** PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS  
**Flower Power in Ecuador**  
*Emilia Ulloa*

**50** BEST PRACTICE  
**Japan's bird-safe energy plan**  
*Tatsuya Ura*

**52** PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS  
**A refuge among the refuse in Saudi Arabia**  
*Dima Obeidat*

**54** IRREPLACEABLE  
**Crossing the Gulf - a Myanmar shorebird sanctuary quadruples in size**  
*Ding Li Yong*

**56** URBAN BIRDS  
**Inner city wildlife art in the US**  
*Jessica Law*



# AROUND THE PARTNERSHIP

ALL THE LATEST NEWS, INSIGHT AND SUCCESS STORIES  
FROM 115 PARTNERS IN 113 COUNTRIES

## KEY

- BIRDLIFE PARTNER
- BIRDLIFE COUNTRY PROGRAMME



## EUROPE

The government of Portugal has approved a major airport construction in one of Europe's most important wetlands, The Tejo Estuary. SPEA and other NGOs plan to take the matter to court and the European Commission, as the project goes against European directives. Tens of thousands of migratory birds from across northern Europe overwinter at the site, and bird collisions with aircraft are a further risk.



Photo BirdLife Europe and Central Asia



## AMERICAS

Colombian landowners in the western Andes have started planting 800 trees on their farms as wintering habitat for the Canada Warbler. This is part of the Canada Warbler Full Life Cycle Action Plan, which brings together research on threats the species face in each country along its migration route. The Canada Warbler is proving a charismatic "umbrella species" to unite bird communities.



Photo Steve Jones



## AFRICA

This February, BirdLife Botswana hosted a successful workshop tackling human-wildlife conflict in Kgalagadi North, a rural area home to livestock herding communities, where predator persecution is common. Local people were trained in monitoring and safeguarding their local wildlife, including how to report vulture poisoning and illegal hunting. They were also briefed on how to measure and use natural resources sustainably.



Photo Clarissa Hughes



## MIDDLE EAST

The Palestine Wildlife Society (BirdLife Partner) has been granted key funding from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund to improve the management of protected areas in the country. Palestine's biodiversity is threatened by agricultural intensification, unsustainable hunting and urbanisation, among many other factors. The new strategy will bring local communities on-side by including them in conservation action, and will target efforts towards globally threatened species.



Palestine Sunbird *Crimyris osea* Photo Abdel Hadi



## ASIA

BNHS (BirdLife in India) has released its full report on the state of the country's birds, compiled using data collected from over 15,000 birdwatchers through the eBird app. Statistics show that roughly half of India's bird species have experienced population declines over the past 25 years, and 101 require urgent conservation action. Conversely, India's national bird, the Indian Peafowl, is on the rise.



Photo Flickr/Nicolas Mirguet



## PACIFIC

Forest & Bird (BirdLife in

New Zealand presented the country's government with a 10,481-signature petition calling for an end to unsustainable fishing practices. Currently, over 14,000 birds are killed every year through accidental 'bycatch' in fishing gear. The petition's demands include obligatory measures to deter seabirds (e.g. bird-scaring lines), and putting cameras or observers on all commercial fishing vessels to ensure obligations are met.



Antipodean Albatross Photo Duncan Wright

## BIRD BULLETIN



### INTRODUCING OUR NEW SPECIES DASHBOARD

Want to see the state of the world's bird populations in simple, at-a-glance visuals? Well, now you can, with our brand new species dashboard. Using clear, easy-to-digest graphics, this interactive resource allows you to view the conservation status of bird populations in every region, country, family, ecosystem and much more. Just select the kind of birds you want to learn about, and our dashboard will show you what they're threatened by, which habitats they use, their Red List categories, and more – the perfect resource for if you're a researcher, a campaigner, or just curious about your favourite bird group. This new tool forms part of the yearly update to our flagship publication, State of the World's Birds. Every four years, we release a full global overview of the status of bird populations, the pressures they face and the actions underway to save them (the last publication was released in 2018). Our latest annual update includes advances in bird science and conservation from 2019.

Read the 2019 update at: [datazone.birdlife.org/2020-annual-update](https://datazone.birdlife.org/2020-annual-update)

Explore the dashboard at: [datazone.birdlife.org/species/dashboard](https://datazone.birdlife.org/species/dashboard)

ONE TO WATCH





## Defending the 'flying fortress' of the bird world

At first sight, Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* certainly doesn't look as if it needs protecting. Towering at a metre tall, this imposing, robust bird struts slowly through the grassland of the Indian subcontinent as if it owned the place. And once upon a time, it did.

Formerly widespread and abundant, this nomadic bustard made yearly journeys between India and Pakistan – a relatively modest migration compared to some species, but no mean feat for one of the world's heaviest flying birds, comparable to the 'flying fortress' heavy bomber planes of the 1930s and 40s.

Today, this species has disappeared from 90% of its former range, leaving fewer than 300 birds, mainly confined to the Thar Desert, Rajasthan. Historically, its decline was set in motion by widespread hunting for food and sport. Today, its woes are compounded by habitat loss due to urbanisation and the expansion of agriculture. With humans come domestic animals: stray dogs are currently one of the biggest risks to both adult birds and the single egg they lay each year. Offspring also risk being trampled by livestock, despite the female's heroic habit of carrying her chick away under her wing when threatened.

One of the biggest dangers, however, are energy structures such as wind turbines and power lines. Needless to say, renewable energy is key to saving the planet – but when badly-planned constructions obstruct habitats or migration routes, they pose a huge collision hazard to this far-from-nimble flyer.

Fortunately, help is at hand – bolstered by a set of major landmarks decided by the Convention of Migratory Species this February. Here, the Great Indian Bustard was added to Appendix I: the strictest level of protection. BNHS, our Indian Partner, is working with the Wildlife Institute of India to satellite-track the species to understand its movements. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change plans to declare all Great Indian Bustard habitats conservation reserves, and bury power lines underground in these areas.

Even more encouragingly, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged to coordinate the conservation of all migratory birds along the Central Asian Flyway – a major migration route that formerly lacked any institutional framework. Thanks to this milestone, every major flyway in the world now has a formal plan connecting conservation action in every country along the way.

GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD *Ardeotis nigriceps*  
Photo Nayan Khanolkar

# CONSERVATION IN THE TIME OF CORONA



3D medical illustration of COVID-19;  
the microorganism that has brought  
the human world to a halt  
Photo Corona Borealis Studio/  
Shutterstock



# VIRUS



Photo Richard Whitcombe

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to escalate, the BirdLife Partnership would like to provide an update on measures we've taken, the impacts on the wider conservation world, and the light at the end of the tunnel

**W**e are currently facing a major and largely unforeseen global challenge that affects people in all corners of the world. BirdLife is no exception: the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting every one of our national partners across the globe, whether directly or indirectly – and this is a challenge that the BirdLife family is responding to with unity. We are taking action to make sure that our staff remain safe and well, and that every BirdLife Partner feels supported and connected. We are encouraging all Partners to talk to us the BirdLife Secretariat, and also each other, in this time of isolation and confusion.

**The disruptions caused by the virus** are harmful not only to people and their wellbeing, but also to the crucial conservation work that we do. That is why we are making plans to ensure we can continue to research, campaign and support the invaluable work of our Partners with our usual enthusiasm and commitment. Although we realise remote working is not possible for many organisations and businesses, where possible, we are supporting our staff to work from home as much as they can, using online co-working technologies that many readers are probably now familiar with. We are also holding regular online consultations to keep up to date with the rapidly changing situation, so that we can advise and assist our workforce as quickly as possible.



↑ With key meetings cancelled, mobilising the conservation world to come together to fight for the next set of targets for nature will be a formidable challenge – but one we must overcome  
Photo Cambridge Conservation Initiative

↗ For now, BirdLife's work continues on – thanks to video chat technology

→ By forcing animals into closer contact with us, we are inviting the outbreak of diseases  
Photo Dan Bennett/Flickr

### KEY GLOBAL MEETINGS FOR NATURE DELAYED?

The wider conservation world is also feeling the impact of this unprecedented crisis. 2020 was meant to be the 'super year for nature': over the coming months, the world's governments were scheduled to meet through the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to thrash out the targets countries need to meet to tackle the biodiversity crisis. Two rounds of negotiation were planned for May and July before the final Biodiversity Summit this October in Kunming, China. Unfortunately, only this week the CBD announced that they have postponed meetings over the coming months (see page 18), with others moving online. All of which is likely to delay the summit, along with the global plan for nature that could save the planet.

**It's not just about the meetings themselves, but also the public awareness-raising and**

campaigning planned alongside them. Quite understandably at the moment, the environment isn't at the forefront of most people's minds. However, some may argue that it should be, because biodiversity and the spread of pandemics are closely entwined. According to the World Economic Forum, the increase in disease outbreaks over the past decades is linked to climate change and biodiversity loss. For example, deforestation is linked to 31% of disease outbreaks, including Ebola and the Zika virus, because felling trees drives animals out of their natural habitats, making them more likely to come into contact with humans and pass on disease.

**Indeed, there are strong indications** that the current outbreak of coronavirus originated in a seafood market illegally selling wildlife in Wuhan, China, and a line of thinking that the virus has passed during transport or trade from bats, to pangolins, to people. This must be a wake-up call that we need to have greater respect for nature and that the trade of wildlife needs to be tackled. It is not the first time that the world has been threatened by a pandemic likely originating from trade in wildlife. The SARS outbreak in 2003, which broke out in Guangdong, China, is thought to have originated in bats, and spread via civet cats, to humans.

**“This must be a wake-up call that we need to have greater respect for nature and that the trade of wildlife needs to be tackled.”**





More widely, climate change also alters the way infectious diseases transmit, and displaces people from their former homes, forcing them to travel to new locations in overcrowded conditions. It's clear that in this way – like in so many others – by protecting nature, we protect ourselves.

### POSITIVE ACTION ALREADY TAKEN

In a time of such negative news, it's encouraging to see that some governments have already taken action to stop the spread of disease by protecting nature. For example, in February China introduced tough new measures to address the concern that the virus had its origin in wild animals. These include a moratorium on all wildlife trade, and an unprecedented ban on the consumption of wild animals as food. Whilst the exact pathway of the coronavirus from animals to humans is not yet proven, this move will certainly protect humans from other harmful diseases, as well as being a blessing for wildlife. As part of Restore Species – a partnership that aims to end the illegal and unsustainable trade of wild animals – we welcome this decision and hope it will become permanent. BirdLife has

↑ Deforestation is driving animals out of their homes – and into contact with humans, an arrangement that benefits neither  
Photo Alexander Gerst

**31%**

**OF DISEASE  
OUTBREAKS  
ARE LINKED TO  
DEFORESTATION**

long worked hard to address the illegal trapping and trade in wildlife, and this crisis is a strong reminder about how important this agenda is.

**There may be another glimmer of hope,** too: many people like us, who are confined to our homes, may finally have the time they need to think about nature. Whilst the BirdLife Partnership will continue to be active in the field for birds and people, where we can, we also plan to increase our online presence so that people indoors remain connected to the natural world. In addition to sharing think-pieces about biodiversity, the virus and the effects of mankind's treatment of the planet, we will also continue to share positive stories of our conservation successes and the very real difference that conversation makes for nature and humanity. Simultaneously, we will look to scale up our conservation impact, despite the logistical challenges remote working can bring.

Through this crisis, BirdLife will continue to be the force that nature needs. We hope you and your families will join us at the other end, all the more willing to fight for nature at this pivotal tipping point for the planet. ■



# **WE ARE ALL CONNECTED**

— **FOR WORSE,** —

## **BUT ALSO FOR BETTER**

The rapid spread of Coronavirus has shown us that the world is even more connected than we realised – and that our connections are also the key to facing this emergency together. Could the world's rallying cry against current crisis be a hopeful sign of the environmental sea change to come?



**Patricia Zurita**  
CEO, BirdLife International





**I**f anything can show us how connected the planet is, it's this. Inadvertent actions that took place in one little market in Wuhan, China have caused Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, Africa and the Pacific to grind to a halt in a matter of months. All of us are shocked and deeply saddened by the lives lost through this pandemic. Millions will also be affected by its economic impact. And while we are all trying to do our part by working from home, and, where possible, volunteering to support our local health services, the speed and scale of this crisis seems to keep surprising us.

Nature has been telling us throughout history that we are connected. Millennia before humans started jetting around the globe, migratory animals like birds, butterflies, wildebeest and reindeer

were transcending borders – to this day, they frequently cross national boundaries and cover vast tracts of land or sea. It stands to reason that a food shortage at a Red Knot's feeding grounds in Delaware, USA will have a profound impact on its breeding success in the high arctic.

So when you think about it, it's no surprise that a pangolin could spread disease when crammed into cage with hundreds of other animals, transported long distances while stressed and immunosuppressed, bound for a crowded market where it will doubtless mingle with countless other species, including humans. The illegal trade of wildlife is the perfect melting pot for the spread of zoonotic diseases. It is also a huge threat to nature that the conservation community has been fighting for decades.

Solving this complex problem will

only be possible if we work together, enacting clear and firm regulations and enforcing laws at markets and trade sources. We also need to work on the ground with local people to provide alternative incomes to alleviate poverty, which is so often the root driver of this practice.

## NATURE LOSS IS DRIVING MODERN PANDEMICS

However, as huge as this problem is, it's not just about the illegal wildlife trade. The truth is that it's not only our exploitation of these species, but also our destruction of their habitats that is exposing us to deadly risk. As populations grow and cities expand, human settlements are spreading into previously untouched landscapes. Building, hunting, mining and logging all disrupt delicately-balanced ecosystems, putting not only millions of species at risk, but also ourselves. Studies have shown that 75% of new or emerging diseases that affect humans originated in animals.

The problem isn't just humans going out to wild spaces – our actions also force wildlife to come to us. Deforestation drives wild animals out of their former habitat and forces them to seek refuge near human populations. Furthermore, climate change is widening the range of mosquitoes that carry malaria and dengue fever, and also drives the movement of people – 'climate refugees' who often arrive at their destination stressed and poverty-stricken, and are forced to live in overcrowded conditions.

Added to this, the destruction of nature is removing the very lifeline that can help us combat illnesses: around 50% of modern drugs have been developed from natural products that are threatened by biodiversity loss. Who knows how many more 'miracle drugs' will go undeveloped because their key ingredient will have already become extinct? Our actions





are putting the balance of the planet out of sync, not only jeopardising the existence of millions of species, but also our very own survival.

It's time to wake up. We humans need to stop seeing ourselves as the owners, or even the stewards, of nature. We are part of nature, and the planet is a system on whose delicate balance our own survival depends. It's time to think less in terms of human health, and more in terms of wider planetary health.

### NOW IS OUR CHANCE TO TURN SOCIETY AROUND

After the current storm calms down, we, as a society, urgently need to rethink the way we've been pushing development and economic growth at the expense of the planet, and move to a system that is truly sustainable for decades to come. In a recent blog my friend Pavan Sukhdev CEO of GIST calls us to revisit our current economic model. "This model glorifies markets, and as markets only trade private claims, it devalues public and community goods and services, such as robust national health services. It places private goods on a pedestal above community and public goods which do not have market prices, indeed do not trade in markets." We need to take this crisis as an opportunity to reset the system and heal our relationship with the planet.

To achieve this, we need to make sure that the new approach begins



right now, when the current economic system is already being opened up to change. Governments around the world are, quite rightly, offering significant and much-needed financial aid to small businesses and vulnerable people who are out of work, sick or homeless. However, we need to make sure this financial support is not hijacked by powerful bodies eager to fuel the same old model of development. Instead, it needs to reinforce the trajectory towards a sustainable economy that we are

already on, and comply with the commitments we have made to reduce and adapt to climate change and end the loss of nature.

For example, former EU Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete is calling for any financial bail-outs for airlines to come with strict climate conditions, such as limits on emissions. A similar sentiment was portrayed in BirdLife's letter to President Von der Leyen of the European Commission:

"This is the time to... accelerate the shift towards an economy which







↗ The ongoing pandemic is believed to have originated in a Chinese wet market, where exotic animals were also traded  
Photo Pxfuel.com

↗ The SARS epidemic of 2002-2003 may have come from captured civet cats  
Photo HG/Flickr

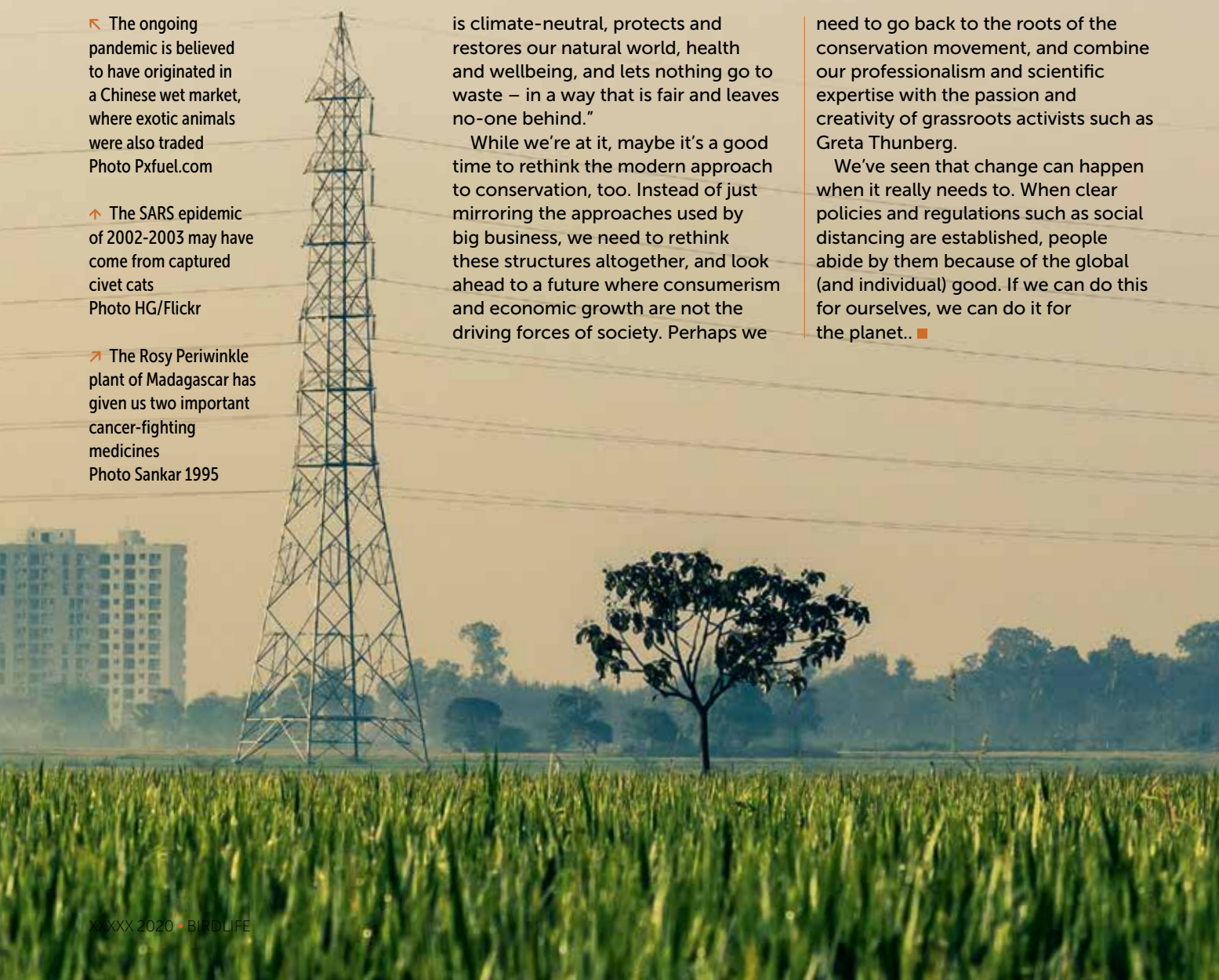
↗ The Rosy Periwinkle plant of Madagascar has given us two important cancer-fighting medicines  
Photo Sankar 1995

is climate-neutral, protects and restores our natural world, health and wellbeing, and lets nothing go to waste – in a way that is fair and leaves no-one behind.”

While we’re at it, maybe it’s a good time to rethink the modern approach to conservation, too. Instead of just mirroring the approaches used by big business, we need to rethink these structures altogether, and look ahead to a future where consumerism and economic growth are not the driving forces of society. Perhaps we

need to go back to the roots of the conservation movement, and combine our professionalism and scientific expertise with the passion and creativity of grassroots activists such as Greta Thunberg.

We’ve seen that change can happen when it really needs to. When clear policies and regulations such as social distancing are established, people abide by them because of the global (and individual) good. If we can do this for ourselves, we can do it for the planet.. ■





# ENSURING THE NEW TARGETS FOR NATURE GO FAR ENOUGH

The world's governments may have other things on their minds right now, but the repercussions further highlight the urgent need to raise nature up the political agenda. With global meetings delayed and the world on track to miss the majority of the nature targets we set to meet by 2020, we must use this time to take stock and ensure the new global biodiversity framework really does restore nature

---

Noelle Kumpel



**T**he year 2020 was set to be a pivotal one for life on earth. Throughout the coming months, the world's governments were set to assemble to thrash out the targets all countries must hit to reverse the biodiversity crisis, and meet the global vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050, as part of a transformational new Global Biodiversity Framework.

In recent months, however, the world's attention has understandably been focused on combating the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving the conservation community questioning whether 2020 will really be the 'super year for nature' we were hoping for. The fact that biodiversity and human health are closely entwined makes it all the more important that we come out on the other side with a clear plan to ensure the health of the planet on which we all live. Studies show that

the increasing frequency of disease outbreaks is linked to climate change and biodiversity loss.

Which makes the coming negotiations all the more vital. The new global framework, being developed by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) through a dedicated Working Group, will replace the current Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and its 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets for 2020. Our collective failure to deliver on the 2020 mission to halt the loss of biodiversity, as highlighted by last year's IPBES Global Assessment, and to meet the majority of the Aichi Targets, provides important lessons.

Nations have spectacularly failed to meet previous targets to protect nature. We have only made good progress towards elements of just four of the 20 so-called Aichi Targets – a disastrous outcome that now

jeopardises not only the survival of over a million species threatened with extinction, but of humankind, too. The biodiversity crisis is nearing a tipping point from which it may no longer be able to recover, and the coming years represent a 'now or never' opportunity to turn things around.

A 'zero draft' of the new Framework has already been produced – with some promising developments, and a few shortfalls, too. In February, BirdLife's delegation travelled to Rome to take part in the official 'open-ended working group' to discuss and develop vital improvements to this draft. Although the subsequent upheavals came as a shock, the conservation world now has additional time and opportunity to formulate a strong plan of action to ensure the next set of targets get it right. Here are our key findings...



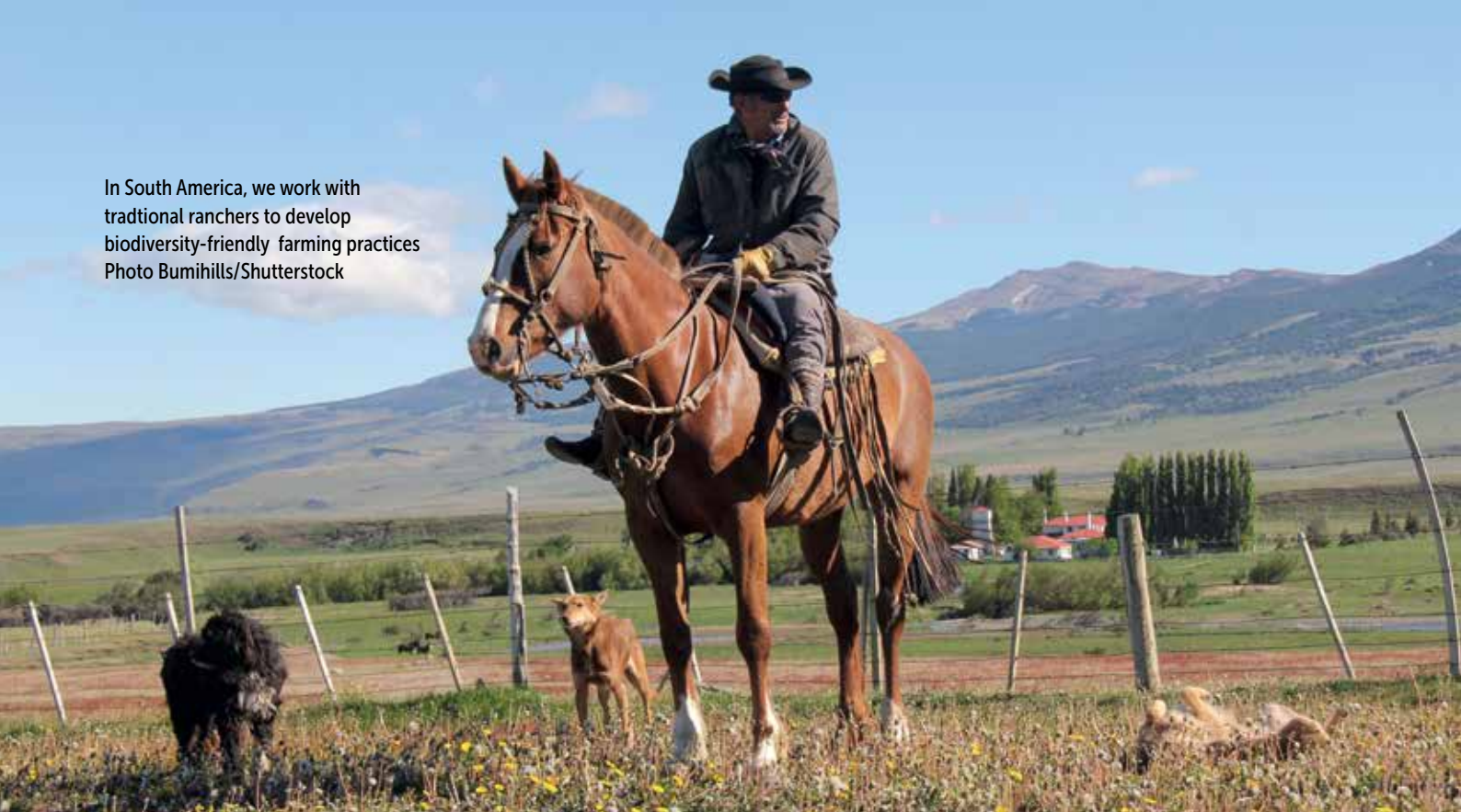
A march for CAP reform in Berlin  
Photo NABU

## THE POSITIVES...

We were pleased to see a clear 'theory of change' behind the logic of the draft: there are five long-term goals to be met by 2050, each supported by 20 action-orientated targets to be hit by 2030. Appropriately, progress will be measured against the three aims of the CBD (conservation, sustainable use and sharing of the benefits of biodiversity) and the three levels of biodiversity (genetic, species and ecosystem). Furthermore, the current framework does a better job of recognising that biodiversity and climate change are inextricably linked: nature is essential for meeting climate commitments, and the biodiversity crisis can't be tackled without serious action on climate change.

Importantly, the document highlights that this is a 'framework for all', requiring ownership and delivery by all of society – governments, the private sector, indigenous peoples and local communities, NGOs and the general public – and through a whole-of-government approach. It calls for international cooperation to deliver conservation beyond national borders, and recommends that different environmental conventions (including the Convention on Migratory Species, the Ramsar Convention, CITES and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) should collaborate with each other more closely through the framework in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In South America, we work with traditional ranchers to develop biodiversity-friendly farming practices  
Photo Bumihills/Shutterstock



KBAs expand the concept of IBAs to encompass all life  
Photo Rachel Gartner/  
Matthew Midgley

## WHERE IT NEEDS WORK...

The overall ambition must be greater to deliver the transformational change needed to put nature on a path to recovery by 2030. For example, we need to go beyond *halting*, and start to *reverse* the loss of biodiversity and the ecosystems that give our planet life. Furthermore, we must strive to immediately halt further extinctions driven by humans, reducing the overall risk of species' extinctions to zero by 2050, by implementing intensive species management where necessary in addition to addressing drivers of loss. We cannot hope to achieve this without integrating conservation into the economic sectors that are most responsible for biodiversity loss, including agriculture, fisheries, forestry, extractive industries and infrastructure. We also need stronger and more transparent mechanisms for achieving and measuring the targets, and for holding countries to account. Communities and countries need to be provided with the skills and resources to help them play their role in implementing the framework.

That said, the greatest failure of the current strategic plan has not been the targets themselves but the failure to implement them. So, crucially, over the next few months we need two key things. Firstly, we need constructive and collaborative discussions between Parties and other stakeholders, to ensure we get the nuts and bolts of an effective, inclusive, comprehensive and ambitious post-2020 framework in place. We must also raise political and public awareness and momentum to ensure this plan is implemented over the next decade.



## OUR POST-2020 VISION

Our four key asks for the new framework are:

- **‘Bending the curve’ for species:** Halting the loss of species and starting to reverse the decline through addressing drivers of loss and implementing intensive species management where necessary to avoid extinctions
- **Retention and restoration of ecosystems and sites:** Strong goals and targets on ecosystem retention and restoration, including the effective conservation of all Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), connecting and integrating networks of KBAs into wider freshwater, coastal, marine and terrestrial ecosystems
- **Mainstreaming of biodiversity:** Integration of biodiversity and nature across sectors and wider policy processes and into economic systems, including climate adaptation and mitigation through nature-based solutions, energy, extractives, fisheries and agriculture, supported by strategic, pre-emptive, biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning covering 100% of national territories, coordinated at an ecologically-relevant scale
- **Strengthened implementation of the framework:** Active implementation both at national level and beyond through international cooperation and synergies across international and national policy processes, in particular with the UNFCCC and the SDGs, regularly tracking and reporting progress via a core set of indicators, and supported by concrete commitments on resource mobilisation

Check out [birdlife.org/post2020](https://birdlife.org/post2020) for more on our work to support the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, including all our position statements

# FIVE VITAL PROJECTS

## THAT WILL CONTINUE IN 2020

The good thing about BirdLife is that, as a truly global organisation, we're already great at staying connected, even when we're thousands of miles apart. Here are just a few of the ways our work will carry on over the coming months, even if it's from our living rooms...

# 1

### OUR CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME



Photo via HeidelbergCement

With schools closed and kids bored indoors, a lot of parents are looking for guilt-free, educational activities to keep their little ones occupied. But they need not fear – our children's programme Spring Alive is on the case. Spring Alive spans across Europe and Africa, striving to inspire children with the wonders of bird migration through workshops, events and classroom activities. Most of this season's events have been cancelled, so instead, our Partners have been sharing their favourite at-home activities on social media and with each other. From instructions on how to build your own nest box to the hilarious "Beak Game", Spring Alive has ideas for all ages and abilities. Check out the Spring Alive Facebook page or search for #SpringAlive on social media to find out more.

# 2

### INVESTIGATING THE ILLEGAL BIRD TRADE



Photo via VBN

We know that illegal and unsustainable trade is a threat to numerous bird species in Southeast Asia. BirdLife already supports and coordinates work by several Asian Partners to protect the Helmeted Hornbill, Asian songbirds and parrots threatened by the pet trade. But what about the rest of the world? It's clear there are excessively traded species worldwide – from songbirds eaten as delicacies in Europe, to vulture body parts traded for belief-based use in Africa. However, without more detail, we cannot focus our action effectively. That's why this year, we're launching an in-depth global review of the bird trade, researching the main sources, markets and trade routes, and highlighting the most urgent priorities. To obtain this information, we are working closely not only with Birdlife Partners, but also NGOs FFI, WCS and TRAFFIC through the Restore Species Partnership.

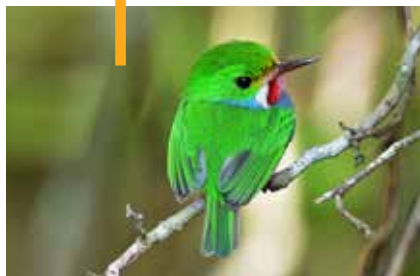




Chattering Lory  
*Lorius garrulus*

Photo Panu Ruangjan/  
Shutterstock

### 3 | IMPORTANT BIRD & BIODIVERSITY AREAS



Cuban Tody Photo Sergey Uryadnikov

Since 1979, BirdLife has mapping the world's most vital bird habitats in the form of Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas (IBAs). Since they were formed, landscapes may have been degraded or restored. Some bird species may have declined or disappeared, or new ones arrived. The species themselves may have moved to a different threat category on the Red List. All this affects how important it is to protect a given IBA, or whether it still qualifies at all. Our national Partners are responsible for updating the IBA data for their country. This year, we'll be leading a major drive to gather the very latest information on all sites across the globe. We will also be applying the new Key Biodiversity Area standard, in a bid to help map, monitor and conserve not only the most important places for birds, but for all life on earth.

### 4 | EXPLORING FOREST-FRIENDLY FUNDING



Photo R Anstead / Twin

This year, we'll continue to explore new, creative approaches to ensure forest conservation gets the long-lasting funding it desperately needs, rather than moving precariously from project to project. Inspired by methods used by start-up companies in the tech sector, our Forest Landscape Sustainability Accelerator, part of Trillion Trees, helps our Partners to explore long-term sources of funding across some of the world's most species-rich tropical forests – ranging from forest-friendly cocoa to carbon schemes. The "Accelerator" matches projects with investors and enables staff from conservation organisations to develop big ideas in a supportive environment. This year, face-to-face workshops and an important 'pitch event' were planned; the workshops will still occur digitally, and the team are exploring online fundraising opportunities.

### 5 | THE RED LIST UPDATE



Ataripe Manakin Photo Ciro Albano

Every year, BirdLife's Red List team analyses the latest scientific literature and specialist information to review the extinction risk of hundreds of bird species for the IUCN Red List. Every four years, they take it even further, undertaking the mammoth task of reviewing the status of all the world's c. 2,500 threatened and Near Threatened species, to check they are correctly classified and update their factsheets with the latest knowledge. 2020 is such a year, and this time the team will also incorporate improved estimates of generation length for many bird species, based on a newly published study co-authored by BirdLife scientists. Although the team's research is desk-based, the information it uncovers goes much further, helping NGOs, scientists and governments make major decisions on where to focus limited resources.

# ACTION STATION

Geographical isolation and rugged terrain have given rise to astounding wildlife within Madagascar's Tsitongambarika Forest, but have also made it difficult to reach and protect – until recently. Introducing Ampasy Research Station: a hub for community support and enabling forest conservation from the inside out

Cressida Stevens



Collared Brown Lemur  
*Eulemur collaris*  
Photo Belinda Bertrand/Flickr





Velvet Asity *Philepitta castanea*  
Photo Artush/Shutterstock



**M**adagascar is renowned for its rich and unique fauna and flora. With more than 80% of its species found nowhere else on earth, the country has more unique species than any comparably sized landmass. Hone in on the southeast and you will find Tsitongambarika Forest, an Important Bird & Biodiversity Area (IBA), which even by the standards of Madagascar is something exceptional.

"Walking through the forests provides a wildlife experience like no other", explains Roger Safford, BirdLife's Preventing Extinctions Programme Manager, and author of 'Birds of Madagascar'. Bulging eyes of lemurs stare down from branches overhead; Asity birds (from which our Partner in Madagascar takes its name) perch with surreal, neon eye-wattles that wouldn't look out of place in a sci-fi film; take a closer look and you could spot a chameleon no bigger than a paperclip, or realise that an innocuous bit of foliage actually belongs to the back-end of a leaf-tailed gecko. "Even those who live and work here regularly discover species not yet known to science – a new plant was named just yesterday!" says Safford.

It is not just wildlife that rely on this special habitat. The forests provide local people with valuable materials such as firewood, charcoal and timber, and facilitate the area's water supply from rivers that originate here. But sadly, this site is in danger, and with it, the vital services it provides.

Forest has been lost to subsistence agriculture, logging and charcoal production, and sadly this continues [see IBA Factfile, right]. For over ten years our Partner, Asity Madagascar, has been working to manage the use of the

forest in ways that benefit people from local communities, including advising them how to make a more sustainable (and often more gainful) living without detriment to the forest, while also respecting local traditions and knowledge.

**Yet, the forest is hard to reach**, and there's only so much Asity can achieve from the sidelines. In fact, Tsitongambarika means "inaccessible to the barrel", referring to the difficulties experienced by armed forces sent some centuries ago to pacify the area, bringing their supplies and weapons in barrels. So, in 2015, efforts to save the forest were boosted by the launch of Ampasy Research Station: in a land with so much still to discover, conservation research

✦ A tree nursery in Ampasy  
Photo Roger Safford

⬆ This species of leaf-tailed gecko, *Uroplatus malama*, is restricted to southeast Madagascar.  
Photo: Mahaviasy Sando

#### IBA FACTFILE

### TSITONGAMBARIKA

**LOCATION:** Southeast Madagascar

**TYPE:** Forest

**SIZE:** 54,102 hectares

**TRIGGER SPECIES:** Scaly Ground-roller, Brown Mesite, Red-tailed Newtonia



#### WHAT IS IT LIKE?

Very rare lowland, humid forest habitat, home to a vast array of exceptional wildlife.

#### ANY THREATS?

Much of the forest has been cleared for subsistence agriculture, or degraded by charcoal production and illegal logging. An increasing population means practices that were perhaps once sustainable are now having a significant impact.

#### WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Asity Madagascar is guiding local people through improving their agricultural methods, equipping them with the skills needed to better manage their forest, and supporting new sustainable sources of income such as vegetable farming and beekeeping.

was taken to the front line.

The research station is in a beautiful location on the edge of the forest, soundtracked by the quiet 'conversations' of lemurs, frogs and birds, the gentle buzz of insects and gurgling water. With shelters, showers and catering, it offers a base for study and exploration. "Working in the station is really exciting; the site is really peaceful, with a clean river and many different species to see", says Faniry Rakotoarimanana, Site Manager, Asity Madagascar. But the purpose extends far beyond just another tropical getaway or study site.

The station has three main objectives: to enable in situ study of local species and habitat; offer environmental education to the local communities; and to conserve and restore the surrounding forests and species within. Situated within the largest remaining areas of lowland rainforest in southern Madagascar, this has been the first ever opportunity to carry out long-term studies of the area's extraordinary wildlife and build an accurate picture of how populations are impacted by human activity.

**The research station** is also contributing to enhanced livelihoods of the local villagers. It requires staff such as cooks, porters and guides, and the income generated is shared between Asity (to finance the wider conservation programme) and the local village associations. The arrival of researchers from across the world has increased awareness among local people as to how special their home truly is.

The creation of jobs is a huge blessing for the forest, since an alternative occupation to unsustainable shifting agriculture minimises the need to clear forest for farming. It has also turned some people away from something more malign. Valuable and endangered hardwoods, such as ebony and rosewood, are



found in the forest, and although their take is illegal, the financial reward for their trade has proven an attractive prospect for someone needing to feed their family with no easier option. A tenacious logger with the promise of ready cash is remarkably capable of finding a way to work around the inaccessibility of such treasure. Tragically, lemurs may be the collateral victims, providing a source of sustenance during a logging expedition.

However, Ampasy Research Station has turned this around completely, with some ex-loggers and hunters now benefiting from livelihood support or employed as staff, glad to be able to make a living that helps to protect the forest rather than plunder it. Ampasy's tree nursery facilities are also helping to heal the forest, replenishing the populations of exploited tree species by nurturing saplings of ebony, rosewood and other species through an initiative with the University of Antananarivo. In 2019, an impressive 10,000 young plants including ebony and rosewood were placed in the nursery, and 5,000 young plants were put in the ground around Ampasy forest.

A recent paper published in *Oryx* and led by Dr Giuseppe Donati from Oxford Brookes University has shown that threats, particularly from hunting, have decreased locally since the beginning of Asity's work in Tsitongambarika, and decreased again since the establishment of the research station. Deforestation has also reduced, with forest cover around Ampasy remaining visibly intact over the same period.

These results also support the idea that one of the best deterrents to poaching and habitat encroachment is a field station permanently used by field workers, both national and international. ■

↑ Visitors are sure of a dry night under shelters made of local materials  
Photo Roger Safford

↙ Scaly Ground-Roller  
*Geobiastes squamiger*  
Photo Pete Morris

## WITH THANKS

The conservation programme at Tsitongambarika has been funded by a range of donors. Ampasy Research Station was set up through a joint initiative of Oxford Brookes University, Rio Tinto QMM and Asity Station. For supporting its creation and work, we thank Rio Tinto QMM, Save our Species - Lemur Initiative, Ted Reissing and the Cultures of Resistance Network Foundation, and Oxford Brookes University.

The BirdLife Forest Landscape Sustainability Accelerator is an initiative of Trillion Trees, and enters a new phase of support from Hempel Foundation and Google in 2020.

[www.birdlife.org/sustaining-forests](http://www.birdlife.org/sustaining-forests)

[www.trilliontrees.org](http://www.trilliontrees.org)





Shot. Trapped. Poisoned.  
**25,000,000 birds**

are illegally killed every year as they  
attempt nature's most incredible journey

Follow our magnificent seven  
on their epic flight for survival

**[www.flightforsurvival.org](http://www.flightforsurvival.org)**



# PROTECTING THE FOREST GIANTS

On the African islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, conservationists are using education and storytelling to protect a unique snail and the forest it lives in – before it gets forgotten forever

**D**eep within the rainforests of São Tomé and Príncipe hides a slow-moving, gentle giant: the Obô Snail *Archachatina bicarinata*. You may have encountered giant African land snails before, or even kept one as a pet – but this magnificent mollusc is something different. Its much thicker, larger shell spirals in the opposite direction to its mainland counterparts. It is one of hundreds of completely unique species that have evolved on these two isolated islands off the west coast of Africa.

**Jessica Law**

**Photos by  
Vasco Pissarra**

↑ Growing from a tiny hatchling, the Obô snail's shell can reach a whopping 13.5 centimetres in length.

Also among the stunning endemic wildlife are birds like the Dwarf Ibis *Bostrychia bocagei* and São Tomé Grosbeak *Crithagra concolor* – both now assessed as being Critically Endangered as a result of irresponsible hunting and habitat loss. Dense tropical forest used to span across the islands from shore to shore, from the mountain tops down to the sea strand. But today, only a third of this pristine forest remains standing. The rest has been given over to palm oil and sugarcane plantations, or chipped away by illegal logging.





← The funds of the Obô Snail project are managed by BirdLife, through a CEPF small grant for West African forests that BirdLife is responsible for implementing.

**For the Obô Snail**, the situation got a lot worse in the 1980s when the non-native West African Land Snail *Archachatina marginata* was introduced – either by accident in cargo ships, or on purpose as a food source. This fast-growing, fast-breeding usurper may be outcompeting the Obô Snail, which has retreated to a few isolated patches of highland forest in the Obô Natural Park: a nature reserve short on staff and resources.

It's easy to care about beautiful vertebrate victims – but the squishy ones are just as ecologically important. Conservation Biologist Martina Panisi recalls her concern after surveys made through Lisbon University found that the little-known snail had almost disappeared:

"My first thought was... nobody cares! But then we found that the local community cared. Local people were the ones with the knowledge about the snail. They were the ones who understood its importance."

When passers-by asked Panisi and the Forest Giant team about their research, she discovered that the older generations remembered the snail, and could provide valuable information about it. They learned that the snail is culturally important, both as a food source and as a medicine, and the team realised that local people were the ones with the power to protect the forest giants and their habitat.

**With support from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)** and Alisei, they set up a small conservation centre to study the snails and raise awareness through environmental education. During sessions, they found that the snail's story had to be told differently depending on the age of the audiences. Adults remembered the snail, but worryingly, children were more familiar with introduced species than the islands' endemic ones.

"The snails are a great way to get the two generations together to talk about endemic



wildlife that adults remember and children don't know", says Panisi. "They also open up conversations about the forest as a whole. Simply telling people to stop illegally logging sounds bossy and can be met with pushback. This way, we provide the knowledge, and the communities themselves decide how to act on it. It's their snail, and it's up to them to save it."

**Already, many communities** are deciding not to collect the snail, and are thinking about their role in protecting the wider rainforest. The next step is to make the project's positive impacts last in the long term. One way is through alternative livelihoods: people who once gathered snails are now sewing beautiful snail-themed merchandise such as clothing and embroidery. The Forest Giants team is collaborating with Flora & Fauna International to draw up a long-term plan for the species on Príncipe, and exploring exciting new avenues to ensure that change happens fast for this sluggish mollusc. ■

#### CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM PARTNERSHIP FUND

BirdLife has been active in São Tomé & Príncipe for over 10 years. In 2017 BirdLife International, through the EU-funded ECOFAC 6 Regional Programme, obtained a 4.3-year grant for the protection of the Natural Parks in São Tomé and Príncipe islands. BirdLife managed CEPF actions enables to build on synergies and promote complementarity in intervention.

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation.





# DYING IN DROVES

Earlier this year, the shocking, and unexplained, discovery of numerous clusters of dead vultures across Guinea-Bissau rocked the conservation world. However, our investigation is shedding light on the crime behind the deaths, and ensuring a safer future for these Critically Endangered birds in the country

**I**n late February, a local worker in a rice field on the outskirts of Bafatá, Guinea-Bissau, discovered a group of around 200 recently-deceased vultures. This shocking scene was the first of many to emerge across the West African nation over the next few days. Soon, more incidents of mass vulture deaths were reported, both on the mainland and in the country's Bijagós archipelago, increasing the death toll to more than 1,100 vultures. While February was the epicentre of these unexplained deaths, various reports indicate these incidents may have begun as early as the end of 2019, and continue on to this day, with 145 more vulture deaths being recorded in the Bafatá Sector of the country between the 4th and 24th of March. This suggests that the true death toll could be much higher, leaving conservationists in a race against time to solve the mystery.

**Almost all the casualties** were Hooded Vultures *Necrosyrtes monachus* (Critically Endangered),

**Lewis Kihumba**

↑ Hooded Vulture, *Necrosyrtes monachus*, coming in to land  
Photo Ian Dyball/  
Shutterstock

one of the six African vulture species driven to the brink of extinction in recent times, with some species' populations declining by up to 97%. Despite its comparatively compact size, Guinea-Bissau is home to the largest regional populations of Hooded Vulture, and according to recent research, may hold around 22% of the global population. It also holds important populations of White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*, another Critically Endangered species.

**Poisoning is the biggest threat** to African vultures, and is suspected to be the most likely cause of the spate of deaths in Guinea-Bissau, with local reports indicating some dying birds were "bubbling from the beak" and searching for water. Since there is no big game in the country, it is unlikely to be related to intentional vulture poisoning incidents found elsewhere on the continent, where poachers lace carcasses with poison to prevent circling vultures from alerting rangers to their activities.





Another hypothesis suggests that the poisoning is being driven by demand for vulture body parts for belief-based use, a practice prevalent in West Africa. Many of the dead vultures were beheaded, suggesting the body parts were harvested for 'medicinal' or ritual purposes, despite the lack of evidence that they provide any such medical benefits.

"Vulture body parts, along with other animal products, are well known to be illegally traded internationally for belief-based use, particularly in West Africa", says Rebecca Garbett, BirdLife's Vulture Conservation Manager. "Information coming from field teams in Guinea-Bissau suggests the vultures being killed in this incident may be illegally traded widely throughout the region for belief-based use, although this is illegal and drives declines internationally."

**Following the discovery of this mass killing,** local authorities immediately swung into action, with the governor of the Bafatá region forming a task force to locate and incinerate all vulture carcasses to avoid potential contamination to humans and other wildlife. The task force comprised of members of the local administration, health officials, tertiary officials and security officials drawn from the National Guard, armed forces and police, working with a network of local civil society organisations, including ODZH (Organisation for the Defence and Development of Wetlands in Guinea-Bissau).

**BirdLife International, in collaboration with** ODZH and others, is playing a key role in implementing an action plan to investigate the causes and prevent similar incidents in the future. A key step in this plan is to collect samples for laboratory analyses, and the detailed circumstances of vulture mortalities in regions where the most deaths were reported, namely Bafatá, Gabu and Bambadinca.

As part of this undertaking, the field team have



◀ **Hooded Vulture**  
Photo R. Maximiliane/  
Shutterstock

➤ **A street in Bafatá,  
Guinea-Bissau**  
Photo Boulenger Xavier/  
Shutterstock

been conducting interviews with stakeholders including cattle breeders, health and veterinary officials, slaughterhouse workers, individuals involved in burning the vulture carcasses, traditional medicine practitioners and local authorities among others.

**A technical committee,** comprised of ODZH and various governmental partners, has been set up to provide support for implementation of this plan. Other partners include the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). Guinea-Bissau is also part of the Multi-species Action Plan to conserve African-Eurasian vultures, adopted in 2017 by the CMS. This Action Plan proposes many steps that are directly applicable to this tragedy, such as rolling out all possible policies and legal measures to reduce the belief-based use of vulture body parts. Furthermore, CITES stipulates that any international trade must be authorized by an export permit, which should only be granted if trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.



BirdLife's support for the response to the vulture poisoning and collaboration with other organisations was made possible through its membership of the Restore Species partnership, which works to prevent extinctions caused by illegal and unsustainable trade and hunting, and poisoning.

**"The mass poisoning** of vultures in Guinea-Bissau is sad and unfortunate. While there are concerted efforts to save these Critically Endangered birds, tragedies such as this undermine conservation efforts", says Geoffrey Citegetse, a Conservation Project Manager based at BirdLife's West Africa office. "In spite of this, we are working together to understand the cause of the deaths and raise awareness about the plight of vultures in Guinea Bissau."

Recent political instability in Guinea Bissau and the COVID-19 pandemic have made tackling this crisis particularly challenging. However, through the action that has already been taken, it is hoped that we can get to the root of the causes quickly, so we can prevent any further incidents. ■



# TOUCHING THE UNTOUCHABLE

After a momentous victory to protect a National Park from development, Albania's entire protected area system came under threat. Here's how a local coalition of NGOs reacted

**B**eaches may not be the first thing that comes to mind when picturing Albania, but nonetheless the country boasts some of the last stretches of pristine Adriatic coastline: kilometres of shore without a tourist resort or tanning beachgoer in sight. Just occasional fishermen, a cow or two, and a few Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* running along the shore. Some sections of Albanian coast are home to a remarkable ensemble of biodiversity that has lived in harmony with people for many centuries. But

**Tilen Baste**

↓ Aerial photo of the  
old sand dunes in Divjaka  
Photo Arian Koci



whilst rich in nature, Albania is not so rich economically. As the country develops and aspires for EU membership, can its pristine coasts be protected from the irreversible damage seen in neighbouring Balkan nations?

One such place is Divjaka-Karavasta National Park, home to more than 260 bird species – 18 of which are globally threatened – and harbouring huge numbers of migrating and wintering waterbirds each year. A colony of Dalmatian Pelicans *Pelecanus crispus* (Near Threatened) also finds its home in the lagoon – the only coastal breeding site for the species along the Adriatic coast. But recently, this safe haven came under serious attack as a private investor, Mabetex Group, together with divisions of public authorities, revealed a plan to build a new 'tourist city' within the core of Divjaka-Karavasta. Whilst sustainable development and ecotourism are important for Albania, it doesn't take much to figure out that the kind of resort proposed doesn't belong next to an important pelican colony in a National Park.

Thankfully, an NGO coalition led by the Albanian Ornithological Society quickly raised their concerns and entered a long and exhausting battle, supported by grants from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)\*. November 2019 brought victory, when Albania's Strategic Investment Committee decided to



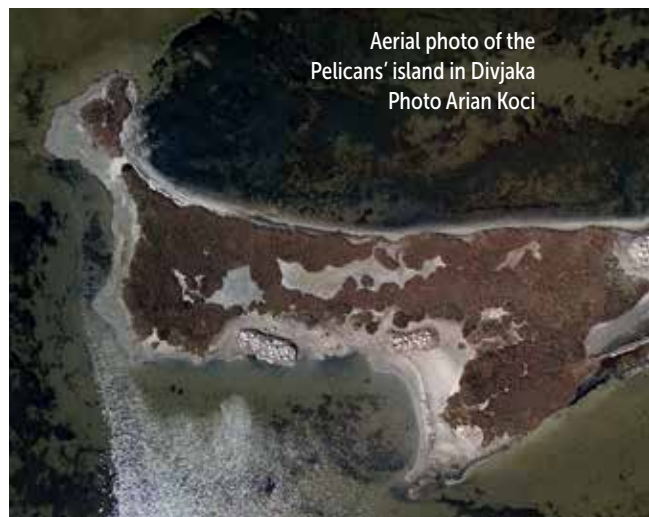
## NARTA LAGOON A 'PROTECTED' AREA?

Another important Albanian coastal wetland is under threat. Part of the larger Vjore-Narte Protected Area, Narta Lagoon is a stunning KBA rich in marine life, including the Mediterranean Monk Seal (Endangered), diverse plant species and a key 'landing' and refuelling site for waterbirds – not aeroplanes. The Albanian government continues to push for the construction of an airport here, despite a failed attempt last year and coordinated opposition from NGOs.

"To build an airport in an area with such a large presence of bird species would be devastating," says Xherri Xhemal, Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA). "The entire ecosystem of Vjore-Narte would also be affected. It's a clear violation of the regulatory and legal standards on protected areas."



Part of Narta Lagoon  
Photo Xherri Xhemal / PPNEA



Aerial photo of the  
Pelicans' island in Divjaka  
Photo Arian Koci



↑ Sanderlings *Calidris alba*  
in Divjaka  
Photo Taulant Bino

reject Mabetex's proposal – an important moment for nature conservation and the non-governmental sector in Albania. However, celebrations didn't last long as new threats appeared on the horizon.

Around the same time, the National Agency for Protected Areas and the Ministry of Tourism & Environment initiated an internal process to revise Albania's protected area network. This proposed revision turned out to be the biggest threat to nature in the whole of the Balkans: with one flick of a pen, coastal protected areas would be reduced on average by at least 22%. "This act would undo more than 15 years of science and conservation work on Albania's protected areas", says Borut Rubinič, CEPF Programme Officer for the Balkans. "Coastal areas would be hit the most, some facing a reduction of almost 40%."

It was clear that investments from abroad and economic interests were fuelling the push to reclaim pristine nature for the price of unsustainable development. "For the NGO coalition, the revision of protected areas seemed to be just an excuse to get those investments through", says Taulant Bino, Head of the Albanian Ornithological Society (AOS).

**Nature conservationists did not rest on their laurels**, but stepped up again, this time forming a coalition of 21 NGOs that reminded the Minister

of Tourism and Environment of his government's commitment to protect existing protected areas. "The latest version of the revised boundaries of coastal protected areas indeed shows an improvement: now only a 5% reduction compared to 22%", says Besjana Sevo, Project Manager, AOS. "This is a good first step, and our NGO coalition remains committed to the conservation of important coastal habitats that are still under risk from this revision and other threats."

Let's not forget the hardest hit wetlands are those of international importance – such as Ramsar Sites, IBAs, KBAs, Candidate Emerald Sites and potential Natura 2000 sites. "If Albania truly aspires to begin negotiations for accession into the EU, it must look to its neighbour, Montenegro", says Rubinič. "The protection of Ulcinj Salina was an EU condition to start the negotiation process. Albania should expect the same and start thinking about developing sustainable tourism in its extraordinarily biodiversity-rich protected areas."

Nature conservationists in Albania won a series of very important battles, but they haven't won the war yet. Threats still loom over protected areas in Albania, as there are governmental bodies that have authority over the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and its decisions – but the NGO response is growing stronger. ■

**CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM**  
PARTNERSHIP FUND

\*AOS and PPNEA are supported by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), of which BirdLife International and Partners DOPPS, LPO and BPSSS form the Regional Implementation Team for the Mediterranean Hotspot. [www.birdlife.org/cepf-med](http://www.birdlife.org/cepf-med)



# LEAPS AND BOUNDS

What started out as a mission to save tree kangaroos has transformed the lives of over 13,000 people and boosted the conservation of some of Papua New Guinea's most biodiverse and globally important rainforest



**P**apua New Guinea's forests are extraordinary – and not just because of the fantastic species found within them. They are set apart by the fact that about 95% of forest land in the country is privately owned (mostly by local communities or tribes), providing a unique conservation opportunity where local people can take the lead. BirdLife International is supporting two organisations within the country: the grassroots NGO Tenkile Conservation Alliance (TCA) and University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), as part of a European Commission-funded Forest Governance project (see 'More Info', page 35). This project is all about empowering local people in four southeast Asian countries to manage and protect their forests. The Papua New Guinea project site is in the Torricelli

**Cressida Stevens**

↑ The Raggiana Bird-of-paradise *Paradisaea raggiana* features on Papua New Guinea's national flag  
Photo Anuradha/Flickr

↖ Victoria Crowned-pigeon *Goura victoria*  
Photo Karin Lewis/Flickr

➤ Tenkile Tree Kangaroo  
Photo TCA

Mountain Range, consisting of rainforest hosting 50% of the nation's bird species and 40% of its mammals, including two of the world's most endangered mammals: enter the tree kangaroos.

**Looking like a curious mix** between a kangaroo and a lemur, these must be one of nature's more implausible animals. On the ground, they can jump, bound or walk – and although well adapted for life in the trees, they appear quite clumsy navigating between branches. There are 14 species worldwide, of which 12 are endemic to the island of New Guinea. TCA takes its name from the Tenkile Tree Kangaroo *Dendrolagus scottae* – a species found only in the Torricelli Mountains. As charismatic as these creatures may be to an outsider, they were a common





source of food locally until human hunting pressure sadly resulted in IUCN uplisting the species to Critically Endangered in 2008.

In 1999, TCA sought to ensure the survival of the Tenkile by persuading 13 local villages to stop hunting them. Today, the Alliance has expanded to 50 villages all agreeing not to hunt the three species of tree kangaroo found here: the Tenkile, the Grizzled Tree Kangaroo *Dendrolagus inustus* (Vulnerable), and the Golden-mantled Tree Kangaroo *Dendrolagus pulcherrimus* (Critically Endangered), which was believed to be locally extinct, until TCA discovered it still existed in certain areas in 2004. The success of their mission is clear: there has been no record of a hunted Tenkile in 16 years and the species' population has more than trebled since TCA began.

**However, the trouble faced by wildlife** wasn't all that concerned TCA. When they noticed the distended bellies of village children, they endeavoured to help address social issues. They set about delivering food security by training people in how to farm chickens, rabbits and fish as an alternative food source, and have supplied over 350 1,000-gallon clean water tanks to villages. Thanks to their efforts, the prevalence of water-borne illness has dramatically decreased.

As TCA continued to work on the ground, gaining the trust of local people and opening their eyes to the benefits conservation brings, people changed their behaviour more, whilst embracing their culture and traditional use of natural resources. Now, villages have not only agreed to stop killing tree kangaroos, but no longer go into the mountains to hunt at all. This respite is allowing other special species to recover, including the Black-spotted Cuscus *Spiloglossus rufoniger* (another

➤ **The community united to carry water tanks over rugged terrain**  
Photo TCA

➤ **Workshops provide local communities with guidance on how to live and work sustainably**  
Photo TCA



Critically Endangered marsupial) and the Victoria Crowned-pigeon *Goura victoria* (Near Threatened) – the world's largest pigeon, which had become locally extinct in certain areas.

**But the changes being made by local people** don't stop there: as well as conserving their wildlife, they are beginning to take other positive actions for the sake of protecting their forest home. The forest is threatened by logging and clearance for mining and oil palm plantations, but our two project partners are helping communities monitor and sustainably manage their land. TCA works directly with local communities running workshops, providing jobs and advising on sustainable livelihoods such as rice and vanilla farming. Meanwhile, UPNG provides technical assistance by monitoring forest cover remotely and creating maps to aid landowners in land-use planning. Those involved at every level take huge pride in their work, and with good reason. "We are protecting primary tropical rainforest, containing some of the world's most special and threatened species – it's important work globally", remarks Jim Thomas, the CEO of TCA.

"These species aren't just charming; they are vital for the survival of the forest itself, and for people everywhere," says Dr Hum Gurung, manager of the Asia-Pacific Forest Governance project. "By acting as pollinators and dispersers of seeds, they are critical to the functioning and long-term resilience of the forest".

The tale of Papua New Guinea's tree kangaroos demonstrates the interdependent nature of ecosystems and people, and provides a persuasive case for flagship species conservation. The key to TCA's success has been building trusting relationships and respecting the local cultures. Of course, a soft spot for tree kangaroos also played its part. ■

#### MORE INFO

\*Find out more about the 2017-2022 European Commission-funded Asia-Pacific Forest Governance project, *Strengthening non-state actor involvement in forest governance in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea* at:

[www.birdlife.org/forest-governance](http://www.birdlife.org/forest-governance)







# ONE BIG LEAP FOR THE **MARQUESAS**

In November 2019, a BirdLife-led team camped out on one of the world's remotest islands to learn more about the Endangered birds we urgently need to save. Here's what they discovered...

---

**Liv Grant**



**A**s a wave swells, an impeccably-timed leap from boat to sharp rock is required to access Mohotani. But it's well worth the effort, according to the BirdLife-led team that clambered ashore bearing precious research equipment. This exceptionally biodiverse uninhabited island in the Marquesas Archipelago, French Polynesia, is the last to still retain a significant proportion of its native forest. Rising in steep crags from a turquoise sea, the lower slopes of this 1,500 hectare ancient volcanic island are cloaked in a resilient dry forest. This unique ecosystem is adapted to drought and hosts a suite of endemic insects and birds that have evolved to exploit these harsh conditions.

As the island climbs, temperatures cool, giving way to a vibrant forest from which giants emerge: towering *Pisonia* trees whose crowns are festooned by noddys, terns and frigatebirds. Rare endemic species such as the Marquesas Monarch *Pomarea mendozae* (Endangered) find refuge in the understory below.

Sadly, this paradise is under severe threat: the introduction of rats, feral cats and sheep has seen the forest shrink dramatically; many ground-nesting birds have been extinguished altogether, and Mohotani's remaining unique plants and animals are struggling to survive. To prevent this natural wonder from becoming a dusty footnote in history, BirdLife has embarked upon an ambitious mission to restore Mohotani and six other islands within the Marquesas archipelago.

**BirdLife brought the restoration of these islands one step closer** with a three-week field expedition to Mohotani, seeking to increase our understanding of the Marquesas Monarch and how to mitigate/avoid any unintended



risks from the restoration operation. The nine-person expedition team comprised experts from BirdLife, SOP Manu (BirdLife in French Polynesia), Auckland Zoo, Island Conservation and local Marquesans. The logistics of coordinating the team were eye-watering, with members travelling from five countries and communicating across three languages.

The location of Mohotani presented its own set of challenges: not only are the island's shores rugged and difficult to reach, but it is in one of the most remote islands in the world, situated over 1,500 km from Tahiti (French Polynesia's capital) and over 5,000 km from the nearest continental landmass. The expedition was only made possible thanks to the strength and expertise of the local people who tirelessly supported the operation. Their support ranged from safely landing everyone on the island, to keeping everyone hydrated – carrying almost a tonne of water to the field camp.

Here the team spent their first night sleeping in caves embedded in the cliffs, listening to the crashing of waves and the cries of seabirds returning to roost. Rested or not, the next day they immediately set to work assessing the seabird population and studying the behaviour of the Marquesas Monarch. Since this species is only found on this one island, and nowhere else in the world, it is vital to understand its behaviour and needs, to inform its protection from the impact of non-native species.

**The team were soon charmed by the Monarch's** inquisitive nature: these territorial flycatchers live in tight family units, and far from being difficult to track down (as you might assume with an Endangered species with less than 400 birds remaining), it is almost more difficult to avoid them. As soon as you wander into their territory, each member of the family will hop down onto a nearby branch to investigate. The team were delighted to see many juvenile Monarchs, but

↑ Just reaching and unloading equipment onto these craggy islands was a major logistical challenge  
Photo Fred Jacq

↙ Biomarkers thankfully confirmed the limited risk of the Monarchs feeding on rat bait  
Photo Tehani Withers



are concerned that these youngsters will be unable to create territories of their own, as over-grazing continues to erode the forest on which the Monarchs depend. The team observed that the birds feed almost constantly, flitting after flying insects and probing under leaves in trees whilst patrolling their territories or displaying to their mate.

This feeding behaviour observed in the wild, alongside observations of how the birds behaved and responded to a short period of time in purpose-built aviaries, confirmed that the Monarchs would not adapt well to captivity. This further highlights the importance of restoring the island's habitat and protecting the species where they are now, before it is too late. This is also likely to be true of its two Critically Endangered sister species, the Tahiti Monarch *Pomarea nigra* and Fatu Hiva Monarch *Pomarea whitneyi*.

**Seabirds were once a major driver** of the island's ecosystem. Their guano (droppings), containing nutrients from the sea, fuelled the plants and invertebrates inhabiting the island's low-fertility soil. Today, the seabird community is a shadow of its former self, restricted to the terns, noddys and boobies that find refuge from invasive predators in the treetops. However,



↑ The Marquesas Monarch is one of five globally threatened endemics this project will benefit  
Photo Fred Jacq

← Black Noddy *Anous minutus*  
Photo Fred Jacq

## RESTORING PARADISE IN THE MARQUESAS

The removal of introduced species is the only solution to restoring the ecological balance and ecosystem resilience in these remote islands, and preserve their cultural importance. Together with the local community, BirdLife has identified seven islands (including Mohotani) as the focus for our ambitious multi-island restoration operation that will secure over 2,000 hectares of predator-free habitat, providing safe havens for five globally-threatened birds and protecting a range of endemic plants from extinction. As preparations advance, we continue to raise the vital funds necessary to save these irreplaceable species.

Visit [birdlife.org/marquesas](https://birdlife.org/marquesas) to learn more, and lend your support

even these species are not immune. The forest floor is littered with skeletal wings: a calling card of feral cats which have caught fledglings just as they took their first steps beyond the nest.

Scientists think that at least five ground-nesting seabird species used to live on the island, but have since succumbed to invasive species and other human threats. Although the team did not see any, they maintain the hope that a few elusive ground-nesters may still be clinging on among the island's massive cliffs. In order to confirm these suspicions, they set up sound recorders across the island (not as simple a job as it sounds given the cliff-side exposure) which will operate every night for the next year, giving an insight into the hidden lives of seabirds on one of the most remote islands in the world.

Islands are microcosms where the threats facing nature more broadly are amplified. Their isolation creates an opportunity for evolution to happen at an almost accelerated scale, and they are some of our most precious natural treasures. They have also been devastated by the impact of introduced species, with 90% of bird extinctions suffered by island-dwellers. This makes Mohotani and its birds all the more precious, and this recent expedition has been a leap forward in its conservation. The next time the team leap off a boat onto Mohotani's shores, we hope it will be the dawn of a new future for the island's feathered inhabitants. ■



Mohotani is a craggy ancient volcanic island with a cloak of dry forest cover  
Photo Fred Jacq





Photo by Michael Mestchenyakov / Shutterstock

# JOIN THE FLOCK!

Complete the form below to become a World Bird Club member – not only will you receive a welcome pack and copy of BirdLife: the Magazine every quarter, you'll be helping support the conservation of threatened birds all across the globe!



Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_ Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone/Mobile/Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

xxxxQ3

## Payment method:

☐ Cheque: Please make cheques out to BirdLife International, and post to the address at the bottom of the page.

☐ Credit/Debit Card: Please charge my card with the sum of: \_\_\_\_\_

Card no.: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ CVV^: \_\_\_\_

^last three digits on the signature strip, or four numbers on the front of your AMEX

☐ Bank Transfer: Please transfer using the reference format: "WBC First name last name"

Account Name: BirdLife International

Bank Address: Barclays Bank, 9-11 St Andrews Street, Cambridge, CB2 3AA, United Kingdom

## £ GBP Account

Account No: 00064564 | Sort Code:

20-17-68

SWIFT code: BARCGB22

IBAN: GB15 BARC 2017 6800 0645 64

## \$ USD Account

Account No: 82812655 | Sort Code:

20-17-68

SWIFT code: BARCGB22

IBAN: GB36 BARC 2017 6882 8126 55

## € Euro Account

Account No: 54243766 | Sort Code:

20-17-68

SWIFT code: BARCGB22

IBAN: GB34 BARC 2017 6854 2437 66

## Membership level (annual, delete currency as appropriate):

☐ Individual £45/US \$60/€55

☐ Supporter £60/US \$120/€100

☐ Sustainer £170/US \$340/€300

☐ Sponsor £250/US \$450/€400

☐ Protector £500/US \$850/€800

☐ Guardian £1,000/US \$1,700/€1,200

☐ Partner member £30/US/\$35/€30

☐ I would like to add an additional donation of:

In addition to membership communications, I am happy for BirdLife International to keep in touch and contact me occasionally about appeals, projects and the work my membership gift is being used for via the following methods (tick all that apply):

☐ Email ☐ Post ☐ Phone ☐ No, thank you

UK taxpayers: boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 you donate. To qualify for Gift Aid you must pay UK Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the amount BirdLife International will reclaim in the tax year. Please let us know if your tax status, name or address changes.

I want to Gift Aid my donation to BirdLife International and any future donations I make or have made in the past 4 years. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Signed:

Date:

Signed:

Please return forms to Sarah Proud, BirdLife International, The David Attenborough Building, Pembroke Street, Cambridge, CB2 3QZ, UK or email [membership@birdlife.org](mailto:membership@birdlife.org). Alternatively, you can sign up online at [birdlife.org/join](http://birdlife.org/join)

A Kookaburra is perched on a dead, dark tree branch on the left side of the frame. The background is a vast, flat landscape of dead, blackened trees and shrubs under a hazy, orange-tinted sky at sunset. The sun is visible as a small orange orb on the right horizon. The title 'FROM THE ASHES' is centered in the upper half of the image, with 'FROM' and 'THE' in black and 'ASHES' in red.

# FROM THE ASHES

The Australian bushfires of late 2019 and early 2020 gave much cause for heartbreak and angst. Here are five affected bird species that give a sense of the enormous task Birdlife Australia has ahead of them

---

Cressida Stevens



T

he ferocity of the 2019-2020 Australian bushfire season and its impact on wildlife and people alike will be felt for years to come. As the fires

raged, a deluge of statistics swamped our headspace and our headlines. Over 18.6 million hectares burnt; more than 2,000 houses; one billion animals; 77 bird species and subspecies affected, with over a third of their habitat up in flames. Data are important, but it can be difficult to connect with a mass of numbers. Australia has such fantastic diversity of bird species – a result of the island's geographical isolation and the need to cope with a frequently harsh climate. In general, these birds are therefore robust, with ecology and morphology specialised to the challenges of living "down under", including seasonal fires. However, the force of these most recent fires is unprecedented, and in many cases, this high degree of specialism can present a greater risk to survival when their environment changes. Wildlife now needs human aid, to address the problems we have likely exacerbated.

BirdLife Australia and other national NGOs are working hard to undo the damage, carrying out bird translocations or providing emergency food on a species-by-species basis. But these solutions will only ever be a stopgap until that ever-more pressing, overriding danger that this event so clearly flags is addressed: climate change. The encouraging news is that Australia's birds have many conservation success stories. BirdLife Australia's Preventing Extinctions Manager, Dr Jenny Lau, remarks: "Just look at the Kangaroo Island Glossy Black-cockatoo [one of the birds featured in this article] – this subspecies would likely have been lost long ago without conservation efforts. We know what needs to be done, with the right resourcing, we can do it again." Whether it's their zany looks or radical behaviour, these birds are really worth getting to know – let's take a closer look at the 'faces' behind the figures and what the fires have meant for their survival hopes.

Visit [birdlife.org.au](https://birdlife.org.au) to find out more and show your support

Photo Dean Ingwersen/BirdLife Australia



## REGENT HONEYEATER

### ANTHOCHAERA PHRYGIA

#### THE BIRD

This Critically Endangered species is highly admired among birders for its distinctive lemon-yellow flecks that create an intricate stained-glass effect over the bird's back, wings and breast. Although they won't pass up the opportunity to snatch a tasty insect on the wing or a spider that strays too close, their main source of sustenance is the sweet nectar of blossoms, for which groups may travel hundreds of kilometres.

#### THE IMPACT

Over the past 30 years, drought and habitat loss have caused the species' population to plummet: pre-bushfire numbers were estimated to be fewer than 250 birds in the wild. For a bird already on the brink, this crisis presents another serious hit in terms of both habitat loss and food availability, since such dry weather causes the eucalyptus trees to stop producing the nectar on which Regent Honeyeaters depend.

#### THE RESPONSE

BirdLife Australia is looking to secure protection of critical breeding habitat for the Regent Honeyeater, as well as working with the government of New South Wales and Australian National University to do rapid assessments of impacts on key areas of habitat.

Photo patrickkavanagh/Flickr



## SUPERB LYREBIRD

*MENURA NOVAEHOLLANDIAE*

### THE BIRD

The Superb Lyrebird is known for its outstanding ability to mimic the sounds of its environment, whether natural or man-made, whilst flaunting its elaborate tail. The sounds of car alarms, chainsaws and even a camera shutter have all resounded convincingly from the beak of this species.

### THE IMPACT

The effect of the bushfires on this species are particularly shocking for two reasons. Firstly, as a rainforest and wet forest dweller, it has come as a big surprise to discover this bird's habitat ablaze. A warming climate has made characteristically wet biomes tinder-dry, and this habitat is not adapted to recover quickly from a burn. Secondly, with a Red List status of Least Concern, this bird has not been on the urgent agenda of BirdLife Australia, but the loss of over half of its habitat to the inferno demonstrates that no bird's future should ever be assumed secure.

### THE RESPONSE

BirdLife Australia will assess lyrebird habitat and populations to determine whether the impact warrants a change of conservation status. They will also try to identify potential "climate refuges" and priority sites for protection, then ensure they are managed to reduce threats from feral cats and foxes.

Photo Rob Kernot



## EASTERN BRISTLEBIRD

*DASYORNIS BRACHYPTERUS*

### THE BIRD

Mottled grey-brown with warm cinnamon patches on its wings, it may not be one of Australia's more showy birds but it does well to blend into its scrubby surroundings, hidden from predators as it hops covertly along the floor foraging for insects and seeds. What it perhaps lacks in bold appearance it more than makes up for with a powerful and melodious voice, making it a species more commonly heard than seen.

### THE IMPACT

The northern population lives in fire-prone habitat made up of tussocky grass and forest woodland: a huge worry, as there are possibly as few as 28 birds left here. When the bush catches fire, this bird will habitually evacuate its usual habitat and take refuge in nearby rainforest, but as the case of the lyrebird reveals, in the face of these exceptionally intense fires, this strategy is no longer always viable.

### THE RESPONSE

There is already much being done to protect this species, such as captive breeding and investigating how they can best benefit from controlled burns. In light of the fires, BirdLife Australia is seeking additional funding to increase captive breeding efforts, including the construction of new aviaries and exploring options for securing important habitat on private land.



Photo Chris Tzaros/BirdLife Australia



## GLOSSY BLACK-COCKATOO

*CALYPTORHYNCHUS LATHAMI*

### THE BIRD

If, whilst walking through the forests of Eastern Australia, you find empty seed cones of the Drooping Sheoak tree raining down from above, it's likely you're stood beneath a feeding Glossy Black-cockatoo. So absorbed are they in stripping the seeds of their favourite food tree with their sharp bills, they are often quite approachable. Their heavy dependence on this tree, also known as the casuarina, has earned them the local name 'the Casuarina Cockatoo'.

### THE IMPACT

Prior to the fires, the Kangaroo Island subspecies' population was already of high conservation concern. In the 1990s, their population numbered as few as 150 individuals, but a dedicated rescue mission managed to raise it to about 400. Now, over 75% of this population's habitat is estimated to have been wiped out by the fires along with the trees that they are so partial to, possibly undoing decades of intensive conservation action.

### THE RESPONSE

Thankfully, other associations are rallying round this bird to protect it and its habitat from further threat, allowing BirdLife Australia to dedicate support to some of the 16 other endemic subspecies on the island such as the Kangaroo Island Western Whipbird *Psophodes nigrogularis* and Shy Heathwren *Calamanthus cautus*.

Photo Laurie Boyle/Flickr



## SOUTHERN EMU-WREN

*STIPITURUS MALACHURUS*

### THE BIRD

It seems ironic that this tiny little bird, found along much of Australia's southern coastline, should be named after the country's largest bird, the Common Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae*. Its name alludes to the resemblance of its six long, wispy tail feathers to those of its gigantic cousin. Whilst both sexes possess the characteristic tail, the male's statement powder-blue eyebrows and throat allow you to distinguish him from the females.

### THE IMPACT

The population found on Kangaroo Island is thought to have lost over 80% of its habitat to the fires. This would warrant an uplisting of the Kangaroo Island sub-species *Stipiturus malachurus halmaturinus* in the South Australian state government's assessment from Near Threatened to Critically Endangered.

### THE RESPONSE

Once it was safe to do so, BirdLife Australia sent a team out to Kangaroo Island to conduct a rapid assessment of impacts, surveying both burnt and unburnt areas in order to form a recovery plan. They are also working to identify priority areas for control of feral cats and foxes, which are predators of the birds, and encouraging protection of remaining habitat.



# MEET DON JOSÉ: MR ORGANIC

In 2004, José Jarvi Bazán chose to move from intensive rice farming to a nature-friendly approach that does not use artificial chemicals. Since then, he has become a pioneer in organic rice production in Colombia and throughout Latin America

**W**hen José Jarvi Bazán started using organic production methods in 2004, he never imagined that his farm, *El Renacer* (south of Valle del Cauca in the municipality of Jamundí, Colombia), would become such a special place for bird conservation. In the beginning, his main motivation was to grow a healthier crop, as he realised that the pesticides he was using were toxic to the environment and degraded his land. Together with his wife, Nelly Lucumí, he began to produce natural agrochemicals to fight weeds and pests.

**It was not an easy process.** “At the beginning we were doing very badly: we produced hardly any rice, and we could not sell it as organic. We could only sell it from house to house because there was no trade”, says Bazán.

**Emilia Ulloa**

But thanks to the constant support of his wife and family, he persevered. Then in 2008, he met Yanira Cifuentes, a biologist at Asociación Calidris (BirdLife in Colombia) and coordinator of the “Wings of Rice” initiative, formed in 2009 by the Ramsar Convention to improve biodiversity in rice fields as artificial wetland ecosystems. That meeting became a turning point both for Bazán and for the wildlife that relied upon his land.

**“In Colombia it was known that rice paddies** attracted birds, but there was no research protocol, no monitoring or follow-up of the populations”, says Cifuentes. Finally, after years of study, Asociación Calidris discovered that waders such as the Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* and Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* actively preferred organic rice fields as their habitat.

↑ Don José  
All Photos via Asociación  
Calidris





Certifying the crop as organic required several years of hard work and compliance with strict regulations. The first step was to monitor the birds on Bazán's land. They found 300 species, of which 20 are migratory, some having travelled all the way from Canada. By then, about twelve producers in the area had joined this initiative, and both children and adults participated in the bird count.

"At the beginning we didn't know anything about the birds", recalls Bazán. "We saw them in the fields and trees, but we didn't have the knowledge. And then Calidris came to do workshops and teach the children their names and what the trees were called on our sidewalk". Soon he and his fellow producers developed a sense of pride in their land and recognised the value of what they were producing.

In 2010, **Asociación Calidris** awarded Bazán the first official "Rice Friend of Birds" seal in recognition of his perseverance and dedication. "The people of Calidris have been very supportive... once I told them that I was going to retire and they didn't let me give up", recounts Bazán with a smile.

One of the main reasons Bazán was awarded this accolade was the ingenious way he uses nature to help his crop. His farm uses trees as living barriers, preventing synthetic chemicals from other crops, which usually spread in the air, reaching his organic rice. Cifuentes adds: "They are also very important wildlife corridors for the movement of birds and other biodiversity."

➤ The rice fields provide habitat for many waders

⬆ Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

➤ Don José and his wife Nelly Lucumi never gave up on their vision

BIRD  
FACT FILE



**LESSER  
YELLOWLEGS**  
*Tringa flavipes*

**RED LIST STATUS:** Least Concern

**RANGE:** Widespread across the Americas

**THREATS:** Hunting, habitat loss, climate change

**FAST FACT:** Excellent at controlling insect pests in rice paddies

Many of the hundreds of birds that flock to the farm for food and shelter give something back in return: pest control. Birds of prey such as the Roadside Hawk *Rupornis magnirostris* help control mice, and other species such as shorebirds, flycatchers and blackbirds consume pest insects like the virulent Rice Butterfly.

At the end of 2012, Asociación Calidris and La Esmeralda Rice signed an agreement to endorse the process that Bazán had been promoting for so many years. Together, they set up *Blanquita Orgánico*, Colombia's first organic rice range, distributed under international standards. Since then, Bazán's estate has become a benchmark not only for Colombia, but for organic farming worldwide. Currently, Bazán receives visits from rice farmers and organisations as far-flung as the United States, Peru and Japan, all of whom are interested in learning about his cultivation model.

**Bazán speaks proudly** of his rice paddies and the birds that visit him at his home during each harvest. He recognises each species, knows when they will arrive and leave, and where they come from. These feathered friends and their home, *El Renacer*, have become a true treasure for him.

"The greatest benefit of all the effort I make are the birds. Now the lands are nourished, there is no longer any danger that they will be poisoned, and many people to visit us to learn what we do," concludes Bazán, with his trademark humility. ■



# A WILDLIFE HAVEN FIT FOR A GODDESS

In 2018, one of the world's largest wetlands was given support to become a National Park. We caught up with Aves Argentinas (BirdLife Partner), who have been hard at work training local communities in ecotourism and inspiring citizens to become guardians of nature

**T**wo years ago, we heard the fantastic news that Mar Chiquita, the biggest salt lake in South America and the fifth biggest in the world, would be transformed into a national park, protecting nearly a million flamingos and other shorebirds. This conservation landmark was made possible thanks to the British Birdwatching Fair, whose proceeds fund a different BirdLife conservation project each year. At the fair, the celebratory atmosphere was infectious, and even resulted in a certain BirdLife news writer dressing as a flamingo.

"Finding out that Mar Chiquita was the flagship project at Birdfair 2018 was incredible", says Andrea Filadoro of Aves Argentinas.

Jessica Law

"Through Birdfair, we were able to raise awareness to a new, international audience and generate even more opportunities for support."

"Mar Chiquita" means "Little Sea" in Spanish, and it really does act like one. Every year hundreds of thousands of migratory shorebirds congregate here, travelling both from the north, and from Patagonia in the south, to feed and breed. Overall, it hosts an astonishing 380 bird species. But for how long?

"Unregulated water extraction from nearby rivers, especially for farm irrigation, threatens to shrink or dry out the lagoon completely", says Filadoro. "Agricultural encroachment and pollution are also pressing concerns. Current regulations are insufficient, but we hope that National Park status will give us more power to create change."

## THE LEGEND OF ANSENUZA

A local fable both explains the national park's name and celebrates its flamingos. One day, Ansenusa – the beautiful, yet cruel, goddess of water – chanced upon a warrior dying in the sandy margins of her lagoon. Unexpectedly, she was entranced by his beauty. Moved by love for the first time, Ansenusa wept as the man's life expired, her torrential tears turning the lake salty. Fellow gods took pity on her and returned life to the warrior, transforming him into a beautiful, slender bird adorned with pink feathers. From that moment on, flamingos are said to have inhabited the lake.

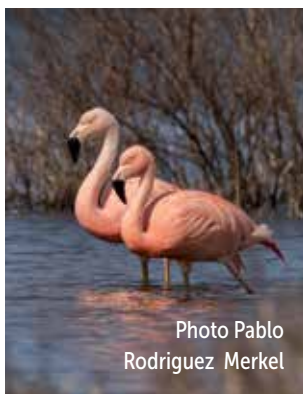


Photo Pablo Rodríguez Merkel

When it comes to protecting an entire "little sea", it can be hard to know where to start. Aves Argentinas focused on the foundation on which this whole project depends: getting local people on board. In many ways, they were on board all along: the lake is much-loved in local folklore. In fact, the protected area will be named Ansenusa National Park after a local water goddess. But with unregulated farming posing a huge threat, what other income does the area have to offer? The answer lies in the beauty and spectacle of the birds themselves.





← Chilean Flamingo  
*Phoenicopterus chilensis* flock  
Photo Pablo  
Rodríguez Merkel



Aves Argentinas started by holding talks in the eleven small towns that surround Mar Chiquita, explaining the project to local leaders and community members. They followed this up by conducting a series of courses in ecotourism, natural history and birdwatching. More than a hundred people from across the region jumped upon this opportunity, empowering themselves to seek new livelihoods that do not threaten the lake they love.

To spread the news more widely, Aves Argentinas held two press tours, sharing the wonders of the site with journalists from both national and international magazines, and building the idea of this site as a stunning ecotourism destination. They also set up a "Guardians of Nature" programme, which instructs local people to carry out surveys, conservation action and citizen science, and trained local school teachers in how to communicate nature conservation to children.

**Behind the scenes, Aves Argentinas and National Park Administration are supporting the Province of Córdoba in creating a formal plan for the National Park. To do this, they are**

↗ **Flamingos congregating at the mouth of the 'little sea'**  
Photo Gustavo Bruno

↗ **A birding boat trip on the river, organised by Aves Argentinas to promote the site as an ecotourist destination**  
Photo Andrea Filadoro

busy surveying the area and compiling vital environmental information. They are also part of the Ansenzuza Commission, made up of legal representatives, local and national governments, public and private sector organisations, rural producers, tourism agents and local conservation groups. To date, the commission has met four times, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard as the project moves forward. The next step will be to enter a bill in National Congress: a long-awaited milestone for researchers and conservationists in the region. "We recently signed a new agreement with the Secretary of Tourism. We also obtained the support of the Wyss Foundation to raise further funds for the creation of the Ansenzuza National Park", says Filadoro.

The future is looking bright, with some exciting new ideas in the pipeline. The project has been given the go-ahead to create a Natural Interpretation Centre in the town of La Para, and a scenic trail around the lake. In the coming years, local communities will continue to learn how to turn ecotourism into a business, paving the way for a new way of life where people and nature go hand-in-hand. ■

# FLOWER POWER

Flitting through the mist in Ecuador's high Andean forests, the Black-breasted Puffleg is running out of habitat. A forest restoration programme offers hope, working with local people to plant the species' favourite flowers

Emilia Ulloa



Although small, the Black-breasted Puffleg will fiercely defend flower-rich areas of forest from other hummingbirds  
Photo Luis Calapi





↑ In Alambi, the local community has planted over 4,500 plants so far  
Photo Juan Carlos Valarezo

➤ Black-breasted Puffleg  
*Eriocnemis nigrivestis*  
Photo Murray Cooper

**W**hen it comes to birdwatching, Ecuador is a lucky country. Although it occupies just 0.2% of the earth's surface, it is densely packed with biodiversity. As an example, Ecuador houses around 130 hummingbird species – that is to say, more than 35% of all the world's hummingbirds. Some of which are found nowhere else on the planet, including the Black-breasted Puffleg *Eriocnemis nigrivestis*. This Critically Endangered endemic lives 3,200–3,400 metres above sea level, amid the cold mist and drizzle of the high Andean forests. Its unique name comes from the white feathers that adorn its legs and resemble the traditional trousers of local people. This glossy, iridescent bird is truly miniscule, measuring just nine centimetres.

The species is so iconic that in June 2005, it was declared the Emblematic Bird of the Metropolitan District of Quito. The founding member of Aves y Conservación (BirdLife in Ecuador), Juan Manuel Carrión, strongly advocated for this recognition during his time as City Councillor. He stated that his intention was to “make the species visible, to attract attention in a symbolic way [...] as well as encouraging municipal participation in efforts to preserve it”.

This bird needs all the recognition it can get. Its population is estimated not to exceed 1,000 individuals, spread across just two sites. One spans the northwestern slope of the Pichincha Volcano; The other population was rediscovered in 2006 by the ornithologist Olaf Jahn in the Toisán Range, Imbabura province.

**Both populations are encroached upon** from all sides. Over 90 percent of the Black-breasted Puffleg's habitat has been severely altered or degraded, through a combination of agricultural expansion, livestock farming, logging and coal mining. Another threat is climate change: rising temperatures interfere with the flowers they feed on, and push its habitat higher up the mountainside – to the extent that one day, it will have nowhere left to go.

The interaction between hummingbirds and flowers is very special. They can visit more than 2,500 flowers in one day, and are essential pollinators for high-altitude habitats such as the Andean forests, which are too cold for most insects and bats. Aves y Conservación realised this relationship was the key to conserving the species. In 2017, they obtained funding from the Swiss Federal Research Institute (WSL) to study plant-hummingbird interactions at Pichincha.


This research, led by Prof Catherine Graham of the WSL, used camera trap technology to discover the diet of the Black-breasted Puffleg and forty other species of High Andean hummingbird. “The cameras are used to record activity at the flowers... Then we used software to analyse the information and determine the network of plant-hummingbird interactions”, said Tatiana Santander of Aves y Conservación, who has studied the species for over 20 years.

**Together with the local community** of Alambi (near Pichincha Volcano), and supported by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, they built a nursery cultivating 32 species of hummingbird-friendly flowers. This oasis of life is overseen by six local women who have propagated an astonishing 4,500 native plants to date. The plants are being used to restore degraded habitats, starting with 40 hectares of forest.

The next step is expand the project to the province of Imbabura, where Aves y Conservación is already building bonds with the local community. Preliminary research from our Young Conservation Leaders programme suggests unexplored high-altitude zones in the area may turn out to house a larger Black-breasted Puffleg population than the two we already know of.

The latest lessons will be added to the 2020 update of the Black-breasted Puffleg Action Plan, originally published by Tatiana Santander and Olaf Jahn in 2008. Meanwhile, in Alambi nursery, each flower brings with it a new opportunity for this tiny hummingbird. ■

B I R D  
F A C T F I L E



BLACK-BREASTED PUFFLEG

*Eriocnemis nigrivestis*

---

**RED LIST STATUS:**  
Critically Endangered

---

**RANGE:** Two sites in Northwest Ecuador

---

**THREATS:** Climate change, agriculture, logging, mining

---

**FAST FACT:** Builds nests using spider webs, allowing them to stretch to twice their size as the chicks grow.

# **JAPAN'S BIRD-SAFE ENERGY PLAN**

Japan is making great strides in renewable energy – good for the climate, but a risk to birds. Read how our Japanese Partner is using science and advocacy to change national decisions, ensuring this expanding sector has minimal impacts on birds and wildlife

---

**Tatsuya Ura**

Wild Bird Society of Japan



**T**o date, Japan has installed over 2,000 wind turbines across the country. While this commitment to renewable energy is great to see, it is vital that these turbines are located such that their impact on nature is minimised. The numbers suggest there is considerable room for improvement. In 2018, a study conducted by the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ – BirdLife in Japan) recorded a shocking 569 bird mortalities caused by collisions with wind turbines. As expected, most of the victims were raptors, totalling 168 fatalities including 92 Black Kites *Milvus migrans* and 58 White-tailed Sea-eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla*. Second hardest hit were gulls with 68 fatalities, then corvids with 43. This supports the hypothesis that large predators and scavengers are at particularly high risk of collision because of their feeding behaviour. By necessity, they fly with their heads down, surveying the land beneath them for food – oblivious to obstacles ahead of them.

Two-thirds of these fatalities were discovered through government surveys, with the rest reported by passers-by. Further discoveries of the devastating effect of wind farms on species such as Grey-faced Buzzard *Butastur indicus*, Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, Japanese Buzzard *Buteo japonicus*, Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* and Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus* were discovered through WBSJ's additional radar surveys.

**The danger is clear to see** – and there are even more wind farms being constructed today, both on land and out to sea. Migratory birds are particularly threatened by such structures as they often travel in large flocks along set routes. Any obstacles blocking their flight paths will not only cause fatalities, but may force them to burn crucial energy reserves diverting their route, or abandon much-needed rest stops altogether.

But slowly, the scene is changing. Since 2005, the WBSJ has been collecting information on the impact of wind farms, both from overseas and within Japan. They have used this important information to advocate for change, passing on the data to governments, industry and Japanese nature conservation groups. As a result of this advocacy, in 2012 the Ministry of the Environment (MoE) made it a legal requirement



to perform environmental impact assessments on all planned wind farms with large outputs.

Since 2010, the WBSJ has also been working with the private sector to influence the location of offshore wind farms at the planning stage, ensuring they do not obstruct migratory flyways or important bird habitats. They have also been helping the New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization to create guidelines on environmental impact assessments for offshore wind farms. Similar guidelines have also been taken up by the MoE.

**In 2015, WBSJ** was inspired by BirdLife International's Sensitivity Mapping Tool for migratory soaring birds in the rift valley. This resource maps out areas of high risk to birds, including migratory flight paths and Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas, informing businesses and governments on where – and where not – to locate wind farms. Following this model, WBSJ developed a sensitivity map for wind farms in northern Hokkaido. Then they passed on this successful technique to the MoE, who are now working on rolling it out nationally.

The challenge is ongoing, and does not just extend to wind farms. Both government and the private sector are planning new, heavyweight power lines carrying electricity from wind farms in northern Japan. Power lines, like wind farms, are a big collision risk for large birds such as cormorants, swans and cranes. In preparation, WBSJ is advocating for the inclusion of power lines in environmental impact assessment laws. As renewable energy expands, WBSJ is there every step of the way, working with key players to ensure the industry becomes safe for birds, both now and into the future. ■

↑ Raptors like the White-tailed Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* are particularly threatened by wind turbines, as they look down while hunting  
Photo Yathin S Krishnappa

## Planned wind farms with large outputs must now factor their environmental impact



# A REFUGE AMONG THE REFUSE

If you wanted to see 6,000 Endangered eagles, a rubbish dump might not be the first place you'd think of looking. But conservationists in Saudi Arabia are working to make these unlikely havens safe for the birds that call them home

**N**owadays, it is incredibly rare and mesmerising to catch a glimpse of the majestic Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*. This large, strong bird of prey used to be a common sight in many countries, but has been tragically declining since 1997 – largely due to habitat loss – and since 2015 the species has been listed as Endangered. However, earlier this year, a few lucky conservationists got a sighting they didn't expect when they found around 6,700 Steppe Eagles at two rubbish dumps near Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, scavenging on animal carcasses.

The adventure started when a team from the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) noticed that a large number of satellite-tagged Steppe Eagles were showing up near the town of Shaqra in central Saudi Arabia. Curious, ESO

**Dima Obeidat**

↑ In its natural habitat, the Steppe Eagle feasts on small mammals and birds. Nowadays, the conversion of steppe grassland to agriculture has forced it to find food elsewhere  
Photo RSCN

reached out to birders in Saudi Arabia asking for their help. Mischa Keijmel, Technical Manager at an engineering firm, happily obliged.

When the new recruit embarked on this journey, he had no idea of the bonanza he was about to stumble upon. He visited two rubbish dumps, one located about nine kilometres from the town of Shaqra, and another six and a half kilometres southwest of the town of Ushaiqer. Upon his arrival at the first dump, he noticed many eagles standing on pylons – posing a direct risk of electrocution. Keijmel described the surroundings as “slightly undulating, barren plains covered with small rocks and devoid of vegetation” – an unlikely wildlife haven.

“In this landscape, observations of large birds such as eagles can be made over several kilometres” says Keijmel, describing how he was



Eagles like to perch on pylons – which pose a risk of electrocution  
Photo RSCN



Researchers studied regurgitated “pellets” of undigested food to learn about the eagles’ diet.  
Photo RSCN

able to get an accurate estimate of the number of eagles.

**The final evaluation confirmed up to 6,000** Steppe Eagles at Ushaiqer alone, 60-70% of which were adults, and the rest juveniles. A further 1,200 were found at Shaqra. This is the largest gathering of this globally threatened species ever recorded anywhere in the world, and accounts for approximately 4.5-9% of the estimated global population.

As luck would have it, at the same time an international team from the Egyptian Vulture New LIFE project, including the Saudi Wildlife Authority (SWA), BirdLife’s Middle East office, BSPB (BirdLife in Bulgaria), and the RSCN (BirdLife in Jordan), was in the region to survey threats to the Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* (Endangered) and other birds of prey. Hearing about this latest discovery, they added the Steppe Eagle to their priority list.

Their research highlighted electrocution and collision with power lines as serious threats. Fifteen dead Steppe Eagles were found along

#### BIRD FACTFILE



#### STEPPE EAGLE *Aquila nipalensis*

**RED LIST STATUS:**  
Endangered

**RANGE:** Eastern Europe, Central Asia, parts of Africa

**THREATS:** Loss of steppe habitat, hunting, collision with power lines and wind turbines

**FAST FACT:** Appears on the Egyptian flag as the national bird of Egypt

just two kilometres of power line at the entrance of the dump in Ushaiqer, and several dozen more were found along four kilometres of power line near a third dump at Al Qunfudhah city. Under some of the killer poles, the remains of seven or eight individuals were found. Black Kites *Milvus migrans*, Booted Eagles *Hieraaetus pennatus*, Corncrakes *Crex crex* and other bird species were also found among the victims.

Furthermore, based on interviews with local people, the research team found that poisoned bait is commonly used to control predators such as feral dogs, wolves and hyenas. As if this wasn’t dangerous enough, drugs like diclofenac – a painkiller for livestock, but toxic to vultures and eagles – were widespread in almost every veterinary pharmacy visited by researchers. Since local people traditionally dispose of deceased livestock out in nature, this poses a serious threat to scavengers.

“Despite the surprise of finding such a high concentration of eagles, and the research being impromptu rather than planned, I think we all believe that electrocution and poisoning events could be killing a large number of eagles, as such events have been seen in other locations”, says Mike McGrady, a researcher for ESO.

However, despite these serious threats, there are also great opportunities for conservation and birdwatching – especially since such a huge concentration of eagles has the potential to generate popular interest in these areas. In November 2019, just after the expedition, the results were presented at an international workshop about Birds and Energy hosted by SWA in Riyadh. All attendees expressed their concern and agreed on the need for urgent actions to prevent further electrocution incidents, especially at major congregation sites.

“These findings highlight the utility of satellite tracking in discovering important sites for birds, and the benefits of international collaboration to identify and mitigate threats to migratory birds”, says Professor Mohammed Shobrak from SWA. ■



Fifteen dead Steppe Eagles were found along just two kilometres of power line  
Photo RSCN

# CROSSING THE GULF

One of Asia's most important shorebird sanctuaries has just quadrupled in size thanks to years of advocacy from our Partner in Myanmar. Read how they made the connection between insight and action to help birds and the people who live alongside them

**T**wenty years ago, few conservationists knew about the Gulf of Mottama and the secrets hidden within its complex coastline.

Its location in southern Myanmar is, like many parts of the country, rugged and difficult to access. However, in the early 2010s, everything changed when surveys lead by BANCA (BirdLife in Myanmar) and international experts from the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force revealed more than 200 Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Calidris pygmaea* overwintering there – fifty percent of the world's dwindling population. This makes the Gulf of Mottama the region's single most important site for this Critically Endangered wader.

Alongside the affectionately-titled "Spoonie", the Gulf boasts some of the largest congregations of shorebirds in Southeast Asia, with over 90,000 birds overwintering here annually. These include significant numbers of imperilled species such as the Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Bar-tailed Godwit

**Ding Li Yong**

*Limosa lapponica* (both Near Threatened), and the Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* (Endangered).

It's no wonder these species want to spend the winter here: the Gulf of Mottama is a vast wetland of great diversity. It sits near the mouths of two of Myanmar's most important rivers: the Sittaung, which drains from the hills to the north, and the mighty Salween, which spills into the Gulf from the east at the town of Mawlamyine. On the eastern fringe, near the village of Thein Ngu, are the forested hills of Kelatha. The coastline between Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, and Mawlamyine contains some of the least-disturbed coastal mudflats and salt marshes in Southeast Asia.

Quenched daily by a tidal bore sweeping up from the Andaman Sea, the Gulf's wetlands are extremely dynamic, with mud islands rising and vanishing in as little as a month. At low tide, the vast mudflats protrude for kilometres out to sea, dotted with thousands of shorebirds including flocks of curlews, godwits and more.

▼ Spoon-billed Sandpiper  
*Calidris pygmaea*  
Photo Shutterstock

▼ Gulf of Mottama  
Photo Ding Li Yong





Armed with this knowledge, BANCA and their collaborators went straight to work to secure the protection of this precious landscape. BANCA staff worked closely with local people, who were found to be hunting shorebirds in substantial numbers, putting the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other declining species at risk. By offering seed funding for assets such as livestock, building materials and fishing boats, they empowered local people to explore alternative livelihoods, weaning them off the need to hunt wild birds. BANCA also worked closely with the local government and village leaders to involve them in the site's protection, forming Local Conservation Groups of enthusiastic community members.

**In 2017, through dedicated advocacy** from BANCA and allied NGOs, the Myanmar Government declared about 40,000 hectares of in the eastern side of the Gulf of Mottama as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar convention – thus setting the momentum for more conservation activity in the region.

The establishment of the eastern Gulf as a Ramsar Site was not only a major breakthrough, but also provided the

impetus for the less-surveyed western site of the Gulf to be considered for conservation. After another two years of consultation with local stakeholders, early this year the Myanmar Government finalised the extension of the Gulf of Mottama Ramsar Site, quadrupling the area to 161,030 hectares, and extending it into the Bago and Yangon regions.

This is a major step forward in wetland conservation in Myanmar and Southeast Asia as a whole. It protects a vast area of coastline from harmful development, while providing a framework for stronger conservation action and engagement with local communities. The gulf is now one of the largest Ramsar sites in Southeast Asia, a region where there are still large gaps in wetland conservation. Because the gulf's western coast is one of the least-surveyed areas in the region, it has bought more time for conservationists to gain a better understanding of how shorebirds are distributed, and how to engage townspeople as effectively as possible.

BANCA's work to conserve the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is also earning dividends for other species, not to mention wetlands in general. Local fisheries are now better-managed, and other threatened shorebirds benefit from action to save "Spoonie", thus protecting one of the finest coastal landscapes for migratory waterbirds in all of Southeast Asia. Most of all, work to conserve the Gulf of Mottama will secure the vital ecosystem services – such as clean water, climate regulation and flood prevention – that Myanmar's coastal communities will rely on for generations to come. ■



Fishermen working on  
the Gulf of Mottama  
Photo BANCA





# INNER CITY WILDLIFE

Larger-than-life paintings of more than one hundred bird species threatened by climate change have been wowing residents and spreading awareness in Harlem, New York. The project is set to cross the Atlantic to Europe, bringing with it the power to reconnect city-dwellers with nature





(L-R:) Black-throated Green Warbler, Palm Warbler, Painted Redstart, Cape May Warbler, Golden-cheeked Warbler  
by George-Boorujy  
Photo Mike Fernandez

**S**ometimes, it's great writing that captures people's attentions. Other times, a rousing speech is what's needed to spur people into action. And occasionally, the only thing that can make busy people stop in their tracks and take notice is the towering image of a beautiful bird staring out at them from the side of a building.

In the modern age, fewer and fewer people experience nature in their

everyday lives – especially if they live in cities. 'Nature Deficit Disorder' is a growing concern, especially among young people: one US study found that the percentage of children who spend time outdoors every day has dropped from 76% to 26% in just one generation. This disconnect isn't just bad for our physical and mental health – it also deeply affects our relationships with the natural world. Research also shows that experiences in nature can make people

more willing to support conservation causes. Conversely, in the words of the 'godfather of conservation' Sir David Attenborough himself: "No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced."

To combat this, Audubon (BirdLife in the US) has been bringing birds into the cities, giving brown brick and grey concrete a splash of colour and beauty in the form of the Audubon





Cerulean Warbler by Tom Sanford  
Photo Mike Fernandez



Bald Eagle by Peter Daverington  
Photo Camilla Cerea



Pinyon Jay by Mary-Lacy  
Photo Mike Fernandez

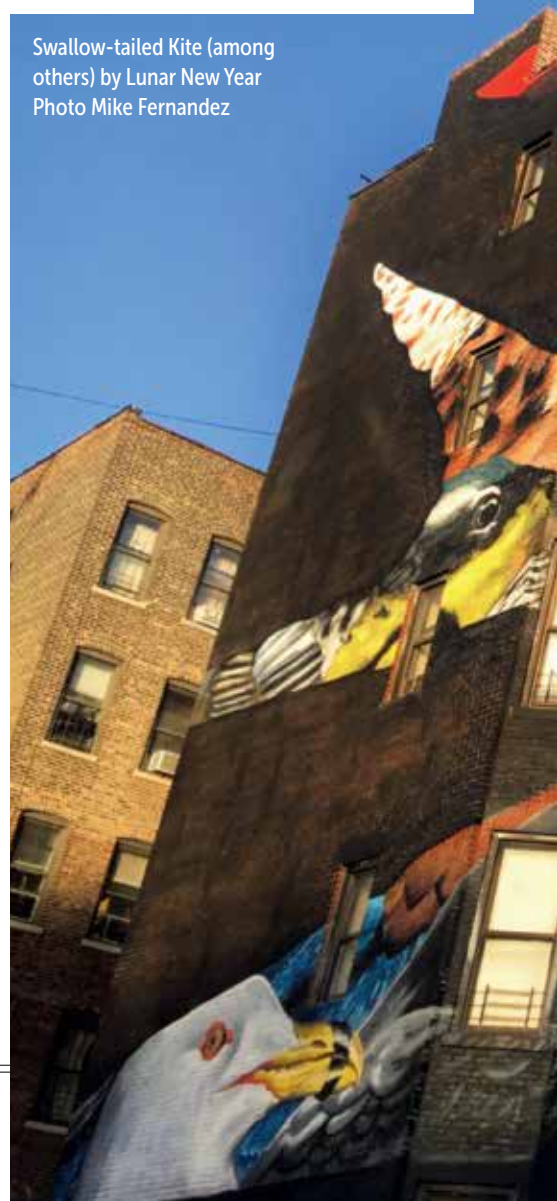
Mural Project. To date, artists have emblazoned larger-than-life images of more than 100 North American species across the Harlem district of New York City: the former neighbourhood of eminent ornithologist and our Partner's founder, John James Audubon. As well as harking back to the stunning illustrations that Audubon himself painted in the 19th century, these visual delights also have a deeper message: each of the species featured is directly threatened by climate change. For example, a warming climate will put the Cerulean Warbler *Setophaga cerulea* (Near Threatened) at much greater risk of wildfires in its forest habitat, according to Audubon's latest 2019 climate report, *Survival by Degrees*. Ultimately, the project aims to create murals of all 314 North American bird species found to be threatened by global temperature rise in Audubon's 2014 *Birds and Climate Change* report.

The murals are already beginning to have an impact. In an interview on the Audubon website, graffiti artist ATM recounts: "Literally every time I was painting, people were stopping and saying really nice things about how much they liked it, and how much they appreciated the improvement to the neighbourhood."

In addition to providing a visual treat, they're also succeeding in getting people thinking about conservation. After observing George Boorujy's murals in Washington Heights, long-time resident Aida Rojas told Audubon: "Some of the most beautiful things created on this Earth have the weakness of not being able to defend themselves. I hope that each one of these birds has the opportunity to live on and express their beauty."

But it's not just North America's birds that are threatened by climate change. And it's not just New York City residents that are disconnected from nature. Before the coronavirus pandemic hit Europe, the intention was for the project to spread its wings to France: our French Partner, LPO, is helping Audubon and COAL, an arts and environmental non-profit, to highlight European species equally threatened by climate change across ten countries. The project was scheduled to launch this April in the Loire-Atlantique region, where John James Audubon grew up, followed by murals across France. The timeline from here is obviously unclear. But when normality finally does return to the streets of France's cities, what better way to celebrate than a splash of avian flair on brickwork? ■

Swallow-tailed Kite (among others) by Lunar New Year  
Photo Mike Fernandez







Williamson's Sapsucker by ATM  
Photo Hillary Eggers



Evening Grosbeak, Black-headed  
Grosbeak by Ouizi  
Photo Mike Fernandez







## HOT OFF THE PRESS

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

### HIGHLIGHTS

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD HOME FOR THE NORTHERN BALD IBIS?

**Y**ou may remember this unmistakable ibis from the cover of this magazine back in January 2019. Back then, we were celebrating the news that its status had improved from Critically Endangered to Endangered in our yearly update to the Red List, thanks to decades of conservation effort. If we want its star to continue to rise, however, we need to know the exact conditions it requires to breed. Not wanting to do anything by halves, researchers analysed the ecological conditions of all 72 Moroccan breeding sites used by the species since 1900. The team measured factors such as altitude, climate and terrain, as well as making resourceful use of Google Earth satellite images to determine land use, vegetation and distance from human settlements. Two elements emerged as the most important factors: low levels of disturbance, and adequate feeding grounds within 5-15 kilometres. This is important knowledge for any future translocation projects for this species, which currently inhabits only three breeding sites in Morocco. ■



Northern Bald Ibis  
*Geronticus eremita*  
Photo via Flickr



## NEPAL'S CRITICALLY ENDANGERED VULTURES ARE STARTING TO RECOVER

**F**antastic news for the White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* and Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris*, whose populations have finally started to recover after huge declines. This is encouraging proof that Nepal's Vulture Safe Zones (VSZs) are working. The VSZ initiative uses awareness-raising and advocacy to end the sale of diclofenac – a painkiller for livestock, but deadly to vultures that scavenge their carcasses. Surveys show that White-rumped Vulture numbers have begun to increase since 2013, and Slender-billed Vultures since 2012. Undercover investigations in pharmacies show that sales of diclofenac (outlawed in 2006) had also been successfully phased out around this time. This demonstrates that community engagement – combined with the provision of safe, non-toxic food – has the potential to help prevent vulture extinctions. ■



White-rumped Vulture  
*Geronticus eremita*  
Photo Deepak Sankat

### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

➤ Vulture declines, threats and conservation: the attitude of the indigenous Ghanaian

➤ Land and sea-based observations and first satellite tracking results support a New Ireland breeding site for the Becks Petrel *Psuedobulweria beckii* (Critically Endangered)

➤ Congo Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus* densities in oil palm plantation, agroforestry mosaic and protected forest in Southwest Cameroon

AND MUCH MORE...



Southern Festive Amazon *Amazona festiva*  
Photo Cláudio Dias Timm

## GOVERNMENT DAM PLAN THREATENS AMAZON BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

**R**io Branco, a tributary of the Amazon River, is a beautiful and truly unique natural spectacle. Upriver, crystal-clear water cascades through rapids, fringed with dense forest. Further down, its waters meander lazily across the Amazon floodplain. On its journey to the ocean, it supports a stunning diversity of species and habitats. Tragically, government plans to build a major hydroelectric dam on the river could permanently flood the area, destroying these ecosystems forever. 15 years of ornithological research shows that at least 439 bird species inhabit the zone, many of them rare and specialised. These include 23 species of global conservation concern – important information for campaigns to prevent this devastating development from going ahead. ■

GET THE LATEST UPDATES STRAIGHT TO YOUR INBOX AT:

**WWW.CAMBRIDGE.ORG/BCI/SUBSCRIBE**

FOLLOW THE LATEST ADVANCES IN OUR RESEARCH ON TWITTER: @BCI\_JOURNAL



# New research shows sustainable fishing and conservation can coexist



In the sub-Antarctic, intrepid expeditions and satellite tracking data have pinpointed important feeding and breeding zones for seabirds and seals. This valuable information has minimised the overlap between fisheries and wildlife, reports our Marine Team's **Jono Handley**

## Why is it so important to regulate fishing in our oceans?

Well-regulated fisheries are critical for providing long-term food security for people, long-term employment for fishers and related industries, and for conserving species such as seabirds and seals which often rely on the same habitats and resources used by fisheries. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are marine sites where human activity such as fishing can be regulated. MPAs can range from strict no-fishing zones, to sites where the sustainable take is allowed.

## How did you pinpoint the most important sites to safeguard?

Managing an MPA is no simple task, especially the one our project focused on, which extends 370 km beyond the coastlines of various South Atlantic islands. Our project set out to pinpoint the most vital spots to protect within this vast expanse, in order to guide the governance of the region. Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) have played a major role in identifying critical sites for seabirds. Nowadays, Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) – of which IBAs are the major subset – can also inform which sites are required for the persistence of species. We used the KBA system to pinpoint the most vital areas to protect in the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands MPA: a key region for several species of albatrosses, petrels and penguins, among other wildlife.



Macaroni Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus*  
Photo Oli Prince

## What are the challenges in governing Marine Protected Areas?

These include enforcing regulations, maintaining relevant policies and legislation, providing evidence to show the MPA is achieving its desired goals, and acquiring and maintaining sufficient funding to manage the area.

## Tell us about some of the major conservation victories achieved through the project...

The results showed that, through robust planning, both in space and time, the MPA effectively protects important feeding sites at sea – at the appropriate times of year. Furthermore, evidence from the study contributed towards a two-month extension to the temporal closure of the krill fishery throughout the entire MPA – meaning that for several months over the critical breeding period, animals have a near-

zero chance of competing directly for food with krill fishing vessels when foraging around the islands.

## What lessons from this project can we apply in a global context?

Identifying KBAs is a useful platform to inform decisions regarding the management of species and the habitats they use. However, we must also recognise the connection between sites. Species studied in this project do not only use the area within the MPA: they use vast areas of ocean and still face several challenges at sea both from direct competition with people, and as a likely consequence of the changing climate. ■

*Evaluating the effectiveness of a large multi-use MPA in protecting key biodiversity areas for marine predators* is published in *Diversity and Distributions*.



**Blue Sky<sup>TM</sup>  
Wildlife**

*Unique Global  
Wildlife Experiences*

An alternative way to search  
[www.blueskywildlife.com](http://www.blueskywildlife.com)



Connect with local wildlife specialists to book your next

# wildlife tour & ecotourism holiday

directly making it better for them and their local economy

- Over 400 unique wildlife tours on offer
- 70 local wildlife specialists listed and growing
- 38 destinations worldwide
- Read independent Wildlife Reviews
- Search for tours by species name
- Tours available throughout the year
- Supporting grass roots conservation initiatives
- Special offers also available

**100% Traveller Protection\***



\* Only for travellers who are contracted to and have paid Blue Sky Wildlife. Refer to: <https://www.blueskywildlife.com/booking-terms>

Proud to be recognised as a



supporting





MERLIN  
BIRD ID



dG  
MAMMALS



BY APPOINTMENT TO  
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II  
SWAROVSKI OPTIK  
SUPPLIER OF BINOCULARS

# dG DIGITAL GUIDE STAY CURIOUS

The first optical device with  
digital animal identification.

SEE *THE* UNSEEN



SWAROVSKI  
OPTIK