



Like its predecessor, *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status* assesses the conservation status of all wild birds in Europe, by examining their population sizes and trends over the whole continent. Its aim is to help conservation actions to be directed to those species most in need of them—Species of European Conservation Concern, or SPECs.

The coverage is truly pan-European, from Greenland in the west to the Urals in the east, and from Svalbard in the north to the Canary Islands in the south. Thanks to increased political stability in the Balkans and the Caucasus, data have been collected from these areas too, meaning that all European countries have been covered for the first time.

As before, the data were collected by an army of thousands of ornithologists and volunteers, and supplied via a network of national co-ordinators. For each species,

national data were gathered on breeding population sizes and trends—and where available winter populations too—during 1990–2000. In total, some 14,000 population/trend records were received and used to reassess each species's conservation status in Europe, according to revised criteria developed to identify SPECs. This process included the first regional application of the IUCN Red List Criteria, and also took into account each species's global threat status and the proportion of its global population occurring in Europe.

Of the 524 species assessed, 226 (43%) were found to have an unfavourable conservation status in Europe. This compares to 38% in 1994. Sixty-seven of these species meet the IUCN Red List Criteria at a regional scale, and thus have a relatively high risk of extinction in Europe. Others qualify as SPECs because they are undergoing moderate declines, are rare or localised, or remain heavily depleted following declines suffered during 1970–1990.

However, it is not all bad news. Fourteen species have recovered and now have a favourable conservation status in Europe. They include the Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, whose recovery illustrates the benefits of targeted conservation action. Many species of global conservation concern are also increasing in Europe, thanks to the effective implementation of species action plans over the past decade. They include species like Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira* and Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*. It will



Agricultural intensification is blamed for declines of many farmland species, like the Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*. Although relatively stable in central and eastern Europe, populations in the north-west underwent moderate declines, and the large population in Turkey also suffered losses

(Simon Stirrup)

**Opposite:** Between a half and three-quarters of all Great Snipe *Gallinago media* occur in Europe. Following large declines in the 1970s and 1980s, the species fared slightly better during the 1990s, but continued to decline in its Russian stronghold, largely as a result of the destruction and deterioration of its nesting habitats. It is one of 40 species of global conservation concern found in Europe

(Simon Stirrup)

Overall, 45 species in Europe deteriorated in conservation status from favourable to unfavourable between the two BirdLife assessments. They include birds like the Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, which has declined by more than 10% over the last decade, mainly though drainage of its wetland habitats

(Simon Stirrup)



take time before these species can be reclassified, but progress to date indicates that co-operative actions that are planned well and funded adequately can indeed reverse declines and restore species to a more favourable status.

Of the 129 species that declined significantly during 1970–1990, 79 (61%) continued to decline during the 1990s, including many farmland birds, waders and raptors. Their plight is particularly worrying—and they have now been joined by 35 declining species formerly considered to have a favourable conservation status in Europe. These include many long-distance migrants and several waterbirds, but also some of Europe’s most familiar species, such as House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* and Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*.

Worldwide these are sobering facts, especially when one considers that governments have pledged to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010, and the European Union is committed to halting this loss completely. For birds, assessing whether this happens is perfectly possible—provided that there is adequate support for monitoring schemes.

Halting current losses requires the

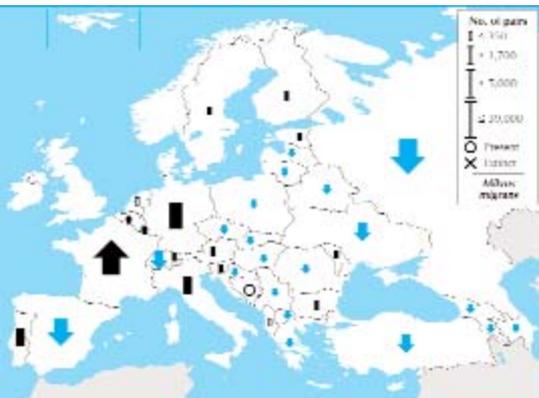
urgent development and implementation of conservation strategies aimed at protecting species, sites and habitats. The time left to meet these targets is short, but Europe already benefits from some of the finest biodiversity conservation legislation in the world. The EU Wild Birds Directive, the Bern Convention and the Convention on Migratory Species were all landmarks when they were adopted 25 years ago. Yet, as this latest assessment demonstrates, many challenges remain to achieve this target over the next few years.

The message from *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status* is clear—birds continue to be threatened by widespread environmental change, and many populations are now in deeper trouble than a decade ago. Given that birds are excellent environmental indicators, the ongoing decline of so many species sends clear signals about the state of European biodiversity and the health of our wider environment. Action must be taken immediately—not only to stop the continuing loss of Europe’s once rich and abundant avifauna, but also to show serious commitment to halting biodiversity loss by 2010.



Above: The Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* is one of 14 species whose conservation status has improved from unfavourable to favourable since the previous assessment of European birds. Around 3 million pairs breed in Europe, and the species has increased dramatically in recent years, possibly due to a series of mild winters

(Chris Gomersall/RSPB-Images)



Left: The Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, a breeding summer visitor to Europe, is one of 32 species in the region that underwent a rapid decline of more than 30% over the last ten years or three generations. As the map shows, numbers of this species declined across almost all of eastern and central Europe during 1990–2000. Similar maps accompany each species account in the new book, using a system of bars and arrows to indicate national population sizes and trends over the last decade (Alejandro Torés Sánchez)



One of Europe’s endemic birds is the Azores Bullfinch *Pyrrhula murina*, a species confined to São Miguel island in the Azores, Portugal, with a total population of around 240 individuals (Simon Cook)