

# Call for action for Irish birds

21 October 2008

A new report published by RSPB Northern Ireland and Birdwatch Ireland has identified alarming declines in a number of bird populations across the island of Ireland. Of 199 species assessed, 25 have been allocated to the '**Red List**', which names bird populations that require urgent action to secure their future on the island.

The wildlife organisations have published the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland: 2008-2013 in the scientific journal *Irish Birds*, their second review of the state of native bird populations across the island of Ireland (the first was published in 1999). The '*traffic light*' system makes it easy to identify those birds most in need of conservation action.

Using information collected by professionals and amateur birdwatchers, scientists from the two organisations have allocated bird species to **Red**, **Amber** or **Green Lists**. The '**Red List**' includes bird populations that have declined by over 50 per cent and those that are threatened across the world.

**The report shows that 11 species have been added to the Red List since the review in 1999:**

- The sooty and Balearic shearwaters have been added because these birds are of global conservation concern, and the Balearic shearwater is considered to be Critically Endangered – the highest level of extinction threat.
- The populations of Bewick's swan, pintail, shoveler, and knot wintering across Ireland have declined by more than half during the last 25 years. The reduction in the number of these species wintering in Ireland has been linked to climate change.
- Golden eagle has been added to the Red List because it is now re-established as a breeding bird following its historical decline and extinction in Ireland.
- The nesting populations of golden plover, redshank, black-headed gull and herring gull have all declined by more than half over the last 25 years.

**Four species have been removed from the Red List, proving the value of conservation work:**

- The populations of both hen harrier and roseate tern have increased following past declines. Both of these species appear on the UK Red List.
- The all-island population of chough is stable or increasing.
- Sadly, the corn bunting has been removed from the list because the species is now extinct across Ireland. It has not nested in Ireland since 1992.

## **Must redouble our efforts**

**Dr James Robinson** from the RSPB, a co-author of the report, said: *'This report confirms that we must redouble our efforts to secure the future for many of our most threatened birds. Most of the birds that appear on the 'Red List' have suffered from long-term changes to or loss of the habitats they need to survive.*

*'However, for some migratory birds, we believe milder winters on the continent are reducing the numbers that visit the island of Ireland in the colder months of the year. This is the first time that changes in climate have been identified as a factor leading to appearance on the 'Red List'.*

**Dr. Stephen Newton**, co-author of the report from BirdWatch Ireland, added: *'Since our last report in 1999, the situation has worsened for many of Ireland's birds. Twenty-five species are now allocated to the Red List, with seven added in the time since 1999. We will lose many of these birds from our shores if concerted and immediate action is not taken. It is only a few short years since the corn bunting went extinct as a breeding species here. Many others are now in danger of following suit.'*

*'Of particular concern are our seabirds, migratory waterfowl, and farmland birds. Iconic species such as the barn owl, corncrake, curlew and yellowhammer all face an uncertain future. However, action to help many of these birds is being put in place by BirdWatch Ireland, the RSPB and government agencies. We believe that by working together across this island, the problems faced by our most threatened birds can be overcome to allow recovery.'*

The news is not all bad. Both the roseate tern and hen harrier have moved from the '**Red List**' to the '**Amber List**', demonstrating that nature conservation can work. Both species have benefited from the work of RSPB Northern Ireland, BirdWatch Ireland and the government bodies that are charged with protecting our environment. Others, such as the corncrake and yellowhammer, should follow suit as work continues to improve their fortunes.

Essential

**Dr. Michael Meharg**, from the *Northern Ireland Environment Agency*, said: *'The publication of the new lists will help the NIEA to identify those species that need our help the most. It is essential that conservation organisations within and outside of the government in Northern Ireland now refocus their efforts to help shortening the Red List, improving the future for our wild birds.'*

**Dr. David Tierney** from the *National Parks and Wildlife Service* added: *'NPWS welcomes the news that both hen harrier and roseate tern have moved from Red to Amber indicating just how effective targeted conservation measures can improve the conservation status of some of Ireland's most threatened birds.'*

*'This list brings into sharp focus those birds that require further research and conservation measures in order to ensure that they remain part of the Irish countryside.'*

**The 25 Red List species for the island of Ireland are:**

Sooty shearwater;  
Balearic shearwater;  
Black-necked grebe;  
Bewick's swan;  
Pintail;  
Shoveler;  
Common scoter;  
Golden eagle;  
Red grouse;  
Grey partridge;  
Quail;  
Corncrake;  
Knot;  
Golden plover;  
Lapwing;  
Curlew;  
Redshank;  
Red-necked phalarope;

Black-headed gull;  
Herring gull;  
Barn owl;  
Nightjar;  
Ring ouzel;  
Twite;  
and Yellowhammer.

**The Amber List (Ireland) – medium conservation concern**

'Amber-list species are those with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe; those whose population or range has declined moderately in recent years; those whose population has declined historically but made a substantial recent recovery; rare breeders; and those with internationally important or localised populations.'

Red-throated Diver  
Dunlin  
Black-throated Diver  
Jack Snipe  
Great Crested Grebe  
Snipe  
Cory's Shearwater  
Woodcock  
Sooty Shearwater  
Black-tailed Godwit  
Manx Shearwater  
Bar-tailed Godwit  
Storm Petrel  
Redshank  
Leach's Petrel  
Little Gull  
Gannet  
Mediterranean Gull  
Cormorant  
Black-headed Gull  
Little Egret  
Common Gull  
Bewick's Swan  
Sandwich Tern  
Whooper Swan  
Common Tern  
White-fronted Goose  
Arctic Tern  
Greylag Goose  
Little Tern  
Brent Goose  
Guillemot  
Shelduck  
Razorbill  
Wigeon  
Black Guillemot  
Gadwall  
Puffin  
Teal  
Stock Dove

Pintail  
Cuckoo  
Garganey  
Short-eared Owl  
Pochard  
Kingfisher  
Tufted Duck  
Skylark  
Scaup  
Sand Martin  
Eider  
Swallow  
Goldeneye  
Yellow Wagtail  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Redstart  
Goodander  
Whinchat  
Goshawk  
Stonechat  
Merlin Grasshopper  
Warbler  
Peregrine  
Reed Warbler  
Water Rail  
Lesser Whitethroat  
Spotted Crake  
Wood Warbler  
Coot  
Spotted Flycatcher  
Golden Plover  
Pied Flycatcher  
Grey Plover  
Redpoll  
Knot

- • • **Birdwatch Ireland** -  
<http://www.birdwatchireland.ie/>
- • • **Bird Web - Bird Survey & You** -  
<http://www.bto.org/birdweb/index.htm>
- • • **British Trust for Ornithology** -  
<http://www.bto.org/>
- • • **The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds** -  
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/>

## Mapping Ireland's birds – can you help to plug the gaps?

From 1 November, over 1,500 Irish birdwatchers will start fieldwork for the second year of the Bird Atlas project, building upon the successes of the first year.

But Brian Caffrey, Irish Atlas Coordinator is appealing for more help this winter. *“We need more pairs of eyes this year to help us map Ireland's birds and everyone can take part. Seeing species such as Kingfisher, Barn Owl, Kestrel or Goldfinch brightens a day's birdwatching – and these are exactly the sorts of records we want to know about.”*

Bird Atlas 2007-11 will map the distribution and relative abundance of birds in Britain and Ireland during the breeding season (April – July) and winter season (November to February). Already, exciting changes in patterns of distribution are emerging for a number of species in both winter and breeding seasons. The Buzzard population has exploded southward while the number of Little Egrets are steadily increasing and spreading north. Birds like the Kingfisher are present across much of Ireland but they can easily be missed. Anyone who sees a Kingfisher or any other species from 1 November can send in a record online or on paper and contribute to the Atlas. The provisional map from the first winter shows very few Kingfishers recorded in many counties across Ireland – have they been under-recorded or are they not there anymore? Help us to discover the answer.

Brian Caffrey commented *“The first winter went really well and we hope many more people will get involved again this year. Not alone will you have great fun taking part in the Atlas but your contribution will also help to safeguard the future of Ireland's birds.”*

*More details can be found on the website [www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net) or by requesting a form from BirdWatch Ireland. The Bird Atlas project is supported by the Heritage Council, National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.*

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