

# Research reveals successes of EU Birds Directive

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The renowned journal *Science* has published a BirdLife International [1] analysis showing that the European Union's Birds Directive [2] has made a significant difference in protecting many of the continent's most threatened birds from further decline. [3]

The groundbreaking paper shows that the Birds Directive has clearly helped those species considered to be most at risk, partly through the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The Birds Directive was adopted in 1979 and now binding law for all EU countries, it requires special conservation measures for a number of listed species.

Importantly, today's research, taking into account the fifteen Member States for which sufficient data were available, showed that the populations of threatened birds not only fared better, on average, than other bird species in the European Union, but also that the same species perform better within the EU than in European countries outside. [4].

Dr Paul Donald, the paper's senior author from the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) said: "*For over 25 years, the Birds Directive has helped provide proper protection for those bird species facing the greatest threats. Today we can reveal that this protection has apparently worked.*"

*"Europe has a world class conservation law and there is no excuse any more for delayed action."* —Konstantin Kreiser, EU Policy Manager, BirdLife European Division

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti* are prominent examples of this success: without the Birds Directive and the efforts of governments and conservationists to implement it on the ground, these birds would now face a much bleaker future.

BirdLife hopes this evidence will now boost efforts of governments to comply with the Birds Directive, especially in the new Member States of the EU.

In June, the European Commission started legal action against many Member States after failing to designate enough protected areas for birds. [5] In recent months, Poland has also faced Europe-wide criticism for the construction of an expressway through the pristine Rospuda Valley, a very important site protected under the Birds Directive. [6]

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*Notes:*

[1] BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries and territories. BirdLife is the leading authority on the status of birds, their habitats and the problems affecting them (website: [www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)). The lead authors of the mentioned *Science* paper are researchers from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the UK Partner of BirdLife International.

[2] The Birds Directive and Special Protection Areas: The EU Birds Directive requires Member States to designate *Special Protection Areas (SPAs)* for birds to ensure the survival of the EU's most threatened birds (194 species and sub-species, listed in an Annex to the Directive) and all migratory birds. Overall, more than 450 species of bird occur in the EU. SPAs form part of '*Natura 2000*', a network of sites covering about 18% of the EU's territory, which aims to reconcile human activities with nature conservation. Natura 2000 sites are not fenced-off areas, but encourage sustainable and nature-friendly land-use and business. (More on the Birds Directive and Natura 2000 at <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature>)

[3] Paul F. Donald, Fiona J. Sanderson, Ian J. Burfield, Stijn M. Bierman, Richard D. Gregory, Zoltan Waliczky (2007) International Conservation Policy Delivers Benefits for Birds in Europe. *Science*. 317: 810-813

[4] The fifteen EU member states included in the study are : Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

[5] See BirdLife Media Release in new legal action from the Commission:  
[http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/06/commission\\_puts\\_foot\\_down.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/06/commission_puts_foot_down.html)

[6] See: [www.viabalticainfo.org](http://www.viabalticainfo.org) (in Polish and English)

[7] Despite significant successes through the implementation of the Birds Directive, BirdLife International data show that about half of the EU's bird species are in trouble (Unfavourable Conservation Status), and the overall tendency is still negative. Much of this decline is due to negative effects of land-use policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy.

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