



World Migratory Bird Day 2011

Statement from BirdLife International

Many migratory bird species are declining, some alarmingly fast. [Migratory birds face numerous and increasing threats](#) on their breeding grounds, on passage and in non-breeding areas. The need to tackle these threats effectively has never been greater, and international collaboration is key to this. BirdLife International Partners are active on the ground in 116 countries throughout the flyways used by migratory birds, working with each other, with Governments and with local communities to conserve migratory birds.

The theme for this year's World Migratory Bird Day is timely. BirdLife information shows that land-use change is an enormously significant issue for migratory birds, with agricultural activities and resource use impacting more than three-quarters of all migratory species for which we have information. Other important land-use threats affecting migratory birds are modification of natural systems (for example by dams and wetland drainage), residential and commercial development, transport routes and energy production or mining.

Land-use change can be dramatic and obvious, when whole swathes of forest are logged, for example, but can also be insidious and inconspicuous. From a bird's eye view the cumulative effect of apparently modest changes, across the many countries visited on migration, can be huge.

At the local scale, many key sites for migrant birds are being lost. Nature Kenya continues to fight alongside local communities and others to save the Tana River Delta in Kenya from conversion to sugar-cane monoculture by private companies, a plan that threatens migratory birds and local communities alike. At least 22 bird species occur at Tana River Delta in internationally important numbers and the site is thought to be the main wintering ground for Basra Reed Warbler. Alongside the drainage of its marsh breeding habitat in Iraq, the loss of such an important wintering site in Africa would have a severe impact on this endangered species.

Land-use change may also be playing a key role in the declines of many trans-Saharan migrants. In over a third of these species, including many once-common birds like the Common Cuckoo and European Turtle-dove, populations are in marked decline, mainly because of land-use changes. Agricultural intensification, brought about by EU policies in agriculture and forestry, is affecting these migrants on their European breeding grounds. Outside the breeding season, degradation and desertification of the Sahel and Guinea Savanna habitats that they rely upon are also taking their toll. Here, problems like over-grazing are interacting with climatic factors to cause widespread land degradation.

For trans-Saharan migrants, many of which disperse over a wide area outside the breeding season, protection of individual sites is not enough. Land-use change is driven by the policies in place at the national or regional level, but is also influenced by investment from outside the region. Large corporates from developed countries are contributing to habitat degradation and destruction in developing countries. Developed countries may also fund inappropriate development projects that contribute to habitat degradation. For example many dams in Africa, which have had a detrimental effect on local communities and biodiversity alike, have been constructed with European support. Inappropriate policies need reform in order to restore the fortunes of migrant birds. BirdLife continues to work with national governments, regional entities and multilateral environmental agreements to try to tackle the drivers of land-use change.

Loss of natural habitat through land 'reclamation' is particularly evident in East Asia where some countries have targets in place to convert a high percentage of intertidal and other wetlands for agriculture and development. Unfortunately the impacts of such policies reach far beyond national boundaries. The Yellow Sea is a key staging area for many migrant species — for example, satellite tracking has revealed that for some Bar-tailed Godwits, this may be the only refuelling stop on a journey of over 10 000 km between non-breeding areas in New Zealand and breeding grounds in Alaska. Loss of intertidal habitat in the Yellow Sea area is thought to be driving alarming declines in migratory shorebirds across the whole East Asian-Australasian flyway. BirdLife is working with others to try to save iconic species like the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper in this flyway. Securing the intertidal habitats that birds rely on during migration.

The scale of the problems and the actions required to reverse the fortunes of our migrant birds are daunting, but international collaboration offers the best chance of achieving effective conservation for these species. The BirdLife Partnership joins all those around the world marking this year's World Migratory Bird Day and welcomes the opportunity it brings not only to raise awareness of the issues, but to celebrate and appreciate these remarkable and inspiring birds.