

## Media release

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### Updated IUCN Red List of Threatened Bird Species released

**Johannesburg, 10 December 2016:** The IUCN has released an update of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species at the 13<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP13) in Cancun, Mexico, including a reassessment of all 11 121 bird species occurring on the globe.

This update of birds for the IUCN Red List, undertaken by BirdLife International, reflects the second of a two-part comprehensive taxonomic review of birds; the revision focused on Passerine birds – 'perching birds' such as flycatchers, thrushes, crows and finches – and has led to the recognition of 742 new species, many of which were previously treated as subspecies of other species. BirdLife International now applies a single, consistent taxonomic approach worldwide, across all species.

Sadly, 11% of these newly recognised species are threatened with extinction with 13 species making their debut on the IUCN Red List in the category of Extinct, with several of these having been lost in the past 50 years. According to IUCN Director, General Inger Andersen, many species are slipping away before we can describe them with the scale of the global extinction crisis occurring on a scale greater than previously thought. For instance, species such as the Pagan Red Warbler (*Acrocephalus yamashinae*), O'ahu akepa (*Loxops wolstenholmei*) and Laysan Honeycreeper (*Himatione fraithii*), all exited our world forever without having being formally included on the IUCN Red List. The majority of these species were restricted to islands, a group notoriously vulnerable to extinction (think of the Dodo), and more than likely wiped out by invasive species.

“Unfortunately, recognising more than 700 ‘new’ species does not mean that the world’s birds are faring better,” says Dr Ian Burfield, BirdLife International’s Global Science Coordinator. “As our knowledge deepens, so our concerns are confirmed: unsustainable agriculture, logging, invasive species and other threats-such as the illegal trade in species, are still driving many species towards extinction.”

The revision also revealed that some of the world's most popular birds may soon disappear in the wild if appropriate action isn't taken. Iconic species, such as the African Grey Parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*), a prized pet with the ability to mimic human speech, are facing extinction in the wild due to unsustainable trapping and habitat loss. Native to central Africa, the parrot has seen its conservation status deteriorate from Vulnerable to Endangered. A study led by BirdLife International discovered that in some parts of the continent, numbers of African Grey Parrots have declined by as much as 99%.

The impacts of illegal trade is most pressing in Asia, with the Rufous-fronted Laughing Thrush (*Garrulax rufifrons*), Scarlet-breasted Lorikeet (*Trichoglossus forsteni*) and Straw-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus zeylanicus*) among a suite of species being uplisted to higher threat categories as a result of the impacts of illegal wildlife trade. There is now evidence that unsustainable levels of capture for the cagebird trade, largely centred on Java, are driving the deteriorating status of many species.

Illegal wildlife trade is not the only threat to the world's bird species. Closer to home In South Africa, three species of vulture are now listed as globally Critically Endangered with a further two being assessed as Endangered, primarily due to intentional and inadvertent poisoning incidents. Seabirds, as a group, remain highly threatened mainly due to mortalities sustained through interaction with fishing vessels and the invasion of their breeding colonies by invasive alien species. The White-winged Flufftail, one of South Africa's globally Critically Endangered species, is threatened by the loss of its high altitude wetlands. In total, South Africa (including the Prince Edward Islands) hosts 102 or 6.9% of the world's 1460 threatened bird species.

Despite the depressing news that the global conservation community now has almost 100 more threatened species to conserve, there has been some good news for some of the rarest and most vulnerable birds on our planet. The Azores Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula murina*), St Helena Plover (*Charadrius sanctaehelena*) and Seychelles White-eye (*Zosterops modestus*) are among the island endemic species to move to lower categories in this IUCN Red List update, as their populations recover from the brink of extinction thanks to tireless conservation efforts.

On a local scale, BirdLife South Africa, as the country partner of BirdLife International, will continue to work towards lessening the extinction risk of threatened bird species in the region. In the past decade the organisation has had notable successes particularly in reducing the number of seabird mortalities in the longline and pelagic trawl fisheries as well as conserving some of South Africa's endemic grassland species through its Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas Programme. BirdLife South Africa will continue with this work as well as focusing on new challenges facing our country's avifauna, aiming to reduce the threats facing globally threatened species occurring in South Africa.

BirdLife South Africa is a partner of BirdLife International, a global partnership of nature conservation organisations.

Member of IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature).

Reg No: 001 – 298 NPO

PBO Exemption No: 930004518

**Ends**

## Notes for editor:

### The Red List by numbers

	<b>Before</b>	<b>Current</b>
Total species (birds)	10 424	11 121
Extinct	140	156
Extinct in the wild	5	5
Extant	10 279	10 960
Threatened	1 375 (13%)	1 460 (13%)

### About The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ (or The IUCN Red List) is an invaluable resource to guide conservation action and policy decisions. It is a health check for our planet – a Barometer of Life. It is the world’s most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of plant, animal and fungi species. It is based on an objective system for assessing the risk of extinction of a species should no conservation action be taken.

Species are assigned to one of eight categories of threat based on whether they meet criteria linked to population trend, population size and structure and geographic range. Species listed as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable are collectively described as ‘threatened’. The IUCN Red List is a joint effort between IUCN and its Species Survival Commission, working with its IUCN Red List partners.

### About IUCN

IUCN is a membership Union uniquely composed of both government and civil society organisations. It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together. Created in 1948, IUCN is now the world’s largest and most diverse environmental network, harnessing the knowledge, resources and reach of more than 1,300 Member organisations and some 16,000 experts. It is a leading provider of conservation data, assessments and analysis. Its broad membership enables IUCN to fill the role of incubator and trusted repository of best practices, tools and international standards.

**About the Species Survival Commission**

The Species Survival Commission (SSC) is the largest of IUCN's six volunteer commissions with a global membership of around 7 500 experts. SSC advises IUCN and its members on the wide range of technical and scientific aspects of species conservation, and is dedicated to securing a future for biodiversity. SSC has significant input into the international agreements dealing with biodiversity conservation.

**About BirdLife International**

BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation Partnership. Together we are 120 BirdLife Partners worldwide – one per country – and growing, with almost 11 million supporters, 7 000 local conservation groups and 7 400 staff. As the official Red List Authority for birds for the IUCN Red List, BirdLife International coordinates the process of evaluating all of the world's bird species against the Red List categories and criteria, in order to assess their extinction risk.

**About BirdLife South Africa**

BirdLife South Africa is the local country partner of BirdLife International. BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation Partnership with more than 120 BirdLife Partners worldwide and almost 11 million supporters. BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organization in the country. It relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work. For more information, visit [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za)

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