

Scientists pour cold water on EU bird policy

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New research from the University of Exeter in collaboration with the University of Texas at Austin published in the journal *Science* (22 February 2008) questions claims that EU conservation policy has been successful in protecting endangered birds.

Introduced in 1979, the EU Birds Directive set out a plan to protect rare birds in all EU countries. A study by scientists from the RSPB and BirdLife International, published in *Science* in August 2007, argued that the policy had resulted in positive impacts on bird conservation, even saving species that were near extinction.

This new research, however, reveals that the arguments presented in the recent study were flawed and based on inadequate data and predictions. By simply comparing bird populations inside and outside of the EU, the research did not take into account the fact that EU countries are generally wealthier and more developed than European countries outside the Union.

Additionally the evidence used to support EU policy included marine reserves in some countries, but ignored them in others. The Exeter researchers argue that this created the impression that the major EU policy for bird protection has been a success when in reality it may well have fallen short of its original aims.

The new research argues that conservation policies require systematic monitoring and evaluation if they are to be scientifically valid. "Current EU conservation policy can be likened to launching a rocket to Mars, but

not actually bothering to check whether it gets there" said lead author Rolando Rodríguez-Muñoz of the University of Exeter. "Without properly monitoring the efficacy of its policies, the EU risks wasting millions of pounds on ineffective conservation programmes." He commented further: "The Birds and Habitats Directives have become the keystones of the EU conservation policies. They are potentially powerful tools to protect our environment, but for these efforts to be efficient we need feedback to allow us to adapt to new situations or to correct poor implementation.

Source: University of Exeter

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