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Wetland aliens cause bird extinction

Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK, 26 May, 2010 (IUCN/BirdLife) - BirdLife International announces today, in an update to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ for birds, the extinction of Alaotra Grebe *Tachybaptus rufolavatus*. Restricted to a tiny area of east Madagascar, this species declined rapidly after carnivorous fish were introduced to the lakes in which it lived. This, along with the use of nylon gill-nets by fisherman which caught and drowned birds, has driven this species into the abyss.

"No hope now remains for this species. It is another example of how human actions can have unforeseen consequences", says **Dr Leon Bennun, BirdLife International's Director of Science, Policy and Information**. *"Invasive alien species have caused extinctions around the globe and remain one of the major threats to birds and other biodiversity."*

Another wetland species suffering from the impacts of introduced aliens is Zapata Rail *Cyanolimnas cerverai* from Cuba. It has been uplisted to Critically Endangered and is under threat from introduced mongooses and exotic catfish. An extremely secretive marsh-dwelling species, the only nest ever found of this species was described by James Bond, a Caribbean ornithologist and the source for Ian Fleming's famous spy's name.

And it's not just aliens. Wetlands the world over, and the species found in them, are under increasing pressures.

In Asia and Australia, numbers of once common wader species such as Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* are dropping rapidly as a result of drainage and pollution of coastal wetlands. The destruction of inter-tidal mudflats at Saemangeum in South Korea, an important migratory stop-over site, correlated to a 20% decline in the world population of Great Knot. Huge flocks of these birds once visited northern Australia, but annual monitoring by scientists have found corresponding declines in numbers.

"Wetlands are fragile environments, easily disturbed or polluted, but essential not only for birds and other biodiversity but also for millions of people around the world as a source of water and food", says **Dr Stuart Butchart, BirdLife's Global Research and Indicators Coordinator**.

Turning the tide

However, the Red List update shows that we now know, more than ever, that conservation works. Azores Bullfinch *Pyrrhula murina* has been downlisted from Critically Endangered to Endangered as a result of conservation work to restore natural vegetation on its island home. SPEA (BirdLife in Portugal) and RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) have worked together with others to turn around the fortunes of this species in what is a model for other projects.

"This is a clear example of conservation action succeeding in turning the tide for a highly threatened species", says **Andy Symes, BirdLife's Global Species Programme Officer**. *"Where there is commitment and financing we can save species. We have the knowledge and will, but there needs to be better funding globally to address the loss of species."*

In Colombia, Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis* has also been the beneficiary of conservation. Protection of its nest sites and education programmes in local communities telling people about its uniqueness has led to a steady increase in numbers, resulting in downlisting to Endangered.

"These successes show what is possible, and they point the way forward to what needs to be done by the global community", says **Dr Butchart**. *"2010 is the International Year of biodiversity; world leaders failed to stem the decline of biodiversity. We cannot fail again."*

"The monitoring of bird species is a key contribution to the monitoring of biodiversity worldwide. We must praise BirdLife International, their Partners and all ornithologists around the world for their massive effort to better understand the current extinction crisis and also their efforts to save some of the most threatened species", said **Dr Jean-Christophe Vie, Deputy Head of IUCN's Species Programme**.

For additional information, go to:

<http://www.iucn.org/?5314>

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Notes to Editors

Total number of species recognised by BirdLife is 10,027. Number of species by category as follows: Extinct 132; Extinct in Wild 4; Critically Endangered 190; Endangered 372; Vulnerable 678; Near Threatened 838; Least Concern 7751; Data Deficient 62.

In total, three species have been uplisted to Critically Endangered (Zapata Rail *Cyanolimnas cerverai*, White-bellied Cinclodes *Cinclodes palliatus*, Black-winged Starling *Sturnus melanopterus*) and three have been downlisted from Critically Endangered to Endangered (Chatham Albatross *Thalassarche eremita*, Yellow-eared Parrot *Ognorhynchus icterotis*, Azores Bullfinch *Pyrrhula murina*), one has been reclassified from Critically Endangered to Not Recognised (Entre Rios Seedeater *Sporophila zelichi*) and one has been uplisted from Critically Endangered to Extinct (Alaotra Grebe *Tachybaptus rufolavatus*).

Alaotra Grebe was known only from Madagascar where it was known chiefly from Lake Alaotra. The species was probably incapable of prolonged flight, so in all likelihood never occurred very far from Lake Alaotra. There have been no direct observations since 12 were seen at Lake Alaotra in December 1982, and two in September 1985. Individuals with some characters of the species (probably hybrids with Little Grebe, or their descendents) were also seen on Lake Alaotra in 1986 and 1988, but by 1999 none were left. The most recent surveys in the region in 2009 by Conservation International and the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust failed to find any grebes. It is now highly unlikely that any Alaotra Grebes survive.

Much of the work leading to the downlisting of Azores Bullfinch was undertaken between 2003 and 2008 in the framework of an EU-funded LIFE project, coordinated by SPEA in partnership with the Regional Secretary of Environment and Sea (SRAM), the Regional Direction of Forest Resources (DRFF), the Azores University's Conservation and Environmental Protection Centre (CCPA), the Municipality of Nordeste and the RSPB. In 2008, support from the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund and Birdwatch magazine (through the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme) allowed the species's global distribution to be mapped for the first time.

Other regional highlights

Americas

Wattled Curassow *Crax globulosa* has been uplisted from Vulnerable to Endangered. To find out more click [here](#)
White-bellied Cinclodes *Cinclodes palliatus* has been uplisted from Endangered to Critically Endangered. To find out more click [here](#)

Pacific

Australian Painted Snipe *Rostratula australis* is newly recognised and has been classified as Endangered. To find out more click [here](#)
Kofiau Paradise-kingfisher *Tanysiptera ellioti* has been uplisted from Data Deficient to Endangered. To find out more click [here](#)

Asia

Great Slaty Woodpecker *Mulleripicus pulverulentus* has been uplisted from Least Concern to Vulnerable. To find out more click [here](#)
Rufous-backed Bunting *Emberiza jankowskii* has been uplisted from Vulnerable to Endangered. To find out more click [here](#)

Africa

Black Crowned-crane *Balearica pavonina* has been uplisted from Near Threatened to Vulnerable. To find out more click [here](#)
Ludwig's Bustard *Neotis ludwigii* has been uplisted from Least Concern to Endangered. To find out more click [here](#)

Europe

Azores Bullfinch *Pyrrhura murina* has been downlisted from Critically Endangered to Endangered. To find out more click [here](#)
Corsican Nuthatch *Sitta whiteheadi* has been uplisted from Least Concern to Vulnerable. To find out more click [here](#)

About BirdLife International

BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries and territories that, together, are the leading authority on the status of birds, their habitats and the issues and problems affecting them. BirdLife is a Member of IUCN.

BirdLife is the Red List Authority for birds for the IUCN Red List. Categories include: Critically Endangered (facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild), Endangered (facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild), Vulnerable (facing a high risk of extinction in the wild), Near Threatened (close to qualifying for Vulnerable) and Least Concern (species not qualifying for the other categories, including widespread and abundant species). Species are assigned to categories using criteria with quantitative thresholds for population size, population trend, range size and other parameters.

www.birdlife.org

To find out more about the 10 key actions needed to prevent further bird extinctions that BirdLife has identified. Visit www.birdlife.org/cr_birds

For more species, regional and country information about the IUCN Red List visit the [BirdLife Data Zone](#)

To find out more about the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme visit www.birdlife.org/extinction

About the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ (or the IUCN Red List) is the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of plant and animal 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 not just a register of names and associated threat categories. It is a rich compendium of information on the threats to the species, their ecological requirements, where they live, and information on conservation actions that can be used to reduce or prevent extinctions. www.iucnredlist.org The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ is a joint effort between IUCN and its Species Survival Commission, working with its Red List partners BirdLife International, Conservation International's Center for Applied Biodiversity Science, NatureServe, and the Zoological Society of London.

About IUCN

IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges by supporting scientific research; managing field projects all over the world; and bringing governments, NGOs, the UN, international conventions and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice.

The world's oldest and largest global environmental network, IUCN is a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists and experts in some 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 professional staff in 60 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world. IUCN's headquarters are located in Gland, near Geneva, in Switzerland.

www.iucn.org

About the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) and Species Programme

The Species Survival Commission (SSC) is the largest of IUCN's six volunteer commissions with a global membership of 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.

www.iucn.org/ssc

The IUCN Species Programme supports the activities of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and individual Specialist Groups, as well as implementing global species conservation initiatives. It is an integral part of the IUCN Secretariat and is managed from IUCN's international headquarters in Gland, Switzerland. The Species Programme includes a number of technical units covering Species Trade and Use, the Red List Unit, Freshwater Biodiversity Unit, (all located in Cambridge, UK), and the Global Biodiversity Assessment Unit (located in Washington DC, USA).

About Conservation International (CI)

Conservation International (CI) applies innovations in science, economics, policy and community participation to protect the Earth's richest regions of plant and animal diversity in the biodiversity hotspots, high-biodiversity wilderness areas and key marine ecosystems. With headquarters in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, CI works in more than 40 countries on four continents. For more information about CI, visit www.conservation.org.

About NatureServe

NatureServe is a non-profit conservation organization that provides the scientific basis for effective conservation action in the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean. The organization represents an international network of biological inventories (known as natural heritage programs or conservation data centers). Together they collect and manage detailed local information on plants, animals, and ecosystems, and develop data management tools, and conservation services to help meet local, national, and global conservation needs.

NatureServe is a Member of IUCN.

About the Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

Founded in 1826, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity: our key role is the conservation of animals and their habitats. ZSL runs ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo, carries out scientific research in the Institute of Zoology and is actively involved in field conservation in over thirty countries worldwide. ZSL is a Member of IUCN.

www.zsl.org