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Declining water birds are still on the list of game species in Eastern Europe

In Europe hunting has contributed to the disappearance of many rare bird species (Mitrus & Zbyryt, 2015, *Ornis Polonica*, 56, 309–327). In Poland even formerly widely distributed and common species such as the Least Concern coot *Fulica atra*, tufted duck *Aythya fuligula* and Eurasian teal *Anas crecca*, and the Vulnerable common pochard *Aythya ferina*, have declined dramatically (Wylegala & Lawicki, 2019, *Common Pochard, Tufted ducks, Eurasian Teal, Coot—State of Population and Impact of Hunting*, Salamandra, Poznan, Poland).

In July 2019 the Polish National IUCN Committee appealed to the Ministry of the Environment, requesting the removal of these four species from the list of game species and the granting of strict protection. In addition, changes have been proposed to the Hunting Law that would support these species, including: (1) delaying of hunting dates for water birds, to avoid the breeding season, (2) prohibiting hunting of water birds after sunset, when it is difficult to distinguish species, (3) introducing the obligation to base hunting plans for migratory water birds on results from monitoring, (4) obliging hunters to help eradicate invasive species from wetlands, and (5) prohibiting the use of lead shot for hunting within 500 m of wetlands (Wylegala & Lawicki, 2019, op cit).

The proposal related to lead shot deserves special attention. Poland is one of the few EU countries where the use of lead ammunition is allowed in all habitats (Kitowski, 2018, *Oryx*, 52, 611–611). This is despite Poland's ratification of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals and that the 11th Conference of the Parties to the Convention in Quito in 2014 adopted a resolution on preventing poisoning of migratory birds and recommended introduction of a ban on lead ammunition (Lamare, 2015, *Proceedings of the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties*, Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species, Bonn, Germany). However, to date, this resolution has been ignored in Poland despite evidence of the accumulation of high levels of lead in water birds (Kitowski et al., 2017, *Ambio*, 46, 825–841).

Unfortunately, in August 2019 the Ministry of Environment, in response to the IUCN appeal, indicated there

would be no changes to the list of game birds or to the Hunting Law (*Redakcja*, 10 October 2019, zycierolnika.pl/index.php/aktualnosci/item/4374-resort-rolnictwa-przeciwny-wstrzymaniu-polowan-na-ptaki-lowne).

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Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into development cooperation—highlights from an ALTER-NET-EKLIPSE workshop

On 18 June 2019 a workshop dedicated to the role of development cooperation in biodiversity conservation in the global South was held in Ghent, Belgium, during the ALTER-NET-EKLIPSE conference 'The European Union Biodiversity Strategy beyond 2020'. ALTER-NET is a network of biodiversity research institutes, and EKLIPSE is an EU networking project on ecosystem services. Mainstreaming biodiversity refers here to the inclusion of biodiversity across sectors—a necessity given the pervasiveness of impacts on biodiversity by different economic sectors and the role of biodiversity in provision of ecosystem services.

A range of European academics, Belgian and European Commission officials, and NGO representatives working at the biodiversity–development interface were invited to formulate an aid deliverer's perspective focused on two interlinked questions: (1) Should the EU biodiversity strategy guide the programmes of member states? (2) Has biodiversity mainstreaming been a priority or not?

Regarding the link between the supranational European and national levels, the current lack of harmonization between the EU and national governments, and the lack of biodiversity mainstreaming, were both highlighted. The unambitious, mainly project-based improvements in integrating biodiversity in European-funded agricultural projects in Africa were acknowledged, and it was noted that capacity building programmes and education for young scientists in the South are often perceived as already being sufficient, although they are not meeting demands at all career stages. The workshop recommended that capacity building needs to be continuously improved through collaborative North–South and South–South programmes. Opinions diverged regarding the desirability of translating elements of European biodiversity policies (e.g. the Natura 2000 network) to the global South, but all agreed that citizen science could be promoted as a tool for data collection and awareness raising. Supporting biodiversity mainstreaming was considered even more important than addressing the lack of formally protected areas, especially in highly biodiverse agricultural landscapes. An additional recommendation

was that economic and social benefits of conserving biodiversity should also be highlighted (e.g. through nature-based solutions).

The workshop participants noted the lack of foresight, and the absence of a sense of urgency, among development actors as explanatory factors for the mixed success of biodiversity mainstreaming. Biodiversity is only considered a policy priority when its degradation is visible and directly hampers development, by which time action to repair damage can be ineffective and/or costly. The cost-effectiveness of early biodiversity mainstreaming was stressed, as well as the need to focus on prioritizing certain sectors (e.g. agriculture) and areas (e.g. the urban periphery, networks of wetlands). Alignment with the Southern partners' priorities was identified as a key condition for success, as was the strengthening of existing mainstreaming initiatives. Focusing on training future biodiversity champions was regarded as key to ensure that a locally developed long-term vision addresses future governance challenges that could otherwise jeopardize the benefits of biodiversity mainstreaming. Ensuring that biodiversity is seen as an asset and not just as an externality, was regarded as essential. Monitoring and evaluating biodiversity mainstreaming requires alignment and harmonization among donors and their partners, to avoid unjustified pro-biodiversity labeling of aid flows. Finally, there was a call for a critical stance regarding the expected linkages between biodiversity and climate action in development co-operation: although synergies are possible, narrowly designed climate projects can actually degrade biodiversity.

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Join the ConservationNOW network

As we are all aware, wild nature is declining rapidly and the Earth's life support systems are under increasing stress. As nature erodes and the response of human systems is inadequate or destructive, it can seem that the only rational response is despair. However, if you zoom in from the big picture, a mosaic appears. Amongst the stories of loss, you find inspiring stories of regeneration and positive change. Stories in which nature is actually making a difference in people's lives and where people value and nurture their natural environment.

At Conservation Optimism we believe that these stories are the key to securing our planet's future. We need to learn from them, replicate them, and thereby build a world in which nature and people can coexist. Our mission is to help tell and amplify these stories of conservation optimism. Conservation Optimism is a spirit and an ethos that many organizations are embracing as we all move forward to build a more effective, more inclusive and more active future for conservation. To this end, we are working to build robust reciprocal relationships with organizations—collectively called the Conservation Network of Optimists Worldwide, or ConservationNOW.

Our members are working to inspire, motivate, equip, support and empower conservationists around the world, and they have joined this network so that collectively we can all be more effective at sharing our successes, broadening our reach and maximizing our impact. We currently have 60 member organizations. To amplify their voices, we publish their stories on our website and share their blogs with our enthusiastic Twitter community. By joining the network, organizations pledge to be optimistic but realistic. Acknowledging failures and exposing challenges is crucial to moving forward and learning from our mistakes. Our community is global, inclusive and uplifting. It aims to provide support for conservationists who are struggling with burnout and the general negativity that comes with working in the challenging world of conservation, and tools and resources to empower people from every walk of life to take action for conservation.

If you are interested in joining this community you can submit your application at conservationoptimism.org/join-conservationnow.

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