

Environment News Service

International Daily Newswire

Since 1990

We Cover the Earth for You

Home

About

Services

Subscribe

News Index

Search

Contact

World-Wire



BirdLife Seeks Species Champions to Keep Rare Birds Alive

CAMBRIDGE, UK, August 16, 2007 (ENS) - The conservation group BirdLife International today reached out for financial help to save all 189 of the world's Critically Endangered birds from extinction, not just a threatened population here and there.

The group is inviting companies, organizations and individuals to become BirdLife Species Champions by contributing the funding that can keep entire species from vanishing forever.

With its more than 100 BirdLife Partner organizations around the world, the network has been successful in saving some birds one species at a time, but the pressures that lead to extinction have been building "relentlessly," the group said.

"We have the capacity and expertise to achieve our conservation goals," said BirdLife. "What we don't yet have is the funding."

"Critically Endangered birds can be saved from extinction through this innovative approach," said Dr. Mike Rands, chief executive of BirdLife International.

Over the next five years, the group aims to raise £19,000,000 (\$37.7 million) from BirdLife Species Champions.



The Philippine eagle, one of 189 bird species facing extinction. (Photo by Rich Lindie, *Rare Birds Yearbook*)



Today's Press Releases

[Environmental Defense Fund, American Rivers Back EPA Decision to Stop Construction of Yazoo Pumps](#)

[Earth Day focuses Attention on Helping Consumers and Organizations "Go Green"](#)

[BioBased Insulation Selected to Participate in the 2008 USDA BioPreferred SM Showcase](#)

[Kinship Conservation Fellows Announce 2008 Cohort Representing Ten Different Countries](#)

[Service Experts to Give Away 10,000 Free Programmable Thermostats in Earth Day Education](#)

[Environmental Concern Changing Consumers' Lives and Buying Habits](#)

[Top Corporate Air Polluters Named](#)

[New Radiation Suit Filed Against Los Alamos Lab](#)

[Startech Environmental Plasma Converter Installation First In Poland and First In Europe](#)

[Members, Groups Protest Misplaced Farm Bill Spending Priorities That Put Proven Conservation Programs at Risk](#)

[Post Your Press Release on World-Wire](#)

The champions will fund the work of Species Guardians for each bird - organizations and people identified by BirdLife as being best placed to carry out the conservation work to prevent an otherwise certain extinction.

"This is an enormous challenge," said Rand, "but one we are fully committed to achieving in our efforts to save the world's birds from extinction."

The first BirdLife Species Champion has already stepped forward.

The British Birdwatching Fair 2007 is contributing funds to help save four Critically Endangered bird species:

- the Bengal florican, rarest of the world's 27 bustard species, is still found in Cambodia, India and Nepal.
- Mexico's Belding's yellowthroat, found in fragmented populations in the freshwater marshes of the Baja California peninsula, is threatened by fires, reed-cutting for hotel and house construction, and drainage for agriculture and cattle-ranching.
- Brazil's Restinga antwren, a tiny insect-eater that inhabits just four square miles of coastal dunes in Rio de Janeiro state, and its habitat is shrinking due to beachfront development.
- Djibouti francolin, a woodland gamebird that is still clinging to shrinking habitat in the Goda and Mabla Mountains of the East African country of Djibouti. Ninety percent of the species has disappeared since 1987.

The BirdLife Species Champions initiative will be introduced officially at this year's British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water this weekend.

The fair is co-organized by the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, RSPB, which is the BirdLife Partner organization in the United Kingdom.

The plight of the Bengal florican will be in the spotlight at the British Birdwatching Fair.

Ian Barber, the RSPB's South Asia officer, said, "The Bengal florican is now hanging on in only three countries and is under huge pressure in all



Ear of Wind
By Leroy DeJolie, [Navajo Nation Parks](#)

[License ENS News](#)
for websites and newsletters

[Send a news story to ENS editors](#)

[Upload environmental news videos](#)

[Share ENS stories with the world](#)



Bird Photographs

Beautiful photos of birds for sale
Bottle-Nosed Dolphin jumping too!
www.fishmangallery.com

Rare Birds

Looking for Rare Birds? Find exactly
what you want today.
Yahoo.com



three."

"It is only eight years since the bird's rediscovery in Cambodia and already it is facing oblivion. Even in protected sites in Nepal, land is being taken for agriculture leaving no room for the bird," Barber said. "This initiative may be its last hope."



The British Birdwatching Fair will help to save the Bengal florican in Cambodia. (Photo by Alan Michaud courtesy BirdLife)

Fewer than 700

Bengal floricans, which resemble small ostriches, remain on the floodplain of Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake, the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. Ten years ago, 3,000 floricans inhabited the area.

The Nepalese population of Bengal floricans, which is legally protected, has dropped by more than half in 25 years to fewer than 60 birds today. In India, only about 250 are left.

Money raised at the fair will support a plan backed by the Cambodian government that encourages farmers on designated sites to resume traditional grazing and scrub clearance on grasslands instead of switching to dry-season rice growing.

Government official Seng Kim Hout has seen how crucial the project is to florican survival. "These grasslands are disappearing before our eye," he said. "On revisiting many of our survey sites, we found the landscape unrecognizable from previous years, squeezing the floricans into a shrinking landscape in which they cannot survive."

RSPB's Birdfair co-organizer Martin Davies said, "It is a fantastic privilege that Birdfair can act as Species Champion for the Bengal florican. Visitors to the fair can take heart in knowing that their contributions will directly help the survival prospects of birds that otherwise would certainly disappear from the planet forever."

Without human interference, BirdLife says, the natural rate of bird extinctions should be less than one each century.

Currently it is at least 50 times that and rising

quickly. In the last 30 years, 21 species have vanished into extinction, and the Hawaiian honeycreeper Po'o-uli, the Hawaiian Crow and Spix's Macaw have all disappeared from the wild since the year 2000.

The good news, says BirdLife, is that 16 bird species were saved from extinction between 1994 and 2004, all as the result of specific conservation actions.

The classification Critically Endangered describes species that have reached the highest category of extinction risk on the IUCN Red List.

The basis of the IUCN Red List section on birds is the work of BirdLife scientists, who have assessed and classified the conservation status of every bird species in the world over many years of intensive research.

The first few Critically Endangered birds for which BirdLife is urgently seeking Species Champions are:

- In Africa – Djibouti francolin, Long-billed apalis, Dwarf olive ibis and Taita thrush
- In the Americas – Restinga antwren, Belding's yellowthroat, Royal cinclodes, Puerto Rican nightjar and the Junin grebe
- In Asia – Bengal florican, Mindoro bleeding-heart, White-shouldered ibis, Negros bleeding-heart, Long-billed vulture, Slender-billed vulture and White-rumped vulture
- In the Middle East – Northern bald ibis



The Djibouti francolin has lost 90 percent of its number in the past 20 years. (Photo Djibouti Flora)

These birds have been chosen because of the extreme urgency of their situation and because there are clear and well-defined actions that are likely to make a significant difference in the near future.

In addition, says BirdLife, there are suitable organizations or individuals in place who are well qualified to coordinate and implement conservation action.

"One hundred and eighty-nine wonderful and fascinating bird species are on the brink of disappearing forever. Any such extinction diminishes us, and narrows our world," said Dr. Leon Bennun, Birdlife's director of science, policy and information.

"But these birds can be saved," he said. "The support of Species Champions will make this possible."

Copyright Environment News Service (ENS) 2007. All rights reserved.