

FOREWORD



It is hard to come to terms with what it really means when a species goes extinct—the loss of a particular life form forever. And nature is facing a wider range of threats than ever before, almost entirely as a result of human activity. Birds are no exception; in fact we know probably more about the threats to birds than those to any other group of plants or animals. Today, over 1,200 species—or 12.5% of the total number of bird species in the world—are threatened with extinction. The natural rate of extinction over time has been less than one species every 100 years, but recently the rate has been at least 50 times that and rising.

A total of 56 species were lost during the 20th century, the most costly era for extinctions ever recorded, and the past 30 years alone have seen 19 bird species vanish. In addition, four species are already Extinct in the Wild, with only a few individuals left in zoos and private collections. The latest bird extinction includes the Alaotra Grebe of Madagascar, while the Po'o-uli, a delicate finchlike bird from Hawaii, is almost certainly extinct, both unable to face the invasive competitors and predators introduced by humans.

Not only are rare birds becoming rarer but common birds are also becoming less common. Almost everywhere in the world once familiar birds are now scarce and losing their place in our consciousness. This disappearance of birds across the globe mirrors a deeper loss—that of biodiversity (life in its many forms)—and indicates our failure as humans to live in harmony with the natural environment.

However, the situation is far from lost. Species can be saved and there are many examples of birds that have been brought back against seemingly impossible odds. But it takes timely intervention backed by sound science, adequate resources, political will, and passionate determination. In recent years, at least 16 species would have gone extinct without the conservation programs that were implemented for them. Birds such as Seychelles Magpie-robin and Mauritius Kestrel are still with us because of the work of dedicated conservation groups and individuals. These examples give us the strength to continue the fight.

The BirdLife International Partnership has been at the forefront of bird conservation for many years and we know what is needed to save those in danger. With partner civil society organizations in over 110 countries and territories, we enjoy the strength and cohesion of a global partnership supported by coordinated local presence and action. This, coupled with scientific knowledge, influence with decision-makers, and first-rate conservation experts in the field, means that we understand the issues that face every globally threatened bird, and the main conservation actions that they need. A lack of resources, however, is often the main obstacle to any action being taken.

Our successes have been many but there is still much work to do. This book serves as a timely reminder of the plight of birds across our planet and the pressures that they face. It is easy to despair in the face of such threats, but for us, documenting the decline of species is an important reminder of our responsibility, a tool to sharpen our action planning, and a trigger for even more passionate commitment to making a difference. The BirdLife International Partnership will continue to save species, protect sites, conserve habitats, and empower people in order to ensure that future generations will be able to marvel at the birds showcased on the pages of *Bird Watch*—hopefully one day, in the not too distant future, out of the danger of extinction.



Marco Lambertini
Chief Executive, BirdLife International

◁ *Black-browed Albatross chicks on nests in the Falkland Islands. Decline in the numbers of this Endangered albatross are attributed to bycatch in longline fishing in open seas.*