**The Birds Directive**

[**https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/index\_en.htm**](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/index_en.htm)

**In a nutshell**

Europe is home to more than 500 wild bird species. But at least 32 % of the EU's bird species are currently not in a good conservation status. The Birds Directive aims to protect all of the 500 wild bird species naturally occurring in the European Union.

**In practice**

Often migratory, wild bird species can only be protected by cooperating across borders. Urban sprawl and transport networks have fragmented and reduced their habitats, intensive agriculture, forestry, fisheries and the use of pesticides have diminished their food supplies, and hunting needed to be regulated in order not to damage populations. Concerned with their decline, Member States unanimously adopted the Directive 79/409/EEC in April 1979. It is the oldest piece of EU legislation on the environment and one of its cornerstones. Amended in 2009, it became the [Directive 2009/147/EC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32009L0147) PDF.

Habitat loss and degradation are the most serious threats to the conservation of wild birds. The Directive therefore places great emphasis on the protection of habitats for endangered and migratory species. It establishes a network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) including all the most suitable territories for these species. Since 1994, all SPAs are included in the [Natura 2000](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm) ecological network, set up under the [Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm).

**Species protection under the Birds Directive**

The 500 wild bird species naturally occurring in the European Union are protected in various ways:

* **Annex 1**: 194 species and sub-species are particularly threatened. Member States must designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for their survival and all migratory bird species.
* **Annex 2**: 82 bird species can be hunted. However, the hunting periods are limited and hunting is forbidden when birds are at their most vulnerable: during their return migration to nesting areas, reproduction and the raising of their chicks.
* **Annex 3**: overall, activities that directly threaten birds, such as their deliberate killing, capture or trade, or the destruction of their nests, are banned. With certain restrictions, Member States can allow some of these activities for 26 species listed here.
* **Annex 4**: the directive provides for the sustainable management of hunting but Member States must outlaw all forms of non-selective and large scale killing of birds, especially the methods listed in this annex.
* **Annex 5**: the directive promotes research to underpin the protection, management and use of all species of birds covered by the Directive, which are listed in this annex.

The Commission provides [guidance on hunting practices](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/action_plans/guidance_en.htm), some of the key concepts of the Birds Directive and on the sustainable [management of cormorant populations](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/cormorants/home_en.htm). The EU first [sustainable hunting initiative](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/hunting/index_en.htm) was launched in 2001. The Commission also aims to eradicate the [illegal killing, trapping and trade of birds](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/illegal_killing.htm) in the European Union.

Considering the poor status of farmland birds across the EU, the Commission has launched the [Birds@Farmland](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/birds_farmland_en.htm) initiative to support Member States in developing specific measures for their conservation.

All Member States have to submit [reporting](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/knowledge/rep_birds/index_en.htm) on the status and trend in bird populations (article 12) as well as on derogations (article 9) they may apply to the directive's obligations.  
Learn more about the EU's [500 wild bird species](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/eu_species/index_en.htm), the [threatened bird species](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/threatened/index_en.htm) listed in the directive's annex 1, which ones are a [priority for LIFE funding](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/life_priority/index_en.htm) or benefit from a [Species Action Plans](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/action_plans/index_en.htm).

The annexes of the Birds Directive have been adapted each time new countries joined the European Union. Find out more about the [impact of enlargement on nature law](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/enlargement/index_en.htm).

**ORNIS Committee**

The ORNIS Committee assists the Commission in the implementation of the Birds Directive.

[Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm)  
[Comitology Register](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regcomitology/index.cfm?CLX=en)

**For more information**

[The Birds Directive – 40 years of conserving our shared natural heritage](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/93b64009-7c3b-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-192343919)

Why do [we have to take care of our birds](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/docs/why_take_care_of_birds.pdf) PDF

[Designation of protected Natura 2000 sites](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/sites/index_en.htm)

[Status of all bird species at the European level in the EU](https://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/birds_in_europe/index.html) (Birdlife International)

[International Conservation Policy Delivers Benefits for Birds in Europe](https://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/317/5839/810): (research paper published in the Science journal, August 2007) has shown that the Birds Directive has significantly helped protect Europe's most threatened birds from further decline, partly through the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs)