

Editorial

BirdLife International—the largest global partnership of national conservation organisations—is 20 years old this year, but traces its roots back over 90 years to the foundation of the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) in 1922. It was ICBP that initiated *Bird Conservation International*, to meet the need for a journal where the best bird conservation science could be published and shared. Now the journal provides a platform for peer-reviewed findings relevant to achieving the BirdLife mission – to conserve wild birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, by working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources.

This special issue of *Bird Conservation International* celebrates the 2013 BirdLife World Congress. In June this year the BirdLife International Partnership of 116 organisations will convene for the fifth time since it was established, the venue on this occasion being Ottawa, Canada. This is an opportunity for Partners to review progress and achievements, share experience and lessons learned, and decide future programmes and priorities. Focusing the discussion will be the four pillars of the new BirdLife Strategy 2013–2020: Save Species, Conserve Sites and Habitats, Encourage Ecological Sustainability and Empower People for Positive Change. A set of conservation programmes give practical effect to the Strategy and coherence to the Partnership's collective work.

The 13 papers in this issue of *Bird Conservation International* speak directly to these strategic themes. They also illustrate the kinds of science-based conservation interventions and approaches that are immediately relevant to the nine global conservation programmes. The Preventing Extinctions programme takes action for the world's most threatened species, such as St Helena Plover *Charadrius sanctaehelenae* (Burns *et al.*). The Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) programme seeks to safeguard the world's most significant sites for birds and biodiversity – including the Namba Mountains in Angola, recently discovered to hold the full suite of Angola's severely threatened Afromontane forest birds (Mills *et al.*). BirdLife's Climate Change programme comprises a broad range of activities, among them identifying the species most vulnerable to a changing climate, such as Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus ireneae* (Monadjem *et al.*), and what can be done to improve their resilience to change.

Li *et al.* illustrate the importance of natural wetlands for migratory waterbirds in the Yellow River Delta, within a vital stopover zone for long-distance migrants. This kind of information is crucial for the success of BirdLife's Migratory Birds and Flyways programme. The Seabirds and Marine Conservation programme tackles the particular conservation problems faced by marine species, as outlined for burrowing petrels by Cuthbert *et al.* This paper, along with Burns *et al.*, also exemplifies the major threat to many bird species posed by invasives, being tackled by BirdLife through the Invasive Alien Species programme. Among other things this programme is mapping the threat, setting priorities and taking action through projects to eradicate damaging invasives.

Building communities of people who care about nature and are motivated to take action for its conservation is the concern of the Local Empowerment programme. The paper by Ma *et al.* on the growth of birdwatching in China is an excellent illustration of this approach, and also relevant to the programme on Capacity Development.

Only one programme, Forests of Hope (focused on conserving and restoring tropical forest) is not tackled directly by a paper in this issue. However, several papers also address aspects of ecological sustainability – a cross-cutting element to all the programmes. Van den Bergh *et al.* discuss consumptive use of the Blue Bird of Paradise, while Šúr *et al.* and Jenkins focus on different aspects of mainstreaming biodiversity into decision-making, through regulation of tourism and power infrastructure respectively.

Most would agree that the practice of conservation has become much more complicated since *Bird Conservation International* was first published. Challenging new threats, notably climate

change, have become apparent, as has the central importance of social and economic factors in achieving conservation success. Conservation science nowadays must therefore address a very broad range of enquiry. The spread of topics covered in this special issue shows clearly that *Bird Conservation International* is tackling these questions and maintaining its relevance to informing conservation action in the real world. As BirdLife turns 20, that is reassuring to know.

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