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**Conservation measures for the Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* in Switzerland: Struggle between effect and politics**

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The Whinchat, a characteristic meadow bird, has been declining on Swiss grasslands in the past 30 years. It has disappeared from the lowlands and there is also evidence for negative trends in the strongholds at higher elevations. Species Recovery Programmes, which are developed, tested and implemented in Whinchat hotspots, are therefore urgent. Habitat changes are the main reason for the decline in breeding populations. In many farmland areas, grasslands no longer meet the species' requirements. There is, for example, a lack of nest sites safe from destruction by mowing machines (Müller *et al.* 2005, J. Ornithol.). Moreover, shifts in the plant species composition of meadows and the advanced mowing date have clearly detrimental effects on farmland insects, the major prey of Whinchats (Britschgi *et al.* 2006, Cons. Biol.). We discuss the prospects of stopping or even reversing these negative effects in (subalpine) farming and ask which of the measures beneficial to Whinchats are acceptable to farmers. Based on the habitat requirements of the Whinchat and on feasible preconditions set by agriculture we propose measures to the benefit of the Whinchat in meadows, pastures and wetlands. The following measures and farming practices proposed for implementation are tested for their acceptance by farmers and their efficiency for Whinchat conservation: small meadow plots or strips with a postponed mowing date; unfarmed plots on pastures, protected by fencing; nest protection from farming; meadow-bird friendly farming on a large scale; rotational pasturing; increasing the availability of perches for foraging Whinchats; specific conservation measures in wetlands. Meadowbird-friendly farming is adequate to maintain populations of a viable size, although it is difficult to implement. Nest protection is justified to save small numbers near a critical population size, although it is elaborate and time consuming.

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**Distribution and movements of the Western pannonic Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) population: Influence on the cross-border conservation**

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During the 20th century the size of the Western Pannonic Great Bustard population decreased from more than 3,000 individuals to about 120 individuals by 1995. This population occurs in parts of Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. It is practically isolated from all other populations in Central Europe. Areas of occurrence, movements and population trends are described for a 12-year period (1995/1996–2006/2007). During this period the winter numbers increased from 129 to 315 individuals. As a consequence of this, the number of occurrence in less frequented places, as well as the home range, has grown. Detailed records of distribution and flight movements have been collected since 2002 and the results show that there are seasonal differences in the distribution of the Great Bustards amongst the four countries. Numerous conservation measures have being implemented in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia for the protection and management of their Great Bustard populations. Habitat management according to the needs of the species started in the first half of the 1990s, initially in Austria and Hungary, where more then 90 % of the whole West Pannonic population occurred. This made it necessary to extend the bustard-friendly habitat management to new areas. The most important measures are large protected areas with agri-environment measures for bustards which are complemented with extensive site surveillance on all Great Bustard areas. Although this steppe bird flies only rarely, within the cross-border monitoring in the border triangle Austria, Hungary and Slovakia more than 1,300 flights were observed and nearly 20 % of them



were transboundary flights. This shows the importance of extensive measures to be taken for the management of all breeding areas and key migration and wintering sites of the Western Pannonic Great Bustard population.

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**Quantifying the decline of the Corncrake in Europe by the use of ringing data**

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Declines of the Corncrake population in Europe had already started at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, but until the 1990s the decline was not monitored quantitatively in most European countries. We analyze Corncrake numbers ringed by 15 Ringing schemes in Europe during the period of 1925–1995. Analyses of ringed adults and pulli were carried out separately. Ringing data can be used for population trend analyses, provided that the ringing of a bird is random event: a higher population will then result in higher numbers of birds being ringed. We assume that ringing of Corncrake pulli has occurred randomly, as would be the case if ringers ring pulli that have been accidentally. The number of ringed Corncrakes was calibrated using 1,000 ringed birds from the same ringing scheme and year, and on the number of active ringers for the ringing scheme and year. Number of ringed Corncrakes, however might be affected by ringer behaviour as well. Therefore we analyzed the numbers of other ringed birds which could be ringed in similar habitats in Latvia: Common Whitethroat, Eurasian Linnet, Eurasian Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Whinchat and Yellow Wagtail. Yellow Wagtails are found in the most similar habitats to Corncrakes, and their numbers have not changed in Latvia over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The estimated index of ringed Corncrakes in 8 countries (except Latvia) combined has fallen from about 1.6 in 1930 to about 0.1 in 1990. In Latvia the number of ringed Corncrakes declined significantly between 1925 and 1995, while the number of ringed Yellow Wagtails has remained stationary. The population size of Corncrakes has increased in Latvia since 1996 and is estimated to have been 48,000–58,000 calling males in 2006.

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**Contribution to the bio-ecology of Grey-necked Picathartes, *Picathartes oreas***

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The ground-dwelling Grey-Necked Picathartes, classified as “Vulnerable” by IUCN and BirdLife International, lives within the Mbam-minkom mountain forest of southern Cameroon. Over the past three years we have been investigating the population status and habitat requirements of this enigmatic bird. Methods involve belt transects for vegetation surveys, ground truthing, quadrat sampling, pitfall and malaise trapping for assessment of potential food supply, radio-tracking to determine home range, observations from hideouts to determine feeding ecology, monitoring, and involvement of adjacent communities to raise awareness and promote its conservation. 90 breeding and 24 potential breeding sites have been mapped with the population estimated at 70 mature individuals. Closed canopy intact vegetation is needed for at least 200 m around breeding sites to provide a hideout and foraging area for this shy bird that feeds on invertebrates (mostly insects) and some vertebrates such as small frogs and lizards. Slash and burn agriculture and illegal timber exploitation remain its major threat. Sensitization is ongoing to develop management plans for site protection as a community sanctuary.