



Updates on

African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Action Plan (AEMLAP)¹

January – February 2017

Topics in this update:

- 1) The connectivity question
- 2) Spring Alive Project – out to reach more!
- 3) More ground covered to develop action plans for the AEMLAP flagships

We welcome short articles related to conservation work and research on migratory landbirds. The updates are currently produced once every two months.

1. Introduction

Through this regular issue, we aim to share snapshots of conservation and/or research work on migratory landbirds within the African-Eurasian region and in line with the implementation of AEMLAP. We hope to encourage action-taking by stakeholders to conserve migratory landbirds which have experienced major population declines in the recent times. We also hope the updates could catalyze development of linkages among stakeholders addressing various issues affecting migratory landbirds.

¹ AEMLAP is a UNEP/CMS instrument for action to improve conservation status of migratory landbirds; see www.cms.int for more info

2. Measuring migratory connectivity – are there general or just species specific patterns?

Migratory animals are currently suffering global declines and their conservation requires an understanding of ‘migratory connectivity’, i.e. how breeding and non-breeding sites are connected via the trajectories of individual. For example, Great Reed Warblers from a single European breeding population can be found spread across all of West Africa during the non-breeding season, whereas Common Nightingales from spatially separate European breeding populations retain reasonable spatial separation on their West African non-breeding grounds. An understanding of such migratory connectivity is important for predicting the response of migrants to environmental change. For example, the degree to which populations mix on their non-breeding ground determines the extent to which different breeding populations experience similar non-breeding conditions – and so the extent to which they are subject to the same potential drivers of population change. Furthermore, population spread during the non-breeding season determines the spatial scale of environmental change to which a breeding population will be affected during the non-breeding season, as well as its potential to track environmental change. Thus, a population or species which relies on only a few non-breeding sites should be vulnerable to any environmental change at those sites, whereas one which spreads out over a wide non-breeding area should be affected only by broad-scale environmental change and, by ‘bet-hedging’, may be more resilient.



We quantified variation in population spread and migratory mixing in all available long-distance, terrestrial migrant land-bird populations that have been tagged (712 individuals from 98 populations of 45 species, from tagging studies in the Neotropic and Afro-Palearctic flyways – map shown). The mean distance between two individuals from the same population during the non-breeding season was 743 km, covering 10–20% of the maximum width of Africa / South America. Individuals from different breeding populations tended to mix during the non-breeding season, though spatial segregation was

maintained in species with relatively large non-breeding ranges (and, to a lesser extent, those with low population spread). A substantial amount of between-population variation in population spread was predicted simply by geography, with populations using non-breeding zones with limited land availability (e.g. Central America compared to South America) showing lower population spread. The high levels of population spread suggest that “bet-hedging” strategies are generally adaptive; this makes sense in the context of the recent evolution of the systems, and the spatial and temporal unpredictability of non-breeding habitat (i.e. rainfall patterns shifting in Africa on a decadal basis, shifting suitable habitat zones profoundly).

The conservation implications of generally low connectivity are that the loss (or protection) of any non-breeding site will have a diffuse but widespread effect on many breeding populations. Although low connectivity should engender population resilience to shifts in habitat (e.g. due to climate change), we suggest it may increase susceptibility to habitat loss. We hypothesise that because a migrant species cannot adapt to both simultaneously, migrants generally may be more susceptible to population declines in the face of concurrent anthropogenic habitat and climate change.

Full story in: Finch, T., Butler, S., Franco, A., & Cresswell, W. (2017). Low migratory connectivity is common in long-distance migrant birds. *Journal of Animal Ecology*: 10.1111/1365-2656.12635

You can also contact Will Cresswell at wrlc@st-andrews.ac.uk for more information about the topic.

3. The Spring Alive Project promises to reach and touch more on migratory birds

a) *Resist the call of the cute*

Alone, helpless, small, cold, clumsy and fluffy... We see a flightless chick on the ground in our garden and many of us go weak at the knees. How did it get here? Where are its parents? Is it orphaned? Has it fallen from a nest? Is it injured? It is cheeping, maybe it is calling for help? We are struck by an overpowering urge: I must rescue it... I must do something...

What should you do when you see a baby bird on the ground? It is hard to resist the urge to rescue. Often people intervene when in fact most chicks should be left alone. This year, a Spring Alive¹ project is raising awareness of this issue with children and adults throughout Europe, Central Asia and Africa, with this season's theme of **"DON'T TAKE CHICKS WITH YOU!"**

In most cases, people misidentify a fledgling as a nestling in need of support, or will take away a nestling when they could be placed in their original nests, or a makeshift one. It's such a common mistake that the Spring Alive teams across Eurasia and Africa will be spreading these messages to teachers, pupils, children and parents, as well as continuing to teach about bird migration and conservation this season which officially begun on 1st February.

Spring Alive is an international project organised by BirdLife International. It is designed to help European, Asian and African children, their families, friends and teachers, to understand, engage with, and take action for birds and nature, and to understand the need for international conservation for migratory species.

Participants are encouraged to observe and record the arrival of 5 migratory bird species each year: Eurasian Bee-eater, Barn Swallow, Common Swift, Common Cuckoo including White Stork. Contributors of information from at least 55 countries in Europe, Asia and Africa are involved.



For more information contact Karolina Kalinowska, International Spring Alive Manager at karolina.kalinowska@otop.org.pl or visit www.springalive.net.

b) *It was jubilation as Ghana Wildlife Society scooped Action of the Year Award*

In efforts to reach more with messages about migratory birds, the Spring Alive organizes annual competition events among participating countries in the African-Eurasian region. In 2016, the contest was organized to reward actions by BirdLife Partners that encouraged children's interest in nature and the conservation of birds.

In a fierce contest in 2016, voters chose the best submissions out of three from Zimbabwe and Ghana. With the announcement of the results, "A walk with Swallows" by GWS won with 47% of total votes. "International Vulture Awareness Day Celebrations" submitted by BirdLife Zimbabwe came second with 32% and "Schools for drawing contest" another action from Zimbabwe scored 21%.

"I cannot express the joy I feel at the moment. To the sponsors, organizers and judges I say 'thank you'. To my fellow SA [Spring Alive] partners and especially those who took time off their tight schedules to vote for Ghana, we at Ghana Wildlife Society say 'we are very grateful' and we look forward to another successful



Teachers, school children and volunteers learning about conserving Swallows and other migratory birds © GWS

year in 2017 with Spring Alive,” the Conservation Education Officer at Ghana Wildlife Society Louisa Kabobah, said, on receiving the news.

This glorious moment gave a group of teachers, school children and volunteers an opportunity to develop interest in Swallows and other migratory birds. They were introduced on how to identify and

observe birds while visiting Pambros salt mining industries on the western part of the Greater Accra Region in Ghana. The children had an opportunity to apply knowledge acquired from the classroom as they learned some unique facts about nature and the life of birds during the field visit.

For more on this article please visit <http://www.birdlife.org/africa/news/ghana-wildlife-society-wins-action-year-award>.

4. Action planning for the AEMLAP flagship Species gathers momentum

Stakeholders meet to develop international species action plans for the both European Turtle-dove and European Roller in Kecskemet, Hungary

Workshops to develop Action Plans for the European Turtle-dove and the Roller were held back-to-back in January this year in Kecskemet, Hungary. A wide range of contributors including the EU Commission, FACE, and BirdLife, with representation of countries in Europe, Asia and Africa attended the workshops.



Participants at the European Turtle Dove international Species Action Planning meeting in Kecskemet, Hungary © Petar Iankov

Representatives from the Convention on Migratory Species and the African-Eurasian Migratory Landbirds Working Group were also present at the workshops. Up to the time of the workshop, which was the second and final consultative gathering for the Turtle Dove plan, a total of 69 participants had contributed, representing 32 Range States. Seventy-four participants from 27 countries took part in the Roller workshop.

The populations of the two species have been on a downward trend due to an array of factors including habitat degradation and hunting variably experienced at both their breeding and wintering grounds. The International Species Action Plans seek to address these adverse factors.

In both meetings, deep concerns were raised regarding the future of the species and the urgent need to implement the plans once completed. The Roller has experienced population crash in some countries while for the Turtle Dove, it was feared that it could go the Passenger Pigeon way if measures to stem threats were not taken early. The national governments were recognized as central stakeholders if positive gains on populations of the species is to be realized. The upcoming plans just provide this opportunity, especially now that they are being developed for entire range of the species.

Roller workshop material can be found at <http://rollerproject.eu/en/content/isap-conference-2017-kecskemet-hungary>. For more on the species action planning you can contact tokody.bela@mme.hu and ian.fisher@rspb.org.uk for the Roller and Turtle Dove respectively.

5. Other information

- Visit <http://migrantlandbirds.org/> for more on research about migratory landbirds
- Joint Meeting of the CMS Task Force/Bern Convention Special Focal Points on Illegal Killing, Taking and Trade of Birds to take place on 22-23.06.2017 in Malta
- 2nd Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council will be on 10-13.07.2017, Bonn Germany
- The next European Ornithologists' Union Conference will take place on Aug 18-22.8.2017 in Turku, Finland
- CMS COP will take place on 23-27.10.2017 and CMS 46th and 47th Standing Committee Meetings will take place on 22nd and 28th October 2017 in Manila, Philippines

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