

The Falconers' Contribution to Stemming Biodiversity Loss

In October 2015 the European Commission published a mid-term review of the [EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020](#), a detailed assessment on stemming biodiversity loss in the EU by 2020.

The [Common Agricultural Policy \(CAP\)](#) is a major policy in Europe, currently using almost 40% of the European Commission's budget but needing reform. The CAP has brought major improvements in food production/security since 1957. However the future CAP needs also to help reverse loss of biodiversity and other services from farmland. In [conferences on this topic](#) Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan, has stressed that it is an EU obligation for the CAP to deliver more for the environment.

Daniel Calleja Crespo, Director-General for Environment, has been quoted as envisioning a CAP with a focus on the environment, linking it to the Action Plan for Nature, Economy and People. He has emphasized the importance of contributions from farmers, consumers, local authorities and other stakeholders.

To this end, [the Perdix Portal](#), an important initiative, has just been launched by the falconry community in Europe. The [International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey](#) is collaborating with the [Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust](#) to pioneer restoration of farmland biodiversity across Europe. Where agricultural intensification has reduced plant and insect diversity, harming the food webs that rely on them, grey partridge populations have suffered. However, when the land and landscape is again suitable for grey partridge it is suitable for all biodiversity.

The Portal has a [multilingual website](#) which gathers restoration information and networks with national-language sites to run local projects. By pioneering this new approach to conservation, in 17 languages, falconers are working with other land users to spearhead a new campaign to assist the recovery of European biodiversity and of the Grey Partridge, an iconic species.

The launch, at the Bozar centre for fine arts in Brussels, brought together science and art, with explanations of the Portal and why it is needed and an art exhibition of works showing biodiversity in farmed landscapes by wildlife artists from all over Europe.

In his opening speech, IAF President, Dr. Adrian Lombard said:

“Sustainability must be the operative word. Falconers have a long history of being sustainable users of the environment. Throughout history there is evidence of our concerns for conservation and, more recently, good evidence that falconers are effective sentinels for environmental change. More than that, we have conclusively demonstrated that we are an effective force to address conservation problems.

The Grey Partridge – Perdix perdix – is our indicator species. Measures taken to restore this species will benefit many other species and elements of the depleted environment. Our plan is to provide people – ordinary people who live in the countryside – with the tools to effect this restoration. We recognize that it is the stated intention of the European Union government to reverse the loss of biodiversity

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by 2020. We support this goal and we offer the Perdix Portal as our contribution to this essential effort."

Dr med. vet. Michael Greshake, Chairman of the IAF Biodiversity working Group, related that, a few weeks ago a farmer-friend left a hectare fallow and so much wildlife had gathered since: four lapwings, a snipe and two pairs of larks had settled on this small area. He had not heard a skylark singing for years and now there were two at once! On adjacent land, there is almost nothing to see or hear. Read [Dr. Greshake's speech in German](#).

Dr. Julie Ewald of the [Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust](#) (the main partner in the project) said:

"The portal uses technology to provide conservation on the ground across Europe and beyond, using the principle of "Conservation through Wise Use".

Information needs to come in the language that land managers use. English biologists may have conceived conservation headlands, but German farmers saw the added value of harvesting 'Blumenstreifen' for biomass after the game-bird breeding season.

Multiple language sites enable standardisation on the best practices and best measures for use in other regions, even beyond the European Union.

Perdixnet is achieving knowledge transfer from scientist to manager and country to country; it provides tools for adaptive management at local level and international collation of the information on success gathered in standardised ways."

Professor Robert Kenward, one of the principals behind the project, attended as representative of the [Sustainable Use and Management of Ecosystems group](#), in the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#) (IUCN) of which IAF is also a member. He praised the teamwork of many people across several organisations:

"They saw the value for conservation of networking multilingual sites to transfer research-based management knowledge from country to country, and encourage further collation of knowledge from projects in each country. They embraced the idea of volunteer practitioner translators to underpin this, thus extending widely via the web the wild species restoration that falconers pioneered 40 years ago."