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# Press Release: New report reveals plummeting migratory shorebird populations globally



As the UN Biodiversity Conference in Colombia enters its final days of negotiations, new IUCN Red List update reclassifies 16 shorebird species to higher threat categories.

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- Some populations of migratory shorebirds have decreased by more than a third.
- BirdLife International, with partners spanning 119 countries, is unified in calling on governments at CBD COP16 to step up urgent actions for species to reverse declines and stop extinctions.

The latest update to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ reveals a highly concerning decline in populations of migratory shorebirds across the globe, with 16 species reclassified to higher threat categories<sup>1</sup>. Science shows the huge negative impact of declining species populations, with whole ecosystems and food chains being disrupted as a result. As birds migrate beyond borders, the new update highlights a need for more collaboration from governments without delay to reverse the losses of migratory birds.

*“COP16 must be the catalyst for governments to back up commitments made two years ago with meaningful action to reverse the catastrophic declines in species populations. This means more action to bolster efforts to recover threatened species, more action to protect and restore more land, freshwater and sea, and more action to transform our food, energy and industrial systems – backed up by the necessary funding. The decline of migratory birds, which connect people across countries and continents, is a powerful symbol of how we are currently failing.”*

**Martin Harper, CEO, BirdLife International**

Birds are important indicators of the state of nature: they occur almost everywhere, their behaviours and ecology often mirror other groups of species, they are extremely well studied, and they are responsive to environmental change. With one in eight bird species threatened with extinction and 60% of bird species in decline globally<sup>2</sup>, diminishing bird populations signal ecosystems in crisis. Many migratory birds follow specific routes called **flyways**<sup>3</sup>, stopping at various sites along the way to rest and feed. This makes them especially at risk from threats like habitat loss and climate change.

*“While many of these shorebirds remain numerous and are still commonly encountered along their flyways, new analyses of data from long-term monitoring schemes reveal that the global populations of some species have declined by more than a third in recent decades. In some cases, the rate of decline is accelerating – underlining the urgent need for research to diagnose the causes and coordinated conservation action to address them.”*

**Dr Ian Burfield, Global Science Coordinator (Species) & Bird Red List Authority Coordinator, BirdLife International**

Shorebirds, often seen darting along beaches or feeding on mudflats, are a familiar sight all over the world. Coastal areas where many of these birds live also support millions of people by providing food, jobs, and storm protection. Protecting shorebirds is essential not just for the birds, but also for the coastal communities that depend on these habitats.

*“The perilous declines of migratory birds are a sign that the integrity of flyways is deteriorating. Losing the network of habitats that migratory birds depend on to rest and feed during their long journeys could have severe consequences for the millions of people that rely on these sites, as well as the birds.”*

**Dr Barend van Gernerden, Global Flyways Coordinator, BirdLife International**

We only have five more years of this defining decade. CBD COP16 is the moment to galvanise action to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030. Plummeting migratory bird populations signal that nature is in crisis. When we lose species, our future is compromised. Nature loss can be reversed but extinctions cannot.

ENDS.

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## Notes for Editors

1. Species with increased extinction risk include:

**Dunlin** (*Calidris alpina*), a small sandpiper with a striking black belly and rufous back in breeding plumage, has declined by at least 20%, with the greatest declines along the Americas flyways. Uplisted from Least Concern to Near Threatened.

**Grey Plover** (*Pluvialis squatarola*), known as Black-bellied Plover in the Americas (where up to 90% of the population occurs), has declined by more than 30%, with potential causes including habitat loss and degradation, disturbance and hunting. Uplisted from Least Concern to Vulnerable.

**Curlew Sandpiper** (*Calidris ferruginea*), which breeds in northern Siberia and winters widely from West Africa to New Zealand, has also declined by more than 30%, likely due to a range of threats including habitat loss and degradation, disturbance, hunting and climate change. Uplisted from Near Threatened to Vulnerable.

**Here is a list of all 16 shorebird species that were reclassified.**

These shorebirds are just some of the 145 bird species whose global extinction risk category has changed in the 2024-2 Red List update. Some of these changes are genuine, reflecting real improvements due to conservation measures or real deteriorations due to increased threats. Others are non-genuine changes, reflecting new information that was not available in previous assessments. Of the 16 reclassified shorebirds, 14 have undergone genuine deteriorations since 1988 (when the first comprehensive Red List assessments of birds was published), while the other two species were probably already declining before that time.

Factsheets presenting the latest assessments for all 11,195 bird species are available on the BirdLife Data Zone: <https://datazone.birdlife.org/species/search>; with more information about the IUCN Red List categories here: <https://www.birdlife.org/projects/iucn-red-list/>

2. Previously estimated at 49% in **BirdLife International’s State of the World’s Birds 2022**, the percentage of extant (i.e. not extinct) bird species with declining global populations is now considered to be 60%, as a result of reassessments by BirdLife International for the 2023 and 2024 IUCN Red List updates. This increase does not reflect sudden recent declines of many species, but the incorporation of data from the last 10–20 years that have only recently been collated, analysed and made available.

3. Find information about the global flyways here: <https://www.birdlife.org/globalflyways/>

## About The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ (or the IUCN Red List) is an invaluable resource to guide conservation action and policy decisions. It is a health check for our planet – a Barometer of Life. It is the world’s most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of animal, fungus and plant species. It is based on an objective system for assessing the risk of extinction of a species should no conservation action be taken.

Species are assigned to one of eight categories of threat based on whether they meet criteria linked to population trend, population size and structure and geographic range. Species listed as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable are collectively described as ‘threatened’.

The IUCN Red List is not just a register of names and the associated threat categories. It is a rich compendium of information on the threats to the species, their ecological requirements, where they live, and information on conservation actions that can be used to reduce or prevent extinctions. When an animal, fungus or plant changes Red List Category for genuine reasons, this reflects a change in the extinction risk for that species. It is therefore a key indicator for tracking conservation successes and failures. The IUCN Red List is a joint effort between IUCN and its Species Survival Commission, working with its IUCN Red List partners – ABQ BioPark; Arizona State University; BirdLife International; Botanic Gardens Conservation International; Conservation International; Missouri Botanical Garden; NatureServe; Rewild; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Sapienza University of Rome; Senckenberg Society for Nature Research; Texas A&M University; and Zoological Society of London. This work has been made possible with the essential contribution of the Red List Partners. [www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#)



**Dunlin** (*Calidris alpina*), a small sandpiper which has declined by at least 20%, with the greatest declines along the Americas flyways. Uplisted from Least Concern to Near Threatened. Photo Credit ©David Fisher.

**Curlew Sandpiper** (*Calidris ferruginea*), which breeds in northern Siberia and winters widely from West Africa to New Zealand, has also declined by more than 30%, likely due to a range of threats including habitat loss and degradation, disturbance, hunting and climate change. Uplisted from Near Threatened to Vulnerable. Photo Credit © Ayuwat Jeawattanakon.

**Grey Plover** (*Pluvialis squatarola*), known as Black-bellied Plover in the Americas (where up to 90% of the population occurs), has declined by more than 30%, with potential causes including habitat loss and degradation, disturbance and hunting. Uplisted from Least Concern to Vulnerable. Photo Credit © Prof. Dr. Christof Monig.

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