

Birds in Finland increasingly threatened – yellow-breasted bunting extinct

More than a third of the bird species that nest in Finland are threatened. The most common reason for species becoming threatened is changes caused by humans to their habitats, including forests, agricultural environments, mires and water bodies. Threatened species can be helped with conservation measures.

Of the 246 bird species that nest in Finland, 86 were classified as threatened in the new assessment. A total of 18 species are critically endangered, i.e. at the highest risk of becoming extinct. New species classified as critically endangered include the common pochard and the ortolan bunting, the numbers of which have decreased by over 80 per cent over the last three generations. The number of endangered species (33) decreased by one, while the number of vulnerable species stayed the same (35) compared to the assessment conducted in 2015. In addition to the threatened species, 34 species were classified as near threatened. The number of threatened and near threatened species increased.

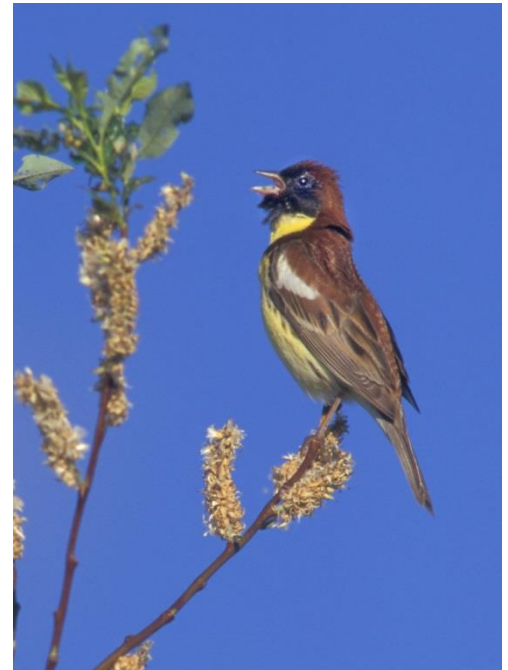
The yellow-breasted bunting, which was last observed in Finland in 2007, was classified as extinct in Finland. The primary reason for the extinction of this species is the fact that people have hunted it for food in its overwintering areas in China, but its extinction may also have been contributed to by the decrease in wetlands.

The main reason for species becoming threatened is changes caused by humans to their habitats

There are many reasons for bird species becoming threatened, the most significant of which is changes caused by humans to their habitats. A total of 29 per cent of bird species living in mires are threatened, with 57 per cent listed on the Red List (extinct, threatened, near threatened and data deficient). Mire bird species continue to be threatened by old ditches, ditch cleaning and peat extraction.

As many as half of all wetland waterfowl species are threatened, and almost two thirds are on the Red List. The most significant cause of the plight of these species is the excessive eutrophication and overgrowth of water bodies. Non-native predators mink and raccoon dog are reasons for the threatened status of wetland species in inland waters and bird populations that primarily nest in archipelagos around the Baltic Sea. A total of 39 per cent of the bird populations of Finnish archipelagos are threatened. Their status is weakened by non-native predators as well as contaminants and pollution.

Forestry remains a significant reason for the decline of bird populations. Nine of the species that primarily inhabit forest habitats are threatened and eight are near threatened. The willow tit, classified as endangered, and the European crested tit, classified as vulnerable, were previously the most populous species in the forests of Finland, but their populations have decreased alarmingly. Semi-natural forests have decreased as a result of forestry, which affects the ability of species such as threatened Paridae to survive over winter.



The decline in the population of the yellow-breasted bunting, which has become extinct in Finland and is critically endangered worldwide, has even been compared to the crash in the population of the passenger pigeon, which is now extinct. This decline is particularly caused by hunting for human consumption that takes place in its overwintering areas. Photo by Juha Ollila.

Of species that primarily nest in arable land, 40 per cent are threatened and 60 per cent are on the Red List. The most significant reason why these bird species are threatened is the decreasing of livestock farms, which is anticipated to continue. The decreasing of livestock husbandry has caused overgrowth of freshwater meadows, loss of diversity in agricultural environments and decreasing of insect populations, which are detrimental to shorebirds in particular.

Conservation measures help, but more are needed

In order for many species, such as the globally threatened yellow-breasted bunting and the ortolan bunting, to be saved, international conservation measures are required. There are examples of successful conservation efforts. Thanks to international cooperation, the small population of lesser white-fronted goose in Fennoscandia is on the rise. The species is still critically endangered in Finland.



The common eider, an endangered species, has been declining heavily, particularly in the population's core habitat in Finland's southwestern archipelago. The species particularly suffers from increased predation of nesting females. The pressure placed on nesting females by predation can be attempted to be reduced with protective artificial nests. Photo by Antti Below.

The white-tailed eagle has been removed from the Red List due to the fact that its population has continued to grow as a result of national and international conservation measures. The numbers of black-tailed godwit, a vulnerable species, have been on the rise as a result of the management of freshwater meadows. The white-backed woodpecker, which is also classified as vulnerable, has benefited from the conservation of old deciduous forests.

More information

Academy Research Fellow **Aleksi Lehikoinen**, Finnish Museum of Natural History, tel. +358 (0)45 1375732, firstname.lastname@helsinki.fi

Senior Researcher **Markku Mikkola-Roos**, Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE), tel. +358 (0)400 148 685, firstname.lastname@ymparisto.fi

Links

- [The 2019 Red List of Finnish Species](#)
- [The 2015 Red List of Finnish Bird Species](#)
- [Web service of the Finnish Red List](#)