

WILL YOU LEAVE A LASTING LEGACY FOR NATURE?

BirdLife Europe & Central Asia, EEB (European Environmental Bureau), Friends of the Earth Europe and WWF European Policy Office call on Commissioner Karmenu Vella to take decisive action in his remaining time as EU Environment Commissioner to improve the implementation and enforcement of the EU's world-leading nature laws – the Birds & Habitats Directives¹.

Threats to birds and the implementation and enforcement of

The #NatureAlert Countdown is on! But there is still time to take action to save threatened wildlife and habitats across Europe, such as the threatened vultures of Thrace!

European biodiversity is in freefall. Major gaps in the implementation and enforcement of our nature laws are leaving our natural heritage dangerously exposed. Bird populations – a barometer of ecosystem health – are collapsing across the continent. The threat of illegal shooting, trapping, poisoning and collision or electrocution is having a massive impact on bird populations, particularly migratory birds, like vultures and many raptors. Scientific reviews have recently estimated that around 24 million birds are illegally killed each year by shooting, trapping or poisoning in the Mediterranean alone. With many species already brought to the brink by habitat loss and climate change, we must urgently address these illegal threats through better law enforcement and better planning of energy infrastructure.



SAVE THE VULTURES OF THRACE, GREECE



©WWF Greece

#NatureAlert



Thrace is an important area for bird conservation and encompasses the Dadia National Park, known as 'the land of raptors'. It is home to important bird species that are threatened by illegal use of poisonous baits and energy infrastructure related mortality. Thrace hosts the last breeding population of Cinereous vultures in the Balkans, 4 of the 5 nests of Egyptian vultures in Greece and is a vital foraging area for black vulture and the majority of the Griffons vultures originating in the Balkan colonies.

The use of illegal poisonous baits is amongst the greatest threats for vultures. Vultures are secondary victims of this illegal practice that aims to resolve either human-human conflicts (e.g. neighbour disputes) or human-wildlife conflicts (e.g. wolf, foxes). In 2013, the European Commission opened an infringement case against Greece on the illegal use of poisoned baits when an entire colony of local griffon vultures was wiped out in the nearby area of the Nestos Straits. In 2016, a reasoned opinion was sent to Greece which expanded the infringement case to the national level. The government needs to adopt a national strategy to tackle this illegal practice, improve active local enforcement, raise awareness about the illegal practice of poisoned baits, and expand anti-poison canine teams and human-wildlife co-existence measures to protect livestock.

Furthermore, the region of Thrace has been selected as a wind priority area by the national renewable energy sources (RES) spatial plan without properly assessing the impacts on the protected vulture species. In 2014, the European Commission opened an infringement case against Greece for not properly or appropriately assessing the impacts of the RES on Natura 2000 sites, including Thrace. In 2017, a follow-up letter was sent.

The Egyptian Vulture National Action Plan, adopted in 2017, included a 5 km no-go buffer zone for wind farms around active nests, but these have not been implemented. The government is in the process of revising the RES Spatial plan, and it needs to ensure that this plan is based on appropriate assessment of the impacts of windfarms upon biodiversity and take into account the needs and priorities of protected species.

¹ [January 2019. 'Joint Policy Brief on the Implementation and Enforcement of the Birds & Habitats Directives'](#)

**The #NatureAlert countdown is on!
Will you, Commissioner Vella, leave a lasting legacy for nature?**

**Please support our call for the European Commission to
closely monitor the situation in Thrace and
bring any unresolved infringement cases to
the European Court of Justice.**

Contact: Sabien Leemans - Senior Biodiversity Policy Officer, WWF EU sleemans@wwf.eu



The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of the European Commission and the MAVA Foundation for this publication. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and cannot be regarded as reflecting the position of the funders mentioned above. The funder cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information this document contains.

#NatureAlert

