

# MARK CARWARDINE



## TIME FOR ACTION ON SUMMER SONGBIRDS

The once familiar soundtrack of summer – the gentle purring of turtle doves, the screaming of swifts and the unmistakable songs of cuckoos – is fading so fast that it will soon be replaced by a deathly silence.

The latest report on the state of the UK's birds, just published by a partnership of organisations ranging from the RSPB to Natural England, makes seriously depressing reading: in less than 20 years, we have lost 88 per cent of our turtle doves, 49 per cent of our cuckoos, 43 per cent of our nightingales, 40 per cent of our swifts... and much more.

It's hard enough to look after birds that stay in one place, but even harder to protect those that spend only part of the year in the UK. I've been following the progress of a cuckoo called Livingstone – satellite-tagged by the BTO, in Scotland, on 21 May 2013 – and in a single year he travelled to no fewer than 20 different countries.

He flew to France and from there to Italy, Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo and Gabon; then he returned via Cameroon,

Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Algeria, Spain and France, before arriving back in Scotland almost exactly a year later. Just imagine trying to keep a world traveller like Livingstone safe.

Clearly, much of the blame does lie outside the UK: hunters and trappers in the Mediterranean, for example, are obvious culprits.

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But we must take responsibility, too. As umpteen more reports testify – from last year's *State of Nature* to Defra's most recent analysis of wild bird population trends – there is ample evidence of shocking declines among our resident species, too.

I know we need research to identify problems, priorities and solutions. And I know people will say that things are being done. But it's clearly not enough. What use are reports that merely record the decline – and even disappearance – of our precious wildlife?