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Inspired by Birds (CREA+BIRD)**

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## Index of acronyms

D	Deliverable
EU	European Union
GA	Grant Agreement
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GBIF	Global Biodiversity Information Facility
PNAB	Parco Naturale Adamello Brenta
RRI	Responsible Research and Innovation
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics
STS	Science, Technology and Society
WP	Work Package

## Partnership

Ref.	OID	Legal name	Country	Region	City	Website	Acronyms
P1	E10208640	JYVASKYLAN YLIOPISTO	Finland		Jyvaskyla	<a href="http://www.jyu.fi">http://www.jyu.fi</a>	JYU.FI
P2	E10208740	LIBERA UNIVERSITA DI BOLZANO	Italy		Bolzano	<a href="http://www.unibz.it">www.unibz.it</a>	UNIBZ.IT
P3	E10208220	UNIVERSITATEA DE VEST DIN TIMISOARA	Romania	Vest	Timisoara	<a href="http://www.uvt.ro">www.uvt.ro</a>	WUT.RO
P4	E10209243	UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI	Slovenia	Osrednje slovenska	Ljubljana	<a href="http://www.uni-lj.si">http://www.uni-lj.si</a>	UL.SI
P5	E10154029	DRUŠTVO ZA OPAZOVANJE IN PROUČEVANJE PTIC SLOVENIJE - DOPPS BIRDLIFE SLOVENIJA	Slovenia		Ljubljana	<a href="http://www.ptice.si">www.ptice.si</a>	DOPPS.SI
P6	E10359479	Suomen luonto- ja ympäristökoulujen liitto ry	Finland		Tampere	<a href="http://www.luontokoulut.fi">www.luontokoulut.fi</a>	LYKE.FI
P7	E10362474	Parco naturale Adamello Brenta	Italy	Provincia Autonom a di Trento	Strembo	<a href="https://www.pnab.it/">https://www.pnab.it/</a>	PNAB.IT
P8	E10016244	"Milvus Group" Association	Romania	Centru	Tîrgu mureş	<a href="http://www.milvus.ro">www.milvus.ro</a>	MILVUS.RO



## History of changes

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## 1 Executive Summary

The CREA+BIRD project empowers teachers and educators to design, adopt, and share innovative teaching modules that promote the European sustainability competence framework (GreenComp) and strengthen sustainability education for students and future EU citizens. This report (Activity 2.4) serves as a starter toolkit focusing on the ecology and conservation of selected bird species.

The aim of this report is to provide introductory educational materials on the ecology and conservation of selected migratory birds and beyond, which will be further developed throughout the project with contributions from ornithology experts, teachers, and educators. Following initial discussions within the project consortium, it was agreed that the selection would include not only migratory species but also common and flagship birds that students and teachers can easily observe in the vicinity of their schools. The learning pack is designed to be user-friendly, accessible, and up to date, supporting both teachers and students in exploring bird ecology and conservation topics.

The toolkit presents 19 bird species and offers a comprehensive overview of their biological, ecological, and cultural characteristics. For each species, the material covers physical appearance, vocalizations, habitat, diet, breeding behaviour, migration patterns, population trends, and conservation status across Europe. In addition, it highlights the cultural significance of the selected bird species in Slovenia, Romania, Italy, and Finland, illustrating their presence in folklore, proverbs, literature, poetry, music, and visual art. Each species is accompanied by a visual legend to facilitate navigation and use of the educational material. Explanations of the IUCN Red List categories are provided in the supplementary materials.

The selection of bird species include:

- mostly migratory birds and species which all participating countries share
- birds living in different environments (forests, fields, waters, shores, urban areas etc.)
- birds which are easy to recognize, see and identify, maybe some threatened ones
- messengers of environmental changes or phenomena
- some that carry myths



## 2 Introduction

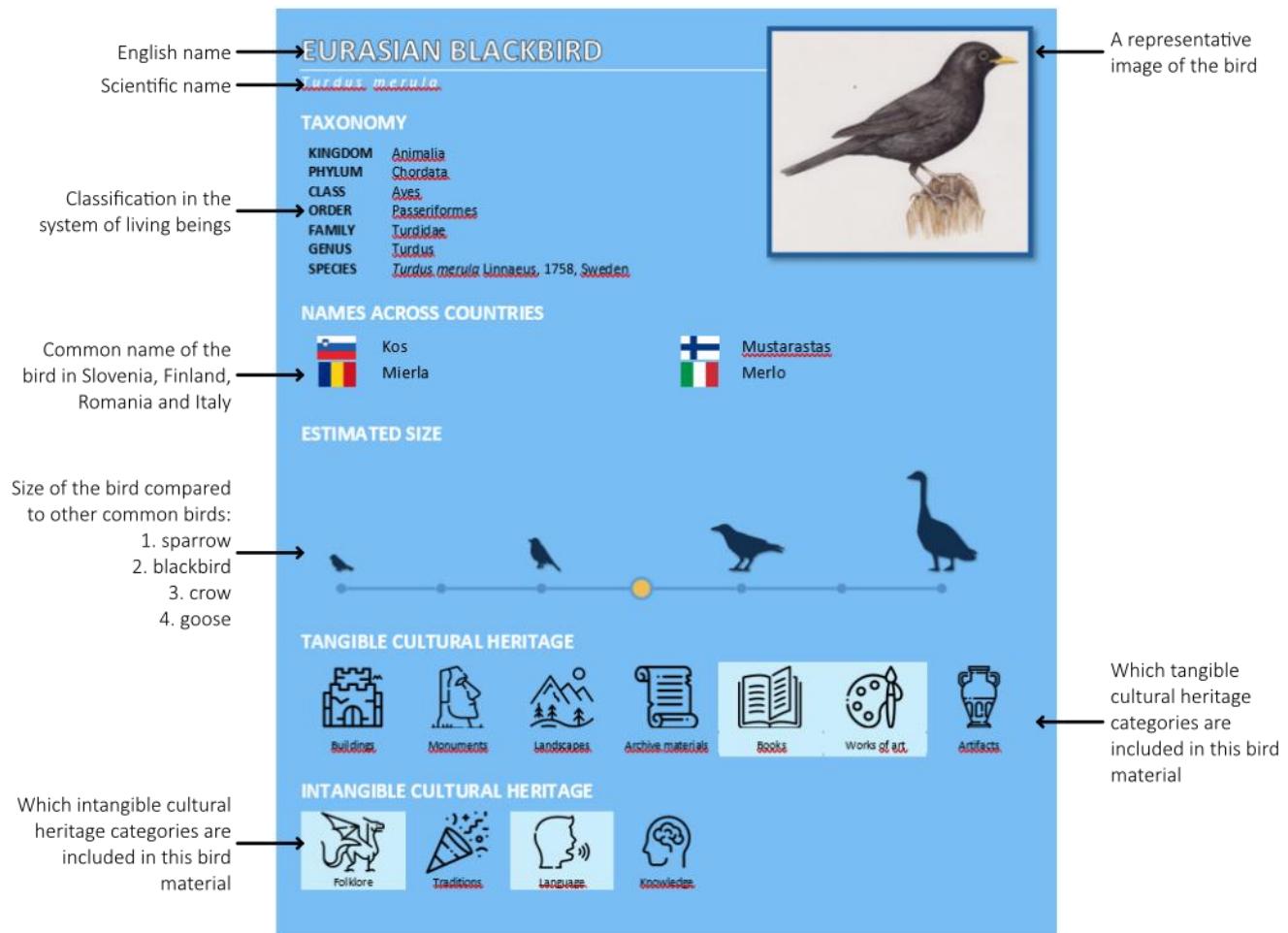
The CREA+BIRD project aims at empowering teachers and educators to model, adopt and multiply new modules to foster European sustainability competence framework GreenComp and sustainability education of students and future EU citizens. Particularly, supported by researchers and experts, they are encouraged to establish communities of practice dedicated to the development of new and more creative modules for green competencies in education. The objective of the CREA+BIRD project is to foster teachers to co-create and share new pedagogical tools for creative sustainability education by using birds as an inspiring common theme, thus operationalizing the GreenComp sustainability competence framework. By integrating cultural narratives about birds with natural scientific knowledge, the project enriches the creative processes, enhancing learners' connection with nature. The CREA+BIRD project advances sustainability education through collecting, comparing, and co-creating pedagogical methods. Utilizing collaborative and participatory action research methodologies, the project seeks to empower educators and students, enriching learning experiences, and promoting active involvement with sustainability issues.

The project unites experienced educators and environmental organizations from four countries with expertise in bird research. The national associations selected for this project are also networked in many ways with schools and teachers in their respective countries and provide in-service training for teachers. Thus, the project provides important input both for pre-service and in-service teacher education. Methodologically, this project follows the principles of action research, based on the initiatives of teachers in schools in search of innovative teaching methods. The project draws on the solid research expertise of renowned researchers on teacher education and sustainability. Leveraging the collaboration between universities, associations, and schools, it strengthens the links between initial teacher education and in-service training as well as formal and nonformal education. Through these collaborations, the main aim of the project is to contribute to the effectiveness of sustainability education through the development of creative methods and thus contribute to a more sustainable future. The project represents a unique opportunity to support transformative initiatives that inspire sustainable action and pave the way towards a more resilient and equitable future.

The main objective of WP2 is to collect, analyse and compare transformative and creative teaching practices for sustainability education. The aim of this report is to provide initial educational materials on the ecology and conservation of selected migratory birds (Activity 2.4), which will be further developed throughout the project with input from ornithology experts, teachers, and educators. Following initial discussions within the project consortium, it was agreed that the list of selected species will include not only migratory birds but also common and flagship species that students and teachers can easily observe near their schools. This learning pack is designed to be user-friendly and up-to-date, supporting both teachers and students in exploring bird conservation topics.



### 3 Legend



Physical structures of historical or architectural significance.	Erected objects commemorating important events, people, or cultures.	Natural or shaped environments with cultural, historical, or aesthetic value.	Historical documents and records	Written works that hold literary, educational, or historical value.	Visual artworks that reflect cultural, historical, or creative expression.	Physical objects made or used by people in the past that carry cultural significance.
Traditional stories, legends, and myths passed through generations.	Repeated cultural practices, celebrations, or rituals.	Systems of communication unique to cultural or ethnic groups.	Collective wisdom, beliefs, and understandings of a community.			



## 4 Songbirds and allies (Passeriformes)

### 4.1 Eurasian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*)

#### EURASIAN BLACKBIRD

*Turdus merula*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Passeriformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Turdidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Turdus</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Turdus merula</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Kos

Mierla



Mustarastas

Merlo

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



#### 4.1.1 Descriptive notes

Male Blackbirds are black with a bright orange-yellow beak and yellow eye-ring. Females are brown often with spots and streaks on their breasts and brown beak. Individuals are around 25 cm long, and weight ranges from 85 to 127 grams.



Figure 1: GBIF *Turdus merula* information sheet



Figure 2: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Turdus merula*

#### 4.1.2 Sound

The first Blackbird song of the year can usually be heard at the end of January or early February; though urban birds often start earlier. Studies have shown that the first birds to sing are cocks that were hatched the year before. The older birds do not start singing until well into March. Blackbirds typically like to sing after rain. Song is well known for its melodic, mellow tune, clear, loud fluting at slow tempo. Alarm call is series of metallic, high pli- pli-pli.

#### 4.1.3 Habitat and distribution

This species inhabits a very wide range of habitats. Its main and original habitat is relatively open broadleaf, coniferous, mixed and deciduous forests but it is also found in tree plantations, orchards, farmland, gardens and parks and commonly in open grassy areas so long as vegetation cover is within a short distance.

	Very common in Slovenia, common in gardens and near humans.
	The blackbird nests both in various types of forests and near humans. The blackbird breeding population in Finland has increased by as much as fourfold in a few decades. The number of blackbirds wintering in Finland has increased more than tenfold. A third of blackbirds winter here. They survive better the winters due to global warming. Blackbirds can often be seen at winter bird feeders.
	The specimens in our country are sedentary. In Romania, individuals from the Carpathian mountain regions or from northern parts of Europe may appear during winter.
	It thrives in mature, moist and open woodlands and forest ecotones with abundant grassy and open spaces, suitable for foraging. It is found where the tree and shrub cover is relatively dense, used for territorial recognition, shelter and nesting.



It demonstrated extreme ecological flexibility, which has led it to colonize a vast array of environments. The Blackbird is partially sedentary, migratory and nesting on the Italian peninsula and on the smaller islands, Sicily and Sardinia.

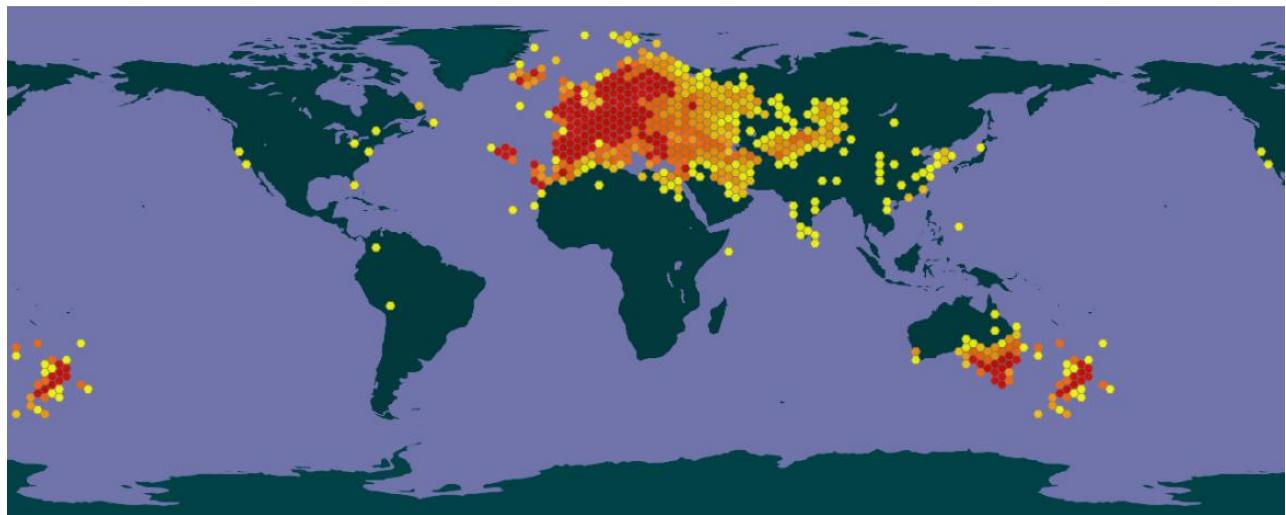


Figure 3: Distribution of *Turdus merula*

#### 4.1.4 Nutrition

It is a highly flexible and adaptive forager and feeds principally on invertebrates, mainly earthworms and insects and their larvae but will also take fruits and seeds and, occasionally, small vertebrates.



Figure 4: Female *Turdus merula*, eating a holly-leaved barberry fruit (*Berberis aquifolium*)



Figure 5: Male *Turdus merula*, eating an earthworm

#### 4.1.5 Breeding



In Europe it breeds from mid-March to early September. The nest is a large cup of dry grass stems and small twigs, packed with mud and lined with fine grass and stems. It is generally sited 0.5–15 m off the ground in a bush or tree or in a climbing plant against a wall, and frequently in or on a wall, outside or inside a building.

It takes a pair of Blackbirds between 11 and 14 days to make a nest. Most of the work is done by the female. It is only the female that incubates the eggs, but the male helps feed his offspring.



Figure 6: *Turdus merula* nest

#### 4.1.6 Migrations

Resident to short distance migrants, depending on the population. Mainly a nocturnal migrant. Birds breeding in northern Europe generally migrates south or west; males are less likely than females and immatures to migrate. Breeders in southeastern Europe and northwestern Africa are essentially non-migratory.



Figure 7: *Turdus merula* migration map

#### 4.1.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

This is due to its large range and large population size, with an increasing population trend. In some European countries there are several factors that threaten the species, Britain (intensification of agriculture), Greece and Spain (hunting), some threats are common for all countries: predators (domestic cats in urban areas), disturbance, adverse weather conditions, nest collapse and starvation (Collar & Christie, 2020).

There are currently no known conservation measures for this species within its European range, only the promotion and maintenance of low-intensity farming has been proposed to benefit the species.

#### 4.1.8 Cultural heritage

##### 4.1.8.1 Slovenian culture

The Blackbird is a well-known bird in Slovenia, not only for its melodic song but also for its presence in folklore, traditional beliefs, and cultural representations. Across Slovenian traditions, the Blackbird has been associated with various stories, sayings, songs, and even weather-related beliefs.

**Weather Prediction:** In Slovenia, an old weather-related belief is linked to the "kosovi dnevi" (blackbird days), which occur at the end of January. According to folklore, these are the coldest days of winter. The legend says that the Blackbird, originally white, turned black after taking shelter in a chimney to escape the freezing weather.

**Symbol of Melancholy and Reflection:** The Blackbird's song is often described as melancholic but also wise. In traditional rural communities, its singing was sometimes interpreted as a warning of change or transition, particularly in the evening.

**Guardian of the Forest:** Some old tales portray the Blackbird as a secretive guardian of the forest, warning other animals of intruders with its distinctive alarm calls.



## The Blackbird in Proverbs and Sayings

Slovenian folklore includes many proverbs featuring birds, including the Blackbird:

"Kakor kos poje v dežju" ("Like a blackbird singing in the rain")	Meaning someone is remaining cheerful in difficult times.
"Kos se ne boji zime, če si gnezdo dobro naredi" ("The blackbird doesn't fear winter if it builds its nest well")	Meaning good preparation ensures survival in hard times.

## The Blackbird in Slovenian Literature and Poetry

In Slovenian folklore, there is a well-known fable called Kos in marec (The Blackbird and March), which warns against premature joy and hasty decisions. The blackbird, which rejoices too early in spring, marriage, or young offspring, does not consider the changeability of the weather, and is therefore killed by the subsequent cold and snow. The story expresses the folk meteorological wisdom that March is unpredictable and can bring severe cold despite warm days (Telban Kropej, 2022). One interesting role is that of the animals at the wedding: the Blackbird is depicted as pouring wine, but he lingers so long to wet his beak that he gets drunk and starts whistling a lot.

Slovenian folk songs: there are several folk songs and children's rhymes that feature the Blackbird:

<b>PLEŠI, PLEŠI ČRNI KOS</b> Pleši, pleši črni kos, kak' bom plesal, če sem bos? Kupil si pa čevlje bom, polke tri zaplesal bom. Plesal bom s siničico, lepo mlado ptičico, s peto tolkel bom ob tla, tresla se bo zemlja vsa.	<b>DANCE, DANCE BLACKBIRD</b> Dance, dance, blackbird, how will I dance if I'm barefoot? I'll buy some shoes, I'll dance three polkas. I will dance with the tit bird, a beautiful young bird, I will tap the ground with my heel, the whole earth will tremble.
<b>LEPO MI POJE ČRNI KOS</b> Lepo mi poje črni kos, oj črni kos Tam v zelenem bukovju, oj bukovju! Prišla sta pa jagra dva, oj jagra dva! Da bi kosa streljala, oj streljala! Kos je bil teh špasov sit, oj špasov sit! Pojta, jagra, se solit, frr v bukovje!	<b>A BLACKBIRD SINGS TO ME</b> The blackbird sings to me, oh blackbird There in the green beech, oh beech! And here come two hunters, oh two hunters! To shoot the blackbird, oh shoot it! The blackbird had enough of fun, Oh, enough of fun! Sing, you hunters, to be, to the beechwoods!
<b>POJ MI, KOS</b> Poj mi, kos, zapoj mi vsako jutro žuborečo budnico in zapleši mi pod oknom svoj lahkotni ples po rosni travi.	<b>SING TO ME, BLACKBIRD</b> Sing to me, blackbird, Sing to me every morning a blaring wake-up call and dance for me under my window your light dance on the dewy grass.



<p>Jaz pa bom veke spustila, pela in plesala s tabo, srečna za zaprtimi očmi.</p>	<p>And I will let my eyelids drop, I will sing and dance with you, happy behind closed eyes.</p>
<p><b>KOS (LJUDSKA PESEM)</b> Poje, poje v grmu kos: nisem reven, če sem bos. moj je tale širni les. V njem je šestkrat tri dreves. Kdor jih kupi, jih prodam in še jagod mu dodam. Potlej hišo si zgradim, da v njej zimo preživim.</p>	<p><b>BLACKBIRD (FOLK SONG)</b> Singing, singing in the bush: I am not poor if I am barefoot. This vast wood is mine. There are six times three trees in it. Whoever buys them, I sell them And I will add to them berries. Then I build myself a house, to spend the winter in it.</p>

### The Blackbird in Slovenian Visual Art and Symbolism

In traditional Slovenian embroidery and woodcarving, bird motifs—including the Blackbird—appear frequently, symbolizing freedom, wisdom, and connection to nature. The Blackbird is also depicted in some older Slovenian fairy tales as a guide or helper figure.

#### 4.1.8.2 Romanian culture

The blackbird occupies an interesting place in Romanian folklore and popular beliefs. Its presence is often associated with nature, seasons, and omens, reflecting the close relationship traditional Romanian communities maintained with the natural world.

In Romanian tradition, the blackbird's song is considered a harbinger of spring. Its early melodious singing signals the end of winter and the arrival of warmer days. The blackbird is also connected to popular weather predictions: if the blackbird sings near the house, good weather is expected. If it is unusually silent, it could indicate stormy or cold weather ahead. Such beliefs show how communities interpreted the bird's behavior as natural signs of changing conditions.

In Romanian folklore, the blackbird symbolizes spring, renewal, melody, and subtle mystery. Its songs and behavior were historically interpreted as omens and guides, reflecting the deep connection between people and the natural rhythms of their environment.

### The Blackbird in Proverbs and Sayings

Romanian folklore includes many proverbs featuring birds, including the Blackbird:

<p>„Dacă mierla cântă, se aproape primăvara.” ("When the blackbird sings, spring is near.")</p>	<p>When people hear the blackbird singing, it is an indicator that spring is approaching.</p>
<p>“Dacă mierla tace sau se retrage, vine frig ori ploaie.” ("If the blackbird is silent or withdraws, cold or rain is coming.")</p>	<p>When a blackbird stops singing or hides, it is seen as a sign of impending bad weather—either cold temperatures or rain</p>



## The Blackbird in Romanian Literature and Poetry

The blackbird, although not a frequent symbol in Romanian literature, appears occasionally and usually carries connotations of mystery, musicality, and the heralding of spring, similar to its role in folklore.

As a singing bird: in many Romanian literary texts, especially poetry, the blackbird is evoked through its melodious song, often associated with the break of dawn or the arrival of spring.

Like in folklore, in poetry the blackbird often serves as a herald of nature's renewal. Its song appears in idyllic rural depictions, for example in the works of George Coșbuc or Octavian Goga, alongside other singing birds of the meadow and forest. Poets like Ion Pillat and Tudor Arghezi describe birds' songs, including the blackbird, to evoke the quiet or vibrancy of the garden. The blackbird often appears as a soundscape element, accompanying the inner states of lyrical characters.

Poets such as Lucian Blaga sometimes use singing birds to suggest the secrets of light and life. In critical commentaries, the blackbird is mentioned as a symbol of "a voice hidden in the night."

<p><b>„BALADA MIERLEI” DE LUCIAN BLAGA</b>            „Ce te miri că-n Cluj, prin soc și nuc,            mierla fluieră ca un haiduc?”</p>	<p><b>DANCE, DANCE BLACKBIRD</b>            What are you surprised at, that in Cluj, through the            elder and walnut trees,            the blackbird whistles like a heroic outlaw?</p>
<p><b>„MIERLA” DE DUMITRIU FLORIN-CONSTANTIN</b>            „Emoționat, te-am ridicat în soare,            Și te-am apropiat de gîndul meu,            În pene-ți are loc o sărbătoare,            Și-n spate ți se-nalță curcubeu.”</p>	<p><b>A BLACKBIRD SINGS TO ME</b>            Moved, I lifted you into the sun,            And brought you close to my thought,            Within your feathers a celebration takes place,            And behind you a rainbow rises.</p>
<p><b>„MIERLA” DE GABI NEGULEI</b>            „În vraja unui dulce tril            Ca picături de ceară caldă            Se-mpotmolește, mai să cadă            Un suflu ca-ntr-un vodevil.”</p>	<p><b>SING TO ME, BLACKBIRD</b>            In the spell of a sweet trill            Like drops of warm wax            It gets caught, almost falling            A breath as in a vaudeville.</p>

These examples illustrate how the blackbird is perceived in Romanian literature: as a symbol of spring, longing, ephemeral beauty, and a deep connection with nature.

## The Blackbird in Romanian Visual Art and Symbolism

The blackbird, with its black plumage and melodious song, carries a dual symbolism: its dark feathers are often linked to mystery or the unknown, its song brings joy, alertness, and vitality. Unlike more ominous birds like the raven or owl, the blackbird represents a harmonious connection between shadow and light, often appearing in folklore as a gentle, wise, and perceptive creature.

### 4.1.8.3 Italian culture

In modern and contemporary Italian poetry, the Blackbird is a frequent and recurring presence. It is not associated with complex symbolism, allegorical references, or fundamental traditions. A very partial sampling reveals the presence of the Blackbird in the verses of Trilussa, Montale, Saba, Fortini, Scialoja. Among contemporary poets, in addition to recalling Pusterla, a poet attentive to nature, it is interesting to refer to a specific work by Giancarlo Baroni. The Blackbird is almost always a background presence, a note, a movement, a profile, or a behavior that fits into the verse scenario without invading it.



As in the nursery rhyme "The Black Bird" by Toti Scialoja:

### L'uccello nero

L'uccello nero  
salta leggero,  
si chiama merlo  
senza saperlo.

### The black bird

The black bird  
jumps lightly,  
it's called a blackbird  
without knowing it.

But in some cases, it becomes the protagonist, emblem, even a dark messenger, as in the extraordinary "La poesia" by Trilussa, where the art of verse and bird song are seen and rendered in sestets with the unrepeatable and irreverent sagacity of the great Roman poet.

### La poesia

Appena se ne va l'urtima stella  
e diventa più pallida la luna  
c'è un Merlo che me becca una per una  
tutte le rose de la finestrella:  
s'aggauatta fra li rami de la pianta,  
sgrulla la guazza, s'arinfresca e canta.  
L'antra matina scesi giù dar letto  
co' l'idea de vedello da vicino,  
e er Merlo furbo che capì el latino  
spalancò l'ale e se n'annò sur tetto.  
– Scemo! – je dissi – Nun t'acchiappo mica...-  
E je buttai du' pezzi de mollica.  
– Nun è – rispose er Merlo – che nun ciabbia  
fiducia in te, ché invece me ne fido:  
Io so che nu m'infili in uno spido,  
Io so che nun me chiudi in una gabbia:  
ma sei poeta, e la paura mia  
è che me schiaffi in una poesia.  
È un pezzo che ce scocci co' li trilli!  
Per te, l'uccelli, fanno solo questo:  
chiucchiù, cicci, pipì... Te pare onesto  
de facce fa la parte d'imbecilli  
senza capì nemmanco una parola  
de quello che ce sorte da la gola?  
Nove vorte su dieci er cinguettio  
che te consola e t'arillegra er core  
nun è pe' gnente er canto de l'amore  
o l'inno ar sole, o la preghiera a Dio:  
ma solamente la soddisfazione  
d'avè fatto una bona diggestione.

### The Poetry

As soon as the last star fades away and the moon becomes paler, there's a blackbird that pecks one by one at all the roses in the little window: it hides among the branches of the plant, shakes off the dew, refreshes itself, and sings. The next morning, I got out of bed with the idea of seeing it up close, and the clever blackbird that understood Latin spread its wings and flew to the roof. "Fool!" I said to it, "I won't catch you..." And I threw it two pieces of bread. "It's not," replied the blackbird, "that I don't trust you, because I do trust you: I know you won't skewer me, I know you won't lock me in a cage: but you are a poet, and my fear is that you'll put me in a poem. You've been bothering us with your trills for a while! For you, birds only do this: chiucchiù, cicci, pipì... Do you think it's fair to make us play the part of fools without understanding a single word of what comes out of our throats? Nine times out of ten, the chirping that comforts you and cheers your heart is not at all the song of love or the hymn to the sun, or the prayer to God: but simply the satisfaction of having had a good digestion."

The blackbird has been defined, for its harmonious, melodious, complex, and highly variable song, as the Beethoven of birds. This reputation is entirely deserved, and Trilussa's choice could not have been more fitting. Not to be overlooked, as we will see at the end of the article, is the adjective "clever blackbird."



Enigmatic and unsettling is the blackbird that becomes the voice in the eponymous poem by Franco Fortini, here a purely woodland creature.

### Il merlo

Uccello che dici "anima  
risorgi", gridi dalla selvetta  
d'aceri e ghiande, merlo  
d'amarezza, e dal vino  
di viole e da cave  
d'alabastro o deboli croci  
dell'Aventino,  
sì, dici, la mente sfinita  
annegala e le rughe  
nella fonte di giovinezza  
che in mezzo al bosco sempre sta  
dov'è il paradiso d'edere,  
dove il risveglio è riso  
e la tua nota non nuoce.  
E dove ogni cosa è com'era  
per virtù di siepi nitida  
in specchi di solchi e nubi  
al giovane di cera e veemenza  
che nel vento ti udiva  
di Pasqua lodare l'ora  
e il convento nel blu spariva.  
O ridicolo mite vacuo  
detto anima mia risorgere  
è, lo sai, di chi nulla ricorda.  
E invece che Irlanda di morti  
narrò mai, di che peregrine  
erbe balbetti, di che limbo rivolo  
gelidissimo sei.

### The Blackbird

Bird that says "soul rise again," you cry from the grove of maples and acorns, blackbird of bitterness, and from the wine of violets and from caves of alabaster or weak crosses of the Aventine, yes, you say, the exhausted mind drown it and the wrinkles in the fountain of youth that always stands in the middle of the forest where the paradise of ivy is, where awakening is laughter and your note does no harm. And where everything is as it was by virtue of clear hedges in mirrors of furrows and clouds to the young man of wax and vehemence who heard you in the wind praise the hour of Easter and the convent disappeared in the blue. O ridiculous mild empty said my soul rise again is, you know, of those who remember nothing. And instead of Ireland of the dead ever narrated, of what wandering herbs you babble, of what limbo stream you are icy.

With the collection "I merli del Giardino di San Paolo e altri Uccelli", as original as his other works, Giancarlo Baroni presents us with a vast catalog of "pointed little wings and sharp beaks" (Pier Luigi Bacchini, in the preface) in which, including the title, blackbirds are given particular attention. Baroni's blackbirds are thinking birds. Both those in the scattered texts and those who are protagonists of the poem "Federico II e i merli del giardino di San Paolo" (where it is imagined that these blackbirds are the guardians of the falconry treatise written by the emperor). Thus, in the isolated composition "Merli e colibri" on page 21, the black thrushes puff out their chests and shout "we did it/ again" to the owl, and even those in "Merli parmiiani" (page 70) speak in the first person plural.

### Merli parmiiani

[...]  
*I duecento quattro volatili  
figurati variamenti negli stucchi*

### Parmesan Blackbirds

[...]  
The two hundred and four birds variously depicted in the white and blue stuccoes of the Ducal Palace



*bianco azzurri di Palazzo Ducale  
con grazia classica dimostrano  
la stima dei parmensi per noi altri  
anche mentre ci abbattono?*

\*

*Davanti agli avvoltoi  
non arretrate. Si cammini  
diritti compiendo gesti sconci*

*con le ali. Ché nemmeno  
una cincia un pollo quella  
fiera fasulla sa uccidere.*

with classical grace demonstrate the esteem of the Parmesans for us even while they bring us down?

•

In front of the vultures do not retreat.  
Walk straight, making obscene gestures  
with your wings. Because not even a titmouse, a  
chicken, that fake beast can kill.

#### 4.1.8.4 Finnish culture

In the early 20th century, the blackbird was still a rare species in Finland, which explains the limited number of Finnish folklore associated with it. Like other dark-colored birds, it was often regarded with suspicion and thought to be an omen of misfortune. However, the bird's distinctive, melodic song was interpreted more positively, symbolizing renewal and the arrival of spring.

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Female Blackbird eating: Žan Rode, CC-BY, (<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/284547779>)

Male Blackbird eating: Žan Rode, CC-BY, (<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/293666486>)

Migration map: migrationatlas.org

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## 4.2 White-throated Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)

### WHITE-THROATED DIPPER

*Cinclus cinclus*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Passeriformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Cinclidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Cinclus</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Povodni kos

Cnișor



Koskikara

Merlo acquaiolo

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



#### 4.2.1 Descriptive notes



Figure 8: 1 Daróczi Szilárd- *Cinclus cinclus*

Its plumage is unmistakable, with a dark brown head, the remaining upper parts slate gray and the lower parts candid from chin to lower belly. It has a squat, shortened and rounded body, with a short neck and beak. The tail is short and is often held in a raised position. The sexes are similar. On average, the Dipper measures about 18 cm in length, has a wingspan of 25.5–30 cm, and weighs between 43 and 75 grams. The Dipper is a bird with truly distinctive behavior: it inhabits fast-flowing rivers and streams and is the only European passerine capable of effortlessly diving, swimming with agility, and even walking underwater.

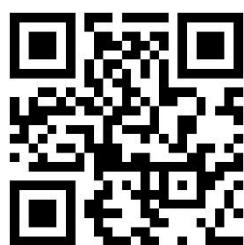


Figure 9: GBIF *Cinclus cinclus* information sheet



Figure 10: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Cinclus cinclus*

#### 4.2.2 Sound

Its song is loud and repetitive, a bit like that of a song thrush. The male sings in a high-pitched, piercing, and melodious way, while the female's song is rougher, made up of scratchy whistles and short, disconnected notes.

#### 4.2.3 Habitat and distribution



It inhabits not too deep streams with high water flow velocity, with little or almost no aquatic vegetation, where rock walls, large boulders are well represented and artificial artifacts such as bridges, small weirs and stone retaining walls.

	<p>Present in NW Slovenia, inhabits fast-flowing mountain streams and rivers. It is mainly widespread in the Alpine and pre-Alpine regions, where it is also most common. Elsewhere, it is more localized, mainly in the hilly areas of central and southern Slovenia. It is absent in the lowlands, especially in the northeast.</p>
	<p>The dipper lives near flowing water. In Finland, the nesting areas of the dipper are concentrated in the northern parts of the country. The breeding population is very sparse in southern Finland, but in suitable locations, it may settle in a nesting box intended for it. The dipper winters practically throughout the country, with large numbers of birds arriving in Finland from Norway and Sweden. The number of dippers has decreased in Finland, and it is in danger of extinction (VU, vulnerable).</p>
	<p>In Romania, the population is estimated at 2,600–26,000 breeding pairs. In Romania, the population trend is decreasing, with the species showing an increasingly sharp decline in recent years.</p>
	<p>The Italian population is estimated at 4,000-8,000 pairs and the trend appears stable in the Central-North, while it appears to be sharply declining in the Center-South, particularly in Latium and Sicily, with situations of local extinction. In Italy, it is sedentary and nests in the Alps, Apennines, central Tuscan mountains, and Sicily, most frequently between 400-600 m and 1,000-1,200 m, with a maximum of 2,200-2,300 m in the Alps and a tendency to expand to lower altitudes, following the courses of rivers. In the Alps, its density is proportional to the flow and quality of the watercourses, and pairs are increasingly spaced out as the streams become less suitable for the species.</p>

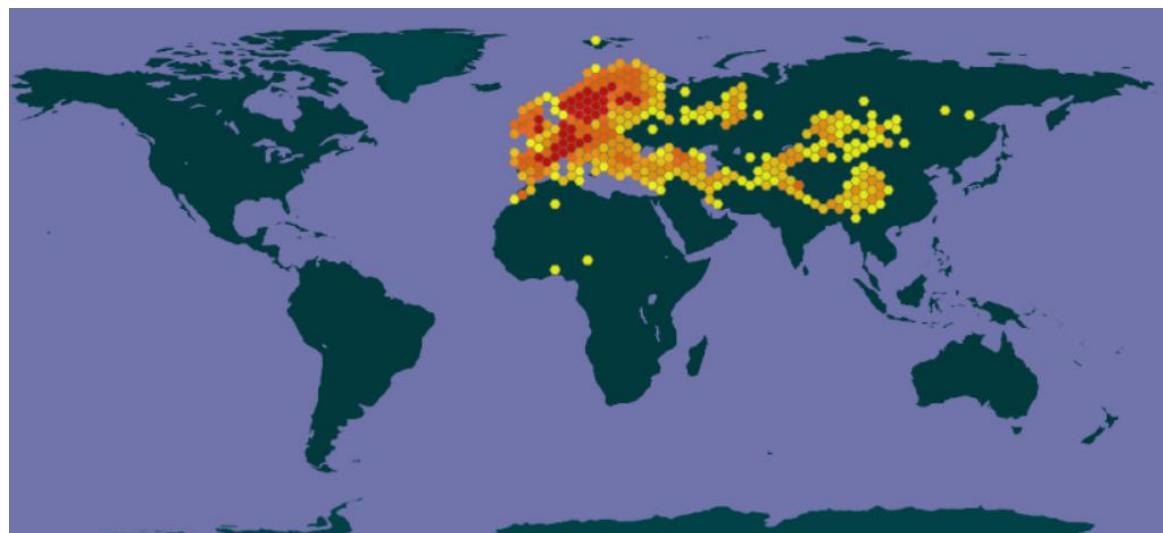


Figure 11: Distribution of *Cinclus cinclus*



#### 4.2.4 Nutrition

Its diet is highly specialized, based basically on the larvae of aquatic invertebrates. It also feeds on small crustaceans and molluscs, sometimes also eggs, or small fish.



Figure 12: White-throated Dipper hunting

#### 4.2.5 Breeding

In Italy, it is breeding in the Alps, Apennines, the mountains of central Tuscany and Sicily, most frequently between 400-600 m and 1,000-1,200 m, with a maximum of 2,200-2,300 m in the Alps and a tendency to expansion to lower elevations, following the shafts of watercourses. It nests in isolated pairs and builds a globular-shaped nest composed mainly of moss, with an entrance side at the bottom, in cavities, crevices or on natural or artificial supports above water (e.g. under a bridge), sometimes immediately behind a waterfall. Locally it uses artificial nests.

In Slovenia the White-throated Dipper is a relatively common breeder in hills and lower mountain ranges in the Alpine and prealpine region.

#### 4.2.6 Migrations

Migratory movements of northern European populations are known, whose phenology and consistency are not known, however. In Italy, it is sedentary. In our latitudes it is generally sedentary and leaves territories at higher altitudes higher elevations when the waters freeze, moving to valley floors and foothills, occasionally to the lowlands.

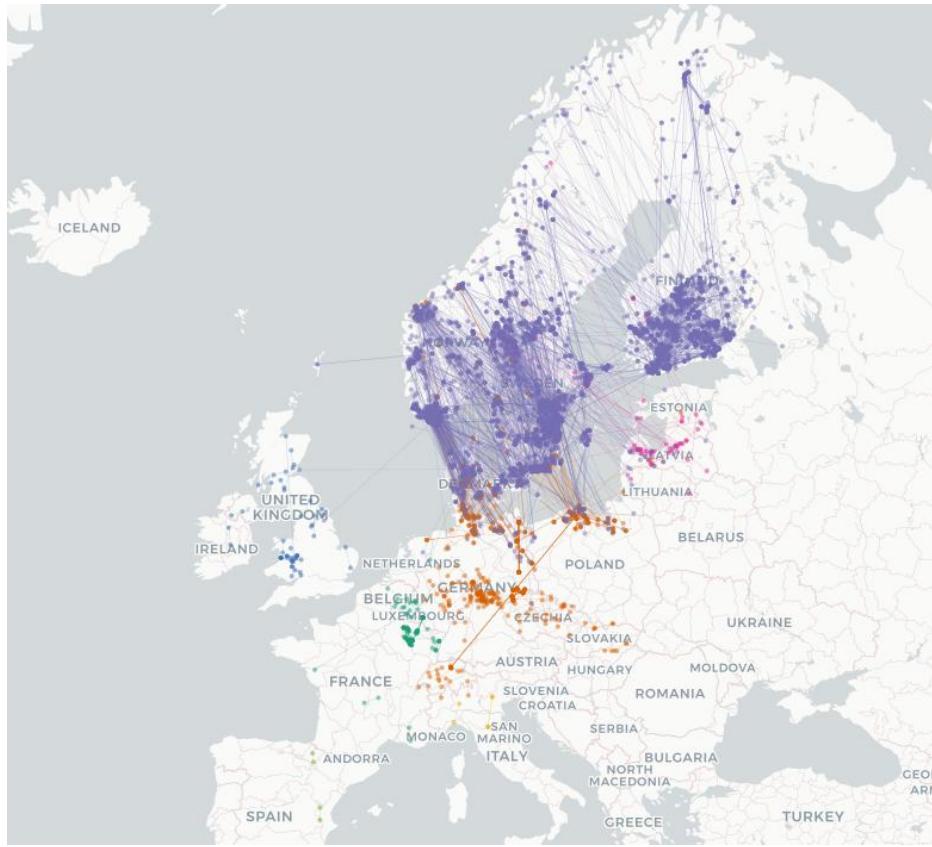


Figure 13: White-throated dipper migration map

#### 4.2.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

The Dipper has an inadequate conservation status in Italy, while at the continental level it is favorable. The Italian population is estimated at 4,000-8,000 pairs and the trend appears stable in the Central- North, while it appears to be sharply declining in the Center-South, particularly in Latium and Sicily, with situations of local extinction.

The main vulnerability factors are due to the cementing of stream banks, the sudden changes in stream levels during the breeding season, especially from sudden floods created by the water release from hydroelectric dams, anthropogenic disturbance from the activities of canoeing and fishing. Increased acidity of waters is apparently very harmful, as well as in spawning season, bottom cleanings of artificial reservoirs built for hydropower purposes, destroying the invertebrate fauna of the afferent streams and the main watercourse.

In Finland the number of dippers has decreased, and it is in danger of extinction (VU, vulnerable). The breeding population is estimated to be at most a few hundred pairs, and the winter population is estimated to be around 4,000–5,000 individuals.



Figure 14: Tempering of riverbed with mechanical means in Genova Valley



Figure 15: Heavy damage of riverbed and banks in Rio Bedù di Villa-Val San Valentino

It is therefore desirable to promote and intensify multidisciplinary research that examines its distribution and abundance in relation also to biochemical parameters useful for water quality analysis. Along waterways frequented by the species, naturalistic management criteria should be observed when undertaking hydraulic regulation works and protocols of understanding between public administrations and hydropower companies shall be agreed. At the local scale, a favorable reference value (FRV) of 2 pairs per km of stream; this value may be exceeded in particularly suitable settings. Lower densities, equal to one pair per km, can be taken as a reference for Sicily and the central and southern Apennines.



## 4.2.8 Cultural heritage

In native America dippers relate to the spirit of rivers and are thought to have a healing influence. Because of its preference for clear water relates to honesty and purity. In Celtic folklore dippers are associated with otherworld and their diving behaviour relates to transition between phases of life.

### 4.2.8.1 Slovenian culture

In Janez Trdina's book *Bajke in povesti o Gorjancih* (Fairy Tales and Stories about the Gorjanci Mountains), there is a motif that a water bird has built its nest in the roots at the confluence of the Sušica and Krka rivers, and that whoever finds this nest and carries it with them becomes invisible and can even reach the water spirit (later in the story, the hero uses it to rescue a kidnapped girl). ("...Where the Sušica flows into the Krka, a water bird has built its nest in the roots. Whoever finds this nest and carries it with them will be invisible to everyone and will be able to go wherever they want, and if they are not afraid of the great abyss, even to the water sprite...").

This is a classic example of the motif of a magical object, in this case specifically linked to the water sprite (nest).

### 4.2.8.2 Romanian culture

In Romania it can be a Symbol of purity / clean streams: Given its strong ecological link to unpolluted mountain rivers, the dipper can be—in modern cultural contexts—used as a symbol of clean, healthy waterways and natural heritage in Romanian mountain regions.

Mountain river identity: In mountain tourism, environmental education, local nature-conservation narratives, the presence of this species may be celebrated as part of the “wild mountain river” identity of places in Romania. For example, when local guides talk about a particular mountain stream as “home to the mierla de apă,” that adds a cultural dimension of “this place is still wild, still worthy of protection.”

Eco-heritage and education: Local conservation projects (such as in Covasna) turn the dipper into a “heritage species” for the region, linking nature protection with cultural pride of the local community.

### 4.2.8.3 Italian culture

In Italian culture, the White-throated Dipper is a symbol of environmental purity and a valuable bioindicator of the health of mountain streams, as it lives only in clear, well-oxygenated waters. Its presence is appreciated by naturalists and photographers, but the species is protected due to threats such as pollution and habitat destruction, which have led to its local decline in some areas of Italy.

### 4.2.8.4 Finnish culture

The white-throated dipper was regarded in Finnish folklore as a bird possessing the power of rapids, which gave it a magical reputation. Its yearly arrival during harsh winter conditions and its ability to run against the current at the bottom of icy streams were considered remarkable. The dipper is the only migratory bird that arrives in Finland for the winter and returns to northern Scandinavia during the summer.

The bird's special powers were used in important matters. For example, the dipper was believed to protect against trade fraud and, when rubbed on a person, to enhance their attractiveness. In addition, the dipper was thought to have a strong influence on horses; for instance, rubbing a horse with a dipper was believed to shield it from harmful spells.

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White-throated Dipper distribution map: <https://www.gbif.org/species/2495093>

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Tempering of riverbed – two photos: PNAB archives



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## 4.3 White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)

### WHITE WAGTAIL

*Motacilla alba*



#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Passeriformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Motacillidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Motacilla</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Motacilla alba</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)

#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Bela pastirica

Codobatură albă



Västäräkki

Ballerina bianca

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



#### 4.3.1 Descriptive notes

About 20 centimeters long, it has a wingspan of 26-30 centimeters, and, between males and females, there are no marked differences in appearance. The perfect white of the forehead and eyes stands out, forming a sort of mask. The head, nape, throat and chest appear black, while the back and rump are light gray, and belly is white. The wings have black and white streaks as the long and narrow tail does. With its slender, long, and narrow tail, black and white, is constantly moving up and down. It walks with jerky head movements, runs quickly after the prey, suddenly raising its tail that swings excitedly. After a quick run, it takes off in an undulating flight.



Figure 16: *Motacilla alba*



Figure 17: GBIF *Motacilla alba* information sheet



Figure 18: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Motacilla alba*

#### 4.3.2 Sound



Song is very simple and clear with few notes. Can be heard as “cli-vit” or “zi-ze-lit”.

#### 4.3.3 Habitat and distribution

It is a common nesting bird in various habitats: open and cultivated countryside, even near houses and water. It is attracted to open spaces, meadows, roofs and asphalt roads because there it can easily see and catch insects. It avoids tall forests and mountains above the tree line. Among the Passeriformes, the White Wagtail is one of those that can adapt best to human presence.

	Present across Slovenia as a resident or migratory bird, near humans, especially near water and open habitats.
	The white wagtail is a bird of open environments, it thrives in yards and cities, in the archipelago, by water bodies, in fields and meadows.
	The population in Romania is estimated at 350,000–700,000 pairs, with a fluctuating population trend.
	In Italy, it is partially sedentary, migratory, nesting, and wintering. It nests on the peninsula, in Sicily, and on some smaller islands (Elba, Tremiti, Aeolian), with large empty areas in the Po Valley (especially in areas of intensive monoculture), Puglia, and Sicily; it is absent in Sardinia. It is more widespread up to 1,500-1,700 m, with moderate numbers up to 1,900-2,000 m and a maximum of 2,500-2,550 m in the Alps.

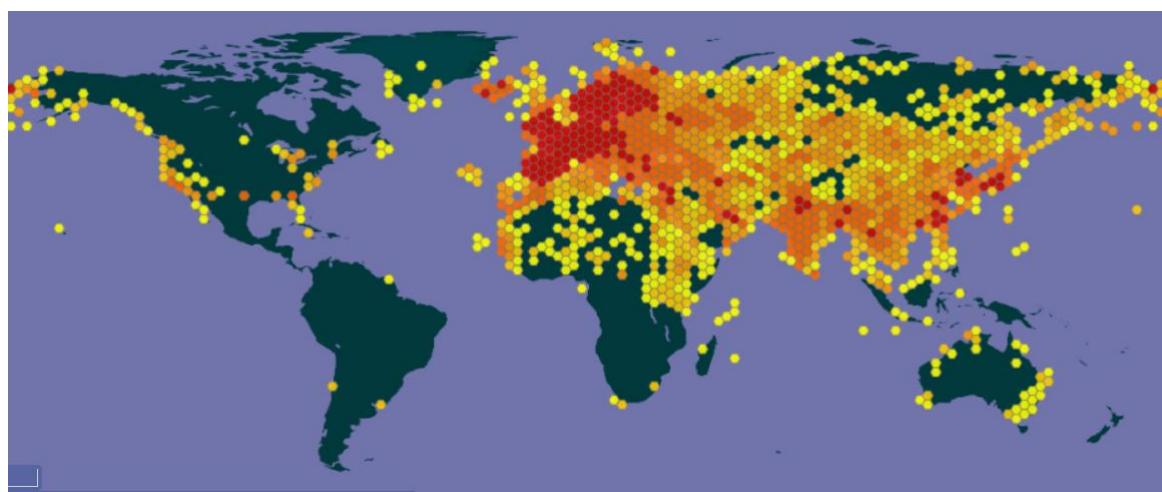


Figure 19: Distribution of *Motacilla alba*

#### 4.3.4 Nutrition

It is insectivorous, actively searching for small invertebrates and insects directly on meadows in the low grass, even near watercourses. Although it mainly feeds on insects, spiders and small mollusks that it catches, it does not refuse food offered by humans and can get used to eating and drinking in the presence of humans.



#### 4.3.5 Breeding

Mating occurs between April and August. The nest, a cup of grass finished with wool, hair and feathers, is carefully hidden in natural and artificial crevices: ripe, slopes, embankments, buildings, holes in walls or trunks, but also on the ground. The female lays five or six eggs, which hatch after about 12-14 days of incubation. The chicks are then cared for in the nest by both parents for two weeks.



Figure 20: Female and male *Motacilla alba*

#### 4.3.6 Migrations

With an elegant bearing and slender shape, the White Wagtail is as delicate in appearance as it is resistant to the most disparate climates: from the rigid temperatures of Siberia to the scorching temperatures of Saudi Arabia. It is in fact famous for its great ability to adapt. By nature, sociable towards its peers, it can also get used to the company of man, accepting food and water. But white wagtails especially love to remain perched in winter in hundreds on trees, on buildings or among the reeds.

Most of the white wagtails in Finland winter in northern Africa and the Middle East. It is a short-distance migrant.

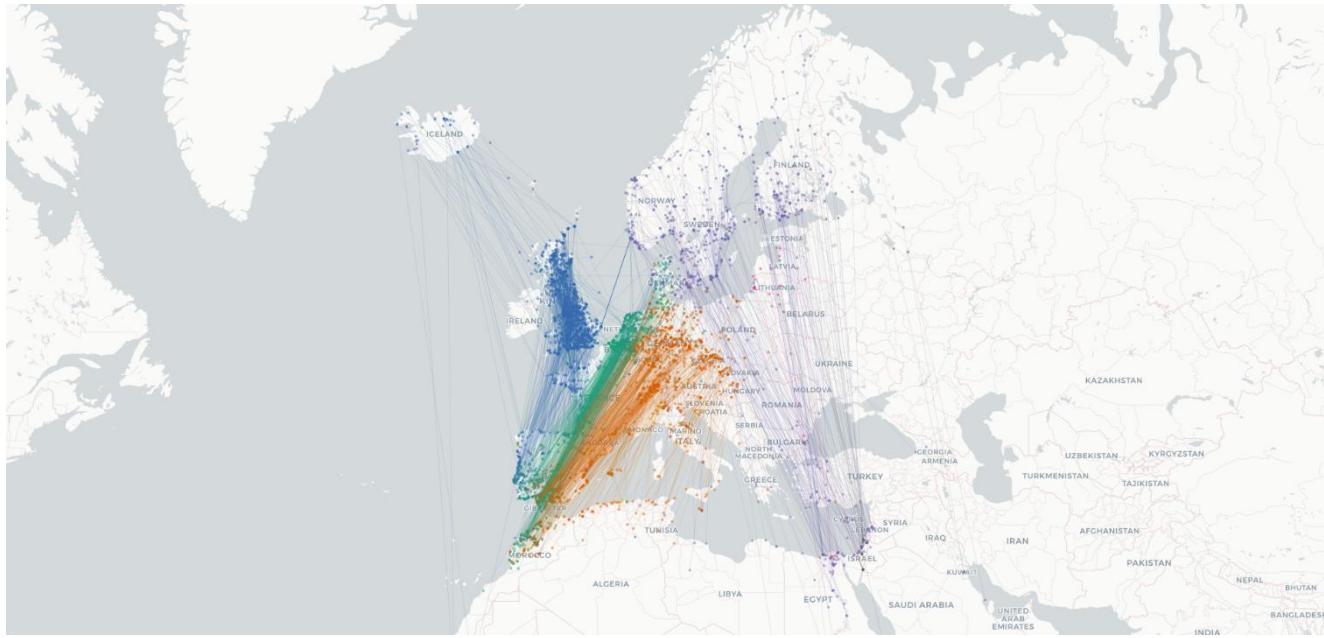


Figure 21: White wagtail migration map based on ring finds

#### 4.3.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

The species is protected by the Birds Habitats Directive. The breeding population of the White Wagtail appears to be decreasing in the Po Valley (and probably also in Lazio) and, consequently, its overall conservation status is still to be considered inadequate. Restricting the field to the Alpine bioregion, the health status of the White Wagtail appears overall much more favorable, regarding both the absolute size of the populations and their distribution over the territory. In this area the conservation status of the species can therefore be considered, overall, satisfactory.

On the other hand, the Po Valley is the area of Italy where the White Wagtail is currently in conditions of relative suffering. This is most likely due to an increase in pollution of the aquatic environments that are the reference habitat for the feeding and reproduction of the species. The rest is done by the increasingly important embankment and hydraulic regulation works that have progressively restricted and compromised essential habitats for the life of this and other species of birds associated with wetlands. For this reason, the current state of conservation of the species in the continental bioregion is to be considered, as things stand, particularly inadequate. Finally, the health status of the species in the Mediterranean bioregion is generally good, with regard to Sicily, where encouraging population increases have been recorded in recent years.

The number of breeding wagtails in Finland has decreased in the long term. The reason for the decline is unknown. The species is now near threatened (NT).

#### 4.3.8 Cultural heritage

##### The Wagtail Tree

White Wagtails, like other passerines, have the habit of gathering in groups at sunset in winter. Staying close together and in groups helps them protect themselves from potential predators, maintain their body



temperature, but it is also a very useful way to socialize and acquire information on the best places to find food. The wagtail roosts can be small shrubs, the roofs of houses or other human constructions that can accommodate up to thousands of specimens, creating an extraordinary natural spectacle as in the case of the "wagtail trees" at London's Heathrow airport.

### **Message from the White Dancer**

Under the African sun, in the cold of the Arctic Circle, in the countryside and in our cities, the dancer with her closeness reminds us that we living beings are all on the same side and share the same needs: the need to feel protected, the need to nourish ourselves, the need to find a place to call home.

#### *4.3.8.1 Slovenian culture*

In Slovenia, there is a town in the Carst region, called Pliskovica. The white wagtail in this area is known as Pliska, which can be found in and around the general area of the town. Its presence and general upbeat character in the area gave local shepherds an idea, to also start calling upbeat sheep and goats pliske – therefore together they gave the name to the town of Pliskovica.

protected, the need to nourish ourselves, the need to find a place to call home.

#### *4.3.8.2 Romanian culture*

In Romania cultural heritage it says that: the white Wagtail appears to serve as a phenological indicator (bird signalling arrival of spring) in some texts. "În cultura populară, codobatura albă este asociată adesea cu venirea primăverii, datorită obiceiului său de a reveni în fiecare an în aceleași locuri."

Cultural / Folkloric Aspects in Romania: Symbol of spring and renewal: As above, the wagtail is mentioned in one source as being associated with the arrival of spring in Romania.

Work-field / agrarian connection: The older vernacular name "pasărea plugului" suggests a tie with agricultural life (the plough, fields) – possibly because the bird follows ploughing activity or is seen in open fields. That gives a cultural/agrarian link.

Name-variants and dialect: The presence of older names like codăuș, petrăriță may indicate regional/local dialect uses and local knowledge of the species.

#### *4.3.8.3 Italian culture*

In Italy, this species has no cultural significance.

#### *4.3.8.4 Finnish culture*

A familiar proverb has taught many Finns to look forward to the spring migration of birds and the birds arriving in order. The return of birds to Finland has given promise of the approaching summer.

"A month from the skylark to summer / a half-moon from the chaffinch / a little from the white wagtail / not a day from the swallow."

"Kuu kiurusta kesään / puolikuuta peipposesta / västäräkistä vähäsen / pääskysestä ei päivääkää."

The proverb claims that there is little time for the white wagtail to summer. However, the proverb refers to the beginning of field work rather than summer. The first ones arrive in southern Finland already at the end of March.

The arrival of the white wagtail in spring was traditionally seen as a sign that the ice would soon melt. According to folklore, the bird was believed to have exceptionally strong legs, and its hopping along the shoreline ice was



thought to break it apart. In addition to breaking river ice, the wagtail was also said to cause the deterioration of roads during the thaw, earning it the nickname “breaker.”

Nevertheless, the wagtail was a cherished sign of spring. It was imagined to travel beneath the wings of larger migratory birds, such as swans and cranes, keeping them company cheerfully along the way. The wagtail was also regarded as the farmer’s bird: seeing a wagtail on a freshly plowed field was believed to bring good luck, making it a valued companion during spring fieldwork.

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White Wagtail illustration: Jan Hošek

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## 4.4 Eurasian Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)

### EURASIAN BLUE TIT

*Cyanistes caeruleus*

#### TAXONOMY

KINGDOM	Animalia
PHYLUM	Chordata
CLASS	Aves
ORDER	Passeriformes
FAMILY	Paridae
GENUS	<i>Cyanistes</i>
SPECIES	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Plavček

Pițigoi albastru



Sinitiainen

Cinciarella

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



#### 4.4.1 Descriptive notes

The Eurasian Blue Tit is a small Paridae, much smaller and more compact than the similar Great Tit, with which it often shares habitats, and with characteristic and diagnostic cobalt blue plumage on its wings and tail, greenish on its back, sulphur yellow on its breast, white cheeks with a dark line at eye level. It has a pointed black beak and short, strong blue-grey legs. The yellow of juveniles is much more vivid than that of adults. It measures on average 11.5 cm in length, with a wingspan of 17.5-20 cm and a weight of 7.5-14.7 grams.



Figure 22: *Cyanistes caeruleus*



Figure 23: GBIF *Cyanistes caeruleus* information sheet



Figure 24: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Cyanistes caeruleus*

#### 4.4.2 Sound



If disturbed while in the nest, Blue Tits emit a hissing sound similar to that of snakes and may try to jump to intimidate the attacker.

#### 4.4.3      Habitat and distribution

The Blue Tit is a species typically associated with tall, wooded environments with mature trees (which guarantee the presence of cavities suitable for nesting), mainly oaks and chestnut trees, but it can also be found in woods consisting of other broad-leaved trees, coniferous woods, mature orchards, olive groves, parks and urban gardens. It also uses holes in dry stone walls and buildings and nest boxes for nesting.



Figure 25: Blue tit on a branch

	Common year-round resident in Slovenia, found across the country, especially in deciduous and mixed forests.
	The blue tit nests in deciduous and mixed forests, yards and parks. It is partially migratory. A significant part of the population winters in Finland, but part of it migrates further south, such as to Sweden. The breeding population of the blue tit in Finland has increased more than tenfold in recent decades.



	<p>In Romania, estimates indicate a population of approximately 750,000–1,500,000 breeding pairs. The species is classified as “Least Concern.” The population trend in Europe is considered increasing. In Romania, the population trend is fluctuating.</p>
	<p>The species has a favourable conservation status in Italy and at continental level. It is positively affected by the expansion and ageing of woodland environments. The Italian population is estimated at 1,500,000-2,500,000 pairs, with an upward trend in recent decades, as well as an expansion of the range, especially in the Po Valley. Numerous data are available on reproductive parameters (thanks mainly to studies of breeding in artificial nests), with values between 3.8 (coniferous reforestation) and 9 (oak woodland) young per nest, an inoculation rate of 2.8-5.4 young per brood and reproductive success between 25% (urban park) and 90%.</p>

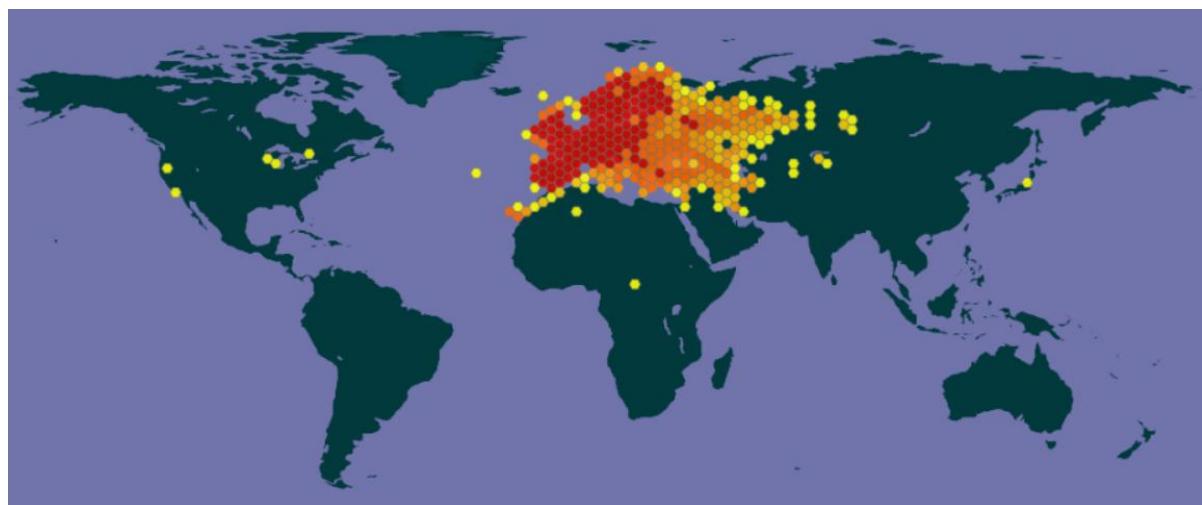


Figure 26: Distribution of *Cyanistes caeruleus*

#### 4.4.4 Nutrition

In spring and summer, it feeds on small invertebrates, especially insects and spiders. In autumn and winter, it supplements its diet with vegetables such as seeds, fruit, buds, flowers and nectar. When feeding, it concentrates on the highest part of the trees, preferring the smallest branches, to which it manages to cling even upside down, displaying remarkable agility and 'acrobatic' skills. In winter it also frequents other environments, such as hedges and reed thickets, and has been observed up to an altitude of 2,130 m in the Alps.

#### 4.4.5 Breeding

In the western Palearctic, the Blue Tit breeds uniformly from the Canary Islands and North Africa to central Scandinavia, reaching, towards the south-east, the Caucasus and northern Iraq. In Europe it is only absent from Iceland and the northernmost latitudes.

#### 4.4.6 Migrations



It is an essentially sedentary species, although most individuals that breed in the central-northern sectors of its vast breeding range make irregular irruptive movements, mainly southwards and westwards. It is among the most widespread of the breeding species in Italy, on the peninsula and the major islands, with a range that only shows discontinuity in some areas of intensive cultivation and scarcity of trees in the Po Valley. It is most frequent from sea level up to 1,200-1,300 m but reaches 1,700 m in the Alps and 1,800-2,000 m in Sicily. In Sardinia, the subspecies *C. c. ogliastrae* is present.

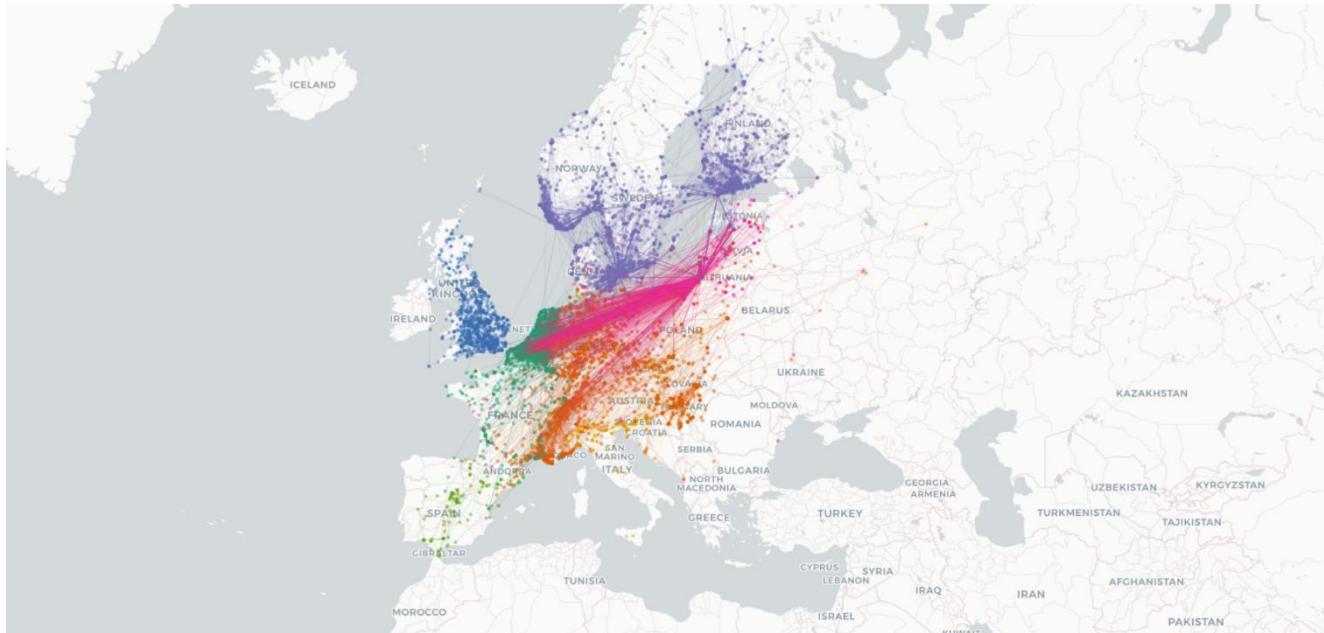


Figure 27: Eurasian blue tit migration map based on ring finds

#### 4.4.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

##### Status

The species has a favorable conservation status in Italy and at continental level. It is positively affected by the expansion and ageing of woodland environments. The Italian population is estimated at 1,500,000-2,500,000 pairs, with an increasing trend in recent decades, as well as an expansion of the range, especially in the Po Valley.

##### Threats

In forests, the main threats are deforestation, cutting down old trees, coppicing of forests, 'clearing' the forest of dry or rotting trees and logs. It should also be noted that reproductive success in Italy is significantly lower in the presence of adverse weather conditions or where it is strongly influenced by predation by mammals, corvids and snakes.

In Finland forestry is reducing the blue tit's nesting opportunities. Due to efficient forest management, there is much less dead wood and natural holes in commercial forests, meaning fewer suitable nesting holes for tits.

##### Protection

The Blue Tit is essentially linked to the presence of cavities within which it nests and could therefore benefit from interventions aimed at protecting mature woodland formations with large and decaying trees (especially



old oak and chestnut trees), as well as from the planting of new woods, especially oaks in lowland areas. Naturalistic silvicultural interventions that lead to the conversion from coppice to mature forest and the maintenance of a certain percentage of over-mature trees are also to be considered positive for the species. The use of artificial nests may favor the extension of the range in less suitable areas; their effectiveness is in fact greater in areas where the scarcity of cavities suitable for nesting may be a limiting factor.

In Finland the blue tit has benefited from climate change; milder winters have reduced winter mortality and helped the population grow. The breeding population of the blue tit in Finland has increased more than tenfold in recent decades. The blue tit has benefited from winter feeding and birdhouses built by people.

#### 4.4.8 Cultural heritage

##### Curiosities

An interesting example of feeding strategy and transmission of learning among birds is a phenomenon that began in the 1960s in England, when Blue Tits learned to peck open the aluminium caps of traditional milk bottles to drink the creamy contents.

##### The Blue Tit in Poetry, Proverbs and Sayings

Because of its playful character, the Blue Tit has always been dear to poets and artists. The English Romantic poet William Wordsworth described it as a 'frivolous imp'.

"Where is he that giddy Sprite,  
 Blue-cap, with his colors bright,  
 Who was blest as bird could be,  
 Feeding in the apple-tree;  
 Made such wanton spoil and rout,  
 Turning blossoms inside out;  
 Hung---head pointing towards the ground---  
 Fluttered, perched, into a round  
 Bound himself, and then unbound;  
 Lithest, gaudiest Harlequin!  
 Prettiest Tumbler ever seen!  
 Light of heart and light of limb;  
 What is now become of Him?"

-William Wordsworth-

The writer Dacia Maraini, on the other hand, compares love precisely to the Blue Tit, because of its free and enterprising nature:

---

"Love is a blue tit that flies, and you cannot stop it, not even putting salt on its tail".

---

Popular belief has it that, the Blue Tit has the power to favor one of particular interest to girls looking for a husband. It seems, in fact, that if a young unmarried woman on Valentine's Day spots a Blue Tit before any other



bird, she will have a dowry of marriage to a happy man. If, in addition to the man, the cohabitation will also be happy, that, however, the belief does not say: one must hope for good luck.

#### The farmer and the Blue Tit (early medieval legend)

One morning a farmer found a Blue Tit in a net, which had become trapped in it.

He picked it up and when he had it in his hand, he told her he would eat it.

The Blue Tit replied that if he ate her, he would not be satisfied, as she was very small.

If he had let her go instead, she would have given him three valuable pieces of advice, which would have been very helpful.

The farmer, convinced, let her go.

She went and rested on a branch, and gave the farmer these three pieces of advice:

*"What you hold in your hand, do not throw it at your feet;  
do not believe everything you are told;  
do not grieve too much over what you cannot recover".*

Having spoken these words, she flew away.



#### The Blue Tit in Heraldry

In heraldry, the Blue tit appears only in a few coats of arms.





Silver, the Blue Tit  
supported by a forked  
branch cut in black  
(Maisach, Oppenau,  
Germany)

A silver Blue Tit  
(Mésangueville, France)

The coat of arms for  
Mesum, a district of the  
city of Rheine in  
Germany.

#### 4.4.8.1 Slovenian culture

In Slovenian culture this bird doesn't have any cultural significance.

#### 4.4.8.2 Romanian culture

In Romania: The older names “pițigoi tuchez” or “pițigoi cu căciulă” suggest vernacular/folk names that reflect how people saw the bird (noteable “capucha/căciulă” = little cap, referencing its blue “cap” plumage).

The standard Romanian name “pițigoi albastru” literally means “blue tit/marsh tit/blue small bird” — pointing to the blue colour as key identifier.

#### 4.4.8.3 Italian culture

In Italy, the Blue Tit appears in Giovanni Pascoli's 'La notte':

"... He was in the woods, in the summer palace of the redoubt. Around him he heard pecking. poplar buds and olive prickles. And the bush seemed like a beehive, full of rustling and buzzing. But she also heard poking, rustling, walking. Who could it be? But in what she regarded among a rare bush, suddenly the little Blue Tit sang."

-Giovanni Pascoli - La notte-

Guillaume Apollinaire in one of his poems compares the woman he loves precisely to a Blue Tit:

*"Her eyes were your pretty eyes / Her feathers your hair / Her song the mysterious words / Whispered to my ears".*

#### 4.4.8.4 Finnish culture

In Finnish tradition, the tit was believed to be the oldest and longest-lived of all birds. Its venerable age made it a symbol of wisdom, and according to folklore the bird taught humans important skills such as agriculture and brewing.

In the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, the tit advises Väinämöinen on how to enrich the soil by slash-and-burn cultivation, a practice that marks the mythical beginning of farming. In the *Kanteletar* poem *The Origin of Beer*,



the tit is also portrayed as a skilled brewer—a role that complements its association with wisdom and joy. Thus, the tit was seen as a close friend to humans and a messenger between nature and people.

In folk tradition, all tit species were generally called by the same name, making it difficult to distinguish beliefs tied to individual species.

#### 4.4.9 Sources

##### 4.4.9.1 Suggested readings

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	<p>Haapasalo, S. (2017). <i>Tii tii tiainen</i>. Maahenki.</p> <p>Järvinen, A. (1995). <i>Maakuntalinnut</i>. Otava.</p> <p>Ojanen, E., &amp; Daga, U. (2015). <i>Suomen myyttiset linnut</i>. Minerva Kustannus Oy.</p> <p>Ranta, R. (2025). <i>Sielulinnut</i>. SKS Kirjat.</p>
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Eurasian Blue Tit illustration: Jan Hošek

Eurasian Blue Tit distribution map: <https://www.gbif.org/species/2487879>

Eurasian Blue Tit IUCN status: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/103761667/264532201>

Migration map: migrationatlas.org

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## 4.5 Willow tit (*Poecile montanus*)

### Willow tit

*Poecile montanus*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Passeriformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Paridae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Poecile</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Poecile montanus</i> (Conrad von Baldenstein, 1827)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Gorska sinica  
Pițigoi de munte



Hömötäinen  
Cincia alpestre

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



#### 4.5.1 Descriptive notes

Smaller than the great tit, rather large-headed and thick-necked. Overall colour grey, darker on the back than the belly. White cheek, black cap and throat patch.



Figure 28: Willow tit on snow





Figure 29: GBIF *Poecile mantanus* information sheet

Figure 30: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Poecile mantanus*

#### 4.5.2 Sound

1-2 short tones, followed by 2-4 lower, raspier and sharp tones “zi-zi-**tae tae tae**”.

#### 4.5.3 Habitat and distribution

The willow tit is a forest species and nests in all types of coniferous and mixed forests. It prefers natural, old and mature forests. The willow tit carves its nest hole in a dead deciduous stump – a new hole every spring. In winter, when life is all about survival, the quality of the forest area is of great importance. The best hiding places for the winter reserves collected by the willow tit are found in the tufts of lichen that grow abundantly on the trunks of older trees. A resident bird, young individuals migrate short distances.ž

	<p>In Slovenia, the mountain blue tit is a common species in coniferous and mixed forests of the Alpine and Dinaric regions, as the majority of the Slovenian population nests in hilly and mountainous areas.</p>
	<p>The willow tit, one of the most abundant species in Finland, has declined to a critically endangered level in the 2000s. The recent decline was preceded by a long recession. The population development has been closely monitored since the 1970s. The reason for the collapse is over-intensive forestry. With clear-cutting, the willow tit's habitat is disappearing for decades, even if the forest is regrown. Surviving winter is the most important thing for the willow tit's population development. The more logging areas and young forest there are in the wintering area, the less the little tit survives the winter. Older forests provide better food in winter. During the breeding season, the willow tit can only hollow out its nest hole in a sufficiently soft, decaying tree, which is usually a birch stump. If all the rotten deciduous trees that the great tit needs as nesting sites are removed or felled during thinning, the great tit may face a shortage of nesting sites for several decades. In addition to the reduction of habitats, the willow tit suffers from fragmentation; especially in southern Finland, suitable forests are increasingly scattered and in smaller islands. The tits have to fly longer distances to find enough food, which is reflected in a lower chick production. In addition, birds crossing logging areas are easy prey for birds of prey.</p>
	<p>This bird is found in Romania mainly in mountainous and subalpine forests, often in coniferous or mixed woods. Population in Romania estimated at roughly 50,000–150,000 breeding pairs (based on European Bird Census Council and Romanian Ornithological Society data). Trend: Considered stable to slightly declining, due to forest management and habitat loss in some areas. Conservation status: “Least Concern” (IUCN), but locally vulnerable where old decaying forests are removed — since the bird depends on dead wood for nesting.</p>



In Italy, it is uniformly distributed in the Alpine and pre-Alpine areas, from the Maritime Alps to the Carnic Alps. In autumn and winter, it can be observed at altitudes below 900-1,000 m and above 2,300-2,500 m. These local movements can also lead it to appear in valley floor, hilly, and foothill areas, occasionally in the Po Valley, especially in riparian forests and peat bogs.

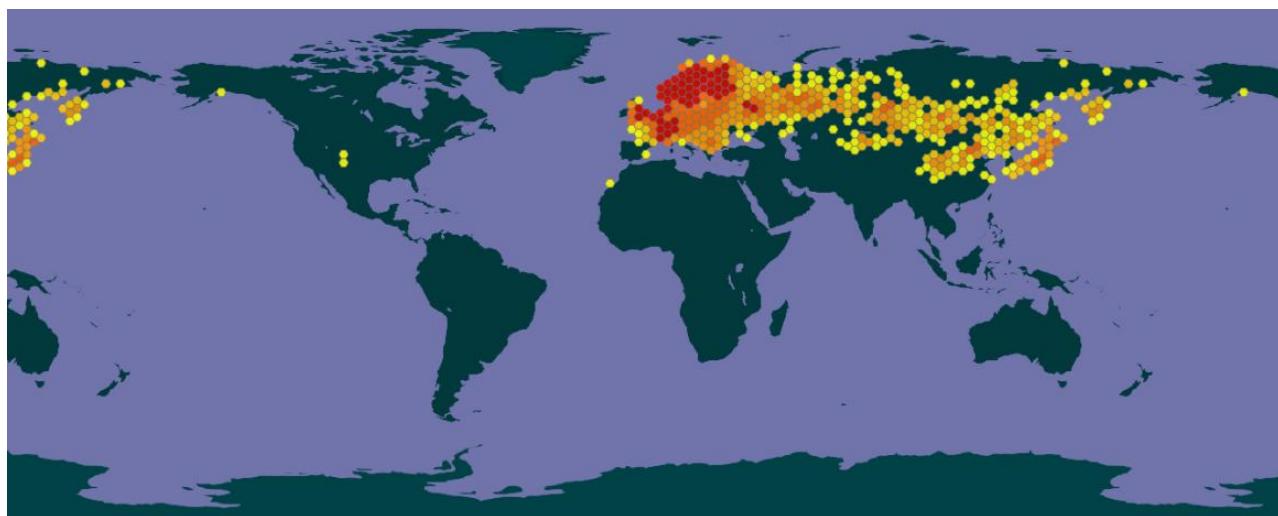


Figure 31: Distribution of *Turdus merula*

#### 4.5.4 Nutrition

The willow tit eats various invertebrates, such as insects and spiders. In autumn, the great tit makes hundreds of food caches in the nodules, sedges and lichens growing on tree trunks and branches, which help it survive the harshest times of winter. In spring and winter, the number of invertebrates is greatest on branches with the most lichen, so they are good to eat. In winter, sufficient food intake is a bottleneck for survival, as the great tit needs more than its own weight in food per day. The great tit also occasionally visits bird feeders.

#### 4.5.5 Breeding

The presence of dead standing trees that are brittle enough for the mountain blue tit to hollow out a nest is important in its nesting habitat. As a rule, it hollows out a new nest each nesting season.

The Willow Tit breeds across a wide area of the Palearctic, including:

- Northern and central Europe: from the UK, Scandinavia, and the Baltics down through central Europe (Germany, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Austria, Romania).
- Eastern Europe & Russia: across much of Siberia to the Pacific.
- South-western limit: the Carpathians and northern Balkans (Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria).

Willow Tit, is a native and regularly breeding species in Romania, mainly in Carpathian mountain forests and other wooded upland regions

#### 4.5.6 Migrations



In late summer and autumn, the willow tit forms mixed flocks with other forest birds, such as crested tit, spruce tit, hippie and treecreepers. The willow tit moving in a flock is more likely to notice a barn owl or other danger than moving alone. This gives them more time to eat, which is vital especially in winter. The collapse of the population of the insect-eating forest bird also speaks volumes about the state of forest insects.

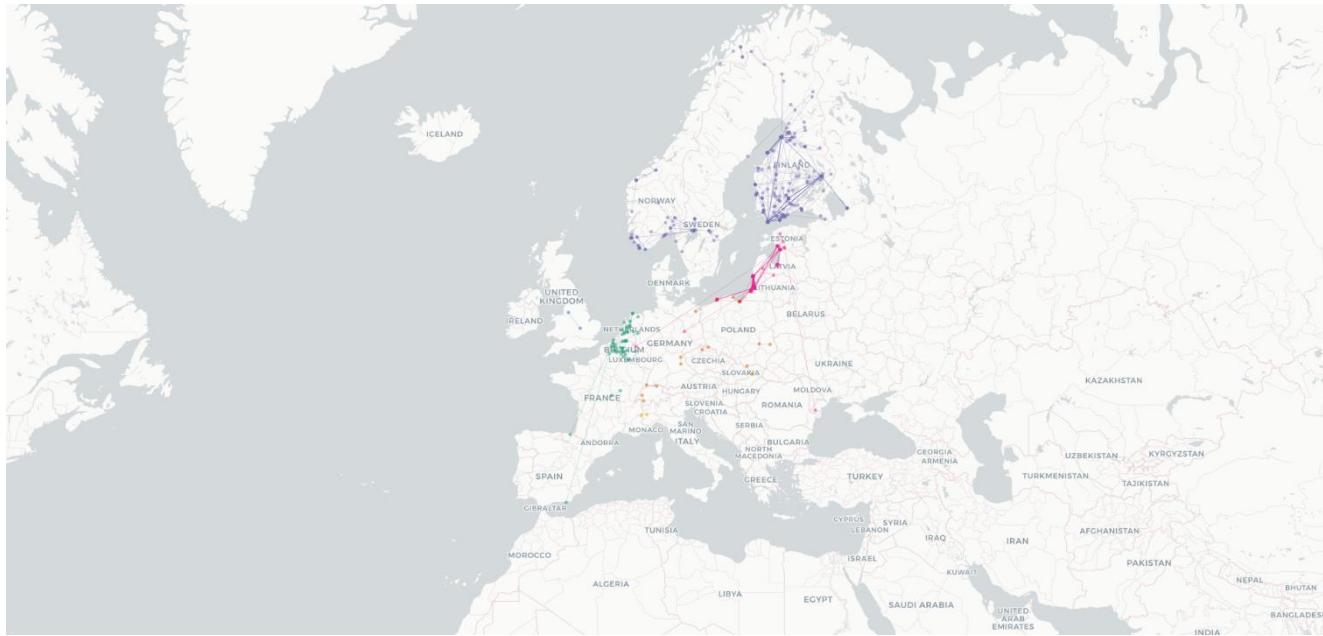


Figure 32: Willow tit migration map based on ring finds

#### 4.5.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories. In Finland, in 2019 it was declared as EN – Endangered.

The decline of the willow tit is one of the biggest changes in Finnish bird life for a single species. As late as the 1940s, the willow tit was the most common winter bird in many places in southern Finland. The disappearance of common forest birds is a sign of a fundamental change in our forests. Hundreds of other forest species are also endangered. According to research, species-poor forests are less able to withstand exceptional situations, such as drought and mass outbreaks of pests, than species-rich forests.

#### 4.5.8 Cultural heritage

In the old days, the Norrbotten settlers and the Sami people told a story about a titmouse and a bear. The story gives an idea of the tenacity and greatness of a small bird compared to its size, and a story that could very well have a basis in fact. Few birds are as brave in their nests as the titmouse.

“The bear found the titmouse’s nest and immediately wanted to eat the chicks in its mouth. But the chicks prayed and begged for their lives. Finally, the bear promised to spare them, at least until their mother returned.

“Some terribly large creature was here, trying to eat us,” the chicks told their mother.

“I should have been home, so you could have seen how I fly it away,” the mother replied, puffing herself up as much as she could. But the chicks just laughed: “Now you are smaller than its ear!”

(Bergström, Lundevall, Pohjolan linnut 2005)



#### 4.5.8.1 *Slovenian culture*

In Slovenia, there is a well-known folk song about a blue tit whose young were killed by children in front of a school. The song was written down in 1877 by Fran Levstik and given the title *Siničja tožba* (also known as *Učilna zidana*). The titmouse appears as the voice of nature, speaking about its experience with humans. In this case, the titmouse is not just a bird from nature, but the central narrative figure of the song, through which the traditional text conveys an experience and ethical meaning—care for living beings and a response to their suffering.

#### 4.5.8.2 *Romanian culture*

In Romania: The tit (in general, not just a specific species – blue tit, great tit, willow tit, etc.) appears in Romanian culture, literature, and the arts more as a symbolic motif and secondary character than as a central figure. Although it does not have the mythic status of other birds (cuckoo, swallow, lark), it consistently appears as a small, lively, agile, and intelligent bird, associated with the forest, the household, and winter.

In Romanian literature, the tit appears mainly in:

- Children's poetry – the tit appears in verses about winter, snow, food, and cheerfulness; it is portrayed as a "hardworking," "lively" bird, sometimes used as an example of solidarity among birds during the cold months.
- Naturalist literature – authors who describe Romanian forests include it in lists of "small, quick birds" (tits, finches, chaffinches), serving as a sonic marker of the forest.
- Textbooks and primers – the tit frequently appear as a familiar and charming bird in educational texts.
- Descriptive/traditionalist poetry – it appears as a small element of the harmony of the village or forest, often near houses, trees, or fences.

#### 4.5.8.3 *Italian culture*

In Italian literature, the blue tit, or similar birds such as the great tit, appears as a symbol of freedom, resourcefulness, and lively life, finding space in the compositions of authors such as Giovanni Pascoli (with his "cinciallegra") and Dacia Maraini, who uses it to describe the elusive nature of love, as in a metaphor of a bird that cannot be stopped.

#### Literary references

Giovanni Pascoli: In his poem "La notte" (The Night), he refers to the blue tit, a bird similar to the great tit, in a natural and evocative context, where nature is the protagonist.

Dacia Maraini: In her work, the writer Dacia Maraini uses the metaphor of the great tit to describe love, emphasizing its freedom and the difficulty of controlling it: "Love is a great tit that flies and you can't stop it, not even by putting salt on its tail."

Children's literature: The figure of the "Cinciallegra" is also present in children's books, such as "È estate, Cinciallegra" (It's Summer, Cinciallegra) by Giuditta Campello, where Cinciallegra is a protagonist, an animal that organizes a picnic with her friends, making her a friendly character linked to the idea of friendship and nature.

#### 4.5.8.4 *Finnish culture*

In Finnish tradition, the tit was believed to be the oldest and longest-lived of all birds. Its venerable age made it a symbol of wisdom, and according to folklore the bird taught humans important skills such as agriculture and brewing.

In the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, the tit advises Väinämöinen on how to enrich the soil by slash-and-burn cultivation, a practice that marks the mythical beginning of farming. In the *Kanteletar* poem *The Origin of Beer*,



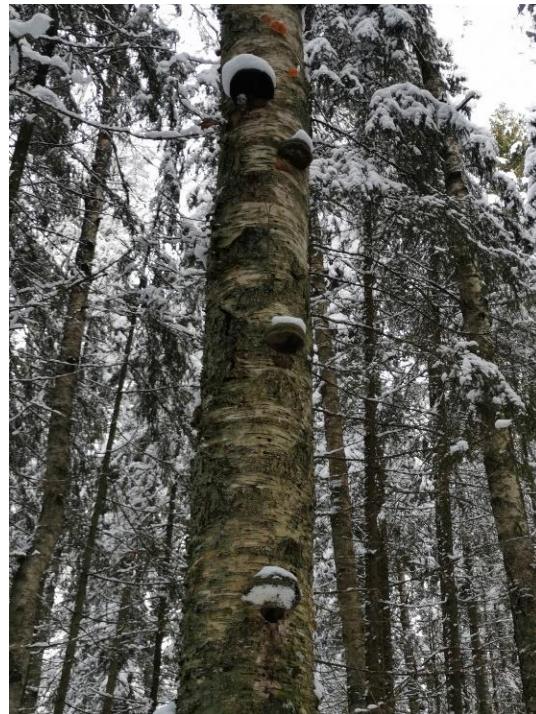
the tit is also portrayed as a skilled brewer—a role that complements its association with wisdom and joy. Thus, the tit was seen as a close friend to humans and a messenger between nature and people.

In folk tradition, all tit species were generally called by the same name, making it difficult to distinguish beliefs tied to individual species. However, the tit mentioned in the *Kalevala* likely refers to the willow tit and the Siberian tit, whose habitats resemble the forest landscapes described in the epic.

In his symphonic poem *Tapiola*, Jean Sibelius took his listeners to the *Kalevala* forest, the wonderful glade of the titmouse. The titmouse forest is beautifully described in the poems of the *Kalevala*. The verses beautifully describe the important trees for the titmouse's food and nesting holes: pines, spruces, birches, aspens, alders, rowans and willows – the entire titmouse forest.



The titmouse of the *Kalevala* is briefly a titmouse, but above all it is thought to have been a common titmouse and a Lapland titmouse. It represented all the titmouses in the poems. The titmouse is the bird known in the *Kalevala*, and by knowing about it, Joukahainen tried to find refuge in Väinämöinen's song: "I know the titmouses birth, I know titmouse a bird!" But that didn't help either, and Joukahainen sank deeper and deeper into the swamp.



In Kantelettare's collection of poems, the poem "The Birth of Beer", the titmouse has become the brewer of beer. This role shows that the titmouse was valued in Finnish culture.

*"Then they gathered  
and came to each other  
The wren carried water  
On a warm summer day,  
The redbird chopped wood,  
The tit brewed beer.  
The tit knew well,  
Knew how to brew beer,  
But he could not name it  
  
The tit, the little bird,  
The sparrow, the poor  
Invited many guests  
To drink beer;  
The drink was good for the pious,  
But it was bad for the drunkards,  
It made the fools  
stir,*



*The men scurry,  
The tit, the little bird,  
The sparrow, the poor  
Couldn't stay at home,  
He had to flee to the forest."*

So, the titmouse has been sung about for thousands of years here in the Nord: in forests, meadows, by fires, while fishing, in saunas, on the edge of the aho. It has also been a winter skier's travel companion and has gone to get its share of the elk's ski boot. The titmouse has also come to the forest in the hope of food. The titmouse has been offered food throughout the ages, even in the poorest conditions it has been given its share. It has lived as a companion to humans near homes and in the forests.

The titmouse is like the soul bird of the forest, a tame friend of those who walk in the forest. They have been familiar to people and there have been sayings related to them in different parts of Finland. For example:

"On ku tiijanen tikun nenäs". –Kauhava "Tie on nii liukas ku tiiase pääluu". –Kanneljärvi

(Samuli Haapasalo: Tii tii tiainen, 2017)

## 4.5.9 Sources

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## 4.6 Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)

### COMMON RAVEN

*Corvus corax*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Passeriformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Corvidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Corvus</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Corvus corax</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Krokar  
Corb



Korppi  
Corvo imperiale

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



#### 4.6.1 Descriptive notes

The Common Raven is the largest of all corvids, measuring 58–69 cm in length and weighing 585–2000 g. It has a large, powerful bill with nasal bristles covering up to half of the exposed culmen, and long, lanceolate throat feathers (especially prominent in males) that are raised during dominance displays. In flight, the raven shows long, broad wings with prominent “fingers” and a notably long tail, often spread into a diamond shape. The nominate race is entirely black, with a greenish gloss on the head and tail, and a bluish-purple sheen across the upperparts and wings. The bases of the neck feathers are brownish-grey, giving the plumage a generally duller, browner appearance with less gloss. The bill and legs are black. The species is distinguished from other corvids by its large size and shaggy throat feathers, and in flight by the characteristic diamond-shaped tail. The sexes are similar in appearance, though males are significantly larger than females.



Figure 33: GBIF *Corvus corax* information sheet



Figure 34: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Corvus corax*

#### 4.6.2 Sound

Large repertoire of at least 20 distinct calls of known function, 79 call types distinguished spectrographically, many mimicked sounds, and numerous utterances of unknown meaning. At least some calls are learnt socially from mates, and especially from nearby (within 12 km) birds of same sex. Adults "caw" loudly and hoarsely, this deep-pitched croaking varying in pitch and intensity to convey caller's motivation. Territorial adults "quork" often in sequence ("quork-quork...quork-quork"), frequently during aerial rolls or dives in defense of territory; mated pairs frequently give loud, patterned knocking (like sound of two wood blocks rapped together) audible for several kilometers, likely serving to defend territory from long range. Juveniles and females beg in typical corvid fashion to be fed by their parents and mates. Juvenile food-begging calls change into "yells" of immatures, which are given at sight of defended food ("haa") or as dominants approach food ("who").

#### 4.6.3 Habitat and distribution

Ravens are extreme habitat generalists, breeding across an extraordinary range of environments in the Northern Hemisphere, from forests and open coasts to steppes, mountains, deserts, tundra, and cliffs. In the southern and northern extremes of their range, they are most often found in open landscapes such as scrublands and deserts in the south, and scrublands and tundra in the north, where cliffs, scattered trees, including Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) in the Mojave Desert of the southwestern United States—and human structures provide suitable nesting sites. In the mid-latitudes, they are more commonly associated with coniferous and broadleaf forests, where tree-nesting often exceeds cliff-nesting.

Although generally scarce in large cities across most of their range, there are notable exceptions, such as Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Their relative absence from many urban areas may be due to unsuitable habitat, competition with abundant species like gulls (*Laridae*) and other corvids, extensive recent habitat disturbance, and a history of human persecution.



	<p>In Slovenia, it is a fairly common resident species, occurring throughout much of the country, especially in large, forested mountain area.</p>
	<p>The raven is a common resident species. It nests in a variety of environments, from sea archipelagos to fell ranges. It is also found on the outskirts of cities and towns, but it does not nest as close to human habitation as the crow.</p>
	<p>In Romania, the species is present across almost the entire territory, except for the lowland agricultural areas in the southeast. The species breeds in Romania and is sedentary. It is predominantly forest-dwelling in Romania, though it also nests in rocky or open areas (often on high-voltage poles). For feeding, it uses both forest habitats and nearby open areas. The estimated population in Romania is 27,000 – 55,000 pairs, with the population trend considered uncertain.</p>
	<p>In Italy, the Raven (<i>Corvus corax</i>) mainly inhabits mountainous and rocky areas, with continuous nesting areas in the Alps and Apennines, and in Sardinia and Sicily. It prefers wild and rugged habitats, such as mountains, cliffs, and rocky outcrops, but it is very adaptable and can also be found in rural and less anthropized areas, near coastal zones.</p>

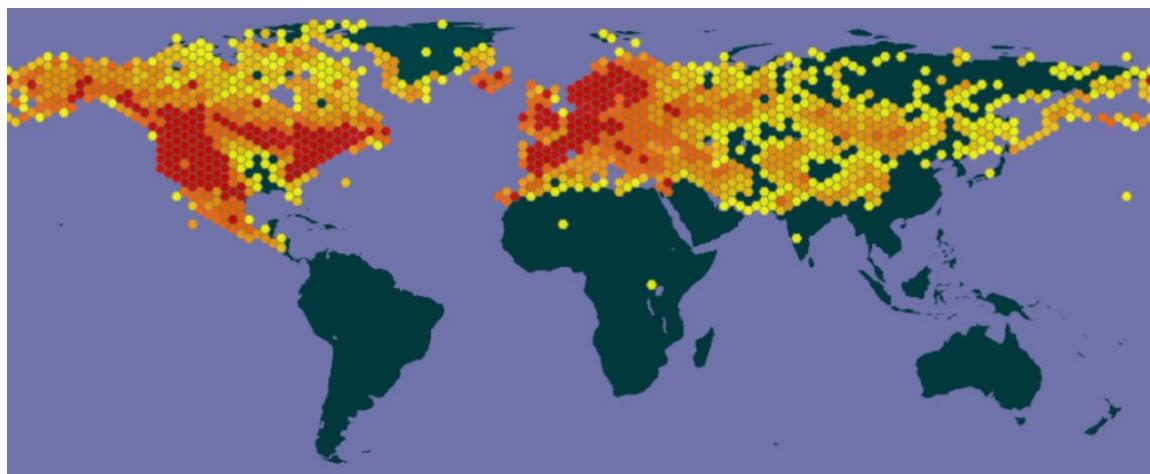


Figure 35: Distribution of *Corvus corax*

#### 4.6.4 Nutrition

Ravens are opportunistic scavengers with an exceptionally varied diet, feeding on both animal and plant matter. They prey on adult and nestling birds, eggs, small mammals, and the sick or dying of larger species, including sheep. Their menu also includes toads, snakes, juvenile turtles, fish, and a wide array of invertebrates—such as butterflies, ants, slugs, scorpions, earthworms, snails, and numerous marine species. They readily scavenge garbage and consume almost any kind of carrion. Plant foods range from fruits, grains, and berries to buds and even calcareous seaweed (*Corallina officinalis*). On some Canary Islands, fruit—especially *Opuntia* and *Ficus*—forms the bulk of their diet.

Ravens locate food primarily by sight and sound, and possibly by smell at very close range. They actively scan for carcasses, investigate the sounds of gunshots or wolf howls, and watch the behavior of foraging birds and mammals for clues. Hunting occurs from perches, in flight, or on foot. While they are curious, ravens are also



highly cautious around unfamiliar foods. Breeding pairs will often defend a discovered food source within their territory against solitary wanderers or small groups.

#### 4.6.5 Breeding

Ravens breed early in the year, often while snow still blankets the ground. Egg-laying typically begins in late February across most of their range, with double brooding being rare. They are socially monogamous, forming pair bonds that likely last for life, though occasional extra-pair copulations have been observed. In most habitats, pairs occupy and defend an all-purpose home range year-round. Territory defense includes vigorous aerial chases, loud vocalizations, and, if an intruder is caught, direct physical attacks using bill and feet.

Both sexes collect nesting material, but the female usually takes the lead in construction, particularly in shaping the nest bowl. Building the nest—often over a period of one to three weeks—results in a large, bulky platform of dead sticks lined with fine roots, grass, string, and other debris, and finished with an inner cup of mammal fur. Nests are typically placed on tree branches or high artificial structures such as utility poles, buildings, signs, radio towers, abandoned vehicles, oil derricks, bridges, irrigation pipes, or windmills. Old nests may be refurbished and reused.

Clutch sizes range from one to eight eggs. The female performs most incubation, sometimes assisted by the male, over a period of 20–25 days. Chicks are brooded and fed by both parents, remaining in the nest for four to seven weeks. After fledging, young birds stay with their parents for several weeks to months, usually leaving the natal territory by late summer. Ravens can live up to 13 years and 4 months in the wild, with credible reports of captive individuals surviving 40 to 80 years.

#### 4.6.6 Migrations

Ravens are generally sedentary, though their movements vary by breeding status and location. Breeding birds may travel up to 30 km from the nest to reach reliable food sources, covering home ranges between 12 and 1,950 km<sup>2</sup>. Non-breeders tend to be more mobile, ranging nomadically over areas of 1,200 to more than 1,900 km<sup>2</sup> each winter in search of concentrated food supplies. In Britain and much of North America, most individuals spend their entire lives within 50 km of their birthplace. Recorded maximum distances between breeding and recovery sites include 551 km in Britain and 480 km in the western United States (Oregon). In Greenland and other areas above 60° N—or at extreme altitudes—ravens are notably less sedentary. In winter, both adults and juveniles from interior Greenland may travel over 150 km to reach the coast.

#### 4.6.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

The species is not globally threatened and remains common to locally abundant across much of its range. It occurs in widely distributed, low-density, self-sustaining populations, though local numbers often reflect a history of persecution or, conversely, the benefits of modern human support. In many parts of North America and Europe, populations are expanding—sometimes at alarming rates—because human activities provide abundant food, water, and nesting sites. These resources boost reproduction and juvenile survival, enabling ravens to establish territories far from their natural habitats, including open tundra and scrublands. In some of these human-influenced areas, local densities can become exceptionally high.

In Western Europe, ravens were once valued as natural “sanitation workers” in medieval cities, cleaning up waste and carrion. However, from the mid-1600s to the mid-1900s (and in some places even later), they were widely persecuted. Over time, the wonder and respect once afforded to ravens gave way to fear and mistrust,



as they became associated with scavenging on the dead, including humans, and were cast as harbingers of evil in the public imagination.

In Finland the breeding population of ravens has doubled in recent decades. Previously, ravens were considered a harmful bird and were even persecuted. The population reached its lowest point in the 1950s. As attitudes changed, the raven population began to recover in the 1960s and has been growing ever since. The species was completely protected outside the reindeer herding area in the early 1990s.

#### 4.6.8 Cultural heritage

Ravens have long captured human imagination, symbolizing intelligence, adaptability, partnership, guidance, transformation, and prophecy. Insightful and mysterious, they appear in myths and legends from cultures around the world. Considered among the most intelligent birds, ravens possess one of the largest brains relative to body size in the avian world. Research by biologist Bernd Heinrich and linguist Derek Bickerton suggests that ravens are one of only four species, alongside humans, bees, and ants, capable of communicating about objects and events distant in space or time. Like chimpanzees, they can also create and use tools.

In folklore, ravens often embody change and opportunity, and their role as scavengers links them to death, fate, and the spirit world. The ancient Greeks associated them with Apollo, the god of prophecy. In the biblical story of the Great Flood, Noah sent out a raven to search for dry land; when it did not return, he assumed no safe ground had yet appeared. Norse mythology tells of Odin's two ravens, Huginn ("Thought") and Muninn ("Memory"), who flew across the world each day to bring him news.

Legends of King Arthur sometimes claim that he did not die but was transformed into a raven at Avalon. In Hungarian history, the raven is immortalized in the coat of arms of the Hunyadi family, most famously worn by 15th century King Matthias Corvinus. Across these diverse traditions, the raven emerges as both a worldly survivor and a messenger between realms—a bird that moves with ease between the material and the mystical.

Raven is also present in a famous poem by Edgar Allan Poe, named Raven. In the poem, the raven represents almost a demonic image, representing death and deterioration. This aspect was also discussed by Branimir Oblučar, who also explains a certain holy dimension because of the ravens' role in cleaning bone from the flesh.

##### 4.6.8.1 Slovenian culture

In Slovenia, we know the story of the Fox and the Crow: "The fox thinks about how she can get something to eat by using her cunning. She lies down on the ground and pretends to be dead. The crow sees the fox lying there and thinks she is dead, so he flies down to eat her. But the fox jumps up and grabs him by the neck." The motif tells the story of how someone uses cunning to gain an advantage. Instead of a raven, crows and chickens may also appear.

In Carinthia, there is a well-known fable about a crow (raven) that had beautiful, colourful feathers. It was one of the most beautiful birds. He also sang very beautifully. Once, when he was singing in front of a church, all the people left the church to come and listen to him. Because he disturbed the service, he angered God, who turned him black and took away his beautiful voice, so that now he can only caw.

##### 4.6.8.2 Romanian culture

###### Romanian folklore and symbolism:

Omens and portents: raven is traditionally seen as a messenger between the human world and the supernatural, often associated with death, misfortune, or prophecy.

Wisdom and intelligence: Its intelligence in observation and problem-solving also links it to cunning and cleverness in folk tales.



**Dual symbolism:** While often negative (death, ill omen), it can also symbolize protection, vigilance, or insight—a common duality in Romanian folklore.

**Names in proverbs:** Romanian sayings often include “corb” for moral or descriptive lessons. Example:

“Corb la corb nu-și scoate ochii” – a proverb about solidarity or mutual restraint among similar parties.

**Fairy tales:** Appears as a character in Romanian folk stories—sometimes magical, sometimes a cunning helper or trickster.

### Romanian literature

**Classic Romanian literature:**

- Poets like Mihai Eminescu reference the raven as part of nature imagery, often to evoke melancholy or foreboding. Example (from Scrisoarea III contextually, or naturalist imagery): the black bird flying over the forest or fields as a visual element of mood.

- In descriptive passages, the raven often sets the mood of the landscape (autumn, winter, or desolate forests).

### Modern literature:

- Contemporary Romanian literature may use the raven symbolically for social critique, loneliness, or mystery.

### Children's literature:

Crows appear in folk-inspired stories and poems for children, sometimes as clever or mischievous characters, teaching lessons.

George Coșbuc – sometimes mentions raven in children's poems or rural landscape depictions, often emphasizing natural sounds or forest life.

### Arts and Visual Culture

**Traditional art:** ravens appear in wood carvings, icons, and rural decorations, sometimes as part of scenes depicting forests, villages, or funerary symbolism.

**Modern painting & illustration:** Used for symbolic landscape compositions, autumn/winter scenes, or as an emblem of foreboding or intelligence.

#### 4.6.8.3 Italian culture

In Italian popular culture, the *Corvus corax* (common raven) is mainly associated with being a messenger of misfortune and bad luck, a role due to its guttural call, which is considered disturbing, and its intelligence, which leads it to be seen as a negative omen.

### Symbolism in popular culture:

**Bird of ill omen:** The raven's loud, hoarse call, which can be disturbing, has helped cement its reputation as a bird that brings bad news.

**Intelligence and ingenuity:** Despite its negative image, the raven is considered a very intelligent and cunning bird, capable of modulating a wide variety of sounds and even imitating the human voice.

A famous fable is Aesop's “The Crow and the Fox.”

One day, a crow found a piece of cheese and flew to a branch to eat it in peace. A fox, attracted by the smell of cheese, approached the crow and tried to trick it into giving him the cheese.

“Good morning, Mr. Crow!” he said. “What splendid plumage you have! If only you had a voice worthy of your feathers, you would undoubtedly be the king of birds!”



Flattered, the crow opened its beak to sing, to prove that it also had a beautiful voice. But in doing so, the piece of cheese fell to the ground.

The fox quickly grabbed it and, as he walked away, said with a laugh:

“Dear Crow, if you had a little brain to go with your voice and beautiful feathers, you would be perfect!”

Moral: those who are easily flattered often lose what they have.

#### 4.6.8.4 Finnish culture

In Finnish tradition, the raven was regarded as a symbol of evil, evoking both fear and respect. Its ominous call, dark appearance, scavenging habits, and remarkable intelligence formed the basis for numerous beliefs. Ravens were thought to sense when a weak animal was near death and would wait nearby, which reinforced their association with death.

Several superstitions linked the raven to misfortune. Ravens fighting above the house were believed to foretell a couple's separation, while a raven flying over a house signalled a death. Ravens were also considered omens of predators attacking livestock, fires, and drownings. In the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*, a raven appears to Lemminkäinen's mother to announce her son's death. As a messenger of death, the raven was often an unwanted visitor, which unfortunately led to its persecution.

The raven was believed to live for hundreds of years, which contributed to its reputation as an extraordinarily wise bird. However, its longevity and intelligence were sometimes interpreted as a sign of the devil. In addition, in ancient Finnish and Sámi traditions, witches and shamans were said to take the form of a raven during their spiritual journeys.

The bird was also associated with magical powers. Folklore claimed that the raven retained a single white feather from its original plumage, which had turned black because of the bird's evil acts. The white feather was considered a powerful talisman, granting abilities such as understanding the language of birds, flying, becoming invisible, and unlocking any lock. Similar powers were attributed to a magical stone taken from a raven chick's beak. Both items were extremely difficult to obtain but drinking raven eggs contents or using its feathers were also believed to give some of the raven's magical strength.

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Common Raven distribution map: <https://www.gbif.org/species/2482492>

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## 4.7 House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

### House sparrow

*Passer domesticus*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Passeriformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Passeridae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Passer</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Passer domesticus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Domači vrabec

Varpunen



varpunen

Vrabie

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



#### 4.7.1 Descriptive notes

A small grey-brown bird with a sturdy beak. The back is brown and streaked, the belly and crown are grey. The male has a black eye patch and throat patch, with a reddish-brown stripe behind the eye. The female lacks the black markings.



Figure 36: GBIF Passer domesticus information sheet

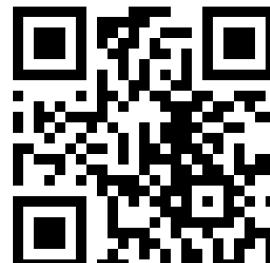


Figure 37: iNaturalist fact sheet for Passer domesticus



Figure 38: Left - male Passer domesticus and on the right female

#### 4.7.2 Sound

House sparrow's calls are simple and rolling or slightly impure: "trilp", "brep", "chev", "cherrr-r-r-r" (a crude rattling) and the like. Song consists of "trilp" calls repeated boldly at different pitches.

#### 4.7.3 Habitat and distribution

The house sparrow lives close to humans. It nests in cities, towns, and farms. Barns are particularly favourable for sparrows, but they can also nest at gas stations and parks. Sparrows usually nest in building crevices, rarely in birdhouses.



In Slovenia, the house sparrow is a very common year-round species that nests exclusively in settlements and individual buildings in the cultural landscape.



	<p>The breeding population of house sparrows in Finland has declined sharply since the 1980s. The reason is at least partly due to changes in agriculture. Grazing livestock has decreased, resulting in less manure to attract insects. Grains and feeds are now stored out of reach of sparrows. Modern agricultural buildings also have fewer suitable nesting crevices for sparrows. In cities, the reason may be overly tidy yards, making it difficult for sparrows to find shelter and food.</p>
	<p>The species is classified as “Least Concern.” The population trend in Europe is considered slightly decreasing. In Romania, the population trend is currently unknown.</p>
	<p>However, the range of this species does not include Italy (apart from some border areas on the Alps). In Sicily and Sardinia, it is replaced by the Sardinian sparrow (or Spanish sparrow), which is also widespread in Spain, Greece, and North Africa, countries where it can coexist with <i>Passer domesticus</i>. In the remaining regions of Italy, it is replaced by the Italian sparrow (or Italian house sparrow), which is almost endemic to our country (outside Italy, it is found in Corsica, Canton Ticino, Alpine border areas, and Crete). Both the Spanish sparrow and the Italian sparrow are found in Sicily.</p>

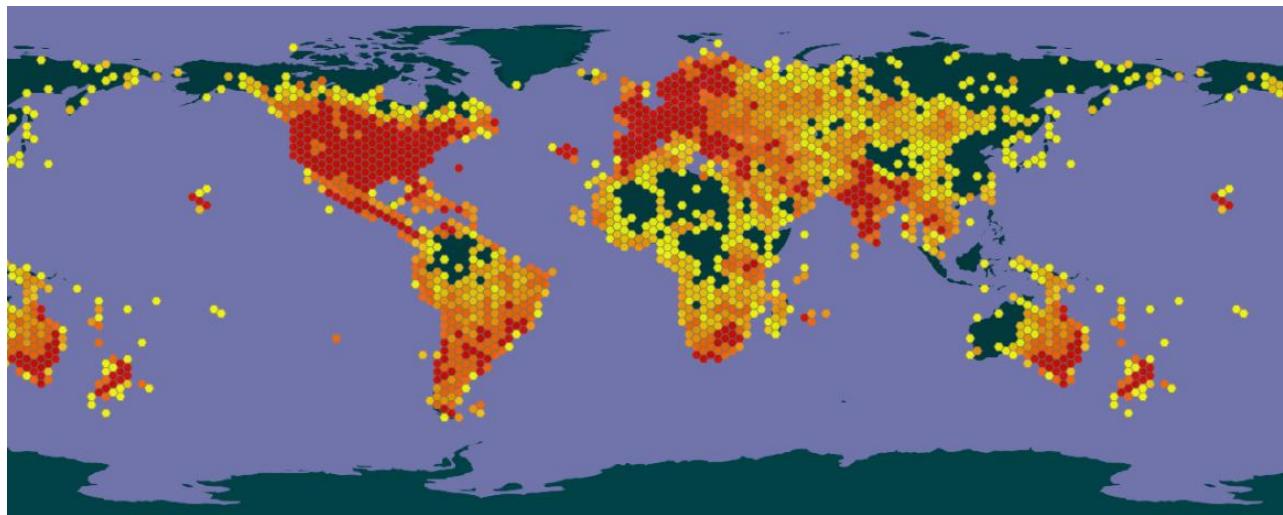


Figure 39: Distribution of *Passer domesticus*

#### 4.7.4 Nutrition

Feeds on seeds and invertebrates. Also visits bird feeders.

#### 4.7.5 Breeding

Closely associated with human habitation, breeds very commonly around farmyards, in towns and villages. Nests under roof tiles, in holes, cavities etc., may also build nests in open: large, domed. Gathers in loud, noisy flocks.

#### 4.7.6 Migrations



Resident bird. Young individuals may search for breeding sites further away.

#### 4.7.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

#### 4.7.8 Cultural heritage

The house sparrow was often considered an ominous bird; if it nested in the yard, it was believed to bring misfortune. It was thought that if a sparrow took hair that had ended up in the wash water to its nest, the former owner of the hair would get a headache. The house sparrow was also seen as a predictor of war and death. If a sparrow smashed into the window, it was known that death was coming to the house. Sparrow nests were often destroyed.

On the other hand, there was also a belief that the disappearance of house sparrows from a house meant the house's destruction.

The house sparrow's lack of colour was thought to come from the fact that when the Creator distributed colours to the birds, the sparrow arrived only when the dyes were running low.

##### 4.7.8.1 Slovenian culture

**Živi kakor vrabec v prosu**

**He lives like a sparrow in millet.**

This Slovenian phrase means that someone lives comfortably, without major worries or shortages.

**Boljši vrabec v roki kakor golob na strehi.**

**Better a sparrow in the hand than a pigeon on the roof.**

This phrase expresses the idea that it is better to have something small but reliable than to expect a lot but end up with nothing.

In Slovenia, there is a fable about a fox and a sparrow, which tells how a fox uses cunning to get hold of a dove's young. The sparrow advises the dove how to avoid this, so the fox takes revenge on the sparrow. The fox tricks the sparrow and eats it. This motif tells us how some people can be full of advice for others but cannot see it themselves.

The sparrow is chosen here because it is closely connected to human life as a synanthropic bird and is very common.

We also know the story of the sparrow and the swallow. The sparrow decides that, despite the poor conditions, it would rather stay at home than go to other countries. The sparrow represents a symbol of loyalty to one's homeland. The sparrow says: "...I will not leave my beloved homeland, but I want to suffer and starve with it and wait for better and happier days." (Kropej Telban, 2015).

##### 4.7.8.2 Romanian culture

**Romanian overview:** The sparrow (*Passer domesticus*, "vrabia" in Romanian) has a rich presence in Romanian literature, folklore, and cultural heritage, being one of the most familiar and symbolic small birds in human settlements.

##### Folklore and Cultural Symbolism



- Everyday life and domesticity: The sparrow is closely associated with human habitation, gardens, and villages, reflecting domesticity and familiarity.
- Symbol of simplicity and diligence: Its constant activity and small size often symbolize humility, resilience, and hard work in rural culture.
- Weather lore: In traditional Romanian belief, observing sparrows' behavior could indicate weather changes or seasonal transitions.
- Proverbs and sayings:

“Nu da vrabia din mâna pentru cioara de pe gard” – similar to “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” emphasizing prudence and appreciating what you have.

“Vrabia mălai visează” – used metaphorically about modest ambitions or desires.

## Literature

Poetry- George Coșbuc and Mihai Eminescu often mention sparrows in descriptions of village life, gardens, and domestic scenes, using them to evoke simplicity, everyday rhythm, or the passage of seasons.

“Vrăbiuțele guralive” de George Budoi  
 Guralive vrăbiuțe,  
 Certărețe și prostuțe,  
 Nu observă că pisica  
 O să prindă păsărica.

“The Chattering Little Sparrows” by George Budoi  
 Chattering little sparrows,  
 Quarrelsome and silly,  
 They don't notice that the cat  
 Is going to catch the little bird.

Children's literature: Frequently appears as a friendly, familiar bird, teaching lessons about work, care, and cleverness.

Prose- In rural narratives, sparrows are used to illustrate the sounds, life, and rhythms of villages, creating realistic naturalistic settings.

Sometimes appear as minor characters in fables or short stories, embodying virtues or everyday wisdom.

## Visual Arts

Folk art and embroidery: Sparrows appear on traditional textiles, ceramics, and woodcraft, symbolizing domesticity, fertility, and harmony with nature.

Modern painting and illustration: Depicted in garden or village landscapes, often to enhance realism or convey a peaceful rural atmosphere.

Frequently illustrated in children's books to familiarize young readers with local fauna.

### 4.7.8.3 Italian culture

In Italy, this species has no cultural significance.

### 4.7.8.4 Finnish culture

The sparrow was often regarded as the soul bird of children. It was believed that sparrows were departed spirits visiting their loved ones in the form of a bird. Feeding birds around Christmas was thought to invite departed relatives and friends to join the festive celebration—a belief that survives today in the form of a popular Christmas carol The Sparrow on Christmas Morning, which is why the sparrow is commonly associated with the Christmas season in Finland.



However, the sparrow also had a darker side in folk tradition. It was considered an omen of misfortune, even predicting wars, natural disasters, or epidemics. A sparrow flying against a window was believed to foretell death in the household. For this reason, sparrow nests were often destroyed, although some beliefs claimed that the disappearance of sparrows from a yard signaled the ruin of the household.

Seen both as a friend to humans and a bird of ill omen, the sparrow was also a symbol of modesty. Its perceived poverty is reflected in the Kanteletar poem The Origin of Beer, where the sparrow is described as poor compared to other birds. This association likely stems from its plain plumage. According to folklore, when the Creator distributed colors among birds, the sparrow arrived late and had to settle for modest hues.

#### A Christmas Carol: Sparrow on Christmas Morning (fi: Varpunen jouluaamuna)

Sparrow on Christmas Morning is a poem by Zachris Topelius from 1859. It has been translated from Swedish to Finnish in 1874 by Konrad Alexis Hougberg. You can see the sorrow of Topelius in the poem; his son, Rafael, died at the age of one the spring before he wrote the poem. The poem has been composed to a song several times.

Original Swedish 1859 Zachris Topelius <sup>4</sup>	Finnish 1874 fi:K. A. Waaranen <sup>5</sup>	English (2019 Ion Mittler) CC BY-SA 4.0
1. Nu så föll den vita snö, föll på björk och lindar,  frusen är den klara sjö, väntar vårens vindar.	1. Lumi on jo peittänyt kukat laaksosessa,  järven aalto jäätynyt talvipakkasessa.	1. White snow has fallen on birch trees in forests,  frozen is lake all along, spring winds it expects.
Liten sparv, fattig sparv, ätit upp sitt sommararv.	Varpunen pienoinen, syönyt kesäinehen.	Small sparrow, poor sparrow, eaten all its summer store.
Frusen är den klara sjö, väntar vårens vindar.	Järven aalto jäätynyt talvipakkasessa.	Frozen is lake all along, spring winds it expects.
2. Vid den gröna stugans dörr stod en liten flicka:  – Sparvelilla, kom som förr, kom ett korn att picka!	2. Pienen pirtin portailla oli tyttökulta:  – Tule, varpu, riemulla, ota siemen multa!	2. At a green small house's door was a girl now standing:  – Sparrow small, come as before, seeds from me pecking!
Nu är jul i vart skjul, sparvelilla, grå och ful.	Joulu on, koditon varpuseni onneton,	Christmas is in our home, and you bird so grey alone.
Sparvelilla, kom som förr, kom ett korn att picka!	tule tänne riemulla, ota siemen multa!	Sparrow small, come as before, seeds from me pecking!
3. Sparven flög till flickans fot, flög på glada vingar:  – Gärna tar jag kornet mot, kornet som du bringar.	3. Tytön luo nyt riemuiten lensi varpukulta:  – Kiitollisna siemenen otan kyllä sulta.	3. Bird flew at maiden's feet, on the wings so merry,  – Happily I'll take your seed that you for me carry.



Gud skall än löna den, som är här de armas vän.	Palkita Jumala tahtoo kerran sinua.	God will yet reward you, who to poor a friend was true.
Gärna tar jag kornet mot, kornet som du bringar.	Kiitollisna siemenen otan kyllä sulta!	Happily I'll take your seed that you for me carry.
4. – Jag är icke den du tror, ty ditt öga tåras.	4. – En mä ole, lapseni, lintu tästä maasta,	4. – I am not who you assume, as your eyes are in tears.
Jag är ju din lilla bror, som dog bort i våras.	olen pieni veljesi, tulin taivahasta.	I am your young brother, whom you in spring lost last year.
När du bjöd glad ditt bröd åt den fattige i nöd,	Siemenen pienoisen, jonka annoit köyhällen,	When you gave crumbs of bread to the poor and well him fed,
bjöd du åt din lilla bror, som dog bort i våras.	pieni sai sun veljesi enkeleitten maasta.	you gave it your brother, whom you in spring lost last year.

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Male and female images: Pixabay

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## 5 Shorebirds and allies (Charadriiformes)

### 5.1 Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

#### NORTHERN LAPWING

*Vanellus vanellus*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Charadriiformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Charadriidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Vanellus</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Pribă

Nagât



Töyhtöhyppää

Pavoncella

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 5.1.1 Descriptive notes

Northern Lapwing is a large wader (shorebird) with long wispy crest, 30.5 cm large, striking pattern with greenish back, black chest, long thin crest. In flight, it shows white tips on broad, rounded wings. A typical Lapwing stands at 28-31 cm in length with a wingspan of 82-87 cm and a weight of 140-320 grams.



Figure 40: GBIF *Vanellus vanellus* information sheet



Figure 41: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Vanellus vanellus*

### 5.1.2 Sound

Highly vocal and often heard at night. Flight-call when fully alarmed is heartbreakingly shrill, breathy “pwaay-eech” or “waay-ach”. In early spring males bubbling, wheezy song and vibrant throbbing by wings.

### 5.1.3 Habitat and distribution

Fairly common in open habitats, from grassland and farmland to wetlands, and locally on coastal mudflats. In winter forms larger flocks on farmland and marshes.

	Locally common breeder in Slovenia, primarily found in lowland areas of central, eastern, and northeastern regions, especially on arable fields and wet meadows.
	The northern lapwing nests in hay and grass fields, pastures, open areas and damp meadows. Typically nests in small groups.
	The population in Romania is estimated at 65,000–130,000 breeding pairs, with the national population trend being fluctuating.
	In Italy, it is a regular migratory species, wintering and nesting. The first nesting in Italy took place in the 1950s, and it is currently widespread in many areas of the Po Valley, where the largest nesting population is located in the rice fields of Piedmont and Lombardy. It also nests in Tuscany and Marche.

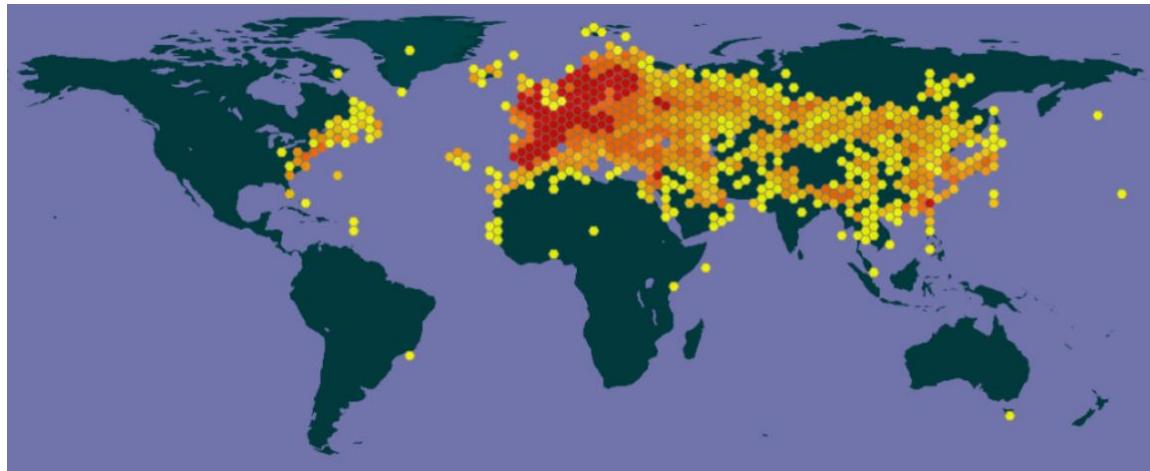


Figure 42: Distribution of *Vanellus vanellus*

#### 5.1.4 Nutrition

Northern Lapwings diet consists of adult and larval insects, spiders, snails, earthworms. It feeds at night to reduce competition from other species such as gulls.

#### 5.1.5 Breeding

Northern Lapwings are serially monogamous and form pairs only for a single breeding season. The species shows a preference for breeding on wet natural grasslands, meadows and hay meadows and patches of bare soil at low altitudes. The nest is a shallow scrape in short grass vegetation. The Lapwing will lay a clutch of four eggs from late March to late May/ early June. The eggs are incubated for a period of 25-34 days and the young will fledge after 35-40 days.

They are solitary and very territorial nesters. Both parents defend noisily and aggressively the nest and young against all intruders, even cattle. Soon after hatching, the pair with their young leave their nest; they raise their chicks at a different site where the young can feed by themselves but both parents still brood and guard them for some time.

#### 5.1.6 Migrations

Most populations of this species are fully migratory and travel on a broad front out of Europe although some breeding populations in more temperate regions are sedentary. The species breeds from Europe to the northern China, and winters from western Europe, through the Mediterranean, Middle East, to south-east China and southern Japan.

**In Finland** due to global warming, the spring migration of the northern lapwing has significantly advanced, and nesting has also advanced. Short-distance migrant.

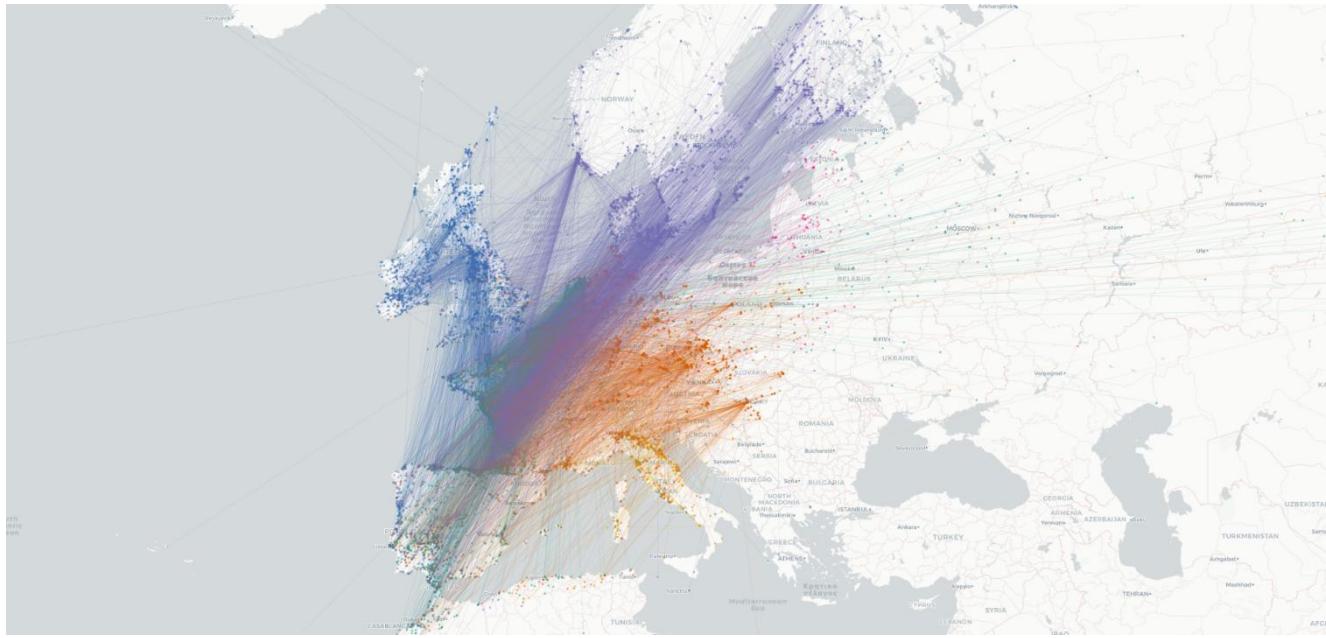


Figure 43: Northern lapwing migration map based on ring finds



Figure 44: A flock of lapwings

### 5.1.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Near threatened (NT) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

This is due to suspected population size to be decreasing at a moderately rapid rate. This species suffered declines because of land-use intensification, wetland drainage and egg collecting. Important migratory stopover habitats for these species on the Baltic Sea coastline are threatened by petroleum pollution, wetland drainage



for irrigation, land abandonment and changing land management practices leading to scrub overgrowth. The species is hunted for commercial use and for recreational purposes in Iran, and is hunted in France, Greece, Italy and Spain.

Conservation practices in Slovenia include activities of protection of nest of the Northern Lapwing at the agricultural land at Ljubljansko barje and Dravsko-Ptujsko-Središkem polju. The nests are found by ornithologists that also place sticks so that it is easier for farmers to see the area. Farmers get information about the presence of the nest and financial compensation of 200 e for each nest. Activities first started 2013 and are planned to last until 2027.

**In Finland** the species has become more abundant since the 1990s. This was preceded by a sharp decline in the population in the 1980s due to changes in agricultural environments. Due to global warming milder winters have improved the survival of the northern lapwing.

## 5.1.8 Cultural heritage

### 5.1.8.1 Slovenian culture

In Slovenian culture this bird doesn't have any cultural significance.

### 5.1.8.2 Romanian culture

The Northern Lapwing holds significance in Romanian nature, appearing in scientific records, particularly around the Danube Delta, but its cultural heritage is more tied to broad European folklore (like its crest and distinctive call) and its presence as a common bird in agricultural lands, rather than unique, deeply embedded Romanian myths; however, it's a recognizable wader found in diverse Romanian landscapes and documented by ornithologists.

### 5.1.8.3 Italian culture

Its Latin name, "Vanellus," means "little fan," also referencing its flight style. In some interpretations, the name lapwing is linked to themes of vigilance, adaptability, and spiritual guidance.

In Sardinian culture, the Lapwing holds a special place as a symbol deeply connected to the island's agro-pastoral heritage. Its image appears widely in traditional crafts—from intricately carved wooden furniture and hand-painted ceramics to woven textiles and ornate jewelry. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, the lapwing carries rich symbolic meanings, representing fertility, the life-giving rains, and the health of flocks—values drawn from its vigilant and protective behavior towards its young. In some regions, expecting mothers wear lapwing-shaped pendants as talismans, believed to ensure safe pregnancies and safeguard new life.

It symbolizes vulnerability of natural habitats, particularly due to threats from agricultural intensification and loss of wetlands.

Meanings:

**Fertility and abundance:** It is associated with abundant harvests, beneficial rains and the fertility of flocks.

**Rebirth and renewal:** Its figure is linked to the phoenix, symbol of resurrection from the ashes, and represents regeneration.

**Good luck:** It is considered a lucky charm, used to protect against the evil eye and to wish happiness.

Traditional uses:



**Crafts:** The image of the lapwing decorates furniture (such as wedding chests), ceramics, jewelry, fabrics (blankets, tablecloths), and even traditional Sardinian bread (“su coccoi”).

**Amulets and pendants:** Pregnant women wear the symbol to ensure a safe delivery.

#### In literature:

The bird appears in literary works, such as in Eugenio Montale's “Gli ossi di seppia” (The Cuttlefish Bones), where the “spersa pavoncella” (scattered lapwing) is an objective correlative of a feeling of joy.



Figure 45: Victorian ring with lapwing

#### 5.1.8.4 Finnish culture

The spring courtship display of the northern lapwing was a striking and noisy spectacle. Its energetic spins and leaps during mating season earned it the reputation of a “crazy bird” in Finnish folklore. Arriving among the first migratory birds in Finland, the lapwing was also seen as a sign that winter’s cold was giving way to spring.

The lapwing is a relatively recent addition to Finland’s birdlife, which explains the limited number of folklore surrounding it. In neighboring Sweden, however, several beliefs were recorded. For example, the location of a lapwing’s nest was used to predict spring weather, and finding a multicolored stone in its nest was thought to grant invisibility to its bearer. Another belief held that carrying a lapwing’s heart in the left boot would bring good luck and ensure success in gambling.

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## 6 Waterfowl (Anseriformes)

### 6.1 Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)

#### EURASIAN WIGEON

*Anas penelope*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Anseriformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Anatidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Anas</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Anas penelope</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Žvižgavka

Raťa fluierătoare



Haapana

Fischione

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 6.1.1 Descriptive notes

Eurasian Wigeon are medium-sized dabbling ducks. The bill is blue-gray with a black tip, and the legs and feet are gray. In flight, they have a green speculum and a notable white wing patch on the upper wing coverts. Females have a dark brownish-red head, the neck and chest are brown, flanks are rufous, and they show the white patch on the upper wing coverts, though it is less prominent than in males.

Males have a distinctive cream to yellowish crown, a chestnut head and neck, gray vermiculated side and back, and a white breast and belly that contrasts with the black rump and vent. Breeding males are beautiful and distinctive with rich reddish-brown head, buffy forehead, pearly gray body, and pinkish breast.



Figure 46: GBIF *Anas penelope* information sheet



Figure 47: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Anas penelope*

### 6.1.2 Sound

Male has characteristic loud whistling note, often preceded by low, brief note “wu, wee-oo”. Flight call of female is a repeated growling “kar karr karr”.

### 6.1.3 Habitat and distribution

Eurasian Wigeon are typically found on freshwater wetlands with abundant submerged vegetation that comprises most of their diet. Nesting birds use upland habitats with scattered trees to open woodlands in Northern Europe and Asia. Winter habitat is variable and includes freshwater and emergent wetlands, and coastal marshes and estuaries where submerged aquatic vegetation is plentiful.

	<p>In Slovenia, it regularly occurs during migration and wintering, but not breeding.</p>
	<p>In Finland the Eurasian wigeon prefers a variety of water bodies, the most preferred being coastal meadows and lakes with grassy banks. It migrates to breed in Finland significantly earlier in the spring than before.</p>
	<p>The species does not breed in Romania, being present only during the cold half of the year, in the migration and wintering periods. It appears from August–September and is present until March–April. The population that winters in Romania is estimated at 1,000–6,000 individuals, with the population trend currently unknown.</p>
	<p>Migratory and wintering species: the Wigeon is present in Italy mainly during migration and winter, when it winters in the country. In Italy, it nests irregularly and sparsely, mainly in northern areas.</p>



During winter, it prefers coastal wetlands, bays, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters. The main wintering areas are the coastal lagoons of the northern Adriatic Sea and the coastal lakes of central Italy, northern Apulia, and Sardinia.

For nesting, it frequents freshwater wetlands such as marshes, lakes, and rivers with shallow waters and marsh vegetation that offers shelter. The last confirmed reproduction was in 2019 in the Po Delta.

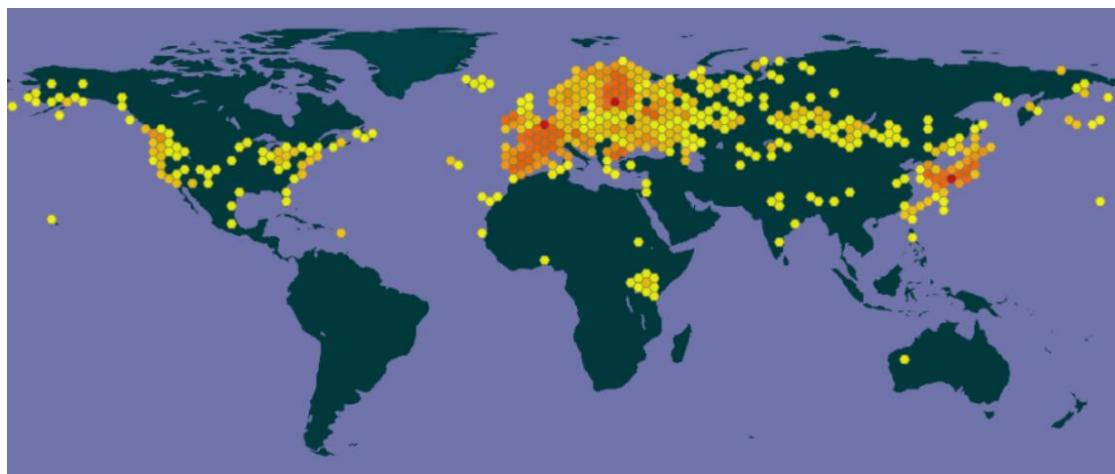


Figure 48: Distribution of *Anas penelope*

#### 6.1.4 Nutrition

Diet is almost entirely plant based. Forages by grazing on land, by dabbling at surface of water, sometimes by submerging head and neck.

#### 6.1.5 Breeding

Breeds on boreal forest lakes and marshes, tundra pools, also on temperate shallow fresh waters. It breeds mostly in Russia, and Scandinavia in May or June. Several males may compete in courting one female. Displays of male include lifting tips of folded wings to expose white wing patch, raising head while giving whistled call, lowering bill to display buffy crown patch to female. The nest site is on ground under dense vegetation, usually near water. Nest is shallow depression lined with grass and with 8-9, sometimes 6-12 eggs. Whitish to pale buff. Incubation is by female only, 24-25 days. Young leave nest and go to water shortly after hatching. Young are tended by female but find all their own food.

#### 6.1.6 Migrations

Eurasian Wigeon depart breeding areas in September or October depending on latitude. They arrive in winter areas from October through November. In Slovenia it is seen only during migrations, or during overwintering when it is common winter visitor. Spring migration occurs from February through April with arrival on breeding areas in late April to May.



The Eurasian Wigeon migrates to Finland significantly earlier in the spring than before. As a result of climate change, the ice on water bodies is breaking up earlier and the wigeons can arrive closer to their breeding areas earlier.

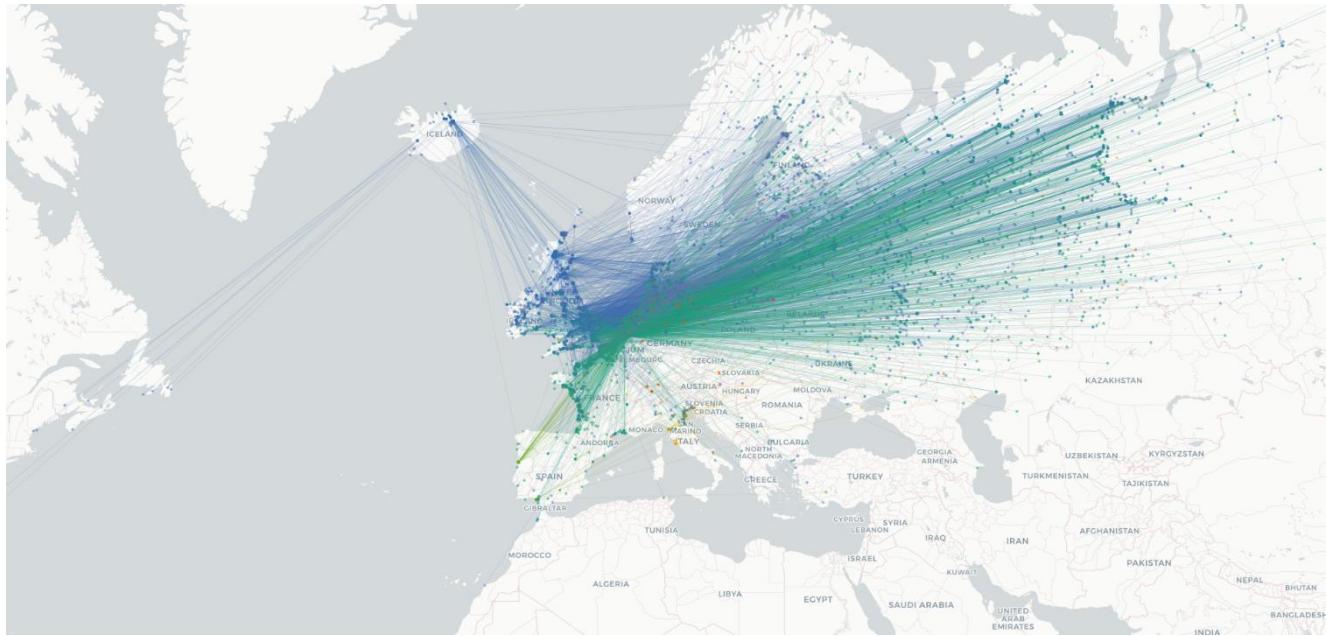


Figure 49: Eurasian wigeon migration map based on ring finds



Figure 50: Eurasian Wigeon flock

### 6.1.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Near threatened (NT) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

Conservation concerns are wetland loss and degradation in both their breeding and wintering habitats. Conservation efforts focus on wetland restoration and preventing further losses of habitat.

**In Finland** the breeding numbers of wigeon have decreased due to eutrophication and overgrowth of coastal meadows. The species is in danger of extinction (vulnerable, VU).



## 6.1.8 Cultural heritage

The species name for Eurasian Wigeon is Penelope, in Greek mythology, Odysseus's wife, Penelope, was rescued by a duck after she was thrown into the ocean.

Unlike other birds, the wigeon does not seem to have a rich body of cultural traditions or symbolism in Italian culture, its importance being linked mainly to its presence in the environment and hunting.

### 6.1.8.1 Slovenian culture

In Slovenian culture this bird doesn't have any cultural significance.

### 6.1.8.2 Romanian culture

In Romania, this species has no cultural significance.

### 6.1.8.3 Italian culture

In Italy, this species has no cultural significance.

### 6.1.8.4 Finnish culture

In Finnish tradition, waterbirds were considered sacred because they could move between realms—sky, land, and water. They also played a central role in the myth of creation. In the version found in the national epic Kalevala, the world is said to have originated from the egg of a waterbird, which rolled into the primordial sea from the knee of Ilmatar, the goddess of the air, as she shifted position. From the fragments of the broken egg emerged the earth and sky, the sun, moon, clouds, and stars.

The waterbird in the creation myth is often identified as the goldeneye, though it may also refer to the wigeon, goose, or mallard. What is certain is that the world was believed to have been born from a waterbird's egg—a notion that led to Finno-Ugric peoples being called "the people of the waterbird."

The wigeon was also thought to be favored by water spirits. Catching it in a fish trap was considered a bad omen, or at least a sign of poor fishing luck.

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Eurasian Wigeon flock image: [Kev, Pixabay](#)

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## 6.2 Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)

### WHOOPER SWAN

*Cygnus cygnus*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Anseriformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Anatidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Cygnus</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Labod pevec  
Lebădă de iarnă



Laulujoutsen  
Cigno selvatico

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



## 6.2.1 Descriptive notes



Figure 51: Whooper Swan flock

A very large white waterbird with a long neck and a small head. Adults have a large yellow bill with a black tip. When swimming, the neck is held straight, and the wings lie flat over the back. Juvenile birds are pale grey.

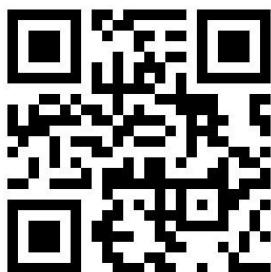


Figure 52: GBIF *Cygnus cygnus* information sheet



Figure 53: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Cygnus cygnus*

## 6.2.2 Sound

Typical loud, trumpeting calls, that can be described as deep "hoop" or "whoop-whoop".

## 6.2.3 Habitat and distribution

The Whooper Swan nests in various water bodies that offer shelter for nesting and are sufficiently eutrophic, such as lakes, coastal bays, and wet mires. It is a short-distance migrant; a small part of the population overwinters in Finland.



No evidence suggests regular breeding or frequent sightings in Slovenia—its appearance remains sporadic, likely during migration or as a vagrant.



	<p>Whooper Swans nest in various water bodies that offer shelter for nesting and are suitably eutrophic, such as lakes, coastal bays, and wet mires.</p>
	<p>In Romania, it is present only in winter, being found mainly in lowland areas outside the Carpathians, especially in regions near large wetlands. The species does not breed in Romania. It arrives starting from the end of October and departs back to its breeding territories in February or early March. In wintering areas, it also prefers lowland plains with open water surfaces that do not freeze (for resting), as well as agricultural lands or open natural habitats (for feeding).</p>
	<p>Its presence is irregular and limited; it is a migratory species that appears sporadically. The few sightings concern places such as the wetlands of the upper Adriatic and the mouth of the Metauro River.</p>

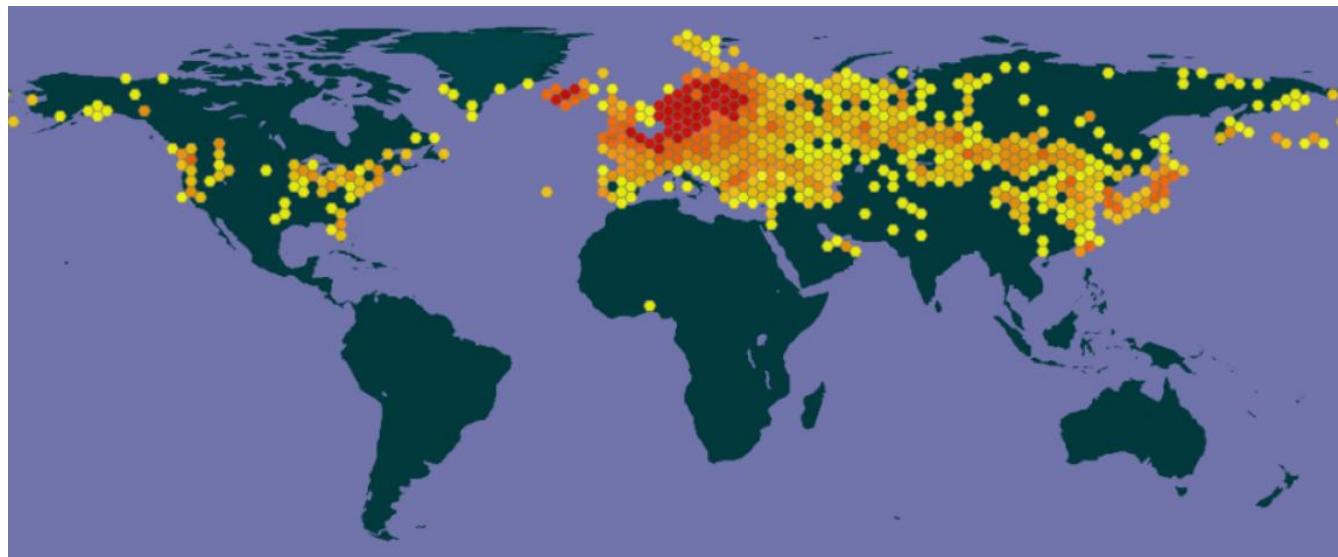


Figure 54: Distribution of *Cygnus cygnus*

#### 6.2.4 Nutrition

In summer, it feeds on various aquatic plants. During migration and in winter, it also forages in fields, eating fallen grains in autumn and sprouting crops in spring. It is a dabbling feeder.

#### 6.2.5 Breeding

Courtship between a swan pair can last for years before they begin raising young. The pair bond is typically lifelong.

#### 6.2.6 Migrations

In summer, young single swans gather in large flocks. During their first autumn migration, parents' guide their young along the route. Due to global warming, the open-water season in Finland's water bodies has become longer, which significantly impacts the Whooper Swan's distribution. Migrating swans now arrive noticeably



earlier in spring and depart later in autumn than a few decades ago. As winters grow milder, an increasing number of swans remain in Finland year-round.

## Muuton ajoittumisen mediaanipäivämäärä

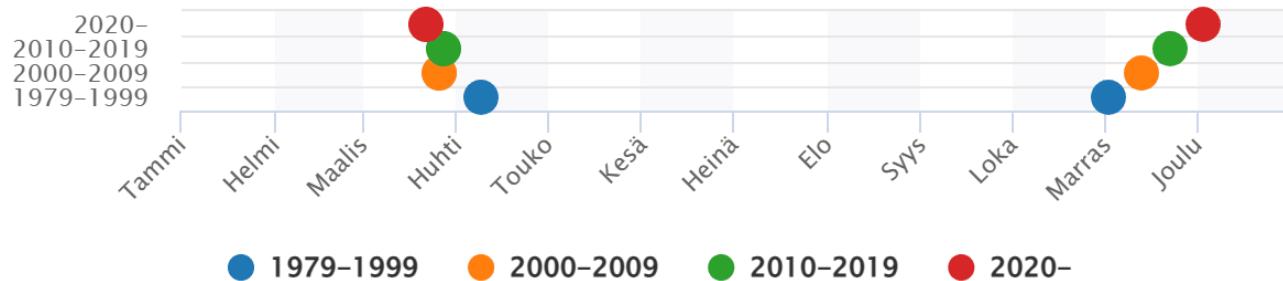


Figure 55: Change in median date of migration, (Observations from Hanko, Southern Finland), Months on X-axes: Tammi=Jan, Helmi=Feb, Maalis=Mar, Huhti=Apr etc.

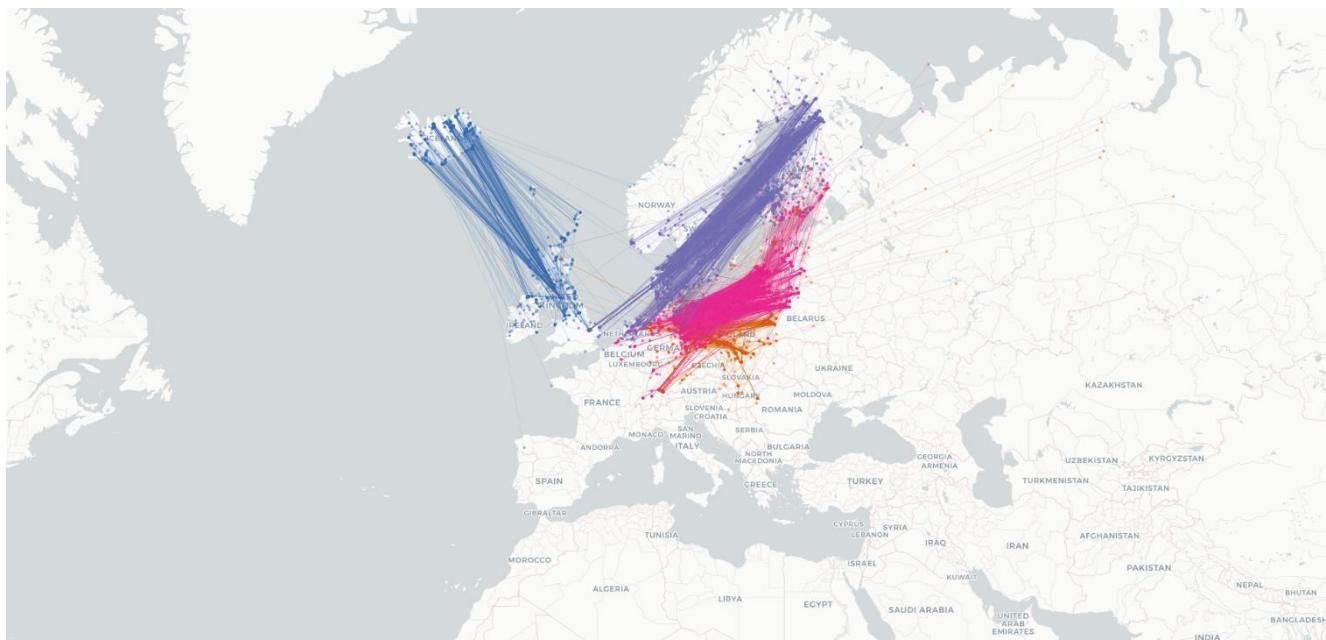


Figure 56: Whooper swan migration map based on ring finds

### 6.2.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

The Whooper Swan nearly disappeared from Finland due to hunting and egg collection. By the late 1940s, only about 15 breeding pairs remained in the northern parts of the country. Although the species was legally protected in Finland as early as 1934, it wasn't until the publication of Yrjö Kokko's book *Laulujoutsen* ("The



Whooper Swan") in 1950 that public attitudes began to shift against the illegal hunting of the bird. As the breeding population recovered, the swan began to spread back to its natural habitats and now nests throughout the country.

The Whooper Swan's conservation status has improved throughout Europe. It has been on the European Union's list of species requiring special protection since the 1970s. It was chosen as Finland's national bird in 1981.

### 6.2.8 Cultural heritage

The swan is a mystical messenger between worlds and a harbinger of death in many cultural traditions. The pure white color and large size of the Whooper Swan have captivated humans, providing hints about the bird's sanctity. The swan has also been a symbol of loyalty, as it mates for life and prefers the same nesting sites. The white color is also associated with innocence.

One of the distinctive features that illustrates the special relationship between humans and swans is the mythical stories of the swan's transformation. Many cultures have tales of humans turning into swans, with the stories often involving young women transforming into swans, such as the folk tale "*The Swan Maiden*." In ancient traditions, there is also a story of the god Zeus transforming into a swan in the myth of Leda and the Swan. The Brothers Grimm also have a fairy tale about six swans.

One of the most famous stories of the shape-shifting swan is Swan Lake (Russian: Лебединое озеро, Lebedinoje ozero), a ballet composed by Pyotr Tchaikovsky. The ballet is based on a medieval German tale of the swan prince and the swan maidens. An evil sorcerer has transformed the maidens into swans, and they can only return to their human form at night. The spell can only be broken if someone promises to love the enchanted maiden forever. In the story, Prince Siegfried must choose a bride, but none of the maidens he is introduced to seem right. During a night-time outing, he sees the swan maidens transformed into human form and fall in love with their leader, Odette. However, the sorcerer tricks the prince into proposing to his own daughter, and when the deception is revealed, both the prince and Odette throw themselves to their deaths. This act of love kills the sorcerer.



Figure 57: Ballet "Swan lake"



Figure 58: Michelangelo's painting replica "Leda and Swan"

The swan has been a divine figure in northern regions, from Siberia to China and Japan. The people around the Baltic Sea have regarded the swan as one of their ancestors. The swan is one of the most popular subjects in ancient rock paintings. In the rock paintings of Lake Äänisjärvi in Karelia, hundreds of swans are depicted, with the largest ones being over four meters tall.

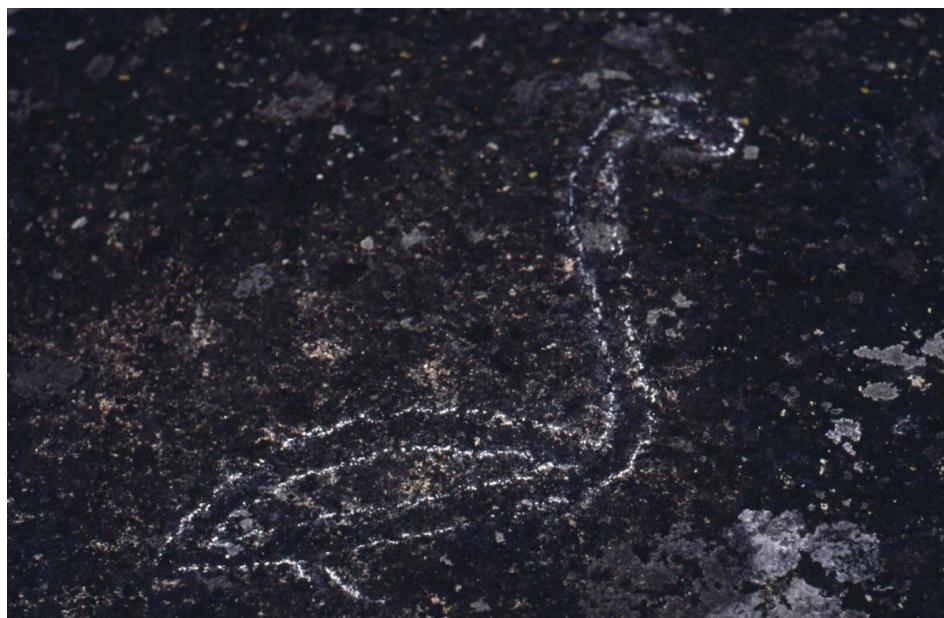


Figure 59: Rock painting of Swan

#### 6.2.8.1 Slovenian culture

As elsewhere in Europe, the swan is often a symbol of beauty, purity, and fidelity in Slovenia, as in the fairy tales of Swan Lake.

Andersen's fairy tale The Ugly Duckling is also well known and widespread in our country.



We also know a fable in which a crow puts on swan feathers and boasts about them. When he is exposed, he is humiliated and ostracized. The fable tells us that the swan is also a symbol of beauty. The moral of the fable is: don't be arrogant, don't be ashamed of your status, and don't imitate customs that don't suit you. (Kropej Telban, 2015).

#### 6.2.8.2 Romanian culture

As a winter guest, it does not have a profound cultural significance in Romania.

#### 6.2.8.3 Italian culture

The swan, in general, is an animal present in the human imagination as a symbol of romantic love, elegance, and grace, an association also due to their monogamous nature and the way they stroll in pairs on the water, especially when the chicks follow their mother in a row. Historically, the swan has been associated with various cultural contexts, from the symbol of light among the Celts, to the connection with death and the sacrifice of Christ in the Middle Ages, to being an attribute of certain saints. While the mute swan is better known and more present in Italian culture and landscapes, the wild swan is less represented due to its rarity, making its sighting an exceptional event rather than a common element of the Italian cultural landscape.

#### 6.2.8.4 Finnish culture

In Finland's national epic *Kalevala*, the swan is a sacred bird that travels the river of Tuoni, which connects the worlds of the living and the dead, carrying the souls of the deceased to the afterlife. Akseli Gallen-Kallela's painting depicts the fate of the hero Lemminkäinen, who attempts to kill the swan of Tuoni: the killer of the sacred swan faces destruction.



Figure 60: Painting "Lemminkäisen äiti"



## Swan symbolism in Modern Finland

The Whooper Swan is Finland's national bird. The swan also appears on the design of Finland's country-specific euro coin. The swan is associated with purity, nature, and innocence, and these images are often used in marketing and brand-building.



Figure 61: Finnish 1 EURO coin



Figure 62: Blue Swan logo



Figure 63: Green Swan logo

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## 7 Owls (Strigiformes)

### 7.1 Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*)

#### TAWNY OWL

*Strix aluco*



#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Strigiformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Strigidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Strix</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Strix aluco</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)

#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Lesna sova

Huhurez mic



Lehtopöllö

Allocco

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 7.1.1 Descriptive notes

The Tawny Owl is the most common species in the European Strigidae family. It has a dark plumage, with tawny hues, from which brown streaked spots stand out. The head is large and rounded and it can rotate by 270°, the eyes are round and large, surrounded by cream-colored discs.



Figure 64: Tawny owl

Tawny owls come in two color variations: their plumage is either gray or reddish brown. The gray variety copes better with cold weather than the brown variety. Recently, the brown coloration has become more common in Finland due to warmer winters, and it is considered an indicator species and evidence of global warming.

The most highly developed sense of the Tawny Owl is hearing: thanks to the asymmetrical position of its ears it can detect even the quietest prey. The differences between the two sexes are not evident from plumage, but rather in size, larger in the female. The species is sedentary and highly territorial.



Figure 65: GBIF *Strix aluco* information sheet



Figure 66: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Strix aluco*

### 7.1.2 Sound

The Tawny Owl's typical 'hooting' call begins with a quavering note, the 'twoo,' followed by a pause and then a falling, tremolo second note. These hoots are usually given by the male. Females, on the other hand, often



produce a sharp 'kee-wick.' When a male and female call together, their duet creates the familiar 'twit twoo' sound for which this species is so well known. Tawny Owls are primarily nocturnal, and their calls are most often heard at night, though they may occasionally call from their daytime roosts.

### 7.1.3 Habitat and distribution

The species is common and widely distributed throughout most of Europe and Asia, absent only from Ireland, Scotland, the Scandinavian Peninsula and Russia northern Russia.

The Tawny Owl is most commonly associated with broad-leaved and mixed woodlands, but its adaptability allows it to thrive in urban parks, large gardens, and farmland with adequate tree cover. Its main requirements are suitable trees for roosting and nesting, though it readily makes use of old nests or artificial structures. The species avoids treeless landscapes, showing a preference for mature woods that provide large cavities for nesting.

	<p>It is widespread throughout Slovenia. It prefers to live in mixed and deciduous forests, but is also common near human settlements or even in towns.</p>
	<p>In Finland, the Tawny owl is a relatively newcomer, having only nested in our forests since the late 19th century. The current distribution of the species extends to approximately the Oulu–Joensuu area. On the south coast, the Ural owl is the most abundant owl species.</p>
	<p>In Romania, it breeds throughout the entire territory, from lowland areas (the plains and the Danube Delta) up to mountain regions. It lives in open and semi-open forests, rocky areas with trees and shrubs, parks, agricultural landscapes with woodland patches. Sometimes it can be observed in gardens and towns, on buildings (in chimneys of abandoned houses), or hunting rodents near households. It is a common species in Romania. The estimated population in Romania is 20,000 – 60,000 pairs. The population trend is unknown.</p>
	<p>The Italian population fluctuates between 30,000 and 50,000 pairs and constitutes about 4% of the total European population. It is a sedentary, non-migratory species and it is extremely tied to its home territory, which it occupies throughout the entire year. In Italy, where it is considered a stable species, it is present and well distributed in the Alpine, continental and Mediterranean biogeographic regions, except for Sardinia.</p>

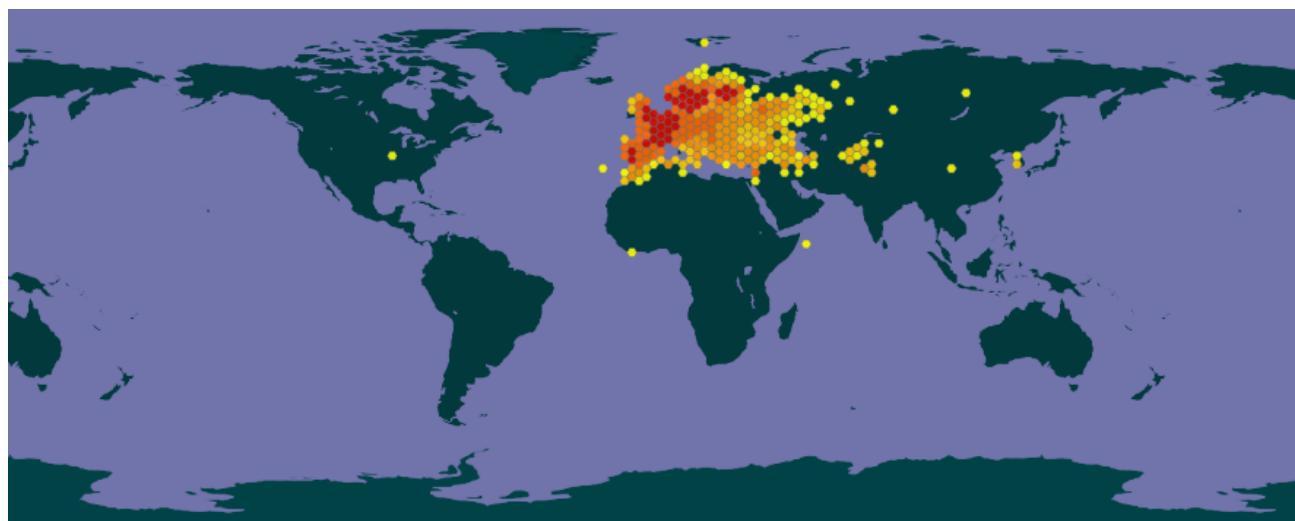


Figure 67: Distribution of *Strix aluco*

#### 7.1.4 Nutrition

It feeds on small and medium-sized mammals-such as squirrels, dormice and weasels-but also small amphibians and various bird species. It swallows its prey alive and expels bones, fur and exoskeletons of insects that it cannot digest, in the form of small wads.

#### 7.1.5 Breeding

The Tawny Owl nests from February although breeding episodes have also been observed in mid-winter. Two or three eggs make up the average brood, which is cared for by the female for about a month. Tawny Owl chicks will be under the care of their parents for at least three months after the first fledging.

In preparation for mating, the Tawny Owl does not build any nests, but merely uses tree cavities, uninhabited houses, and if necessary nest boxes. In urbanized areas (usually peripheral to the historic center), it may settle under roofs or in chimneys. It also occupies nests abandoned by other raptors, such as magpies or gray crows.

#### 7.1.6 Migrations

Tawny Owl is a sedentary, non-migratory species and it is extremely tied to its home territory, which it occupies throughout the entire year. Species usually hunt at night, most actively between dusk and midnight. They move in a rather unpredictable way, often returning to places where they've caught prey before. Adults are largely sedentary and usually remain within about a kilometer of their territory, while young owls disperse in autumn and winter, traveling a few kilometers to find their own home range or a place to spend the winter. Their flight is steady and direct, with slow take-offs and only a few wingbeats as they glide silently through the forest.

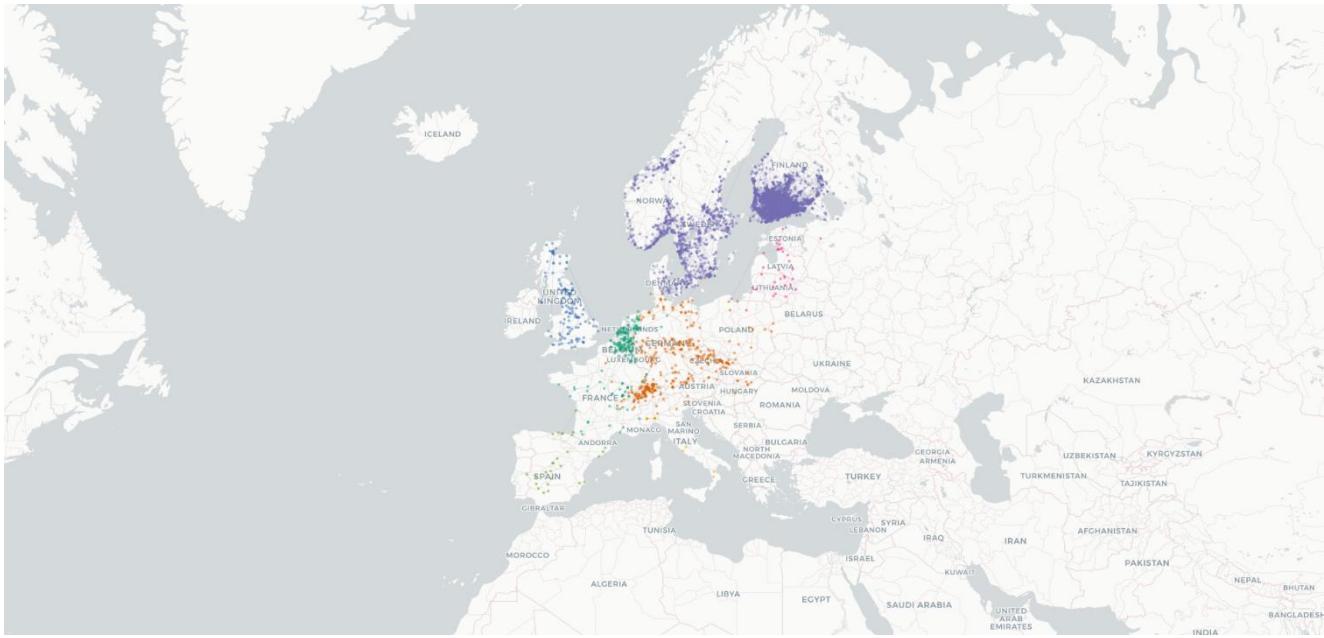


Figure 68: Tawny owl migration map based on ring finds

### 7.1.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

#### Status

The Tawny Owl currently shows a favorable status throughout Europe. Current conditions also bode well for the future: in most of its range, the species is in fact gradually and steadily increasing. The Italian population, fluctuates between 30,000 and 50,000 pairs and constitutes about 4% of the total European population. In Italy, where it is considered a stable species, it is present and well distributed in the Alpine, continental and Mediterranean biogeographic regions, with the exception of Sardinia.

#### Conservation

The species is well studied in terms of distribution, ecology and feeding habits. However, it is important to continue monitoring during the breeding season in order to collect additional data quantity and, consequently, estimate more accurately the population size in some southern regions, such as Calabria, Campania and Basilicata, which are still insufficiently known. In the flat areas of northern Italy, it seems essential to provide for the establishment of a dense network of green, preserving existing forests and creating new ones. Despite being exposed to the scarcity of adequate breeding sites; Tawny Owl pairs can easily use artificial nests. In forested or transitional areas, it appears essential to encourage and ensure the securing of medium- and low-voltage electrical pylons, while also reporting the presence of overhead cables.

The effects of chemicals used by humans on Tawny Owl populations, as well as, more generally, the use of active ingredients with less impact on wildlife should be studied more. For more suitable and continuous forest environments, such as deciduous and mixed forests found on the Alps, Pre-Alps and Apennines, the Favorable Reference Value proposed for the Tawny Owl corresponds to 3 pairs per square kilometer. In particularly favorable locations, however, the species may exceed these values, such as for example within urban parks and



in protected areas. In the Po Valley and in agricultural plains with intensive cultivation typical of central and southern Italy, the proposed index is instead 1.3 pairs per square km.

## Threats

Potentially lethal to the species are power lines and cables suspended in forest and agricultural areas. Especially dangerous are overhanging wires and logging cableways. Reproductive success can be reduced by forestry operations and sparse forest cuts, especially when carried out right during the breeding season. Despite being a particularly protected species under hunting legislation, unfortunately the species often remains a victim of illegal culling. The use of pesticides and poisons intended for rodents is also potentially harmful, as it exposes individuals to the risk of poisoning. Other reasons for disturbance consist of the degradation and destruction of forest and pastoral habitats in rural and forested settings in mountainous areas: such as the opening of new roads and the fragmentation of the same habitats. In lowland areas characterized by intensive agriculture, the scarcity of breeding sites such as trees rich in cavities can severely limit the establishment of the species.



Figure 69: Tawny Owl found dead at the mouth of the Genova Valley

The photo above shows a Tawny Owl found dead at the mouth of the Genova Valley (03/22/2016). The bird had died after becoming entangled in the netting used to delimit the yard of the accommodation facility Casa Alpina Don Bosco.

### 7.1.8 Cultural heritage

The Tawny Owl has long fascinated humans, appearing in folklore and literature as a creature of both wisdom and mystery. Across cultures, it is often seen as a symbol of knowledge and insight, its nocturnal habits embodying quiet observation and intelligence. Yet the same owl can also carry darker associations, linked to omens, the supernatural, or the unknown. This dual nature is reflected in literature: its haunting call evokes the eerie and mysterious in Shakespearean plays, while in children's stories, the Tawny Owl often assumes a gentler role, offering guidance and counsel.

The tawny owl has long been linked with superstition, often seen as a bird of bad luck. W. Shakespeare drew on this belief in Julius Caesar (Act 1, Scene 3), where the owl's call is used as a sign of impending trouble:

"And yesterday the bird of night did sit/ Even at noon-day upon the market-place/ Hooting and shrieking."



William Wordsworth described the technique for calling an owl in his poem "*There Was a Boy*":

And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands  
Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth  
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,  
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,  
That they might answer him.  
—And they would shout  
Across the watery vale, and shout again,  
Responsive to his call—with quivering peals,  
And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud  
Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild  
Of jocund din!

-William Wordsworth-

#### 7.1.8.1 Slovenian culture

Gleda kakor bolna sova.

*He looks like a sick owl.*

This phrase means that someone looks unfriendly, gloomy, with an expression that causes discomfort.

Kadar sova čovika, se nekdo narodi, kadar joče, je  
smrt blizu, kadar vriska, bo ženitnina

*When an owl hoots, someone is born; when it cries,  
death is near; when it screeches, there will be a  
wedding.*

This dialect phrase expresses the popular belief that the hooting of an owl has a prophetic role and heralds important turning points in life – birth, death, and marriage.

#### 7.1.8.2 Romanian culture

Folk sayings:

Când cântă huhurezii – semn de ploaie

“When the tawny owl sings – it’s a sign of rain.”

Când cântă huhurezul - are sa fie frig

“When the tawny owl sings, cold weather is  
coming.”

Când cântă huhurezul în pădure - îi vreme rea

“When the tawny owl sings in the forest, bad  
weather is near.”

It foretells weather changes, illness, misfortune and loneliness.

#### 7.1.8.3 Italian culture

In Italian culture, the *Strix aluco* (tawny owl) is a symbol of naivety and sometimes amazement, due to its large, round, fixed eyes that give it a silly expression, especially when dazzled by light. As a protected and adaptable species, the tawny owl has a well-established presence in the Italian environment, from forests to urban parks, and its call is often associated with scenes of tension in films. Its widespread distribution and ability to live in



anthropized environments have made it a familiar animal, although its nocturnal ethology and hunting habits have fueled its image in oral and popular tradition.

Idioms:

“Essere un allocco” (to be an owl), “fare l’allocco” (to act like an owl): to be very naive.

“Restare come un allocco” (to remain like an owl): to remain inert, stunned, with a dumbfounded expression in the face of an unexpected situation, just as an owl appears when suddenly dazzled by a strong light.

#### 7.1.8.4 Finnish culture

Owls appear in mythical stories across the world. Like other nocturnal birds, they were often associated with death and evil. Their mournful hooting was considered ominous, even ghostly. At the same time, owls carried positive meanings as well: they were seen as symbols of wisdom and spiritual growth, and as bringers of good fortune and guidance.

In Finland, however, the perception was quite different. The owl was regarded as an especially foolish bird, with no power to predict anything important. This belief gave rise to the Finnish expression of calling a foolish person an owl. In addition, the owl’s appearance was not admired in Finnish folk tradition.

Although the owl in Finnish folklore stood as the opposite of wisdom, its contradictory reputation is reflected in another Finnish saying: ei pöllömpää, meaning “not bad at all” or even “quite clever.” Thus, depending on context, the owl could represent very different—and even opposing—ideas.

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Tawny Owl photo: Campora-Galasso, PNAB archives

Tawny Owl IUCN status: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/22725469/264546097>

Tawny Owl distribution map: <https://www.gbif.org/species/9282206>

Figure 53 photo: PNAB archives

Migration map: migrationatlas.org

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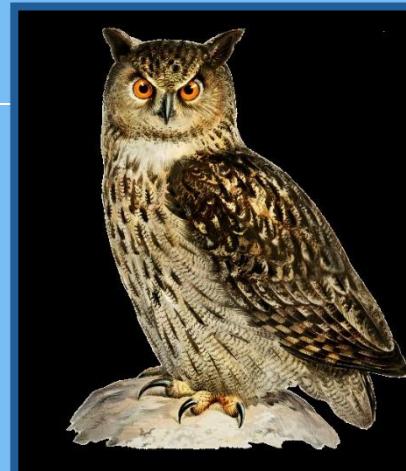
## 7.2 Eurasian Eagle-owl (*Bubo bubo*)

### EURASIAN EAGLE-OWL

*Bubo bubo*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Strigiformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Strigidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Bubo</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Bubo bubo</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Velika uharica

Bufo niță



Huuhkaja

Gufo reale

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 7.2.1 Descriptive notes



Figure 70: Eurasian eagle owl

Very large and powerful owl with obvious ear tufts, deep orange eyes, and finely streaked pale buffy underparts. Like other owls, and some other raptors, Eurasian Eagle-owls are equipped with a facial disk, a group of feathers around their heads that helps direct sound to their ears. Eurasian Eagle-owls are among the world's largest owls with weight of 1.2-4 kg, and length 70 cm.



Figure 71: GBIF *Bubo bubo* information sheet



Figure 72: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Bubo bubo*

### 7.2.2 Sound

Pairs often duet, with the male giving a deep, resounding hoot and the female giving a hoarser, higher pitched one.

### 7.2.3 Habitat and distribution

Eurasian Eagle-owls are found throughout much of Europe and Asia and in parts of northern Africa. They live in a variety of wooded habitats. They are more commonly found in areas with rocky outcrops and cliffs, but they



also live in open habitats that have some trees and rocky areas like taiga, farmlands, steppes, semi-arid areas, and grasslands.

	<p>In Slovenia, it is considered a rare breeding bird, but it is widespread throughout most of the country. The species is mainly threatened by disturbances near the nest and mortality due to electrocution on medium-voltage power lines</p>
	<p>A breeding bird in forest environments in Finland. Also found in urban areas. In Finland, the eagle owl breeds throughout the country, except for the northernmost part of Lapland. It is a territorial resident bird. The Finnish breeding population has declined by more than 60% in three decades and is in danger of extinction in Finland (EN).</p>
	<p>In Romania, it is present across almost the entire territory, except for the high mountain areas and the southern part of the country, but its distribution is very fragmented and discreet. The species breeds in Romania and is sedentary. It inhabits forested or semi-open areas with rocky cliffs, steep slopes, and mature trees. During the day, it may be seen resting in old trees, rock crevices, or caves. It prefers wild, undisturbed areas such as river valleys with gorges, vegetated quarries, etc. It can also be observed near agricultural lands in rocky regions, as well as close to garbage dumps. The estimated population in Romania is 100 – 300 pairs. The population trend is still unknown.</p>
	<p>Nesting and sedentary in the Alps and Apennines, extinct in Sicily. In Italy, the eagle owl is present in the mountainous areas of the peninsula, while it is absent in Sardinia and extinct in Sicily. The population of eagle owls in the Apennines is in sharp decline and numerically reduced (about 50 pairs); the Alpine population is stable and estimated at least 300 pairs. It nests in mountainous and hilly areas with rocky walls, gorges and rocky outcrops bordered by trees and shrubs.</p>

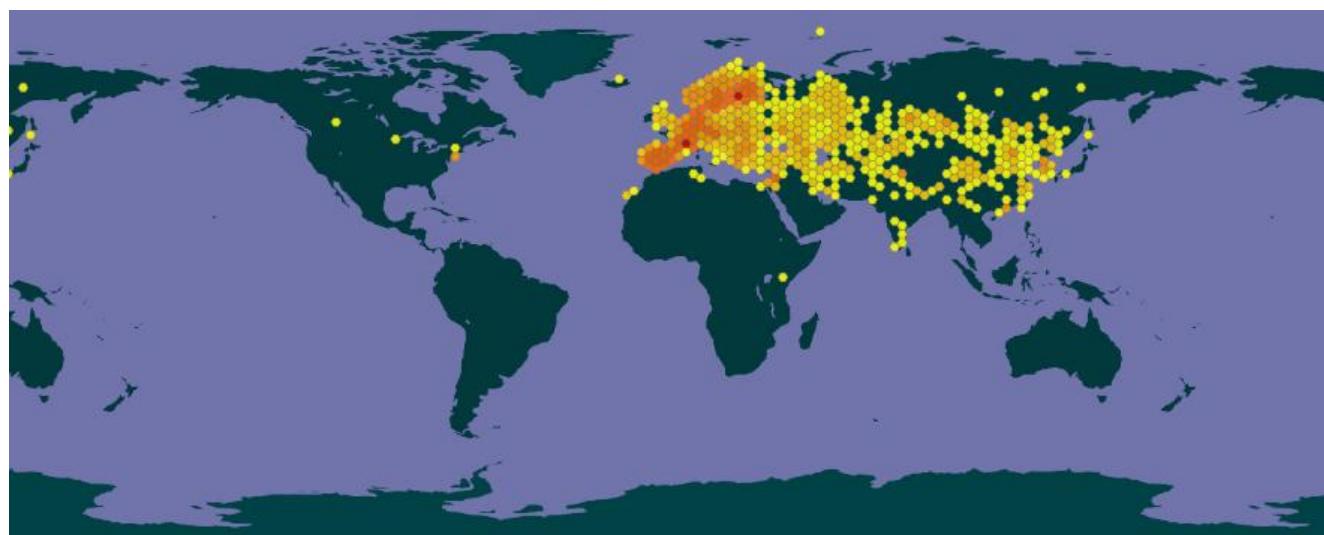


Figure 73: Distribution of *Bubo bubo*

#### 7.2.4 Nutrition



Active mainly at night but can be seen perched up on prominent lookouts at dusk, searching for prey. They mainly eat small mammals such as voles, rats, and rabbits, but also hunt woodpeckers, herons, and other birds, including other raptors. They also prey on amphibians, reptiles, fish, and insects.

### 7.2.5 Breeding

Eurasian Eagle-owls may be found nesting on ledges, in cave entrances, and within rock crevices on cliffs. They also sometimes use the abandoned nests of other large birds, such as ravens or eagles, and some even nests on the ground. The same site is often used for several years or in rotation with other favored sites. Clutches are usually two to four eggs. After the female lays her eggs, she spends most of her time incubating them to make sure that the young develop well inside the eggs and hatch into healthy chicks. Meanwhile, the male is responsible for finding food and bringing it to the nest. He will continue this important role after the chick's hatch. In just a short seven weeks after hatching, or less, the young reach nearly adult size and are ready to fly. At first, they make short practice flights as they gain strength, agility, and confidence. They remain in their parents' territory for another 3-4 months before leaving home and looking for a territory of their own. In Slovenia they nest from February until June.

### 7.2.6 Migrations

Non migrant species.

### 7.2.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

During the first half of the 1900s, Eurasian Eagle-owl populations declined drastically. Humans hunted and poisoned them, even today in some countries there is egg collecting. Thanks to conservation efforts, the Eurasian Eagle-owl is recovering in Europe although their numbers still haven't returned to what they were before the mid-1900s.

It is extremely sensitive, and the slightest disturbance can cause the abandonment of the nest. Unfortunately, cross-country skiing, mountaineering, alpinism and other leisure activities often take people unknowingly near nests. Electrocution and collisions with cars continue to be a problem.

### 7.2.8 Cultural heritage

#### 7.2.8.1 Slovenian culture

In Slovenian culture Eagle owl is represented as a symbol of knowledge and wisdom, but also a symbol of death in some cases when they are represented as a guide in the afterlife. This aspect of the owl as a symbol of death is well represented in an old Slovenian tale of Kekc, written by Josip Vandot. The story was also turned into a film in 1951 and the famous line "Sova kliče smrt!" ("The owl calls death") was uttered by Bedanec, the antagonist of the story and then this fact and his fear was utilised by the protagonist Kekc to mimic the owls' call to frighten Bedanec and at the finale of the story, where he sets up an owl in a tunnel to frighten Bedanec away and thus save the old hermit Kosobrin and his handmaiden Minka.



Figure 74: Bedanec catching Kekec



Figure 75: Bedanec uttering the phrase "Owl calls for death" to Kekec

#### 7.2.8.2 Romanian culture

In Romanian folklore, the eagle-owl is mainly associated with the prediction of death and the idea of a warning, mysterious events. Folk sayings: "When the owl sings in February, it is a sign of an early spring." It also appears as a symbol of wisdom on the façade of the "Teleki Téka" library in Târgu Mureş.

#### 7.2.8.3 Italian culture

A magical and ancestral creature, in almost all ancient cultures the owl is considered a magical creature, child of the night, in which it moves and flies. With its extraordinary ability to see in the dark, it represents prophecy and clairvoyance in many myths.

In classic fairy tales, the owl is often depicted as a wise animal that gives good advice and helps the hero solve problems and return home safely. An omniscient and reassuring figure who dispenses advice to humans and animals alike. The figure of the wise owl appears in many classic Walt Disney cartoons, such as The Sword in the Stone, where we find the owl Anacleto, Merlin's assistant, in Bambi, and in the adventures of Winnie the Pooh. But the real craze for owls and barn owls exploded after the global success of the Harry Potter saga by English writer J.K. Rowling. In Harry Potter, owls are the companions of successful wizards and witches and are the postmen of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, which has a large owl aviary in a special tower of the castle. Harry himself has a beautiful snowy owl named Hedwig as his friend and companion.

The owl has such an elegant appearance that it seems tailor-made for drawing. The first owl illustrated in human history appears in the Chauvet caves in southern France. It is an eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*) in an alert position and is approximately 32,000 years old. The Egyptians used owls in seals and amulets found in mummies, and there are at least two hieroglyphic characters representing owls.

In Greek art, owls and little owls are everywhere. The little owl, as a symbol of Athena, appears on vases, statues, temple bas-reliefs, and coins. Pre-Columbian civilizations such as the Maya and, above all, the Moche have also left us dozens of terracotta artifacts depicting owls (sometimes with horns) that were used in the ancient rituals of these peoples.

#### 7.2.8.4 Finnish culture



The eagle owl was considered a wise prophet and the most feared among owls. As a nocturnal bird, it was believed to embody death and evil, which matched its fierce appearance and ghostly hooting. In Finnish folklore, the eagle owl was even called *hyppiö*, a word meaning a spirit of the dead or a ghost. Like a ghost, it was thought to bring signs from the otherworld. People said that its call united the living and the dead.

Unlike other owls, the eagle owl was regarded as exceptionally wise, and its cry was believed to foretell approaching death. Known as “the devil’s bird,” it was said to predict tragic events such as fires, famine years, and wars. Stories told of eagle owls hooting in strange ways across Finland just before the outbreak of the Winter War in autumn 1939. This association with wisdom only deepened the fear surrounding the bird, leading to its long persecution.

In some cases, however, the eagle owl was imagined as an old maid left calling after hunters in the forest—a belief that made its hooting seem less ominous. It was also said that if wanderers behaved respectfully, the eagle owl might even become their protector.

In sports, *Huuhkajat* (Eagle owl in Finnish) usually refers to the Finnish national football team, which got its name after an eagle owl named *Bubi* interrupted a game by landing on the goal at the Olympic Stadium in 2007. Inspired by this event, the team began using this name, which is now the team's official name.



*Finnish national football team got its name after an eagle owl, that interrupted a game by landing on the goal at the Olympic Stadium.*  
(Photo CC0, no attrib. <https://pxhere.com/fi/photo/105773>)

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## 8 Birds of prey (Accipitriformes)

### 8.1 Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

#### GOLDEN EAGLE

*Aquila chrysaetos*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Accipitriformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Accipitridae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Aquila</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Planinski orel



Acvilă de munte



Maakotka

*Aquila* reale

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 8.1.1 Descriptive notes

The Golden Eagle is a powerful raptor with a commanding presence in the sky. Adults are mostly dark brown, but the golden-bronze feathers on the back of the head and neck (giving the species its name), catch the sunlight and give the bird a regal glow. In flight, it shows broad wings and a long tail, soaring with steady wingbeats or gliding effortlessly on thermals. From a distance, its wings often appear slightly raised in a shallow 'V.' With a wingspan that can exceed 2 meters, it ranks among the world's largest birds of prey. On the ground, the eagle looks strong and statuesque, though less agile, moving with short hops or steps around nest sites and feeding areas. Its large, hooked beak is pale at the base, and its legs are feathered all the way to the toes, distinguishing it from many other eagles. The eyes are piercing amber or dark brown, sharp and intelligent, perfectly adapted to detect prey from great heights. Juveniles are recognized by bold white patches on the tail base and wing undersides, which gradually fade as they mature. These markings fade as the bird matures over several years.



Figure 76: GBIF *Aquila chrysaetos* information sheet



Figure 77: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Aquila chrysaetos*

### 8.1.2 Sound

Although generally silent, Golden Eagle occasionally give high-pitched, whistling calls, most often during the breeding season or when defending territory. Its voice is not as loud or varied as some other raptors, consisting mostly of soft yelps or squeals.

### 8.1.3 Habitat and distribution

The Golden Eagle is one of the most iconic birds of prey in the Northern Hemisphere, known for its power, speed, and grace in flight. It inhabits a wide range of open and semi-open landscapes, including rugged mountains, high plateaus, cliffs, and vast grasslands. These birds prefer remote and undisturbed areas where they can nest on high rock ledges or tall trees and have broad visibility for hunting.

Golden Eagles have a vast geographic range, occurring across North America, from Alaska and Canada through the western United States and into northern Mexico. In Europe and Asia, they are found from the British Isles and Scandinavia across to Central Asia, Mongolia, and even parts of Japan. Isolated populations also exist in North Africa, typically in mountainous or arid environments. While many populations are resident year-round, those living in northern or higher-altitude regions may migrate south during winter. Young birds, in particular, are known to travel great distances from their birth areas as they search for new territories.



	<p>In Slovenia, the golden eagle is a rare breeding bird, with most of its population living in the Alps. It also occurs in the Pre-Alps, mainly in the Idrija and Cerkno hills and on the edge of the Trnovo Forest and Nanos in the Dinarides. Elsewhere in Slovenia, we find mainly individual nesting pairs that nest in the Pohorje, Škofja Loka, Polhov Gradec, Posavje, and Krim hills, the Kolpa Valley, on Snežnik, and on the Karst edge.</p>
	<p>In Finland, the continuous nesting area of the golden eagle covers the northern part of the country, with the southernmost territories located in Southwest Finland and North Karelia. The golden eagle is one of Finland's most persecuted bird species. Thanks to full protection, the golden eagle population has now recovered. The Finnish breeding population is classified as vulnerable (VU).</p>
	<p>The Golden Eagle's distribution in Romania is centered in the Carpathian Mountains, including areas like the Apuseni, Eastern Carpathians, Retezat, and Trascau Mountains, favoring rugged, forested landscapes with open areas for hunting, with an estimated population of around 90-150 pairs.</p>
	<p>Found in Italy in the Alps and Apennines, Sicily, and Sardinia. It nests in rocky mountain areas rich in grasslands and pastures. Locally and on the islands, it also nests on cliffs.</p>

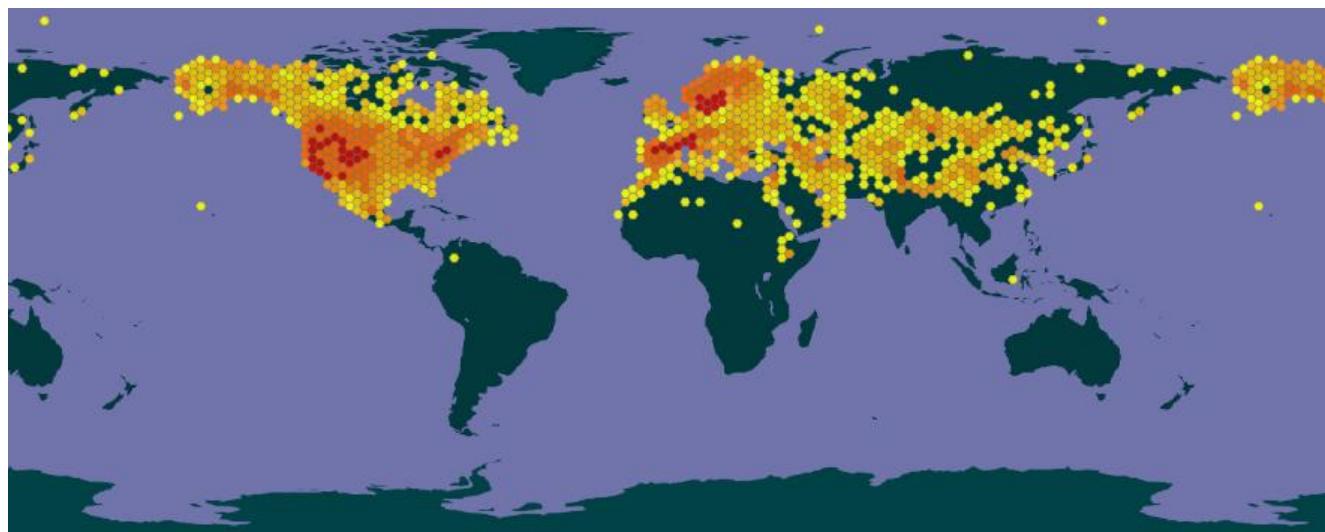


Figure 78: Distribution of *Aquila chrysaetos*

#### 8.1.4 Nutrition

Their diet is primarily composed of small to medium-sized mammals such as rabbits, hares, marmots, and ground squirrels, although they will also hunt birds, reptiles, and sometimes scavenge on carrion. In harsh winters or food-scarce environments, they have been known to take down larger prey like foxes or even young deer. Prey taken are usually 0.5-4.0 kg and the species can hunt in pairs or small groups. In hunting, they are swift and precise. Species use its incredible eyesight to locate prey from afar, then stoop at speeds that can exceed 240 km/h (150 mph) to strike with deadly accuracy.



### 8.1.5 Breeding

Golden Eagles are usually solitary or found in monogamous pairs. They are strongly territorial and defend vast home ranges from intruding eagles or other large raptors. Their courtship displays are spectacular, with steep dives, talon-grappling, and powerful wingbeats that demonstrate both strength and aerial mastery. During pair bonding, these acrobatic flights, often described as 'sky dances', help reinforce the partnership.

Golden Eagles begin breeding in late winter or early spring. They build massive nests, known as eyries, typically on cliff ledges and where these are not available, in large trees or similar artificial structures. In central and southeastern Mongolia, birds regularly nest on the ground (Ellis 2020). These nests are often reused for many years and can grow to impressive sizes as the birds add new material each season. The female usually lays one to three eggs, though competition among chicks often means that only one or two survive to fledge. Incubation lasts about 40 to 45 days, primarily undertaken by the female, while the male provides food. After hatching, the chicks remain in the nest for up to 80 days and may depend on their parents for some time even after fledging.

### 8.1.6 Migrations

Most adult Golden Eagles are resident and remain in their territories year-round, especially in temperate or mountainous regions where food remains available through the seasons. In contrast, northern and high-altitude populations, such as those in Alaska, Canada, and parts of Scandinavia or Siberia, may show seasonal migration. These birds move southward in autumn to avoid harsh winter conditions and return north in the spring to breed. Juvenile and immature eagles are more likely to roam widely after leaving the nest. These movements, known as post-fledging dispersal, can span hundreds or even thousands of kilometers as young birds search for suitable, unclaimed territories.

Golden Eagles are highly territorial, especially during the breeding season. Pairs defend large territories, sometimes over 100 square kilometers, using both flight displays and vocalizations to deter intruders.

Highly territorial and long-lived, Golden Eagles are majestic symbols of wild, open country. Whether soaring effortlessly on thermal currents or diving with astonishing speed to capture prey, they are a remarkable sight and a key species in the ecosystems they inhabit.

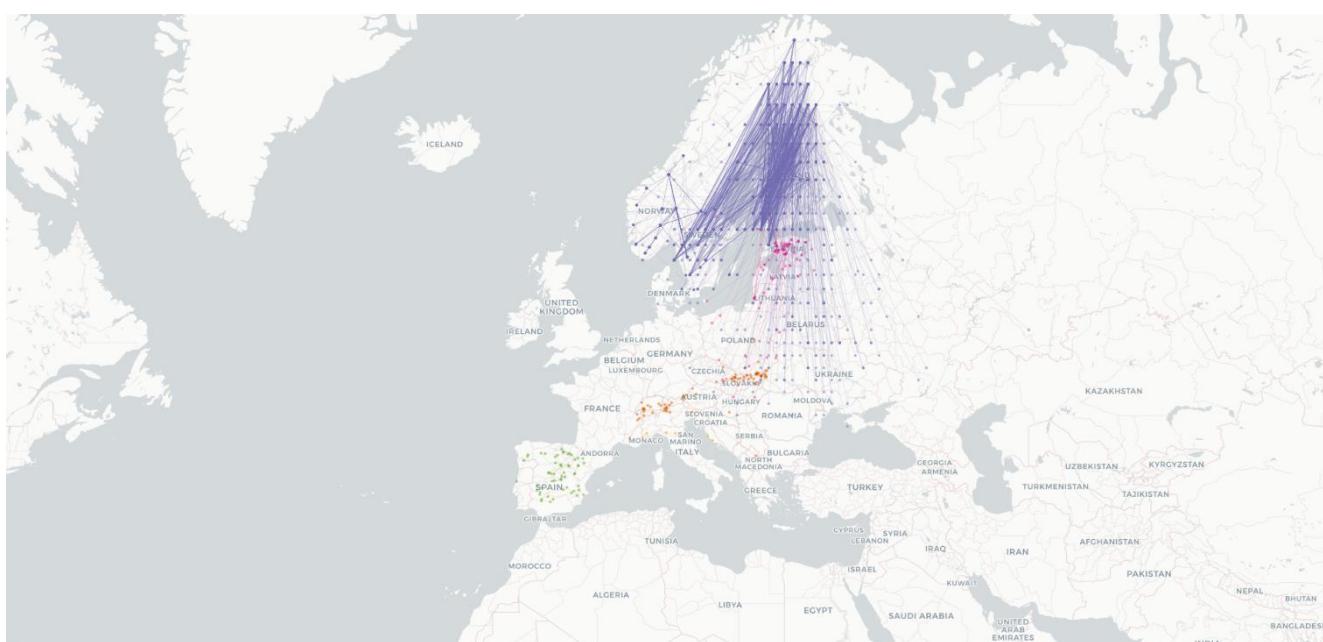


Figure 79: Golden eagle migration map based on ring finds



## 8.1.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

However, its conservation status can vary significantly by region, and in some areas, local populations are under pressure from various human-related threats.

Globally, Golden Eagle populations are considered stable or slightly increasing in many parts of their range, especially where conservation efforts and legal protections are in place. In some regions, however, particularly parts of Europe and the U.S., local populations have faced historical declines due to persecution, habitat loss, and poisoning. Recovery has been slow in some of these areas, and the species remains vulnerable to certain modern threats.

Golden Eagles are protected under various national and international laws: In Europe, they are listed under Appendix II of the Bern Convention and Annex I of the EU Birds Directive, which ensures protection of habitat and controls on harmful activities. Many countries also include Golden Eagles in national red lists or raptor protection initiatives.

The golden eagle is one of Finland's most persecuted bird species. Due to illegal hunting and disturbance, the breeding population was at its lowest at around 200 pairs. Thanks to full protection, the golden eagle population has recovered, and the Finnish breeding population is now estimated at 430–470 breeding pairs. In reindeer herding areas a reformed compensation system has virtually ended the persecution. The Finnish breeding population is classified as vulnerable (VU).

## 8.1.8 Cultural heritage

### 8.1.8.1 Slovenian culture

In Slovenian folklore, there is a well-known fable called The Eagle and the Fox, published in 1854 by Jožef Eržen (Telban Kropej, 2024). In the story, the eagle appears as a symbol of power, dominance, and self-confidence bordering on arrogance. Living high up in a tree, he feels completely safe from the fox, whom he perceives as weaker and harmless. The eagle steals the fox's cubs to feed his own. When the fox begs for mercy, he mockingly rejects her plea, believing that she cannot do anything to him. The turning point comes when the fox, with cunning and ingenuity, threatens him with fire. Fearing for her own offspring, the eagle is forced to right his wrong and return the cubs to the fox. The eagle's experience illustrates the folk wisdom that peaceful coexistence and fair treatment benefit everyone, regardless of their position or power.

The fable The Eagle and the Fox also gave rise to a proverb that expresses the relationship of power and fear between the stronger and the weaker: "When the eagle calls, foxes usually cower and hide." (Telban Kropej, 2024)

In Slovenian heraldry, the eagle is a common motif and is considered one of the most important bird figures in heraldry—it symbolizes courage and prudence and is often depicted with outstretched wings and a powerful gaze.

The coat of arms of the Duchy of Carniola includes an eagle figure (as a blue eagle on a light field) as a symbol of authority and nobility.

### 8.1.8.2 Romanian Culture



The Golden Eagle, commonly known in Romania as the Mountain Eagle, or more rarely the Royal Eagle, holds an important place in Romanian imagination, symbolizing strength, freedom, and greatness. Although its presence in popular folklore is not as widespread as that of other birds (such as the cuckoo or the raven), it is deeply rooted in national and military symbolism.

### National and Historical Symbolism

The most significant appearance of the eagle in Romanian culture is on the coat of arms of Romania. The Golden Cross-bearing Eagle (a stylized representation of the mountain eagle) is the heraldic symbol of Wallachia, adopted in the Middle Ages and preserved in various forms to this day. It appears on the current coat of arms of Romania (adopted in 1992 and revised in 2016), where it holds a cross in its beak and a mace and a sword in its claws—symbols of faith, power, and sovereignty. The eagle on the coat of arms symbolizes bravery, nobility, and aspiration toward greatness, and is associated with the sun and the open sky.



### In Folklore and Popular Mythology

Although the eagle does not hold a prominent role in Romanian fairy tales, it occasionally appears as a regal bird, related to mythical creatures like zgripăuroi (giant birds), ravens, or vultures, helping the hero on his journey, transporting him across mountains or between worlds. It is often described as a wise and ancient being, connected to the mountains, the sky, and otherworldly realms. In some stories and legends, it appears as a divine punishment or as a messenger of the gods, bringing warnings or judgment.

### In Literature and Art

The eagle appears in patriotic poetry, invoked as a symbol of national strength and spiritual rebirth. Poets like Mihai Eminescu or George Coșbuc use the image of the eagle's flight as a metaphor for the soul's elevation or the ascent of the Romanian nation.

### In Military and Political Tradition

The eagle was a commonly used symbol on insignia, uniforms, and military flags, especially during the royal period (1881–1947). It is also featured in the emblems of national defense and security institutions (e.g., the Foreign Intelligence Service, Ministry of Defense), reinforcing the idea of vigilance and protective strength.

In ancient mythology, the eagle is often associated with the sun and is considered, depending on the culture, a manifestation of the divine spirit or a messenger of the gods. In Greek and Roman tradition, the eagle is the symbol of Zeus and, as the father of the gods, is the bearer of lightning bolts and an image of great power.

In Native American culture, eagles are also birds of lightning, or rather "thunderbirds," the embodiment of the Great Spirit and therefore worshipped and respected. Eagle feathers, totems, and masks resembling eagles were very common in Sioux shamanic rituals.



In ancient Babylon, Ningirsu, god of storms and fertility, was personified by a double-headed eagle with two heads looking in opposite directions. In fairy tales, as in ancient medieval bestiaries, if the lion is the king of animals on earth, the eagle is considered the queen of all birds. In Christian symbolism, the apostle John is often represented in the form of an eagle, and angels are often depicted with the face or wings of an eagle. Among the various attributes associated with the figure of the eagle is that of intelligence, so much so that, even today, a person who is not very bright is said to be “not an eagle.”

#### 8.1.8.3 *Italian Culture*

In Italy, the official coat of arms of the Trentino-Alto Adige region is quartered (i.e., divided into four parts), with two types of eagles:

The first and fourth quarters contain the ancient eagle of Trento: black, with a golden beak and claws, surrounded by red flames, with a red tongue, with wings bearing golden supports and golden shamrocks around the wings. The eagle of Trento (black) is linked to the Bishopric of Trento. The coat of arms of the Bishopric adopted the eagle (of St. Wenceslas) as its heraldic symbol in the Middle Ages.

The second and third quarters contain the ancient eagle of Tyrol: red, also with a golden beak and claws, red tongue, with wings bearing golden supports. The red eagle of Tyrol is the historical symbol of the Counts of Tyrol; it already appears in documents and frescoes dating back to the 13th century (e.g., fresco in the chapel of Tyrol Castle).

This coat of arms was officially established by the Decree of the President of the Republic on March 21, 1983.

The eagle is a traditional symbol of power, sovereignty, and authority: in Trentino, the black eagle reflects the ancient ecclesiastical and political-military authority of the Bishopric. In South Tyrol/Tyrol, the red eagle recalls the historical past under the Counts of Tyrol and the links with the Holy Roman Empire and the German institutions of Tyrol.

The regional coat of arms thus acts as a fusion: it represents the two historical and cultural entities that make up the region (Trentino and South Tyrol) in a single symbol.



Proverbs, idioms:

“An eagle does not give birth to a dove.” This means that children (or descendants) tend to have the characteristics of their parents/ancestors; from someone who is proud, strong, and “tall,” one cannot expect weakness or extreme gentleness.

“An eagle does not catch flies.” Those who are superior or powerful do not stoop to chasing trifles or trivial things. (Similar to the idea that an eagle does not bother with small prey).

“Although the eagle flies high, the hawk kills it.” Even those who are majestic or dominant are not immune to those who are more cunning or opportunistic; flying high does not guarantee invulnerability.



“The eagle teaches its inexperienced offspring, from the nest, to fix their gaze on the sun.” A poetic image, educational value: the eagle “trains” its young to look up, toward the light, toward great goals.

#### 8.1.8.4 Finnish culture

The eagle was a majestic ruler of the skies, whose role shifted between friend and enemy. In Finnish folklore, it is known as the mythical kokko-bird, usually referring to the golden eagle. In the national epic Kalevala, the kokko helps Väinämöinen clear a field by striking lightning from the sky with its wings, igniting a fire. It also rescues Väinämöinen from drowning and carries him in its talons to Pohjola. Yet in the same epic, the kokko becomes an enemy when Louhi of Pohjola transforms into a giant eagle and pursues the thieves of the Sampo.

The kokko of the Kalevala was said to be so big that when it spread its wings, one touched the heavens while the other brushed the water. It could easily carry a grown man in its yellow iron talons and dive toward the earth like a lightning bolt. Its eyes and beak were described as glowing like flames. Thus, the kokko represented not only a bird but also the elemental forces of sky and fire.

The tradition of the firebird survives today in midsummer bonfires known as juhannuskokko. Calling a great blaze a “kokko” is likely no coincidence, but a remnant of sacrificial fires once dedicated to the mythical bird. This theory is supported by the fact that midsummer was long celebrated as Ukko’s feast—the festival of the thunder god. Although the ordinary golden eagle lacks the kokko’s supernatural traits, these beliefs reflect the deep respect accorded to the eagle as a symbol of celestial power.

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## 8.2 Eurasian sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)

### EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK

*Accipiter nisus*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Accipitriformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Accipitridae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Accipiter</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Accipiter nisus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Skobec

Uliu pāsārar



varpushaukka

Sparviere

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 8.2.1 Descriptive notes

A small bird of prey, clearly smaller than a crow. Legs thin and stick-shaped, chest striped. Young birds have a brown back, while old birds have a gray back. Males have a reddish-brown breast. Good distinguishing features in flight are a long tail and short wings with rather rounded tips.



Figure 80: GBIF *Accipiter nisus* information sheet



Figure 81: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Accipiter nisus*



### 8.2.2 Sound

It is known by its' alarm sound "kyikyikyi", slower and jerkier than a falcon. Begging call "PEEE-ee", thinner than Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*).

### 8.2.3 Habitat and distribution

The sparrowhawk prefers dense mixed forests and also nests in mature seedling stands and young unthinned forests.

	<p>It is widespread in Slovenia, where it can be found throughout the country all year round. Its habitat consists of forests, often close to human settlements. It avoids only larger closed forest complexes and high mountains. It hunts its prey in forests with dense undergrowth as well as in open countryside.</p>
	<p>Breeds in forested areas, favoring spruce-bordered stream valleys and wet, swampy woodlands. It is found throughout Finland, including Lapland. The estimated breeding population in Finland ranges between 6,000 and 9,000 pairs.</p>



	<p>In Romania, the Eurasian sparrowhawk (<i>Accipiter nisus</i>), known locally as <i>uliu păsărău</i>, is a common and widespread bird of prey. Its distribution and habitat reflect its specialized hunting style, which relies on surprise and agility. Highly adaptable, found in most woodlands, from dense forests to city parks, gardens, and suburban areas with tall trees. Widespread across Romania; northern populations migrate south for winter, increasing numbers in Romania during colder months.</p>
	<p>Widespread throughout the peninsula from north to south, Sicily, and Sardinia. Estimated population of 2,000-4,000 nesting pairs, with numbers stable or slightly increasing. Nests in coniferous or deciduous forests, mainly between 500 and 1,600 meters above sea level.</p>

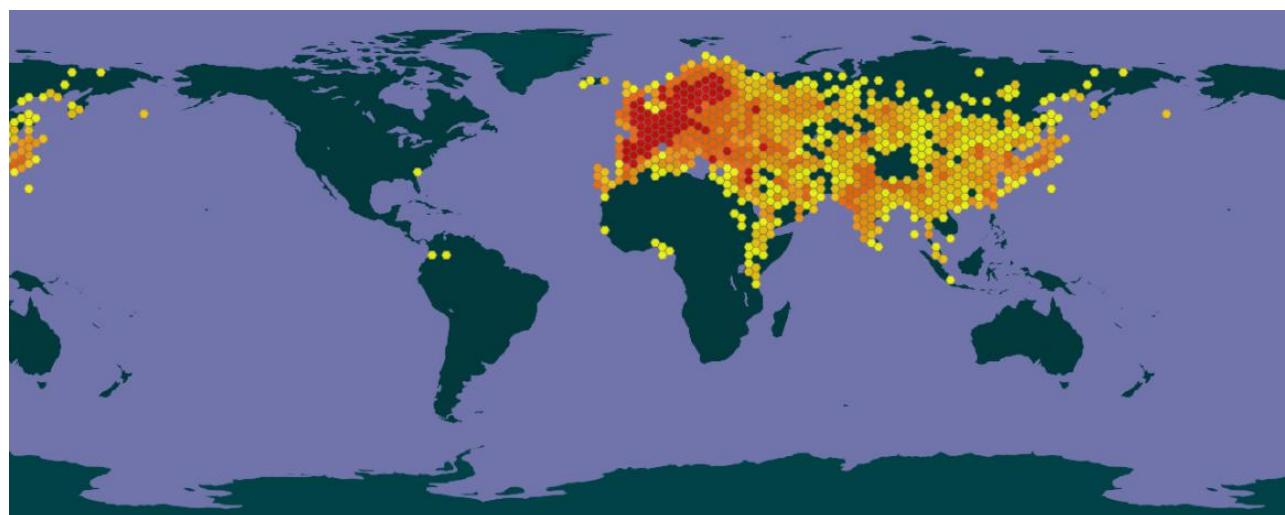


Figure 82: Distribution of *Accipiter nisus*

#### 8.2.4 Nutrition

It preys on other birds, from small birds to species the size of a woodpecker, blackbird and pigeon. The Eurasian sparrowhawk's hunting behaviour has brought it into conflict with humans for hundreds of years, particularly racing pigeon owners and people rearing poultry and gamebirds. It has also been blamed for decreases in passerine populations.

The Eurasian sparrowhawk is a major predator of smaller woodland birds, though only 10% of its hunting attacks are successful. It hunts by surprise attack, using hedges, tree-belts, copses, orchards and other cover near woodland areas; its choice of habitat is dictated by these requirements. It also makes use of gardens in built-up areas, taking advantage of the prey found there.

#### 8.2.5 Breeding

It rebuilds its nest every year on trees, most often on 6-12m high spruce trees. It stays hidden when near the nest.

#### 8.2.6 Migrations



A local mover. A small part of the population hibernates. The Eurasian sparrowhawk is found throughout the temperate and subtropical parts of the Old World; whilst birds from the northern parts of the range migrate south for winter, their southern counterparts remain resident or make dispersive movements.

Climate change has had a clear impact on the sparrowhawk's annual cycle. The spring migration of the sparrowhawk has come earlier, and with it the nesting has also come earlier. The young individuals embark on their first migration soon after becoming independent, and thus the autumn migration has also been brought forward. An increasing number of sparrowhawks leave Finland already during August.

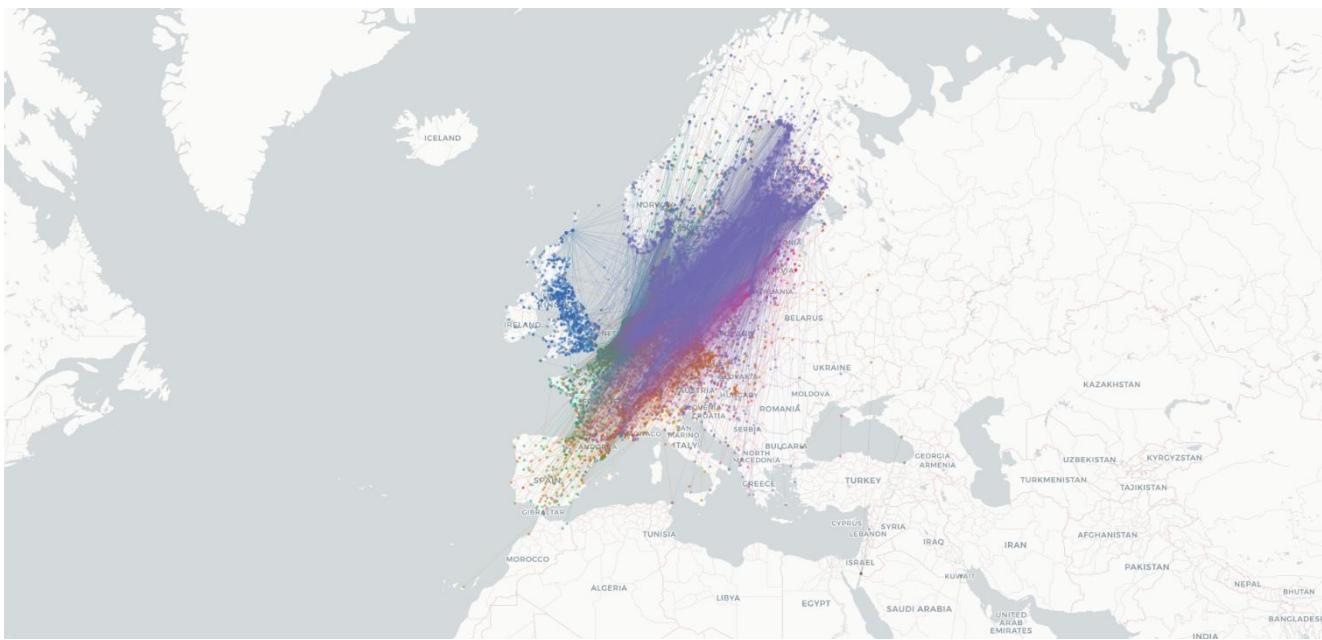


Figure 83: Eurasian sparrowhawk migration map based on ring finds

## 8.2.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

Conservation measures led to a large-scale ban on pesticides, and nesting populations of birds of prey began to recover. Birds of prey brought a warning message to us humans about the dangers of environmental toxins.

The status of the population at the EU level was evaluated as “least concern” at the species level; this was based on the reports delivered by Member States under Article 12 of the Birds Directive.

### 8.2.7.1 Status according to Birdlife:

This species has an extremely large range, and hence does not approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the range size criterion (extent of occurrence <20,000 km<sup>2</sup> combined with a declining or fluctuating range size, habitat extent/quality, or population size and a small number of locations or severe fragmentation). The population trend appears to be stable, and hence the species does not approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the population trend criterion (>30% decline over ten years or three generations). The population size is extremely large, and hence does not approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the population size criterion (<10,000 mature individuals with a continuing decline estimated to be >10% in ten years or three generations, or with a specified population structure). For these reasons the species is evaluated as Least Concern.



## 8.2.8 Cultural heritage

### 8.2.8.1 Slovenian culture

South Slavic terms for a trap, such as *kob*, *kobac*, or *skobec*, etymologically derive from the meaning ominous, fateful, associated with danger, which indicates a successful predator. A prohibited animal trap is also named after it.

### 8.2.8.2 Romanian culture

The sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) often appears in culture as a symbol of hunting, speed, cunning, and alertness. As a nimble, small-bodied bird of prey, it causes great alarm among smaller birds, plays an important role in falconry, and is also associated with various myths and misconceptions. At the same time, it appears in literature and art and can symbolize the power of nature.

**Symbolism:** The sparrowhawk can represent hunting, precision, and speed, similarly to other birds of prey.

**Falconry:** The sparrowhawk has traditionally been used in falconry, the ancient art of training birds by humans.

**Misconceptions and myths:** Various beliefs and misconceptions (for example, those related to its eggs) are associated with it in folk culture.

### 8.2.8.3 Italian culture

In Italian culture, the Sparrowhawk is a bird of prey known for its hunting skills and its adaptation to woodlands. In the past, it was used in falconry for its hunting abilities.

### 8.2.8.4 Finnish culture

In Finnish folklore, the hawk was often compared to the eagle, as the similarities between these birds of prey were obvious. This is reflected in Finnish expressions such as *haukan katse* ("hawk's gaze") and *olla haukkana paikalla* ("to be there like a hawk"), which, like the eagle, refer to the hawk's sharp vision and swift flight. Both birds could be seen as protectors or as enemies. Although the hawk often stayed in the eagle's shadow in stories, its importance can be seen in the many Finnish place names that mention it.

Beliefs about the hawk frequently involved supernatural powers—specifically, it was said that the hawk possessed one-ninth of such power. Like the eagle, the hawk was invoked in spells for tasks requiring great strength, where the qualities of a bird of prey would be useful. Its magical powers were also believed to protect livestock and property. It was common practice to nail a shot hawk to a barn or stable door with its wings spread wide to keep evil forces away, even though the hawk itself was sometimes considered the devil's bird.

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Migration map: migrationatlas.org

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## 9 Large waders (Pelecaniformes)

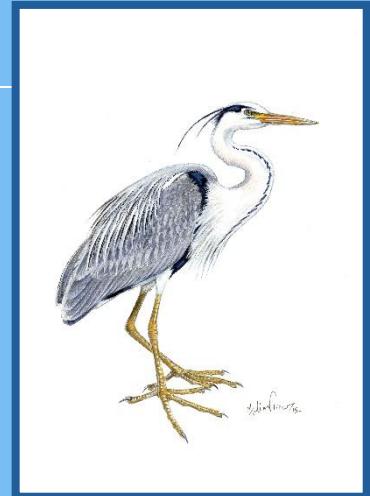
### 9.1 Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

#### GREY HERON

*Ardea cinerea*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Pelecaniformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Ardeidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Ardea</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Ardea cinerea</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Siva čaplja



Stârc cenușiu



Harmaahaikara

Airona cenerino

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 9.1.1 Descriptive notes

The Grey Heron is distinguished from other Ardeidae by its large size: as an adult it can reach 90-98 centimeters in length and its weight can range from 1 to 2 kilograms. Its wingspan is also very large (between 160 and 175 cm). Adults have black feathers on the neck and a very pronounced dark tuft on the nape; a more grayish plumage prevails in younger birds. When it takes flight, its neck folds up, assuming a typical "S" shape.



Figure 84: GBIF *Ardea cinerea* information sheet



Figure 85: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Ardea cinerea*



Figure 86: *Ardea cinerea*

### 9.1.2 Sound

The most common call of Gray Herons is a harsh, raspy note given in flight, though other calls vary in pitch, length, and frequency. They are particularly vocal at breeding colonies, where adults produce yelps, gargles, squawks, growls, and wails, while begging chicks chatter to solicit food. In addition to these vocalizations, Gray Herons make loud bill snaps during aggressive encounters and occasionally during pair greetings. They may also quietly rattle their bills during pair formation, or, more rarely, clatter them loudly, similar to storks.



### 9.1.3 Habitat and distribution

Optimal habitat for grey heron is uneven-aged hygrophilous forest predominantly with black alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), poplars and willows, with succession of tall (25-30 m), medium (15-20m) and low (8-15 m) tree cores and bands of tall shrubs (e.g., willows). The perimeter of the forest and part of its interior should have pools, ditches and canals.

Species is widespread in the temperate zones of the Old World, except for Arctic areas and deserts. It lives in Europe, Africa and western Asia, eastern Asia and Madagascar.

	<p>The gray heron is the most common species of heron in Slovenia, as it can be found on almost every major river or wetland. It is also often seen in meadows, hunting rodents, snakes, or amphibians. It nests scattered, mainly in the lowlands of central and eastern Slovenia.</p>
	<p>The most common species of heron in Finland. The gray heron prefers peaceful, dense forests near lakes, shallow bays, and wetlands. It nests alone or in colonies of several dozen pairs. The gray heron benefits from global warming. Its range has expanded northward and the Finnish breeding population has increased. A short-distance migrant. Most of Finland's gray herons winter in Europe.</p>
	<p>In Romania, the grey heron breeds in a fragmented manner across all regions of the country, except in the mountain zone. Being partially migratory, in the cold season the number and distribution of individuals may vary depending on the extent to which aquatic surfaces are covered by ice. The species is present in most types of aquatic habitats, but also in wet meadows or agricultural areas. For nesting, it prefers tall trees near wetlands, but also marsh habitats with shrubs. The estimated population in Romania is 4,500 – 6,000 pairs, and the population trend is considered stable.</p>
	<p>In Italy the Grey Heron is a partial sedentary breeder, regular migrator and winterer. From 1980 to 2003 the breeding population in Italy grew from 700 up to about 10,000 pairs, with a regular and particularly marked increase in the 1990s. Until the 1980s, nesting colonies were in fact restricted to northwestern Italy and some Tuscan marshes. In parallel with the remarkable increase in populations, the nesting range has expanded to all of northeastern Italy and parts of central and southern Italy, Sicily and Sardinia.</p>

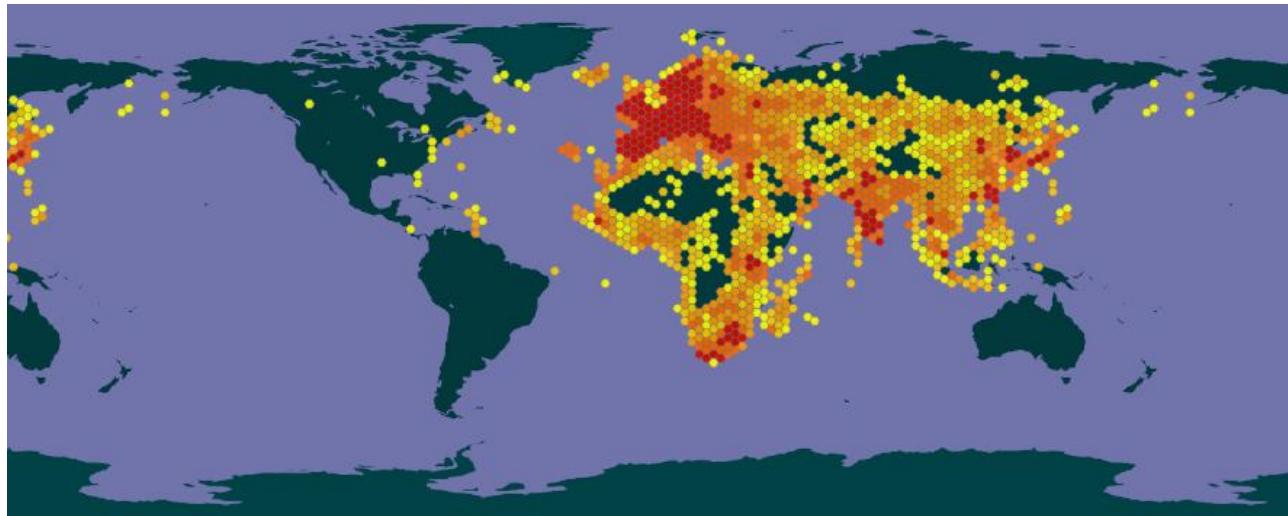


Figure 87: Distribution of *Ardea cinerea*

#### 9.1.4 Nutrition

The Grey Heron has a yellow beak (especially during the breeding season) and is very robust, suitable for catching its prey; it feeds on fish, frogs, tadpoles, water snails, crustaceans, mollusks, aquatic insects, small mammals and the young of other birds. It is active both during the day and at night and will travel as far as tens of kilometers from its nesting or roosting site to feed.

#### 9.1.5 Breeding

Species nests in lowland forests, surrounded by rice fields, swamps and wet fallow lands used as feeding areas; locally in groves, cultivated poplar stands, wetlands with reed beds, tree rows, patrician parks, lake islets, coniferous reforestation, pre-Alpine rocky environments, and also in human-dominated habitats, such as suburban environments and highway junctions. Most colonies are widespread up to 250 m, with localized occurrences up to 400-500 m, maximum 1000 m on the central Apennines and Alps.

#### 9.1.6 Migration

In Italy the Grey Heron is a partial sedentary breeder, regular migrator and winterer. From 1980 to 2003 the breeding population in Italy grew from 700 up to about 10,000 pairs, with a regular and particularly marked increase in the 1990s. Until the 1980s, nesting colonies were in fact restricted to northwestern Italy and some Tuscan marshes. In parallel with the remarkable increase in populations, the nesting range has expanded to all of northeastern Italy and parts of central and southern Italy, Sicily and Sardinia. Different European populations exhibit different migratory behaviors: while populations in Italy are generally sedentary, those living in more northern countries in the cold months become gregarious and migrate in flocks to milder regions, settling along sheltered coasts and freshwater bodies of water.

Nesting colonies in Italy have greatly increased in the past decades, and are thus one of the few positive cases in the negative landscape of general decline of animal life around us. There are currently several hundred colonies in northern Italy, varying in size from a few nests to many hundreds, usually clustered in a small area. Monitoring is organized by regional associations of ornithologists, in Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli, Trentino, Emilia-Romagna, and other regions of southern Italy.

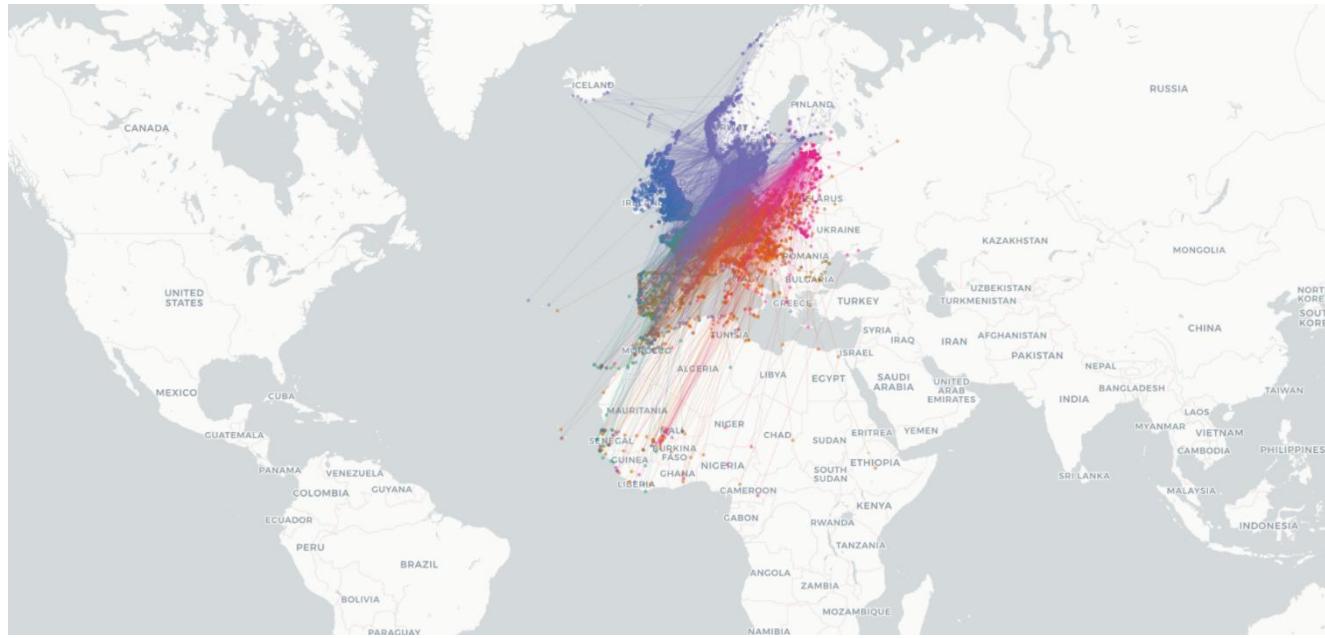


Figure 88: Grey heron migration map based on ring finds

### 9.1.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

#### Status

The Grey Heron has an inadequate conservation status in Italy (according to the indicators of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC), due to a period of decrease shown in recent years, following several decades of increase; this occurred especially for the breeding population in colonies located in the rice fields of Piedmont and Lombardy (the most numerous in Italy), as a result of the spread of the practice of "dry" cultivation of rice and the subsequent decrease in prey availability.

The Italian population was estimated at 13,000 pairs in 2002, declining between 2005 and 2012, and recovering in the following four years, despite the continued decline of the rice-field-bound population. The wintering population over the past decade has varied from 15,000 to 30,000 individuals, concentrated mainly in the inland Po Valley, Upper Adriatic, central Italy and Sardinia.

The Grey Heron is a species of low concern (Least Concern) according to the IUCN Red List, although its local populations may be threatened by habitat loss and water pollution. In Italy it is a protected species under Law 157/92, moreover it is protected under the Bern Convention, all. III.

#### Threats

In Italy, the distribution of the Grey Heron is often influenced by the presence of areas cultivated with rice, used for foraging. The main threats to populations of this species are habitat transformation due to the gradual spread in the Po Valley of the technique of "dry" rice cultivation, which results in a consequent reduction in food availability. In addition, the species is affected by the aging of the woodland formations in which the heronries are located, anthropogenic disturbance near the heronries, episodes of poaching, illegal felling of trees in the presence of nests, anthropogenic disturbance during wintering, collision with power lines, and the colonization of heronries by the Cormorant. Despite the fact that urbanization, intensive agriculture, hunting, and poaching have caused such a dramatic loss of biodiversity that there is talk of a "sixth mass extinction" (more than two-thirds of all bird species in Italy are at risk), the heron population has multiplied, with a more than 20-fold



increase over how many there were in the 1970s. Herons are birds that always return to the same nesting site, even for centuries, if factors do not intervene to drive them away, and some heronries, already described in early 17th-century texts, are still present today.

At the local level, potential conflicts are detected with trout farmers (generally using preventive measures such as protective nets) and hobby fishermen, who generally consider the Grey Heron one of the two main causes of fish loss (the second is the Cormorant).

## Protection

The conservation of the species in the Italian territory requires specific activities to protect the heronries through the establishment of special nature reserves and proper management of these areas with vegetation maintenance measures that favor nesting. It is also useful to limit anthropogenic disturbance in these areas and, in parallel, to limit access to these areas. Management of rice fields more in keeping with the needs of this and other heron species can be promoted through appropriate measures within Rural Development Programs. Another important factor in preserving the species is the safe management of overhead cables placed near major breeding sites and wintering areas.

### 9.1.8 Cultural heritage

#### 9.1.8.1 Slovenian culture

As in European symbolism, the heron is also often a symbol of caution, wisdom, and vigilance in Slovenia due to its hunting method—it stands still and waits attentively for its prey, which is anthropomorphically interpreted as caution, patience, or inner wisdom.

Sometimes the heron can also be perceived as a symbol of unnecessary curiosity or an "intrusive" nature, because it seems to be observing and checking everything. Thus, it can be a symbol of intrusiveness or excessive curiosity.

#### 9.1.8.2 Romanian culture

In Romanian culture, the grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*) is an emblematic bird, appreciated for its elegant posture and associated with aquatic landscapes and marshy areas, being present in the Danube Delta and similar habitats. Although there are not many specific cultural or folkloric mentions, the grey heron is seen as a symbol of wilderness and of patience in hunting.

#### 9.1.8.3 Italian culture

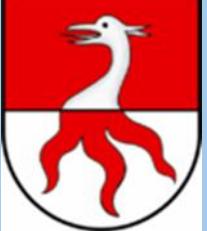
Herons have long captivated people with their elegant silhouette and are now part of Po Valley culture; they appear in posters, urban sculptures, and as symbols of sports clubs and associations. These birds also feature in mythology and fairy tales. In Aesop's fable "*The Wolf and the Heron*" they symbolize naive candor, likely inspired by their striking plumage. The Egyptian myth of the Phoenix, a bird reborn from flames, is closely linked to herons. For the Egyptians, herons were symbols of prosperity, appearing after the Nile's floods that fertilized the fields, giving rise to the legend of a bird capable of rising anew. The Phoenix, depicted as a heron, appears in some tombs, where it was revered as a symbol of rebirth and transformation.

The scientific name of the Heron is derived from the town of Ardea, which is mentioned in Ovid's "*Metamorphoses*": according to the Roman poet's account, a heron soared from the town of Ardea after it destroyed by Aeneas. Hence the origin of their scientific name, e.g. *Ardea cinerea* or *Ardea purpurea*.

The Heron, a wary and timid bird that stays on the banks of rivers and flees man, is very rare. Joined with the crow, they are a symbol of league against an enemy, as in common opinion, based on the writings of Aristotle and Pliny, they are also believed to unite to fight against the fox. The Heron can be recognized by the presence



of a tuft of feathers protruding from the back of the head. It is sometimes depicted without a beak and feet, like the blackbird or the duckling, and has the same meaning.

	Flamed and serpentine Heron's head at the tip (coat of arms of Naz-Sciaves, Italy)
	Silver Heron (old coat of arms of Kührstedt, Germany)
	Silver heron (Großhart, Austria)
	Heron in the wild (Nerva, Spain)
	Silver Heron, flying in band, wings in bar (Ardea, Italy)

Focus on Irone (Municipality of Tre Ville - Adamello Brenta Natural Park): Irone - ghost village.

Near Ragoli is a small, perfectly preserved medieval village, which was completely abandoned for years. It is Irone, the ghost village since the plague of 1630, the one recounted by Manzoni in *The Betrothed*. The small church, isolated from the village and located on a panoramic hill, is also of medieval origin: traces of Gothic frescoes have been found under the plaster. It is dedicated to St. James and was entrusted in 1657 by Bishop Madruzzo to the Stefani family of Tione, who had a residence here, whose coat of arms is the Heron, "iron". The village, which repopulates in the summer, still preserves in the structure of its houses the characteristic of a medieval alpine agglomeration and still preserves the ancient well that once served the entire small community. Numerous events are organized here, mainly during the summer months, with the aim of promoting local traditions and popular culture. The village is also the subject of studies aimed at an architectural recovery that respects its history.



In music

### The Heron (by Eduardo Cossu)

In its slight elegance,  
a heron crosses the endless waters  
of this world; rivers, lakes, seas  
and as a heavenly creature imparts  
their own supremacy,  
as a God in his own heavenly sphere.

A snowy and grayish creature  
It hovers with its sturdy wings,  
cheerful and serene in the air and  
a graceful breeze caresses its mantle,  
its head and its sharp golden beak,  
That like a dart hurled from  
his rope, penetrate and scratch the puny  
atmosphere.

Like a feather lightly settles,  
And in the underlying water surface  
his beating of wings transforms  
the magical lake in a perennial  
expanse of ice, and like a waltz  
continuous dance and sway  
as a talented ice skater.

### The Black Herons (Nomads 1991)

Black herons, crossing the sky,  
white winter, descends from the north,  
the yellow summer, she hid in the sea,  
the cold wind is running across the meadows.  
But you and me friend, with our hands in our pockets,  
we walk on the road, and summer still inside,  
with a dream of tides and warm bodies in the sun,  
and of voices in the night, clear night.  
You who know the sea, take me away with you,  
where people dress only in their colors,  
you who know the sea and the wind its master,  
fill that sail and break those waves.  
Gray fog filled the streets,  
streetlights lost on the river bank,  
the yellow summer, it stayed in our eyes,  
white rain covers the silver streets.  
But you and me friend, with our hands in our pockets,  
we walk on the road and summer still inside,  
with a dream of tides and warm bodies in the sun,  
and of voices in the night, clear night.  
You who know the sea, take me away with you,  
where the night is clear and the sky is closer,  
you who know the sea and the stars as your guide,  
take that rudder and teach me the way.

### Emotions (Mogol, Lucio Battisti)

Following with your eyes a heron  
above the river and then  
finding yourself flying  
and lying down happy  
above the grass to listen to  
a subtle sorrow  
and at night look  
over the hill to discover  
where the sun goes to sleep  
wondering why when the sadness falls  
at the bottom of the heart  
like the snow doesn't make a sound.

And driving like a lunatic  
with headlights off at night to see  
if it's that difficult to die  
and clenching your fists to catch  
something that  
is inside me  
but in your mind is not there  
you can't understand  
you call them, if you want  
emotions  
you call them, if you want  
emotions.

Going out on the moor in the morning  
where you can't see one step ahead  
to find yourself  
talk about this and that with a fisherman  
for hours and hours  
to not feel that something is dying inside  
and covering with soil a green seedling  
hoping it will be able to  
sprout one day a red rose.

And punching a man,  
only because he was a bit rude  
knowing that what burns  
aren't the insults  
and closing the eyes to stop  
something that  
is inside me  
but in your mind is not there  
understanding that you can't  
you call them, if you want  
emotions you call them, if you want emotions.



## In fairy tales

In the imagery and symbolism associated with birds, the Grey Heron has several meanings that make it a highly suggestive animal. Traditionally a melancholy creature, several writers have used the Heron as a symbol for their stories. Jean De La Fontaine's "The Heron," which spends all day waiting for the most succulent prey, remaining dry-billed at the end of the day, represents those "who want too much end up with nothing". Aesop's Heron finds himself helping a wolf in distress but it ends up gulled by the evil animal.

For Giorgio Bassani, the author of "*The Garden of the Finzi Contini*", the Heron becomes - in the novel of the same name - a symbol charged with existential meanings and reflections on the human condition.

## In cinema

Animated film "The boy and the heron", 2023, adventure, teenagers, drama



Tokyo, 1943. During the war in the Pacific between the Japanese and the Allies, a 12-year-old boy, Mahito, loses his mother Hisako, who was killed in a fire that broke out inside a hospital. After some time, his father Shoichi remarries Natsuko, Mahito's aunt. The man will decide to move to another city, but as time passes, in the longing for his mother grows, so he dreams of being able to see her again. One day, while standing in the ruins of an abandoned tower, Mahito meets a gray heron, who gives him his feathers to make arrows. Later, Mahito also finds a book that his mother would have liked to give him as a gift, which includes annotations: through the volume he will begin to question the meaning of life and death, and discuss this with his uncle. But it will be the heron who will show him the way to a fantastic world, there where death ends and life finds a new beginning.

### 9.1.8.4 Finnish culture

No cultural significance in Finland.

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Grey heron illustration: Fabio Perco

Grey heron photo: Žan Rode, CC-BY, (<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/276505449>)

Grey heron distribution map: <https://www.gbif.org/species/9797180>

Migration map: [migrationatlas.org](http://migrationatlas.org)

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Založba ZRC.



## 10 Cranes, Rails and allies (Gruiformes)

### 10.1 Common Crane (*Grus grus*)

#### COMMON CRANE

*Grus grus*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Gruiformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Gruidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Grus</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Grus grus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Žerjav

Cocor



Kurki

Gru

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 10.1.1 Descriptive notes

The Common Crane is a large and elegant bird, easily recognized by its striking plumage and distinctive features. It reaches a length of about 115 cm, with males weighing 5100–6100 g and females 4500–5900 g, and a wingspan ranging from 180 to 200 cm. The body is slate grey with black primaries, while the dark head features a white stripe extending from behind the eye down the nape and a bright red patch on the crown. The iris varies from yellow to orange. The species is similar to *Grus nigricollis* but shows more extensive white on the head. Juveniles have a feathered crown and body plumage tipped with yellowish brown.



Figure 89: GBIF *Grus grus* information sheet



Figure 90: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Grus grus*

### 10.1.2 Sound

Calls are high-pitched, penetrating, and carry over long distances. The contact call, given mainly in flight, is a deep, resonant, rolling “krro” or “karr.” Juveniles in autumn produce a piping “cheerp” call as well as adult-type calls. Breeding pairs often duet at dawn, with the male giving a loud trumpeting call, immediately followed by the female’s lower-pitched “kraw” or, occasionally, a harsher “ka-ka-ka.”

### 10.1.3 Habitat and distribution

Breeds in a wide variety of shallow wetlands, including forested swamps (especially birch and alder), sedge meadows, and bogs. In Europe, it has adapted to using smaller natural, artificial, and restored wetlands. Throughout its winter range, it forages in agricultural fields and pastures, while roosting in nearby wetlands or other shallow waters.



In Slovenia, cranes can be observed mainly during migration, when flocks fly overhead in their characteristic V formation or linger in flocks in fields. The peak of spring migration in Slovenia is at the end of February and beginning of March, while the autumn peak is in November. An attempt at nesting has also been recorded at lake Cerknica.



The typical nesting environment for cranes in Finland consists of various types of mires and wetlands, and nowadays even clear-cut forest areas are suitable. The crane population has multiplied in five decades. Cranes have benefited from improved protection in Europe, and hunting and persecution in their wintering areas is now minimal. The protection and restoration of bogs and wetlands has helped the crane population to grow. Cranes have also benefited from climate change.



	<p>In Romania, the common crane is present mainly in wetland areas and open landscapes suitable for feeding and resting during the migration. The species prefers large open spaces, marshes, and agricultural fields with minimal disturbance. Most observations of the crane in Romania are from the western region (Arad, Timiș, Salonta, Satu Mare, Oradea).</p>
	<p>Italy is mainly a country of passage during autumn and spring migration. Similar in size to the stork and the gray heron, the crane is a symbol of elegance. A great flyer with an unmistakable posture, it can be seen in spring as it reaches Italy. It is said that it nested regularly in Veneto until the mid-19th century. Now this is no longer the case: for the crane, Italy is almost exclusively a place of passage, through which it reaches its distant African grounds where it spends the winter.</p>

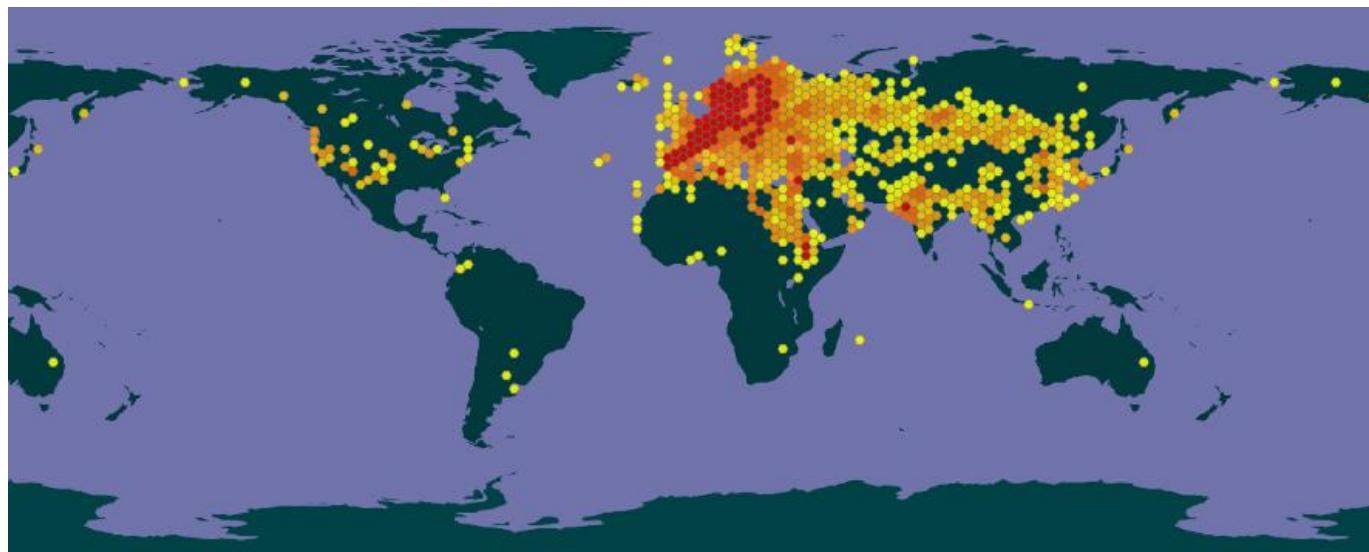


Figure 91: Distribution of *Grus grus*

#### 10.1.4 Nutrition

The Common Crane is omnivorous; plant material generally predominates, especially outside the breeding season, including roots, rhizomes, tubers, stems, shoots, leaves, berries, and seeds of emergent wetland plants, grasses, forbs, and cultivated crops. It also consumes acorns, nuts, legumes, and waste grain. Animal matter is more prominent in the summer diet, mainly invertebrates such as worms, snails, insects, and other arthropods, but also frogs, snakes, lizards, fish, and rodents. Foraging occurs both on land and in water, through probing and picking.

#### 10.1.5 Breeding

The species is a spring breeder, with most eggs laid in late April or early May. The nest is a mound, about 80 cm wide, constructed from wetland vegetation and typically located in the most inaccessible parts of shallow marshes or bogs, often near trees. Adult cranes cover their backs with mud before settling on the nest, which provides camouflage and protection against predators, making them harder to detect among the brown marsh vegetation. Clutches usually consist of two eggs, with an incubation period of 28–31 days. Chicks are dark brown above and pale brown below, and fledging occurs at around 65–70 days. Both parents care for the chick until



the next breeding season—throughout the winter and sometimes even during the return migration. Sexual maturity is reached at 4–6 years.

### 10.1.6 Migrations

Major migration routes:

- from Scandinavia and northern continental Europe through western Europe to wintering areas in France, Spain, Portugal, and Morocco;
- from northeastern Europe through central Europe and Italy to wintering areas in Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria;
- from eastern Europe and western Russia, through the Balkans and around the Black Sea to wintering areas in eastern Africa, the Middle East, and Asia Minor;
- from central Russia around the Caspian Sea to southeastern Iraq and southwestern Iran;
- from western Siberia through Afghanistan and Pakistan to wintering areas in western and central India;
- from northern China and central Siberia across China to wintering areas along the middle Yangtze River;

and

- from Xinjiang and Qinghai Provinces on the Tibetan Plateau to wintering areas in southern China.

A small breeding population occurs in Turkey and may also breed in Azerbaijan, where the species until recently overwintered regularly at several sites.

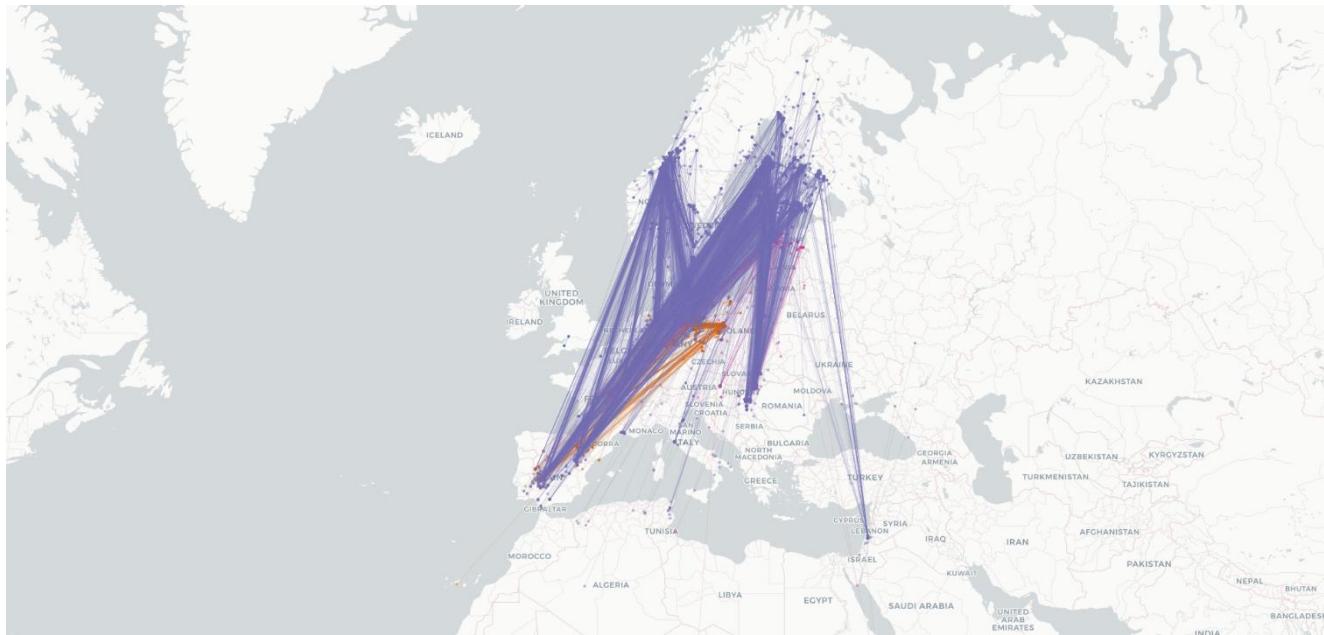


Figure 92: Common crane migration map based on ring finds

### 10.1.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

#### Conservation Status and Population



The species is not globally threatened; the global population is estimated at around 360,000–370,000 individuals, although only the European and European Russian populations are reliably surveyed on a regular basis. The species has been extirpated as a breeding bird in much of its historical range in southern, western, and eastern Europe. Last recorded breeding in some countries occurred as follows: Italy c. 1880, Austria c. 1885, Hungary 1952, Spain 1954, and Greece 1965. Overall, the global population is considered stable, with western populations recovering, while some eastern populations may be declining.

### Threats

Major threats include the loss and degradation of wetlands across the breeding range, human pressures on wetlands in wintering areas, changes in beneficial agricultural practices, and persecution due to crop damage. Hunting remains a concern in some regions, particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### Conservation Efforts

Conservation work is primarily focused on the western part of the range and is coordinated through regular international meetings of the European Crane Working Group. Key migration and wintering habitats are protected in reserves or through agreements with landowners, especially in Germany, France, and Spain.

### Monitoring and Research

Populations in Europe are closely monitored, and the species is often included in waterbird surveys in other parts of its range. Migration routes have been studied through ringing and telemetry in Europe, western Siberia, and eastern Asia. Extensive field studies have been conducted in Europe, Russia, Ukraine, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and China.

The species is also the focus of educational projects in western Europe, Pakistan, Russia, and other regions.

## 10.1.8 Cultural heritage

Almost anywhere cranes are found in the wild, they also appear in human mythology and popular culture. They are often symbols of happiness, youth, good luck, and peace.

They also represent a symbol of wakefulness, as cranes during their sleep stand on one leg like a guard should to stay awake.

In heraldry, cranes are often shown holding a rock in one foot. This comes from an old legend recorded by Pliny the Elder: when a group of cranes was under threat, one bird would stand watch, holding a rock. If the crane dozed off, the rock would fall and wake it, keeping the flock safe. In this way, a crane with a stone became a symbol of vigilance and alertness.

In ancient Greece and Rome, people admired the cranes' graceful dances, seeing them as celebrations of life and joy. The bird was linked to gods such as Apollo and Hephaestus, embodying beauty and energy.

In Japan, cranes are considered sacred creatures, symbols of good luck and extraordinary longevity—legend says they can live a thousand years. They appear in haiku poetry and the art of origami, where folding a thousand paper cranes is believed to grant a wish. After World War II, the story of schoolgirl Sadako Sasaki and her thousand origami cranes made the bird a powerful symbol of peace and hope.

In Germany, there is even a museum dedicated entirely to the natural history of the Common Crane. The Kranich Museum, located in a renovated manor house in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, features display of various aspects of crane biology, behavior, and cultural significance.

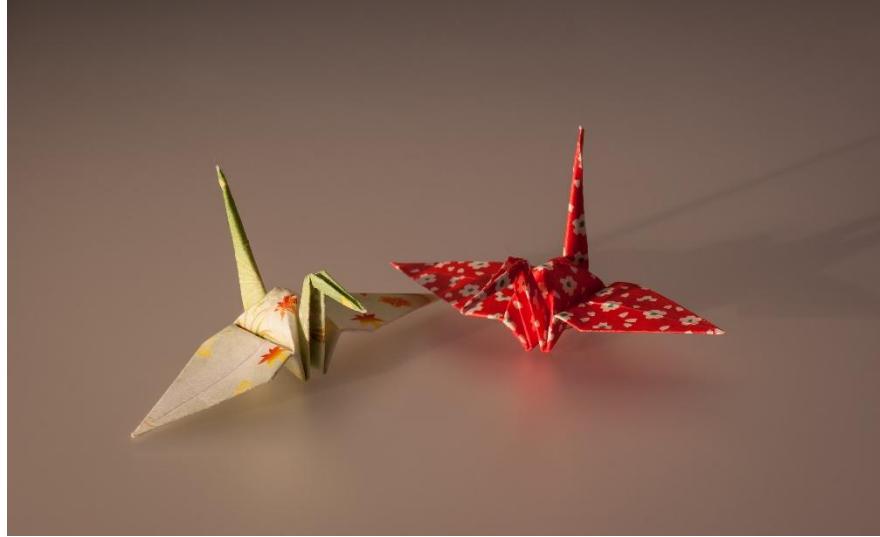


Figure 93: Origami paper cranes

#### 10.1.8.1 Slovenian culture

In Slovenia, there is a song/verses: »Hoarse cranes cry loudly, rushing south« (Boris Miran) (»Hripavi žerjavi visoko kriče, na južno hite« (Boris Miran)) (Erjavec, 1995), which indicates that cranes rarely stop in our country and are mostly just passing through. The verses also describe their calls.

#### 10.1.8.2 Romanian culture

While Romania doesn't have specific foundational myths centered solely on the crane like some Asian cultures, its presence in Romanian nature evokes universal themes of wild beauty, migration, and purity, making it a valued part of its natural heritage, even if observed less frequently than other iconic birds.

#### 10.1.8.3 Italian culture

In Italy, this species has no cultural significance.

#### 10.1.8.4 Finnish culture

The tall and stately crane was seen as the king of birds, believed to hold the sky on its head. This idea gave us the word kurkihirs, which means the main beam that supports the top of a roof. The crane was also thought to have the loudest voice of all birds. In the national epic Kalevala, its cry wakes the people of Pohjola and starts the great battle to reclaim the sampo.

The crane was believed to possess magical powers, for instance, it was capable of creating gold coins in exchange for sparing its life. Ancient shamans may have imitated the crane's calls and movements in their rituals, as the bird was seen as wise and mystical.

The crane's spring migration was linked to the end of winter and melting ice. It was said that the crane's call warned of treacherous ice in early spring. Autumn migrations were observed just as closely. The shape of the crane's V-formation was used to predict fate. If the left wing stretched much farther than the right, it was said that many men would die the next day, leaving women widowed.

Crane migrations were also tied to customs surrounding light. In earlier times, artificial light sources—such as splints or candles—were used sparingly. Between the spring and autumn migrations of the cranes, all evening chores were to be done by natural light. Lighting a splint or candle during this period was thought to bring bad luck.



## 10.1.9 Sources

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Common Crane photo: Alen Ploj

Origami paper cranes: by Laitche - Own work, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3244373>

Common Crane distribution map: <https://www.gbif.org/species/2474950>

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## 11 Wading birds, Herons and Storks (Ciconiiformes)

### 11.1 White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)

#### WHITE STORK

*Ciconia ciconia*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Ciconiiformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Ciconiidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Ciconia</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Bela štorklja



Barza albă



Kattohaikara

Cicogna biancha

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 11.1.1 Descriptive notes

The White Stork is one of Europe's biggest birds. When standing, it measures about 95 to 110 centimeters and it has a wingspan of around 183 to 217 centimeters. The white stork is easily recognizable by its white plumage, its black wing and shoulder feathers as well as its long red bill (measuring 14-19 centimeters) and its red legs. When foraging for food, the white stork strides sedately across meadows and pastures, its neck straight, leaning slightly forward. In flight its wingbeats are slow and regular. Unlike herons, storks fly with both their neck and legs outstretched. As "gliders", they use thermals to soar, their wings held still, high into the sky. We know from monitoring ringed storks that they can live to be up to 39 years old.

There are two sub-species of White Stork, that differ slightly in size:

- the European White Stork which is found breeding in Europe,
- the African White Stork which is found breeding in North West and Southern Africa.



Figure 94: GBIF *Ciconia ciconia* information sheet

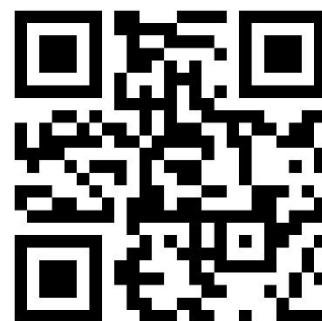


Figure 95: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Ciconia ciconia*

### 11.1.2 Sound

White Storks are generally silent due to the lack of a developed syrinx (vocal organ), but they are well-known for their distinctive bill-clattering, a form of communication especially used during courtship and territorial displays. This sound is amplified by neck stretching and resonation in the throat pouch.

### 11.1.3 Habitat and distribution

The White Stork breeds in Europe, North Africa, and parts of Western and Central Asia. It migrates to sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian subcontinent during the winter months. In Europe, they are particularly common in Eastern and Central countries such as Poland, Germany, and Romania. Some populations in southwestern Europe are now partially sedentary due to changes in climate and feeding opportunities.



The white stork is a nesting and migratory species that nests mainly in the Pannonian region (Murska and Dravska plains, Slovenske gorice hills), extending towards Notranjska, Dolenjska, and the Sava plain. In recent decades, its nesting range has been expanding, including areas in western and southern Slovenia, while in the northeast (Prekmurje) the number has been declining slightly due to the loss of wetlands.



	<p>Found in open cultural landscapes, riverbanks, wetlands, and floodplains. The white stork is a regular visitor to Finland. Sightings are concentrated heavily in the spring season. In Estonia, the number of white stork pairs has more than doubled since the early 1990s. The increase in sightings in Finland in the 2000s probably reflects the situation in Estonia. The species has bred twice in Finland, in 2015 and 2025.</p>
	<p>White Storks are widespread across Romania, nesting everywhere except high mountains and dense forests, with the highest densities in Olt river basin, the Danube area, and NW/SW regions (Satu Mare, Timis), using low-intensity farmland and river valleys, though population shifts show declines in intense lowlands and increases in hilly Carpathian foothills.</p>
	<p>The species is migratory and nests in Italy, with the highest concentration in the Po Valley. It prefers open, flat environments. It seeks areas with grasslands, marshes and floodplains. Rice paddies and plowed fields are suitable environments where it can hunt insects, amphibians, and rodents. White storks nest on tall man-made structures such as bell towers, electricity poles, chimneys and pylons, or sometimes in trees. They build large nests using branches and other plant material.</p>

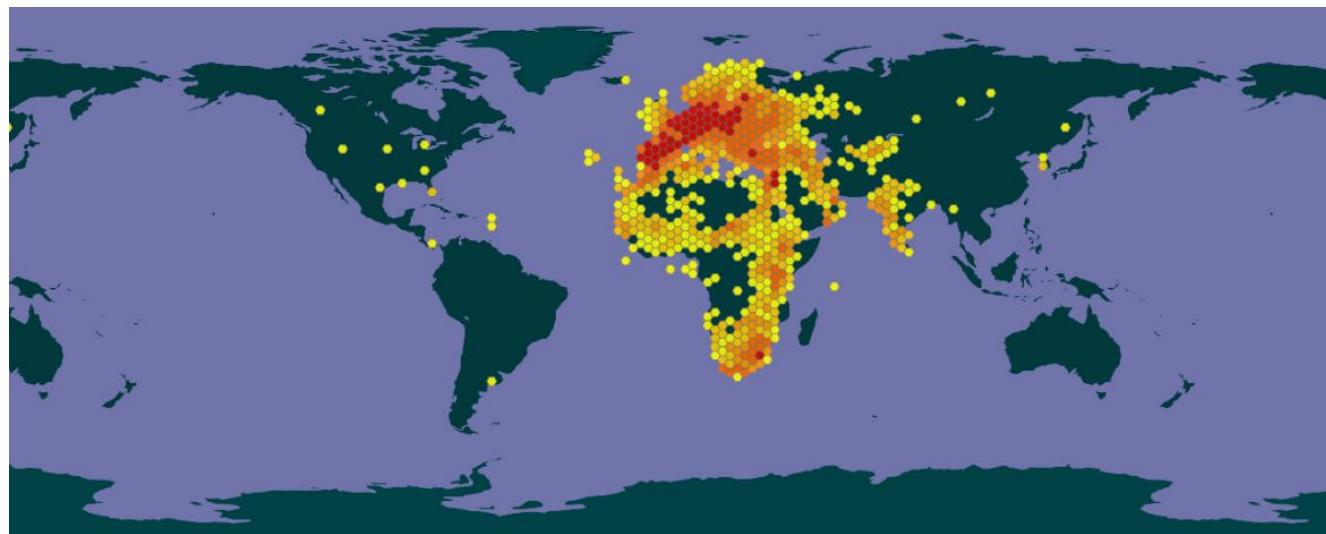


Figure 96: Distribution of *Ciconia ciconia*

#### 11.1.4 Nutrition

White Storks are opportunistic feeders with a diet that varies by habitat and season. They mainly feed on small vertebrates and invertebrates such as insects, frogs, toads, small mammals, birds, reptiles, and occasionally fish. They forage in open fields, wetlands, and grasslands, often following tractors to catch disturbed prey.

#### 11.1.5 Breeding



Breeding begins in early spring when the birds return from migration. White Storks are monogamous during a breeding season and often return to the same nest annually. Nests are large platforms made of sticks and lined with softer materials, placed on tall structures like trees, rooftops, chimneys, or purpose-built poles. Females lay 3–5 eggs, incubated for about 33–34 days. Both parents feed and protect the chicks, which fledge at around 58–64 days old.

### 11.1.6 Migrations

White Storks are long-distance migrants, with European populations flying thousands of kilometers to reach wintering grounds in Africa. They follow specific migration routes, avoiding large bodies of water by soaring on thermal currents. Some western populations have begun overwintering in southern Europe and North Africa due to urban feeding opportunities such as landfills.

The European White stork nest in central and eastern Europe, and is a long-distance migrant, wintering in Africa from tropical Sub-Saharan Africa to as far south as South Africa.

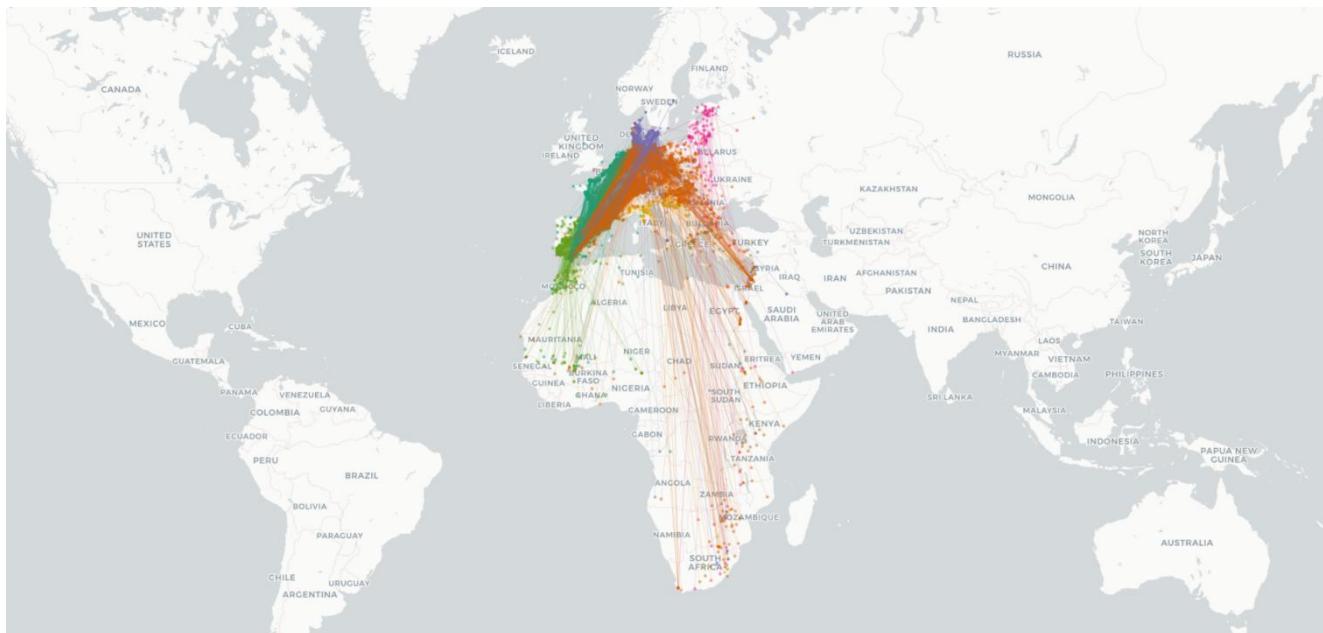


Figure 97: White stork migration map based on ring finds

### 11.1.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see 14.1 IUCN red list categories.

While populations suffered significant declines in the 20th century due to habitat loss, pesticide use (especially DDT), and changes in agricultural practices, conservation efforts have helped many groups recover. Nesting platforms, legal protection, and education campaigns have been key. The White Stork is listed as Least Concern by the IUCN but remains a conservation priority in some regions due to its ecological and cultural significance.

### 11.1.8 Cultural heritage

#### 11.1.8.1 Slovenian culture



In Slovenia, people believed that storks brought babies, protected them from snakes when they fell asleep in the forest, and that in autumn they turned into humans in the East. It is said that it carries its young on its back, teaches them to fly, and rescues them from danger if the building where it nests is threatened by disaster. That is why people consider the stork a lucky bird. Where it nests, lightning does not strike. They say that whoever sees the first stork in spring will become rich, so when children in Štajerska see storks flying, they sing: »Roda, roda, roda! Stork, stork, stork! Golden uncle without a beard, give us gold, gold!« (» Roda, roda, roda! Štrk, štrk, štrk! Zlati stric brez brk, daj nam zlata!«) (Erjavec, 1995).

In Slovenia white stork is also used as an image on EURO coin value of 1 cent. This image was reused from the previous Slovenian value of 20 SIT coin, which was used for its symbolism of birth and long life.



Figure 98: Slovenian euro coin for 1 cent

#### 11.1.8.2 Romanian culture

In Romania, the White Stork holds a special place in folklore and tradition. It is widely seen as a symbol of luck, renewal, and family, often associated with the arrival of spring. Seeing a stork on its nest is considered a good omen, and people celebrate its return each year. Romanian villagers commonly install nest platforms to encourage storks to breed nearby. The bird is also featured in children's stories, poems, and even in rural superstitions — for example, it's believed that a stork nesting on one's house brings prosperity and protection. Its strong connection to the land and seasonal cycles reflects the bird's deep-rooted presence in Romanian rural life.

#### 11.1.8.3 Italian culture

In Italian culture, the stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) is primarily seen as a symbol of birth and fertility, linked to the Roman goddess Juno, and as an emblem of virtue and healing in art and heraldry. After a period of extinction, its recent return, thanks to reintroduction projects, has also made it a symbol of success in nature conservation and ecosystem restoration.

##### **Birth and Fertility:**

This belief has its roots in Ancient Rome, where the stork was considered sacred and dedicated to Juno, goddess of fertility.

##### **Virtue and Healing:**

In art, it has been associated with the virtue of patience and the idea of Christ driving out evil. The stork carrying a branch of oregano in its beak represents healing and is featured in the coat of arms of the Faculty of Medicine, as mentioned by Lipu ODV.



## Heraldry:

The stork appears in the coats of arms of noble families and cities, such as Cerignola (Foggia) and the Abbey of Chiaravalle, thanks to its positive connotations.

### 11.1.8.4 Finnish culture

No cultural significance in Finland.

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White Stork illustration: Fabio Perco

White Stork distribution map: <https://www.gbif.org/species/2481912>

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## 12 Cockoos (Cuculiformes)

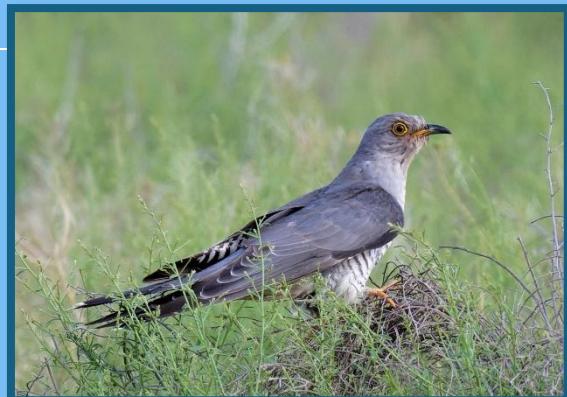
### 12.1 Common cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)

#### COMMON CUCKOO

*Cuculus canorus*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Cuculiformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Cuculidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Cuculus</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Cuculus canorus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Kukavica  
Cuc



Käki  
Cuculo

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 12.1.1 Descriptive notes

The cuckoo is a very long-tailed and narrow-winged, hawk-like bird. There are two colors of cuckoos: gray and brown. The pale belly is densely striped. The cuckoo is most easily identified by the male's repeated "cuc-kuo" song.



Figure 99: GBIF *Cuculus canorus* information sheet



Figure 100: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Cuculus canorus*

### 12.1.2 Sound

The call of the cuckoo is the most recognizable feature of this bird: it makes a "cuck-oo" sound, which has become a symbol of spring and the first sign that winter is ending. The call is mainly used by males to mark their territories and attract females. It is quite simple but very loud, and can be heard from far away. In folk tradition, the call of the cuckoo is often associated with predicting the future (e.g., "you heard the cuckoo, spring will come soon").

### 12.1.3 Habitat and distribution

The cuckoo thrives in all types of forests, even in mountain birch forests, and is mostly absent from open fells and the outer archipelago. The cuckoo is a parasite, the female always lays her eggs in the nest of a specific bird species, where the parents of the host species incubate and feed the cuckoo chick.

	<p>In Slovenia, the cuckoo is a widespread and common species, but in autumn it migrates to Africa.</p>
	<p>The cuckoo thrives in all types of forests, even in mountain birch forests, and is mainly absent from open fells and the outer archipelago. The cuckoo has become more abundant in Finland, but has declined sharply in many European countries. The reasons for the increase in Finland have not been studied, but perhaps the chicks survive better due to the warming climate.</p>
	<p>In Romania, it is found throughout the entire territory. It is a migratory species that breeds in Romania. It arrives from mid-April and departs towards its wintering grounds in August–September. The species appears in a wide variety of habitats, which increases the diversity of species that may be parasitized. During the breeding season, it is found in most types of forests, forest edges, regenerating woods, grasslands with isolated trees or tall shrubs, reed beds, orchards, gardens, as well as in human-modified areas. In Romania, the</p>



	population is estimated at 300,000 – 600,000 singing males, with the trend considered fluctuating.
	It is a migratory species widespread throughout Italy, both in the northern and central regions, also present in coastal areas and in Sicily and Sardinia, preferring habitats such as light woods, countryside with undergrowth, and wetlands with reeds, environments rich in host species for its parasitic reproduction. The species is in decline in Italy, with the main threats linked to habitat destruction, pesticide use and problems in its wintering areas in Africa.

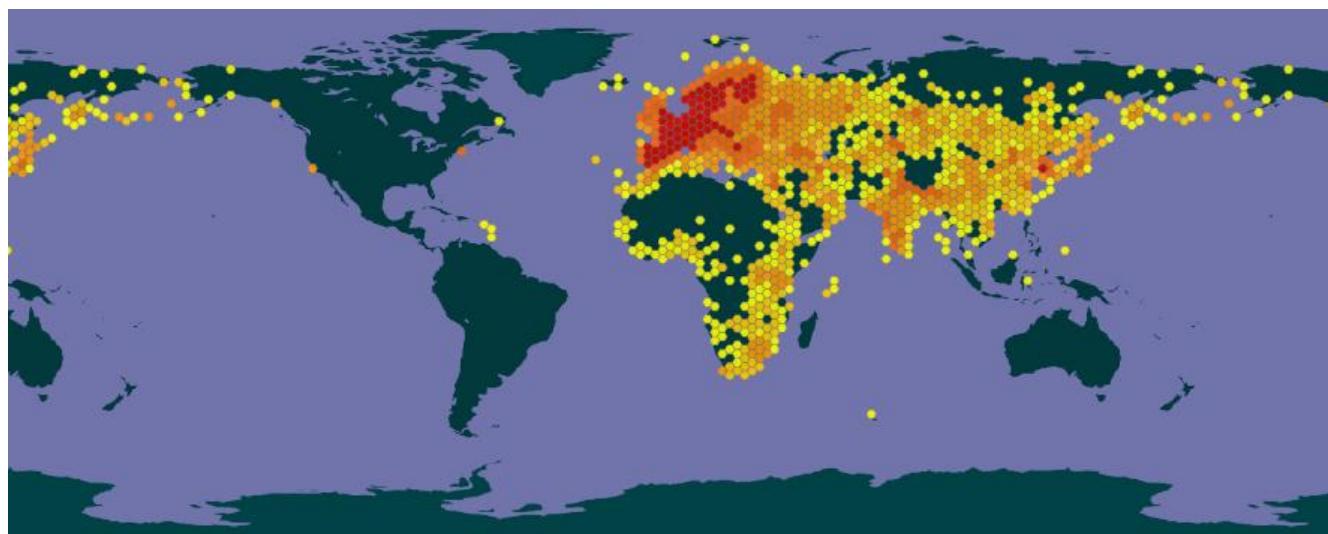


Figure 101: Distribution of *Cuculus canorus*

#### 12.1.4 Nutrition

The cuckoo is an omnivore; it feeds mainly on caterpillars, insects, and larvae, which it searches for in bushes, trees, and plants.

#### 12.1.5 Breeding

The cuckoo is the only nest parasite. The cuckoo is known to host several dozen different species, including the Common redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*), White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) and dunnock (*Prunella modularis*). The female cuckoo always lays her eggs in the nest of the same species in whose care she herself grew up. Although its eggs are larger than those of its hosts, the eggs in each type of host nest resemble the host's eggs. The adult mimics the sparrowhawk; since that species is a predator, the mimicry gives the female time to lay her eggs without being attacked.

So why do parents of another species feed the chicks of other species? The hatched cuckoo chick, guided by instinct, pushes the other eggs and chicks out of the nest. The cuckoo is the only chick in the nest, and its large red mouth begging for food tells the mothers: food here and now! The cuckoo chick eventually grows much larger than its foster parents, but the red mouth of the begging cuckoo tricks the parents into feeding the cuckoo until it is fully grown.



## 12.1.6 Migrations

The Common Cuckoo is a long-distance migrant, breeding across the Palearctic (Eurasia) and wintering in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Sahel. Both adults and juveniles make this remarkable journey, guided largely by instinct. Adults usually follow well-established, predictable routes, while first-time juveniles often take more variable paths. Migration takes place mainly at night, with birds capable of flying thousands of kilometers non-stop across major barriers such as the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert. Along the way, they pause at suitable stopover sites to rest and refuel before continuing toward their wintering grounds.

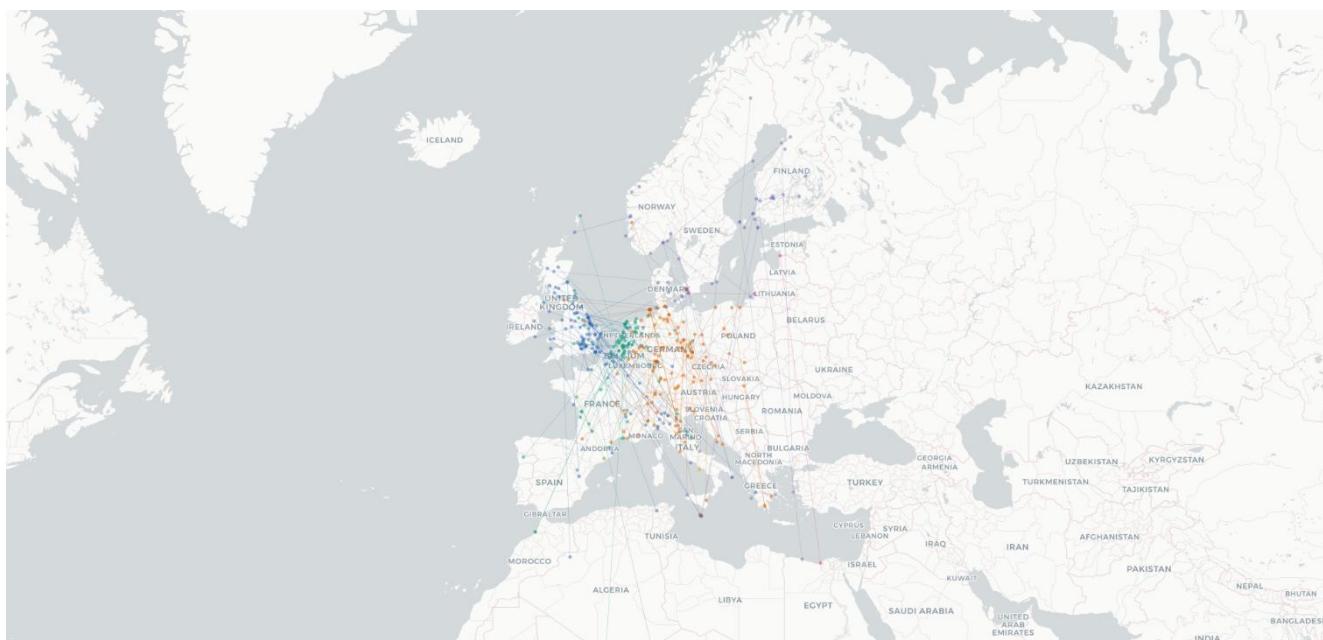


Figure 102: Common cuckoo migration map based on ring finds

## 12.1.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see [14.1 IUCN red list categories](#).

The cuckoo has increased in abundance in Finland, but has declined sharply in many European countries. Climate change has a significant impact on the occurrence of the cuckoo through its host species, and the timing of nesting is particularly important for the nest parasite. Now, due to global warming, many of the cuckoo's host species have brought forward their spring migration and the start of nesting. It is more difficult for the cuckoo to catch the early spring, as it is a long-distance migrant. The reasons for the increase in the cuckoo's abundance in Finland have not been studied; perhaps the chicks are surviving better due to warming.

In wintering areas and along migration routes, the cuckoo is threatened by habitat changes, such as the reduction of suitable feeding places due to changes in agriculture, for example, and the global loss of insects.

## 12.1.8 Cultural heritage

### 12.1.8.1 Slovenian culture



### The common cuckoo in proverbs and sayings

"Ako slišiš kukavico prvič peti na tešče, boš celo leto lačen"

"If you hear the cuckoo sing for the first time on an empty stomach, you will be hungry all year"

is a metaphor for being ready or in the right state at the start of something important.

"Če imaš pri sebi kakšen dinar, ko prvič slišiš kukavico peti, bo tisto leto zate finančno ugodno"

"Hear the cuckoo's first song with a coin in your hand and the year will bring you fortune"

meaning being mindful and ready when opportunities arise.

### The common cuckoo in songs

#### KUKAVICA (song by Janez Bitenc)

KU-KU, KU-KU, iz gozda odmeva,  
KU-KU, KU-KU, že kukavice glas.  
KU-KU, KU-KU nam ptička prepeva,  
KU-KU, KU-KU, pomlad je že tu.

Coo-coo, coo-coo, from the forest near,  
Coo-coo, coo-coo, the cuckoo we hear.  
Coo-coo, coo-coo, the little bird sings,  
Coo-coo, coo-coo, and spring it brings.

#### KUKAVICA LEPO KUKA (folk song)

Kukavica lepo kuka  
tam v zelenem travniku:  
prepelica prepeluje  
tam v zelenem travniku.

Ljubček moj kosico brusi  
tam v zelenem travniku:  
mrzla rosa, dobra kosa  
rada trav'co položi.

Suha burja, gorko sonce,  
rado se seno suši:  
mehka post'lja, lepa ljub'ca,  
kratke so pri nji noči.

The cuckoo sings so sweetly  
there in the green meadow;  
the quail is calling  
there in the green meadow.

My darling sharpens his scythe  
there in the green meadow;  
cold dew, a good scythe,  
he likes to cut the grass.

Dry bora wind, scorching sun,  
the hay likes to dry;  
a soft bed, my lovely dear,  
the nights are short with he

#### KUKAVICA (folk song) (written by Erjavec F.)

Ku-Ku! Kaj si vendar že tukaj?  
O kukaj, tica, le kukaj

Cuckoo! Why are you here already?  
Oh cuckoo, birdie, just cuckoo



po svoji stari navadi!  
Saj ni še prave pomladi,  
dokler ni tvojega čuti glasu.

as you always do!  
It's not really spring yet,  
until we hear your voice.

### Ku-Ku: A Symbol of Slovenian Radio History

Ku-Ku was the iconic interval signal of Radio Ljubljana. Despite its modest technical beginnings, the station immediately stood out with its distinctive cuckoo sound. Across Europe, most radio stations used musical snippets as their interval signals; in Vienna, for example, the ticking of a clock was common, and only one Italian station featured bird song. The Ljubljana cuckoo was created by Franc Kramar, the first professional radio technician, following an idea by engineer Marij Osana. It was a real taxidermy cuckoo, whose 'ku-ku' signaled the exact time, and its eyes lit up with two small built-in bulbs whenever it called. Radio Ljubljana began experimental broadcasts on September 1, 1928, and officially opened on October 28, the same year. Since then, the cuckoo has remained a recognizable symbol of Radio Slovenia.

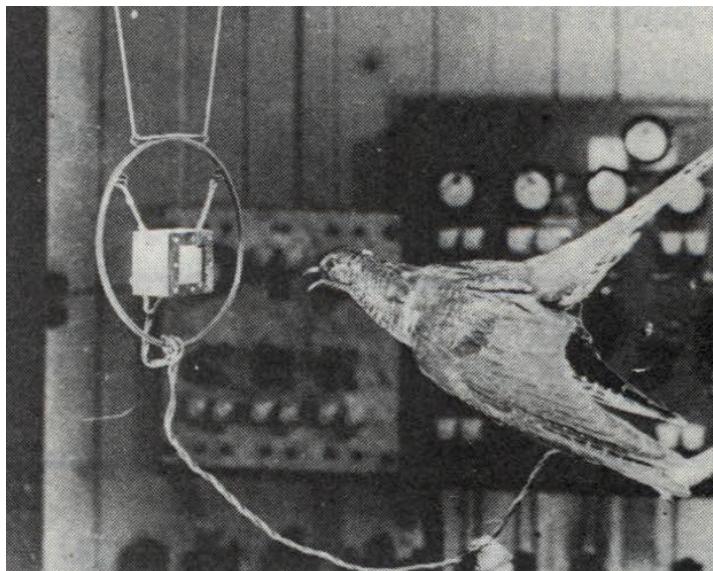


Figure 103: Ku-ku of Slovenian Radio

#### 12.1.8.2 Romanian culture

In Romanian folklore, the cuckoo is a bird with multiple meanings: a calendrical timekeeper marking spring (Buna vestire) and summer (Sânziene), a source of prophecies (counting the years of life or marriage), and a symbol of loneliness, longing, and the link between human life and nature. Its brood-parasitic behavior turned it into a legendary character, inspiring anthropomorphic legends and literary motifs.

Calendar and symbolic roles:

**Beginning of spring:** First song on March 25th (Buna Vestire, Ziua Cucuclui) marks start of the warm season.

**End of summer:** June 24th, (Sânziene, Amuțitul Cucuclui) the bird stops singing, chokes on a barley grain, and turns into a hawk, symbolizing the passage of time.

**Marriage and life predictions:** Number of calls predicts years to marriage.

**Luck rituals:** At the first song of the cuckoo you have to keep money in your pocket, dress up pretty and be happy.



**Symbolism:** Loneliness, longing, cycle of life, nonconformism, because his breeding habits.

The cuckoo's name is also preserved in Romanian ethnobotany (laptele cucului, ciuboțica-cucului, grâul-cucului, limba-cucului, mălaiul-cucului, mărgica-cucului, mărul cucului, măzărichea-cucului, mierea-cucului, porumbul-cucului, scaunul-cucului, stupitul-cucului, umbra-cucului)

It is considered sacred, and killing it is seen as a sin. "E păcat să-l omori, căci nu face niciun rău; îți seacă mâna, dacă l-ai omorât".

Its song inspired many proverbs, songs, and legends.

"De când s-a urzit pământul

De-atuncea ne bate vântul,

De-atuncea ne cântă cucul."

"Singur-cuc"

"A fi frate cu cucul".

"Cioara vrea să cânte ca un cuc, piticul vrea să pună mâna pe Lună."

"Oricât ar țipa, bufnița nu poate cânta cum cântă cucul."

"N-ai văzut din porc stup și din cioară cuc"

"Casa cucului"

"A umbla a flori de cuc"

"Ascultă cucul până îți cântă."

"Rău i-a cântat cucul."

"A-i cânta cucul în spate."

"A-i cânta cucul în casă."

"A aduce cuiva lapte de cuc."

"A avea mila cucului."

One legend says that the cuckoo abandoned his wife because of her infidelities and cursed her to call and lament for him with the arrival of spring until its end. On the day of the summer solstice, after Midsummer ("Sânziene"), the cuckoo falls silent because, according to the story, it chokes on a barley grain. This bird symbolizes both laziness and jealousy, and in certain regions, the cuckoo represents divinity.

Another version of the legend says that Cuckoo and his brother, Vartolomeu, were cursed by Satan. Thus, God transformed him into a bird, which will search for his brother – Cuckoo.

Frumos cântă cucu-n deal - Maria Ciobanu

Foiae verde maghiran,

Frumos cântă cucu-n deal,

La umbriță de tufan

Mândra-nșiră la mărgean

Și-mi înșiră câte-un bob

S-aibă-n dragoste noroc.



Cucul cântă la răsura  
 Și mândruța mi-l îngână,  
 Vântu-mi bate-ncetișor  
 De mândra m-apuc-un dor  
 Să mă duc să mi-o sărut  
 Și de dorul ei să uit.

De-al ei dor prieag mă duc  
 Să ascult și eu la cuc,  
 S-ascult cucul și mierlița  
 Și să-mi găsesc pe mândruța  
 Prin tufițe, pe sub coastă  
 Să mi-o iau la mine-acasă.

Canta cucu, bata-l vina - Grigore Lese

Cânta cucu bată-l vina  
 De răsună Bucovina  
 Cânta cucu bată-l vina  
 De răsună Bucovina  
 Cântă cucu-ntr-un brăduț  
 De răsună-n Cernăuți

Bucovină, plai cu flori  
 Unde-ți sunt ai tăi feciori?  
 Bucovină, plai cu flori  
 Unde-ți sunt ai tăi feciori?

Au fost duși în altă țară  
 Dar se-ntorc la primăvară  
 Au fost duși în altă țară  
 Dar se-ntorc la primăvară

Înapoi când or veni  
 Tot pe tine te-or iubi



Muntele cu creasta rară  
 Nu lăsați straja să piară  
 Muntele cu creasta rară  
 Nu lăsați straja să piară

Dacă pierde straja voastră  
 A pierit și țara noastră  
 Dacă pierde straja voastră  
 A pierit și țara noastră

Nicolae Sulac – Ce frumos mai cântă cucul  
 ce frumos mai cântă cucul.  
 Vara când e'n floare nucul.  
 Pe ziua și pe'nserat,  
 La mândră de măritat, la mândră de măritat, măi.  
 Numai eu nu pot cânta,  
 Că nu-s cuc – nu pot zbura, că nu-s cuc – nu pot zbura, măi.  
 Fă-mă Doamne un pui de cuc, măi.  
 În pădure să mă duc, măi.  
 În pădurea de salcâm  
 Să cânt seara lângă drum, să cânt seara lângă drum, măi.  
 Și să cânt în floare deasă,  
 Să scot mândrele din casă, să scot mândrele din casă.  
 Așa-i cucul – frumos cântă  
 Stau fetele și-l ascultă.  
 Ascult și eu cu mândra  
 Săruta-i-aș gurița, săruta-i-aș gurița, măi.  
 Că nici eu n-am să mă las  
 Să fac cucului necaz, să fac cucului necaz, măi.

#### 12.1.8.3 Italian culture

In Italian culture, *Cuculus canorus* (the cuckoo) is associated with the arrival of spring and the beginning of agricultural work. Its onomatopoeic song gives rise to its name and to the word “cucù,” which is also used to refer to a foolish or crazy person and appears in sayings such as “vecchio come il cuoco” (as old as the cuckoo). The cuckoo is known for brood parasitism, laying its eggs in other birds' nests, which has influenced its cultural representation as deceitful. Although associated with spring, the cuckoo's deceitful behavior has also made it a symbol of idleness, opportunism, and annoyance in popular culture.



Proverbs in Italian culture:

“Qualcuno volò sul nido del cuculo” (Someone flew on the cuckoo's nest): in the past, this was used to refer to someone who ended up in a mental hospital.

“Vecchio come il cuccio” (As old as the cuckoo): refers to people or things that are dated and outdated, probably due to the belief in the bird's longevity.

“Non voler a che fare con gli scemi” (Don't want anything to do with fools): a more specific saying, like “qua no se imbarca cuchi” (No fools allowed here), used to indicate an inability to accept fools.

#### 12.1.8.4 *Finnish culture*

The cuckoo was one of the most important omen birds in Finnish tradition. Its call was believed to predict many things. Unmarried girls counted the cuckoo's calls to find out how many years they would wait before marrying. The direction of its call could even hint at where a future spouse might be found. For older women, the cuckoo's voice foretold how many years of life they had left. Because of these beliefs, the cuckoo was often seen as a women's bird, though its call was carefully observed by everyone.

The cuckoo's song in early summer marked the progress of the growing season and was therefore very important. A late first call meant that summer was late. The first call was also thought to “bless” the forest, so cattle could be let into the forest to graze. If the cuckoo kept calling late into July, it meant a warm autumn and possibly a delayed spring.

The cuckoo's call could also bring luck—or misfortune—depending on the circumstances. Hearing the cuckoo nearby was considered a sign of good fortune. And if someone managed to creep to the base of the tree where the cuckoo was calling, all their wishes would come true.

On the other hand, the first call could ruin a person's summer if they had not eaten anything that morning. To avoid this, people often kept a small piece of food—called a “cuckoo bite,” such as a crust of bread—under their pillow or around their neck, so they could eat it as soon as they woke up. This custom shows how important the seasonal turning point was for the year ahead. Being hungry at that moment was thought to mean weakness for the whole summer.

Beliefs about the cuckoo did not end there. It was widely thought that the cuckoo turned into a hawk at the end of summer when its calling stopped. This idea may have come from its hawk-like appearance and flight, as well as its silence after the breeding season. The cuckoo was considered a sacred bird, and killing it before it changed into a “cuckoo hawk” was believed to bring death—or at least madness—to the killer.

#### **The bird of luck and happiness**

Of all the birds, the cuckoo brought the most luck. The cuckoo's call foretold many things. The cuckoo's song was closely monitored in the spring, which kept us in tune with the rhythm of the year and prepared us for the arrival of summer, the new growing season. The cuckoo's first song in spring was an important turning point of the year. The cuckoo's call inaugurated the forest and only then could the cattle be let out of the barn into the forest after winter.



Figure 104: Cuckoo calls and the forest fills with wandering cattle



Figure 105: When the cuckoos sang in unison, it was time to sow barley

The sound of a cuckoo singing nearby brought especially good luck. If you managed to sneak close to a tree where a cuckoo was currently singing, then all your wishes would come true. For old people, the cuckoo's call told them how many years they had left to live. Young women, on the other hand, calculated from the cuckoo's call how many years it would be before they could get married.

The cuckoo was a particularly women's bird. The direction of the cuckoo's call could be used to determine where a future spouse would come from. In Finnish folk poems, we find "three golden cuckoos", one of which sings of *love* *love*, the other of *happiness* *happiness*, the third of a *fiance* *fiance* (or *groom*?).

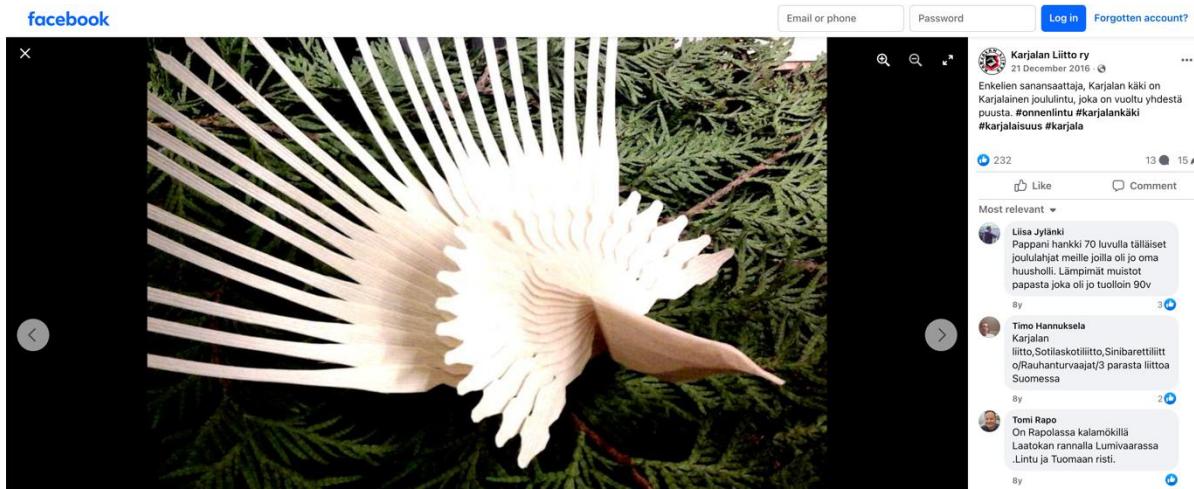


Figure 106: The lucky bird

The lucky bird and the messenger of angels, the Karelian cuckoo is a Karelian Christmas bird that has been hatched from a single tree. Traditional handmade gift and Christmas decoration.

#### Cuckoo in the Kalevala, national epic of Finland and Karelia

Väinämöinen (the main character in Kalevala), who at the beginning of time began to cultivate the land for the first time, left one tree as a singing tree for the cuckoo. The golden cuckoo settled in the tree to sing. This wise act brought happiness to all of humanity and a rich reward for Väinämöinen himself.

#### The cuckoo can also bring misfortune

Everyone heard the cuckoo's song in the summer, but few hit the cuckoo's nest. Finding the nest meant bad luck, the finder became blind or died. The cuckoo's shooter, on the other hand, was believed to go mad. If the cuckoo sang before the birch was budding, it was a bad sign. It was bad luck to hear a cuckoo's song in the spring before you had had time to eat anything.

#### The cuckoo in proverbs and sayings

"Ilona käki metässä, lapsi pieni lattialla".

"Joy is a cuckoo in the forest and a small child on the floor,"

"Kuin käki kukahteloo, lintu laihe lauleloo, niin syvän pakahteloo".

"Like a cuckoo hooting, a bird singing, my heart bursts."

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## 13 Swifts and Hummingbirds (Apodiformes)

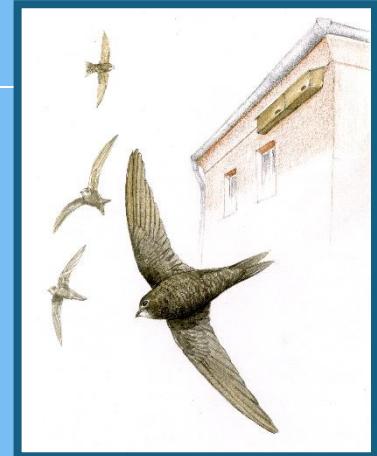
### 13.1 Common swift (*Apus apus*)

#### COMMON SWIFT

*Apus apus*

#### TAXONOMY

<b>KINGDOM</b>	Animalia
<b>PHYLUM</b>	Chordata
<b>CLASS</b>	Aves
<b>ORDER</b>	Apodiformes
<b>FAMILY</b>	Apodidae
<b>GENUS</b>	<i>Apus</i>
<b>SPECIES</b>	<i>Apus apus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)



#### NAMES ACROSS COUNTRIES



Hudourník

Drepnea neagră



Tervapääsky

Rondone comune

#### ESTIMATED SIZE



#### TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Buildings



Monuments



Landscapes



Archive materials



Books



Works of art



Artifacts

#### INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE



Folklore



Traditions



Language



Knowledge



### 13.1.1 Descriptive notes

The Common swift is a medium-sized (length around 17 cm) aerial bird, which is a superb flyer. Plain brown, with a white throat, with long curved wings and a forked tail, that can be put together to sharp point. No significant difference between the sexes. Sleeping, eating, bathing and even mating while flying. They are also the fastest birds in level flight.



Figure 107: GBIF *Apus apus* information sheet



Figure 108: iNaturalist fact sheet for *Apus apus*

### 13.1.2 Sound

Calls frequently, especially near the nest, giving a high-pitched wheezing scream.

### 13.1.3 Habitat and distribution

The species inhabits a wide range of habitats from arid steppe, desert, temperate, Mediterranean and boreal zones. Swifts have a broad breeding distribution, with higher densities in warm, dry areas such as East Anglia, and lower densities in northern and western regions.

	<p>In Slovenia, it is mainly widespread in the Primorska, Notranjska, and Štajerska regions.</p>
	<p>Swifts have benefited from urbanization. Most swifts, which previously nested in tree hollows in forests, now nest in cities or urban areas, in various holes in buildings. A small portion of the population still nests in old woodpecker holes, especially in northern Finland. The nesting population of swifts in Finland has declined by half over the last 40 years.</p>
	<p>In Romania, the species has a patchy distribution, linked to the presence of settlements and rocky areas, being scattered throughout the country. It is a migratory species that breeds in Romania. It usually arrives starting in April and leaves for its wintering grounds in August. The species occupies a wide range of habitats, including anthropogenic ones, being more dependent on nesting sites such as cliffs, gorges, quarries, clay ravines, hollow trees, and various buildings. It frequently breeds in settlements, nesting in tall buildings. In Romania, the population is estimated at 15,000 – 60,000 pairs. The population trend is considered unknown.</p>



It has a wide and migratory distribution in Italy, nesting as a summer species on the peninsula, in Sicily, and in Sardinia. It mainly inhabits urban environments, but can also nest on rocky walls and sea cliffs. European populations, including the Italian one, winter in sub-Saharan Africa, while the species is present in Europe and Western Asia during the breeding season.

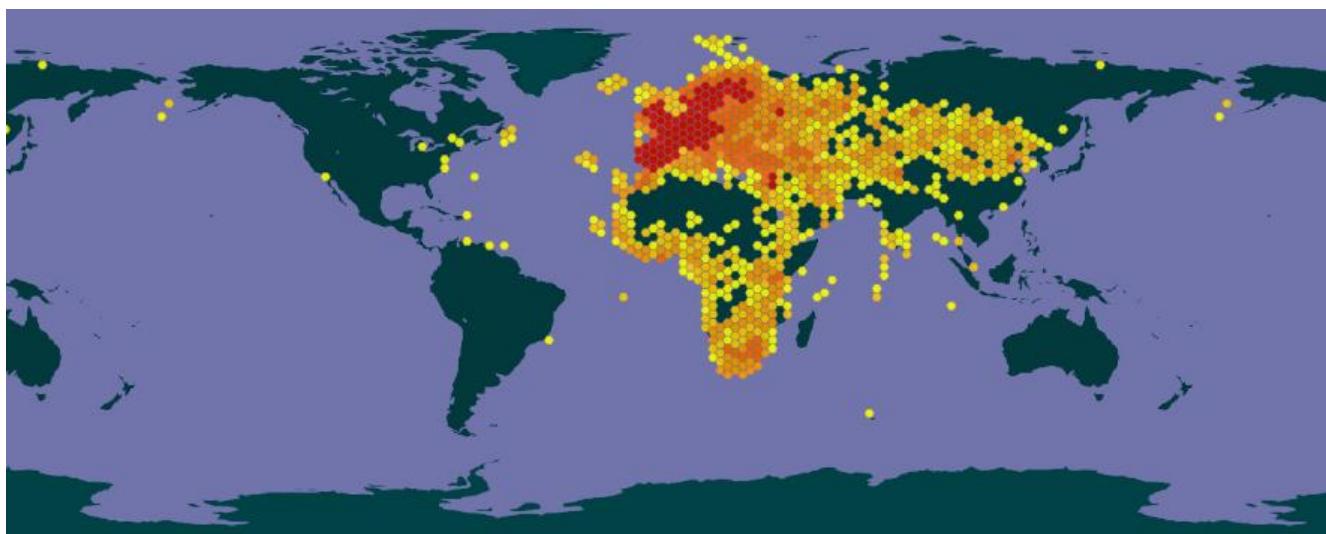


Figure 109: Distribution of *Apus apus*

#### 13.1.4 Nutrition

Mainly insects caught in open gape in flight.

#### 13.1.5 Breeding

Swifts mostly breed in towns and villages, and rarely in deserted wooded areas or cliffs. They pair for life, returning to the same site each year for a little nest renovation before laying and incubating their eggs. Only when breeding do they sleep and rest in the nest.

#### 13.1.6 Migrations

Migrants, in Europe summer visitors during May- August, they winter in South Africa. Spend most of their life flying, when migrating and in winter they sleep most nights at high altitudes in the air.

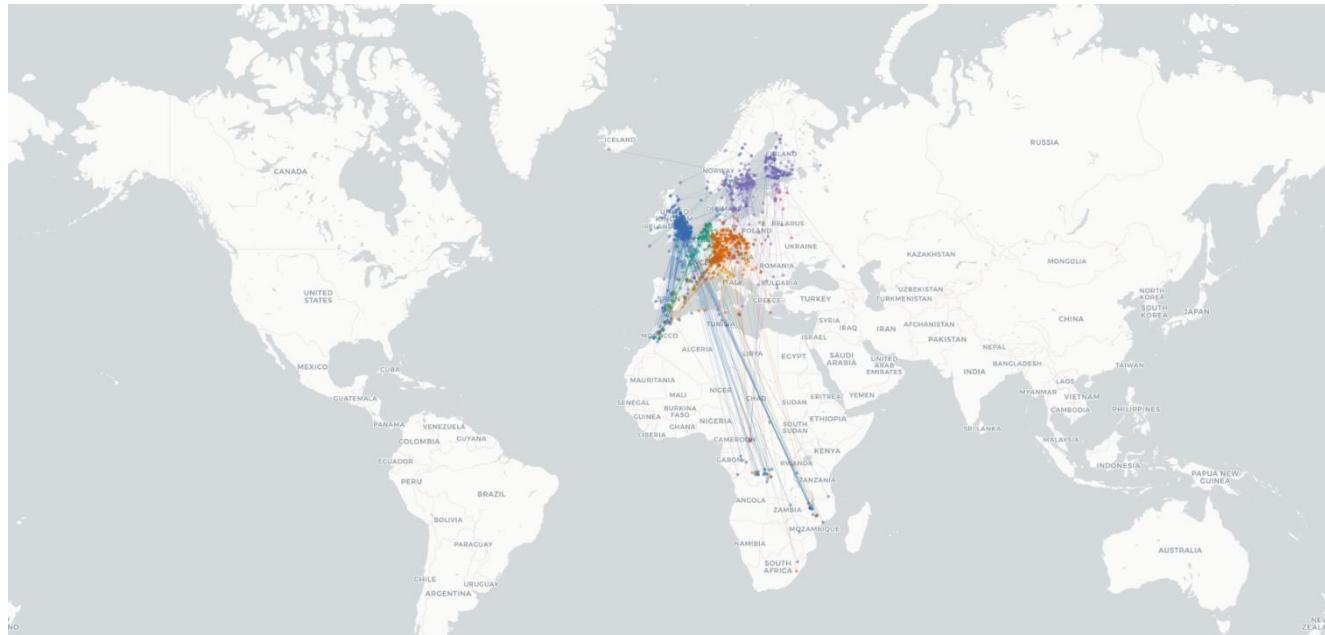


Figure 110: Common swift migration map based on ring finds

### 13.1.7 Status and conservation

IUCN assessment of this species is Least concern (LC) – see [14.1 IUCN red list categories](#).

The BirdLife Partnership is committed to monitoring and preserving swift populations and their habitats. The “Save Our Swifts” initiative focuses on preserving nesting sites in urban areas, promoting swift-friendly building practices, and raising awareness about the ecological importance of these birds. Some BirdLife Partners have developed solutions in a technical guidance document for architects, developers, and individuals, in Spanish (by our Spanish Partner SEO/BirdLife), and in French (by our French Partner LPO).

**In Finland** the swift is at risk of extinction and is classified as endangered (EN). The nesting population of swifts in Finland has halved over the last 40 years. Threats include changes to their habitat both in Finland and along their migration routes and wintering grounds. The global decline in insect populations is reducing the barn swallow's food supply, affecting its winter survival and breeding success.

### 13.1.8 Cultural heritage

#### 13.1.8.1 Slovenian culture

In Slovenia Swifts are seen as bringers of the spring, since they come back from Africa during April. In Slovenian literature commonly Swifts are described in their flights, one of the stories “Faries in Gozdnik” shows swifts as a protector of the forest from humans. In teather play “Jezernik moves Black Lake” there is drawn a parallel between the “migration” of the main character and the swifts during night. This character, Jezernik, wanted to protect his home for building of the church and disturbing the peace around, so he decided to move lake to another location.

The swift, a special type of swallow, appears in Slovenian folktales and songs as a sign of stormy weather. In a well-known Slovenian tale "Gospod Hudournik" (Fran S. Finžgar), the swift is described as a bird that lives in the mountains and hunts insects, but can sense when a storm is approaching. For this reason, it flies in flocks down



to the fields as a sign of bad weather. People therefore regarded it as a harbinger of storms and gave it the name *hudournik* (literally "torrent bird"). This reflects its symbolic role as a weather omen in folk tradition.

In addition, the swift also appears in children's songs and educational materials about birds in Slovenia, where it is part of the natural heritage and local knowledge of birdlife.

In proverbs and folklore, the swift is closely linked with approaching storms and sudden weather changes, serving as a warning of powerful and abrupt natural events.

#### 13.1.8.2 Romanian culture

Direct references in Romanian folklore are scarce, often confused with *Riparia riparia* or *Hirundo rustica*. Significance is traced in universal history.

- Antiquity: Herodotus and Aristotle described the species. Aristotle called them "Apous" or "Kypseloi," meaning "footless" in Greek. Pliny the Elder also mentioned them.
- Biblical references: Old Hebrew word "suus" referred to its curved shape.
- History and superstition: Swifts were hunted for food, feared, or seen as omens. In England, they were called "the devil bird".
- Art and science: Depicted by Hieronymus Bosch, Leonardo da Vinci, and Goya; Bosch captured them in noisy aerial flocks. Da Vinci studied their flight for his flying machines

#### 13.1.8.3 Italian culture

In Italian culture, *Apus apus* (common swift) is present as a symbol of migration and aerial life, often confused with swallows, but distinguished by its exclusive existence in flight. It is an element of urban fauna, nesting in city buildings and becoming the subject of citizen science conservation and monitoring projects, such as *Apus&Co Tracker*, due to habitat loss caused by urbanization.

The scientific name *Apus apus*, the common swift, is not directly associated with specific legends, but the term "Apú" refers to the spirits of sacred mountains in Andean cultures, such as the Incas, where they are believed to protect people and the land. Although the swift does not have its own mythology, its ability to sleep while flying and its Latin name ("without feet") may have linked it to mythological figures representing freedom and life in flight, or simply be a reference to its nature as a bird born to fly, as the name "Apus" suggests.

#### 13.1.8.4 Finnish culture

In Finland, the common swift is usually regarded as one of the swallow species, although it belongs to a different bird family and is not closely related to the swallow. Therefore, most traditions associated with swallows probably applied to common swifts as well.

In Finnish folklore the swallow was a sure sign of summer, a welcome guest and a bringer of good fortune, surrounded by many positive beliefs. It was considered a sacred bird, even a relative of humans, perhaps because of its narrow eyes and small beak. People believed this was why swallows preferred to live near human dwellings.

The arrival of swallows meant warm summer weather and the end of spring hunger. A swallow's nest was thought to bring happiness and prosperity to the household where it nested under the eaves. It was also believed to protect the home from lightning, fires, and other misfortunes. If a swallow abandoned its nest, it was taken as a sign that the family should move soon. Anyone who harmed a swallow or destroyed its nest was said to suffer illness and bad luck.

Despite these beliefs, parts of the swallow were sometimes used in love spells to make someone fall in love as deeply as a swallow loves its chicks. These spells, which were popular among young people, cost some swallows their lives. However, swallows were rarely used in folk medicine.



The swallow was admired for its amazing flying skills. Watching its graceful movements was a joy, but its flight was also used to predict the weather. Swallows flying low over water or fields signaled rain, while those soaring high after insects lifted by high pressure indicated clear skies.

### 13.1.9 Sources

#### 13.1.9.1 Suggested readings

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#### 13.1.9.3 References



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## 14 SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

### 14.1 IUCN red list categories

#### *Not evaluated* **NE**

A species is classified as Not Evaluated when it has not yet been assessed using the IUCN Red List criteria.

#### *Data deficient* **DD**

A species is classified as Data Deficient when there is not enough information about its population or distribution to assess its risk of extinction.

#### *Least concern* **LC**

A species is classified as Least concern when it has been evaluated and does not meet the criteria for any threatened category or Near Threatened. These species are usually widespread and abundant.

#### *Near threatened* **NT**

A species is classified as Near Threatened when it does not yet meet the criteria for Critically Endangered, Endangered, or Vulnerable, but is close to qualifying or is likely to qualify soon. These species are not considered “threatened” but require regular monitoring, as their status may worsen over time.

#### *Vulnerable* **VU**

A species is classified as Vulnerable when it faces a high risk of extinction in the wild. This may result from a population decline of 30–50%, a limited and shrinking geographic range, fewer than about 10,000 mature individuals, or scientific evidence showing at least a 10% chance of extinction within the next 100 years.

#### *Endangered* **EN**

A species is classified as Endangered when it faces a very high risk of extinction in the wild. This can be due to a large population decline (50–70%), a small and shrinking geographic range, fewer than a few thousand mature individuals, or scientific evidence showing at least a 20% chance of extinction within 20 years or five generations.

#### *Critically endangered* **CR**

A species is classified as Critically Endangered when it faces an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild. This can be due to a drastic population decline (often 80–90%), a very small or shrinking geographic range, a population of only a few hundred or fewer individuals, or scientific evidence showing at least a 50% chance of extinction within the next 10 years or three generations.

#### *Extinct in the wild* **EW**

A species is classified as Extinct in the Wild when it survives only in captivity, cultivation, or in populations outside its original range. It is also classified here if extensive surveys across its former habitats, carried out at suitable times and over a period matching its life cycle, fail to find any individuals.

#### *Extinct* **EX**

A species is considered extinct when there is no reasonable doubt that the last individual has died. It is presumed extinct if thorough surveys in its known or expected habitats, carried out at suitable times and across its historic range, fail to find any individuals. These surveys must cover a time frame appropriate to the species' life cycle.



### 14.1.1 Sources

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