

Continued decline of Red List species

Threatened species on the Red List are most frequently found in the Jura, the inner-Alpine valleys and the wetlands of the Central Plateau. Only very few threatened species still breed in areas of intensively cultivated farmland. Since 1993–1996, the species on the Red List have become rarer in most parts of Switzerland, highlighting the urgent need for additional, species-specific protection.

Red Lists assess a species' risk of extinction in a given region based on criteria defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)¹. They have proven an important tool in nature conservation and are published for Switzerland by the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN). The Red List of threatened breeding birds in Switzerland includes 78 species following its last revision in 2010^{RLCH}. 41 species are classified as «Vulnerable» (VU) and 21 as «Endangered» (EN), while nine species are considered «Critically Endangered» (CR). The Red List also includes seven former breeders – species that have not bred in Switzerland for more than 20 years (category «Regionally Extinct», RE). Birds in the categories «Near Threatened» (NT, 32 species) and «Least Concern» (LC, 89 species) are not considered Red List species.

In the 2010 revision, 12 species were removed from the 2001 Red List². Of these, Red-crested Pochard, Peregrine Falcon, Middle Spotted Woodpecker, Cirl Bunting and others show significant gains compared to 1993–1996. Some species that have remained on the Red List also exhibit positive trends, including White Stork, Bearded Vulture, Eurasian Scops-owl, Little Owl and Common Hoopoe. Across large areas, however, the negative trends dominate. Not surprisingly, therefore, ten new species had to be added to the Red List in 2010^{RLCH}. Woodchat Shrike and Eurasian Curlew, once widespread, disappeared completely as breeding species before

the 2013–2016 survey period. In the case of Grey Partridge, Common Snipe and Ortolan Bunting, only individual territories remain, and these species are expected to disappear from Switzerland in the foreseeable future.

On the Central Plateau, only wetlands still support several threatened species

Superimposing the distribution maps of all species on the 2010 Red List allows us to identify regional hotspots. Today, the Jura and the Alps still hold rather significant numbers of Red List species. In terms of their potential range, many more species should occur on the Central Plateau than in the mountains. In reality, however, only very few threatened species were found on the Central Plateau, where land is intensively cultivated. Notable exceptions are the few remaining larger wetlands like Les Grangettes VD, the southern shore of Lake Neuchâtel, parts of the Grosses Moos BE/FR, and the wetlands in the Reuss Valley in the Canton of Aargau, where a comparatively large number of Red List species still occur today. Smaller wetlands such as Chavornay VD, Wauwilermoos LU, Neeracherried ZH, Greifensee and Pfäffikersee, Kaltbrunner Riet SG or Bolle di Magadino TI also show up on the map with a somewhat higher number of threatened species.



Distribution in 2013–2016 of 77 species on the current Red List. The map combines all species maps.

Steep declines at low and medium altitudes

Combining the distribution change maps for all Red List species reveals a significant decline since 1993–1996. Species from both the 2010^{RLCH} and the 2001 version² of the Red List were included in this comparison. Significant losses even occurred on the Central Plateau, even though the number of Red List species recorded there in 1993–1996 was already very low. Substantial losses were also apparent in the Jura and the northern Pre-Alps, whereas Ticino and large parts of Grisons showed little change. Gains were only noted locally, for example in the Geneva area and the Ajoie JU, where populations of Little Owl, Middle Spotted Woodpecker and Common White-throat have increased. Moreover, Wood Warbler and Fieldfare are not declining in these areas, in contrast to most parts of Switzerland.

Many threatened species in wetlands and in farmland

Red List species breed in all types of habitats. Wetland birds and waterbirds are most strongly represented, with 36 species on the Red List. For most of these species, the breeding area was already quite small in 1993–1996, being largely restricted to the remaining wetlands. Among the more widespread species, only the Red-crested Pochard has increased significantly.

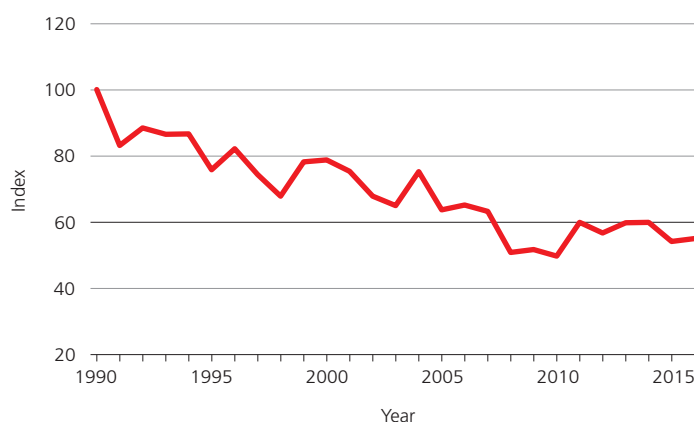
Farmland birds are the second largest group, with 19 species on the Red List. Of these, White Stork and Little Owl populations have shown substantial gains since 1993–1996. On the other hand, four species have suffered marked losses (Northern Lapwing, Whinchat, Fieldfare and Corn Bunting). Only nine woodland birds are on the Red List. Nevertheless, five of these exhibited substantial changes in population size. Only the Middle Spotted Woodpecker has shown an increase, while Hazel Grouse, Ring Ouzel, Wood Warbler and Willow Warbler have suffered losses, some of them substantial.

Urgent effort needed to protect threatened species

The Red Lists confirm that the situation of farmland and wetland birds is especially serious. The threatened species are in urgent

need of extra protection. Recovery measures must be species-specific, as each species has different needs and habitat requirements. On an encouraging note: many of the Red List species that have shown positive trends are species currently benefiting from recovery programmes, such as Little Owl, Common Hoopoe and Northern Lapwing.

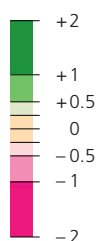
Simon Birrer



Following a prolonged decline that has continued unabated since 1990, the SBI® sub-index for species on the current Red List appears to have stabilised at a low value of 55 %.

¹ IUCN (2003); ² Keller et al. (2001a–c)

Number of species/km²



Distribution change since 1993–1996 of Red List species. The map combines the distribution change maps of 27 species; these are species that appear either on the 2010 or the 2001 Red List and for which we had sufficient data to model the occurrence probability for both atlas periods (most of the remaining 50 species are extremely rare).

Species

pages 102, 104, 128, 188, 210, 214, 215, 238, 244, 254, 272, 292, 306, 318, 400, 404, 426, 452, 454, 476, 548, 554, 556