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New project set to bring the Red List to a wider audience

WILD BIRDS

A RECENTLY LAUNCHED creative project aims to bring awareness of the UK's most at-risk birds, and also to secure additional funding to support important ongoing conservation research.

Red Sixty Seven, a new collaboration between two of Britain's wild bird charities, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and RSPB, as well as leading writers and artists, went live on January 16. It takes its name from the UK Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern, of which there are currently 67 species. All monies raised through *Red Sixty Seven* will be donated directly to Red-listed species' conservation projects run by both charities.

Artworks by 67 renowned wildlife artists have been pro-

duced for each of the 67 species, which will be sold to raise funds, and a book combining both artwork and supporting texts from 67 authors, including Chris Packham, will be published by the BTO on February 14.

Species featured range from dotterel to red-backed shrike and golden oriole. The last species usually appears on migration and can mainly be seen in May and June.

The project was the brainchild of Northumberland-based conservationist Kit Jewitt, who said: “The idea was simple; a book featuring the 67 Red-listed birds, each illustrated by a different artist with a personal story from a diverse collection of writers.

“All that remained was the small task of persuading 134 people to contribute, and to give their work for free. *Red*



Featured artwork: skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) by Rory McCann. The skylarks' UK population halved during the 1990s, and is still declining. The RSPB says in its preferred habitat of farmland, skylarks declined by 75 per cent between 1972 and 1996

Sixty Seven is the result; 67 love letters to our most vulnerable species, each beautifully illustrated by some of the best wildlife artists, showcasing a range of styles as varied as the birds in these pages.”

The BTO's Mike Toms commented that the artworks and texts provide “a unique opportunity to raise the profile of these birds and to engage new audiences with the work that is being done to conserve them.”

● To buy the *Red Sixty Seven* book (RRP £19.99, hardback,



Red Sixty Seven: a collection of words and art between 67 authors and 67 artists inspired by Britain's most vulnerable birds. The aim is to raise funds to support conservation work to help reverse the declines of the UK's most at-risk birds

160 pages) or other merchandise, such as T-shirts and badges, visit: www.british-trust-for-ornithology.myshopify.com



Mistle thrush: the artwork for this species has been created by Carry Akroyd, with accompanying text by actor and birdwatcher Samuel West

Programme on track to monitor scarce heron species

RESEARCH

TRACKERS FITTED TO six Endangered Malagasy pond herons (*Ardeola idae*) in 2019 are already transmitting information on the movements of some of the birds.

The tracking devices will improve knowledge of specific feeding areas and colony feeding habits as well as the size of the population's territory in the breeding season and where it goes once breeding is over.

The timid bird breeds only on four islands in the world: Madagascar, Aldabra,

Europa and Mayotte, with the last being the most important site after Madagascar, with 182 pairs in 2018. They build their nests in the tops of mangrove trees.

This island is French-administered territory where on the French Red List the bird is classed as Critically Endangered. Here, the species is threatened by human disturbance, loss and degradation of wetland (where it feeds and nests) and by poaching of chicks and eggs which, it is also believed, are predated by young rats.

The research is being car-



The Malagasy pond heron is happy among the treetops © Shutterstock.com/Jues01

ried out by Groupe d'Etudes et de Protection des Oiseaux de Mayotte, GEPOMAY, an association set up for the study and protection of birds on the island. It used a specialist team of bird ringers to help with the mission, including one researcher with experience of capturing wetland birds and fitting them with harnesses and trackers.

This year and next it plans to fit the lightweight (less

than 5g) harnessed units to nine more pond herons.

The rings are uniquely coded so that individual birds can be identified. Measurements such as weight, beak length and wing length were taken and then the birds released immediately.

The equipment weighs less than 3 per cent of the bird's weight and has a solar panel to recharge the GPS battery.



BIRDKEEPER AT LARGE

by Dennis Webster

AM SURE readers have been horrified by the extent of the fires in Australia over the past several months. The Australian fires are not unique; there have been many huge fires reported from around the world, notably in the USA. Add these to the many areas of flooding, and a not very happy picture emerges.

The Australian fires have been disastrous for the human population, many of whom have lost their homes and belongings in the rapidly moving fireballs. But there is almost certainly going to be a bigger effect on the flora and fauna of the area, although the extent of this will probably not be known for several years. Many birdkeepers have a great affinity with Australian birdlife; many of the species we keep, breed, show, and spend a great deal of our time caring for are of Australian origin, even if they can now be considered domesticated. It has often been said that there are more budgerigars, grassfinches, grass parakeets and zebra finches bred in captivity around the world than the entire population of these species living wild in their native land. So if it proves that some species have been wiped out by the devastation, could we not replace them with captive-bred stock?

It would be a mistake to include any mutation colours in stock released, or even birds carrying those mutations

Sadly, the answer is no. The first reason is that only birds of the original wild colour could be used; it would be a mistake to include any mutation colours in stock released, or even birds carrying those mutations. Secondly, domesticated birds are accustomed to having all their food and water supplied for them and they would have no idea of foraging for their own. Finally, the size and shape of the domesticated species has radically changed over the years, so that their outline is substantially different to the wild birds. It could perhaps be done starting with normally coloured aviary-bred pet-type birds, but it would take years and generations to make them suitable for release. Presumably the same sort of techniques currently used for the gradual release of primates and big cats would need to be used to prepare them for life in the wild.

I've long been convinced that one root cause of the frequency and magnitude of these fires in recent years is global warming. Speaking of global warming, it seems to me that few protestors have cited world human population growth as a major factor. Just in my lifetime, estimates are that the world population has risen from about 2.25 billion to 7.75 billion (Source: Worldometers.info). Advances in medical care has extended the lifespan of the elderly and reduced infant mortality very considerably in recent times, but my estimate of world population in 2050 is more than 10 billion, each of whom will be a consumer, wanting food, shelter, and above all, space. They will also all be carbon dioxide emitters. What will be left for the other species on this planet?

Dennis Webster is a panel judge for the Zebra Finch Society.

Birdkeeper at Large returns on February 26



An adult heron shows how it got its name © Shutterstock.com /Agami Photo Agency