

# No Chance of European Monitoring of Raptors and Owls?

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## 1. The Project

The Monitoring of Raptors and Owls in Europe Project was founded in 1988 in Germany at the Martin-Luther-University in Halle and has been carried out continuously since then. Any ornithologist who has investigated a fixed study plot over a period of at least 2 years for its breeding population of raptors and owls can participate. The project also allows studies of reproductive success to be undertaken. Results are entered into form sheets and are sent to the project office in Halle once a year. The magazine 'Annual Report of Raptors and Owls in Europe' is published as a form of feedback for the participants and the scientific community. Detailed descriptions on the Project's development have been published (Gedeon 1994, Stubbe *et al.* 1996, Mammen & Stubbe 2000).

The project aims to obtain comprehensive data on population development of all raptor and owl species in Europe. On one hand, the database provides the basis for protection programmes, and on the other, it demonstrates that changes in the populations of the commoner species can be indicators of environmental changes that remain otherwise undetected.

## 2. The Problem

Although the project comprises data from all over Europe on raptors and owls, after 13 years the main source and focus of the data still lie in Germany, where the project originated. Fig. 1 shows the spread of study plots in Europe. Fig. 2 shows the proportion of registered owl and raptor territories in Germany in comparison those in other countries. Therefore, comprehensive data on owl and raptor population development exists only for Germany and not for other countries, let alone Europe.

## 3. Proposed Solutions

There are a number of reasons why so few co-workers from other states are participating in the project (these reasons also apply in Germany, but to a lesser degree).

1. Not all ornithologists able to participate know about the project. Better publicity and advertising is therefore necessary, possibly in the form of appeals for collaboration placed in national ornithological magazines in different countries. The publication of the Project's results in English more often would certainly help. Multilingual leaflets would be another option.



Fig. 1. Location of study plots for the Monitoring of Raptors and Owls in Europe.

2. Some countries lack sufficiently knowledgeable ornithologists, a difficulty encountered often in European ornithological atlas and monitoring projects. An obvious medium-term solution is for national BirdLife Partners to recruit ornithologists from biology graduates and from literate or informed public, so that knowledge gained on projects could be passed on to others at a local level. Furthermore, ornithological societies should be encouraged to approach and cooperate with the national BirdLife partners.
3. Some ornithologists are reluctant to send their data abroad. This reluctance may stem from a lack of trust or of personal contacts, where they imagine that those who process their data will make

errors or will misinterpret the information. Furthermore, the lack of trust may lie in their uncertainty as to how copyright is handled in other countries. We should make it clear to all that our Project's Annual Report, in English and German, is sent free to all Project collaborators. The Report contains the addresses of all contributing collaborators, and readers can use a simple number key to discover whose data has been used. The copyright of course remains with the ornithologist who has collected the data. Although pro-active publicity would help diminish suspicion and mistrust, it needs to be augmented in many countries by organising a network of regional and national fieldwork coordinators who would also

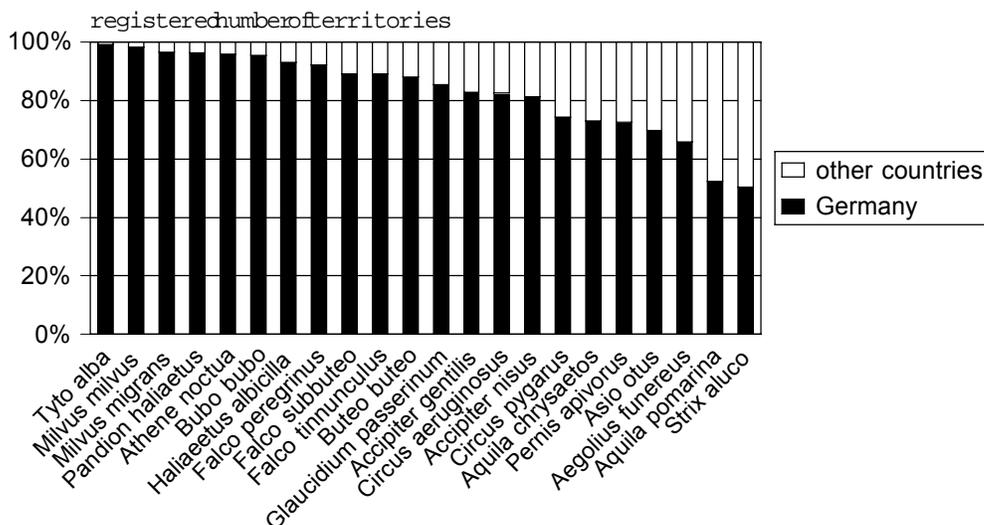


Fig. 2. Proportion of the registered number of territories for selected species in Germany in comparison to those in other states.

collect and collate the data for onwards transmission.

4. For some ornithologists, voluntary work is too expensive of time and money (*e.g.* fieldwork, office work and postage). Although the manhours spent on monitoring study plots cannot be subsidised in general, some form of monetary compensation for eastern European ornithologists would at least not leave them out of pocket for mailing costs, which can be disproportionate to their total income, and thus encourage their participation.
5. Some countries have their own comprehensive raptor and owl monitoring programmes, yet do not participate in the European monitoring programme. The German Project should encourage and invite these countries to participate in the European monitoring programme in a coordinated fashion. Once uniform evaluation methods had been agreed, such as using the same indices, carrying out bilateral or multilateral

comparisons would become feasible, a significant step towards a genuine pan-European raptor and owl monitoring programme. Ornithologists who already send their data to national co-ordination offices that co-operate with the Monitoring of Raptors and Owls in Europe Project would not have to submit their data twice.

6. There is a perception that the Monitoring of Raptors and Owls in Europe isn't a genuine monitoring programme. To challenge this perception, the results achieved by the Project should be disseminated widely and frequently in summary form, the recipients having the opportunity to question all aspects of the Project as feedback. Of course, the Project itself must be subject to reappraisal as an integral part of its development. The formal results from Project should be published in international scientific magazines on a regular basis.

The Monitoring of Raptors and Owls in

Europe Project could be a useful complement to the national common bird census monitoring programmes, because they scarcely consider raptors and owls at all due to these species' relatively low population density. We believe our Monitoring Project offers the opportunity to be representative of studies and conclusions obtained throughout Europe and can therefore become a genuine Euro-Monitoring project. The Project's infrastructure (*e.g.* database and methods of data evaluation) is a sound basis for it.

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