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Birds of the Swiss Alps – trends and challenges

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The “Alpine” biogeographical region in Europe consists of discrete mountain massifs, the Alps being one of the southern ones. The geographical situation is reflected in the composition of the bird species community, which consists of species with a more northern and others with a more southern overall range. The combined indicator “Swiss Bird index SBI® - Alpine habitats“ has shown a slight increase but the population and range trends of the species of high altitude vary. Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta* is the species showing the strongest population decline, and climate change models predict a massive shrinking of its range over the next decades.

Apart from climate change, mountain habitats in the Alps have changed dramatically in the last decades. Intensification of agricultural management on the one hand and land abandonment on the other reduce or alter the habitat of breeding birds. Results of the monitoring programmes indicate that some species occurring over a wide altitudinal range are shifting the centre of their distribution upwards although so far this is not very obvious. Some species show differing trends in relation to altitude, indicating effects both of land use and of climate.