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**Ecology and conservation of birds in upland and alpine habitats**

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**The uplands as an agri-environment for bird conservation: what can we learn from comparisons with lowland farming systems?**

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Europe's land surface is dominated by agriculture and this extends to upland and alpine habitats. Here, extensive grazing of domestic livestock is often the only agricultural use possible within bioclimatic constraints, coexisting with other land uses, including hunting, forestry, recreation, renewable energy generation and water storage.

The interaction between low-intensity agriculture and environmental variation in upland landscapes can support communities of exceptional biodiversity conservation importance set in the context of globally rare or unique cultural ecosystems: for example, the heather moorlands of the Atlantic fringe of Europe and the species-rich montane grasslands of the continental interior. Many High Nature Value farming systems are thus found in upland and alpine regions. This conservation importance extends to bird populations, and the UK, for example, supports an upland breeding bird assemblage that is globally unique in both species composition and the high breeding density of some species.

Since the early 1990s, greening of Europe's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has brought public funding of bird conservation management to agricultural landscapes through agri-environment schemes. In lowland farming systems these interventions have been the focus of intense scientific scrutiny, from the design of measures to their implementation and the evaluation of their cost-effectiveness in reversing population declines. Three previous BOU conferences have focused on these challenges. The link between agricultural policy change and bird conservation in upland and alpine habitats has, however, received much less attention. Here I review the evidence for agri-environment scheme and wider CAP impacts on bird populations in these landscapes from the perspectives of science, policy and conservation outcomes, explain similarities and differences in comparison with lowland agricultural systems, and ask whether the CAP can do more for upland bird conservation in the future.