

Dutch-Georgian Ornithological Foundation (DuGOF)

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DuGOF-initiatieve:

Bird conservation and preparation for EU application of Georgia

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1. **The European Union and Georgia** have maintained relations since 1996 in the [INOGATE](#) framework, and in 2006 a five-year "Action Plan" of rapprochement was implemented in the context of the [European Neighbourhood Policy](#) (ENP). A more comprehensive [Association Agreement](#) entered into force on 1 July 2016, providing Georgia with access to some sectors of the European Single Market, as well as visa-free travel to the EU. This also initiated a broad process of approximation of Georgian legislation with the EU acquis which has already significantly modernized the country's legal and administrative capacities. As of January 2021, Georgia is preparing to formally apply for EU membership in 2024.
2. The Birds & Habitats Directives (Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds and Council 92/43/EC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna) form the **cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy**. It is built around two pillars: the [Natura 2000 Network](#) of protected sites, and the strict system of species protection. The aim of the network is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.
3. The Birds and Habitats Directives are referred to in Annex XXVI (Environment) of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement whereby Georgia undertakes to gradually approximate its legislation to the above EU directives and other international instruments within the stipulated timeframes.



4. In addition to intended EU compliance, Georgia is also bound by the provisions of many other conventions, notably the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which stipulates that the country has to designate as protected area 17% and 10% of its terrestrial and marine areas respectively (presently 9,3 % and 0,7%) ([source wikipedia](#)).
5. As a lead up to formal EU application in 2024, it is in line with the Euro-Integration policy of Georgia to accomplish the process of approximation of its legislation prescribed by the Association Agreement.
6. Our assumption is that collaborations in ornithological activities between Georgia and The Netherlands, carried out by governmental and non-governmental organizations could benefit the approximation process under Annex XXVI of the Association agreement. Therefore it will significantly aid the preparations for EU application.

WWF Assessment on Current situation of biodiversity in the Caucasus

7. In an assessment of the state of biodiversity of the entire Caucasus region, WWF wrote in 2020 *“The biodiversity of the Caucasus is being lost at an alarming rate. Nearly half of the lands in the Ecoregion have been transformed by human activities. The plains, foothills, low-mountain and subalpine belts have been the most heavily impacted. Native floodplain vegetation has been badly affected: only two to three percent of original riparian forests remain in the South Caucasus. Most natural old growth forests have been fragmented into small sections, divided by areas of commercial forests or plantations, as well as agricultural and developed lands. A study in 2017 inspired by the Nature Needs Half Coalition found that nature is imperilled in more than half of the Caucasus. Only about a quarter of the region remains in reasonable condition and no more than 12% of the original vegetation, including forests, can be considered pristine. Nowadays the major proximate threats to biodiversity in the ecoregion are infrastructure development, unsustainable and illegal logging, overgrazing, poaching, overfishing, mining and climate change. These threats, which affect the Caucasus’ various ecosystems at different scales, lead to habitat degradation and fragmentation, decline of species populations and disruption of ecological processes – all amplifying the overall loss of biodiversity.”*
8. We assume that this WWF assessment of status and threats holds largely true for Georgia.

DuGOF Initiative

9. The Dutch Georgian Ornithological Foundation (DuGOF) was founded in 2015, and principally aims to ‘further and support ornithological research in Georgia’, and to ‘further and stimulate the protection and conservation of wild birds in Georgia’. In recent years some projects were executed as collaborations between the Georgian Government, Georgian Universities and NGOs, and DuGOF.



10. Topics which seem relevant in the context of the Birds and Habitats Directives include *inter alia*:
- a) Updated listing and detailed description of Important Bird Areas/Key Biodiversity Areas;
 - b) Updated listing and detailed description (including socio-economic factors) of all wetlands and rivers;
 - c) Investigation of bird species (and habitats) that could act as indicators or symbols for wider climate change related activities;
 - d) Analysis of challenges in achieving effective bird (and habitat) conservation, such as balancing economic and environmental priorities;
 - e) Investigations of globally threatened bird species (*and subspecies*) in Georgia so that Species Action Plans can be launched swiftly in due course;
 - f) Assessing the present formal protected area coverage and effectiveness in Georgia;
 - g) Assessing the feasibility of setting up a platform (e.g. like the ones set up by Observation International) in Georgia.
11. After an initial consultation with partners during 2020 and 2021, the DuGOF board has agreed that possibly its best contribution to birds and bird conservation in Georgia is to offer assistance in understanding some of the issues mentioned above under point 10.

Planning a first step

12. Early 2022 a delegation of DUGOF plans to visit Georgia and discuss the feasibility of the intended collaboration and to start drawing up a list of bird related activities or programmes which will support successful adhesion to the (EU) Birds and Habitats Directives in due course as prescribed in the Annex XXVI of the Association Agreement.