

Wetland and waterbird conservation take centre stage

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The United Nations decade on Biodiversity under the theme *Living in Harmony with Nature* should have culminated in 2020 with “a crunch year for the biodiversity and climate emergencies”. Instead, the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity reported that year that none of the 20 Aichi Biodiversity targets from the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 had been achieved, although six were reported to have been partially achieved. At the beginning of that same year, when Lisbon celebrated its status as European Green Capital, the Portuguese environmental authority issued a favourable license for the location of the new Lisbon airport in a peninsula at the heart of the Tagus estuary, the largest wetland in the country, holding the highest national concentrations of migratory waterbirds using the East Atlantic Flyway.

In a letter published in *Science*, we made a plea for the conservation of habitats and biodiversity in the most important Portuguese wetland for birds. The issuing of a favourable environmental license for the construction of a new international airport in the Tagus estuary, and despite imposing conditions, is clearly at odds with current national and international sustainability and conservation objectives, as outlined by the National Strategy for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity, the European Green Deal and the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. More recently, together with other researchers we argued that the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought global aviation to a halt, could serve as an invaluable opportunity to reassess mobility and to properly evaluate the need for new infrastructure, in order to better align future development with biodiversity and climate targets. Threatening protected areas with infrastructures that impact the natural environment well beyond its physical location, will further limit our capacity to reverse biodiversity declines, a global target that we are currently and very dramatically failing to achieve.

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FIGURE 1

Flock of thousands of black-tailed godwit that use the Tagus estuary to refuel on their migratory journeys between Africa and the breeding areas at northern latitudes.

Limosa limosa flock by Verónica Méndez Aragón.

