
Argentina: Monoculture tree plantations impact on grassland bird populations

In Argentina, the invasion of tree monocultures is destroying the country's grassland-related biodiversity. Subsidised by the government with backing from the World Bank, plantations are expanding in the eastern Provinces of Misiones, Corrientes and Entre Rios, while significant areas are also being planted in the Provinces of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Cuyo, Chaco and Patagonia. According to unofficial figures, the plantation area in Argentina has increased five fold from 1995 to 2000, and continues growing. The Argentinian authorities are keeping in line with neighbouring Chile and Uruguay, ignoring the social and environmental impacts that this plantation model is generating in those countries.

A study recently published by the ornithological association "Aves Argentinas" (Argentinian Birds), reveals that "the increase of plantations promoted through State subsidies has provoked a reduction in the populations of endangered bird species in the eco-region Los Campos, located in the northeast of the country". Many crucial areas for the conservation of bird species are being converted to large-scale pine and eucalyptus monocultures, which constitute a uniform and food-poor habitat for birds. Some of the grassland habitats of endemic bird species in the Argentinian Mesopotamia (a region located between the Paraná and Uruguay rivers), are disappearing. The area of Los Campos is dominated by subtropical herbaceous vegetation, transitional between the savannah of the Chaco, the grasslands of the Pampa and the Atlantic Forest. It is a biodiversity rich environment where grasses, subtropical forests, riverine forest and wetlands coexist. It is the richest area in the country concerning the number of grassland bird species, of which more than ten are considered in danger of extinction at the global level, for example the ochre-breasted pipit (*Anthus nattereri*), the saffron-cowled blackbird (*Xanthopsar flavus*), four species of seadeaters (*Sporophila* sp.) and the strange-tailed tyrant (*Alectrurus risora*).

The survey carried out in the area reveals that the destruction of the grassland natural habitats in the area of Los Campos and their substitution by eucalyptus and pine plantations has led to the loss of bird populations. Other practices related to afforestation --like the elimination of wetlands and the use of pesticides-- are resulting in further impacts to local bird populations. The study thus proves that large-scale tree plantations in grassland ecosystems have similar negative impacts on biodiversity as those implemented in forest areas, and that the larger the scale the more widespread are the impacts.

Article based on information from: Carlos U. Leoni, 8/4/2001