

the Mediterranean have also fallen by 99.99 per cent compared with previous numbers.

For the rest of the top 20 predators, records were not comprehensive enough to plot a trend, though declines were evident. That may be because their decline began even earlier, when records were even more sparse, the researchers believe.

"This study will hopefully contribute to a greater threat status

for hammerheads and blue sharks, and other assessments in the Mediterranean," he said.

Conservationists have long campaigned for better protection for sharks and rays, which have not traditionally been considered by organisations that regulate fisheries.

But rapidly developing economies in Asia are boosting demand for shark fins as a culinary delicacy, putting sharks increasingly within fishermen's

sights. A recent report from Australia found that shark fins reached a price 30 to 40 times by weight compared with the rest of the fish, making them a lucrative target.

The new Mediterranean study highlights the increasing human pressure on marine species. "In addition to large predatory sharks, cetaceans, pinnipeds, turtles and large bony fishes have declined similarly," the authors write.

## Prize recognition

Conservation biologists have a tough time getting projects under way even in regions where there is considerable public support. So winning over locals where there is little conservation awareness is doubly challenging. And then to be recognised for their efforts by a key environmental prize is a major achievement. So the announcement of the Whitley Gold Award to Cagan Sekercioglu for his work at Kuyucuk Lake, in the north-eastern Kars province of Turkey, is therefore particularly welcome. The lake is a haven for birds, supporting up to 30,000 from over 160 species. It is also vital for local people who rely on it to raise the livestock, crops and fuel that help them to survive severely cold winters. It was with all these needs in mind that Sekercioglu began the Kars Biodiversity Project.

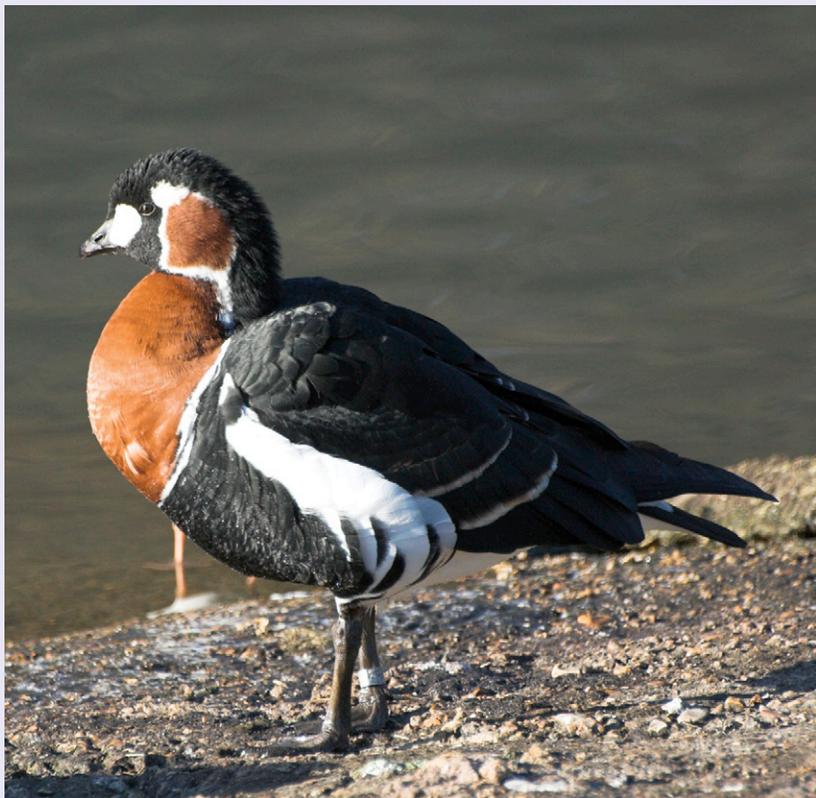
Using an approach that is new in Turkey, he and a local NGO are helping local people to see how good stewardship will raise their incomes, safeguard the lake and its species, and make the area attractive to birdwatchers and eco-tourists. Sekercioglu, a graduate of Harvard and Stanford universities who turned down a financial career to concentrate on conservation projects in his native Turkey, particularly impressed the prize judges for his leadership of the project. Progress is already evident and the community is backing efforts to win greater protection for the region, including a designation under Ramsar, the international programme to conserve wetland habitats.

Sharing the first prize was Rodrigo Huckle-Gaete from Chile who had identified a previously unknown feeding and breeding ground for the blue whale near the Corcovado Gulf in southern Chile. He is now leading a project to increase the protection of the region from pollution, invasive species, over-fishing and increased shipping. He is hoping to create a marine protection area in the region and to expand this approach to other marine regions of Chile, Latin America and Antarctica. The judges were impressed with how

he had brought together fishermen, government and industry to consider his plans.

The Whitley awards have been running for 15 years and are funded by a number of private individuals and other organisations and presented in London. Sekercioglu and Huckle-Gaete will each receive £60,000 of project funding plus long-term support and the opportunity to bid for further funds from the Whitley Fund for Nature. ([www.whitleyaward.org](http://www.whitleyaward.org))

Nigel Williams



**Brighter ahead:** The red-breasted goose is one of the species benefitting from a new Turkish wetland conservation programme. (Photo: Alamy.)