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# Turkish ornithologist makes National Geographic's top explorers list

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Ornithologist Çağan Hakkı Şekercioğlu, an assistant professor in the biology department at the University of Utah in the United States, was included among the year's 14 newest explorers, the Anatolia news agency reported.

"By the end of this century, 25 percent of all bird species may be extinct. 'That is 2,500 unique species,' Şekercioğlu warns. Many pressures that will ultimately affect other animals, and even people, are happening to birds first. They are, quite literally, the canaries in the coal mine," National Geographic wrote in its entry on the Turkish scientist.

"Şekercioğlu not only documents the trend, but also works to reverse it by integrating his work as a highly cited scientist, director of an award-winning grassroots conservation organization and accomplished wildlife photographer," the magazine said.

"He charts and analyzes the causes and consequences of vanishing bird populations via projects in biodiversity hot spots such as Costa Rica, Turkey, Ethiopia, Nepal, and Tanzania," National Geographic wrote. "Şekercioğlu's rare ability to combine world-class science with local conservation efforts gives communities new reasons to protect threatened bird habitats."

Şekercioğlu meticulously gathers data from fieldwork and scientific literature, and then combines it with global-warming and habitat-loss scenarios to estimate bird extinctions.

He monitors birds in Costa Rica's forest fragments and agricultural areas to document the effects of habitat loss and land use. In one of the longest tropical bird-banding and radio-tracking projects ever, more than 50,000 birds – from more than 250 different species – have been captured and banded at stations he has established. Şekercioğlu's study shows some populations shrinking fast, especially those of insectivorous birds.

"I don't see conservation as people versus nature, I see it as a collaboration," Şekercioğlu was quoted as saying on the National Geographic website.

"The whole time I was growing up, I loved collecting animals and wouldn't stop bringing home insects, hedgehogs and lizards," he said. "My mother thought I was absolutely nuts and took me to a child psychiatrist."

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