



natura

EUROPEAN COMMISSION DG XI's NATURE NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

DGXI's new Director General - Mr Jim Currie - presents his views on Natura 2000

AS I TAKE UP MY FUNCTIONS as Director General of DG XI, I am struck by how all encompassing Europe's Environmental Policy really is, touching as it does all aspects of people's lives from their jobs to their health and well-being. This is also true of measures to protect our natural environment where important decisions need to be made about how we use our land.

As you will see from the contents of this issue, Natura 2000 is now at a

critical junction. After some initial delays, the national lists of sites are finally coming in and discussions can begin on a biogeographic level to select those that will ultimately be part of the European network. For those involved in the process so far, the going has sometimes been tough. They face opposition from citizens, interest groups and colleagues in the public administrations. Often

the debate is skewed by inaccurate information.

I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise again that Natura 2000, and the Habitats Directive on which it is based, is designed to be a pragmatic instrument. In no way does it prohibit, a priori, all human use of land or resources within the sites proposed. Nor does the Directive require them to

have a particular legal protection status. What is necessary however is that the favourable conservation status of the habitats and species is maintained and ideally, improved.

How this is done in practice is up to the Member States. This *can* be through legal protection, but it can just as much be through land use planning, management agreements or covenants. Whilst each case will be different the approach should however be the same and should be based on consultation and dialogue. This is not to say that some difficult choices will not have to be made but these will have to be discussed on a case by case basis in dialogue with the parties concerned.

Natura 2000 also has certain social and economic benefits to offer. In a recent Commission communication on employment and the environment, nature conservation was identified as one of the key areas for employment potential within the agricultural sector. Also the tourism and leisure industries – among the fastest-growing sectors in the EU economies – are known to be labour-intensive. Nature is an important, even essential, capital asset on which parts of these activities are built. Natura 2000 will help to nurture this capital.

So whilst there may still be a number of tough debates and decisions to be made before the Natura 2000 network is established let us not lose sight of some of its potential gains too. I am impressed by the work that has been done up to now on Natura 2000. You can be assured that I will maintain DG XI's commitment to this important initiative in order to bring it to fruition.



The NATURA 2000 Newsletter is produced by the Nature Conservation Unit of the Environment Directorate General (DG XI.D.2) of the European Commission. It provides regular updates on the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives and the establishment of the NATURA 2000 Network.

Director General of DG XI

IN FOCUS

NATURA 2000: dispelling some of the myths

As the process for selecting sites to be included in the Natura 2000 network gathers pace, so are the discussions surrounding the practical consequences of this multiplying. Public consultation is part of the Natura 2000 process, and a principal that is enshrined in the Habitats Directive. Yet, for these discussions to meet their objective, it is vital that they be conducted in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and trust.

It would seem, however, that a number of misconceptions about the implementation of the Directive has developed over the years and that this is not only confusing the issue but also creating unwarranted concerns amongst certain interest groups. This article addresses some of the most commonly heard remarks and concerns in the hope that this will allay certain fears and promote a better understanding of the ultimate objectives of Natura 2000.

“The Habitats Directive is a Community initiative that was concocted in secret by Brussels technocrats”

Ministers of the Member States unanimously adopted the Habitats Directive – which provides for the establishment of the Natura 2000 Network – in May 1992 after five years of debate in the Council and the European Parliament. Many interest groups communicated their position to both the Member States and to Brussels during that period and their observations were taken into account.

“The European Commission decides the sites to be included in Natura 2000”

The responsibility for proposing sites within Natura 2000 lies first and foremost with the Member States.

The Habitats Directive defines three stages in the establishment of the Natura 2000 network:

1. each Member State proposes a list of sites for their country;

2. on the basis of these national lists, the Commission selects, in agreement with each Member State, a European list of Sites of Community Importance (SCI);
3. it is then the Member States who must designate them as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) by the year 2004.

The Birds Directive, an earlier piece of legislation, has only one stage. It is the Member States who designate sites directly as Special Protection Areas under Natura 2000.

“Natura 2000 sites will all become nature reserves”

If a site is in the Natura 2000 Network, it is because it is of EU importance for the species or habitat types listed in the Habitats or Birds Directive. In many cases, these species or habitats will already be in a favourable conservation state thanks to existing human activities. All that is needed is for this to be maintained. Nominating a site as SCI does not therefore *a priori* imply that the activities underway within the site will have to change or stop.

This principal is also reflected in the Directive. Member States have a choice of mechanisms to use to manage a site, they *can* be statutory (e.g. making a nature reserve) but do not *have* to be. They could just as well be done contractually (e.g. signing a management agreement with the land owner) or administratively (providing the necessary funds to manage the site). Several Member States are already proceeding along these lines and it is probable that the administrative and contractual measures will be applied to the majority of areas in Natura 2000.

“We will have to stop all our activities within a site for the sake of preserving nature”

There will, of course, be occasions where decisions will have to be made about restricting or stopping certain activities that are a significant threat to the species or habitat types for which the site is being proposed as a Natura 2000. But these need to be addressed on a case by case basis.

Maintaining species or habitats in a good conservation state is not necessarily incompatible with human activities. This even applies to well managed hunting. In 1996 Mme Bjerregaard, European Commissioner for the Environment wrote ‘*I do not consider that hunting within Special Protection Areas should be generally or automatically prohibited*’. This consideration refers to protection areas for birds but it applies equally

Ecological rice cultivation in the Delta del Ebro SPA, Spain. Photo: J. Laviña





Sale of ecological products from nature sites are increasingly popular. Photo: H.W. Silvester

to the majority of other species and habitats for which Natura 2000 is being set up.

In fact, many of the natural areas are highly dependant upon certain human activities for their survival (e.g. agriculture). Some of these sites are already being managed in the spirit of Natura 2000. Their inclusion in the Natura 2000 network should not only provide an opportunity to valorise these activities but also to ensure that they will continue well into the future.

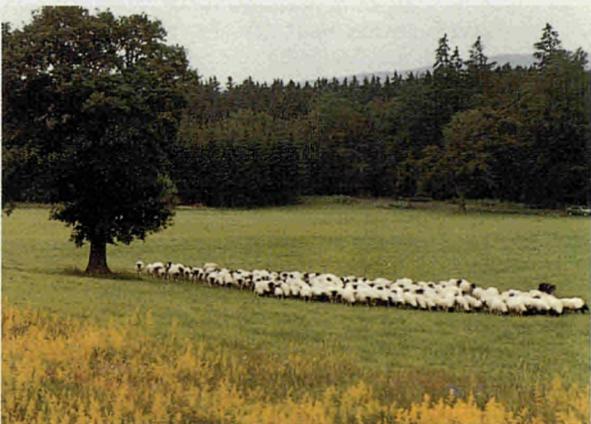
Finally, nature conservation can also provide additional opportunities for human use activities (environmental tourism, pursuit of leisure activities, labelling of natural produce etc). The Commission's recent communication on Environment and Employment identified conservation of high-value natural areas and sustainable forestry as being two particularly promising areas for job creation.

“Brussels will dictate to us what can or cannot be done in each site”

The Habitats Directive, and the Natura 2000 network, are based on the principle of subsidiarity. It is up to the Member States to decide how best to conserve the sites that are identified as being of Community importance and they have until 2004 to do so.

Although not an obligation, management plans are identified in the Directive as a useful tool in

Many Natura 2000 sites are dependant on agricultural activities. Photo: Helene Kainzner



determining what needs to be done to maintain or restore a site in a favourable conservation state. These plans are site specific and provide a vehicle for consultation with local interest groups, thereby ensuring that the fate of a Natura 2000 site can be decided on together and in a spirit of cooperation and co-management. In fact, discussions specifically about management plans often help the different interest groups to find an area of common ground between them.

“Once a site is included in Natura 2000 it becomes untouchable as regards future developments”

The Directive does not *a priori* prevent any new activities or developments within a Natura 2000 site from taking place. Article 6 does however require that new plans or programmes that are likely to have a significant effect undergo an appropriate impact assessment before being implemented. If it turns out that a proposed activity is likely to cause significant damage to a site and all possible alternatives have been exhausted, it may still go ahead but only if it is of overriding public interest and if measures are taken elsewhere to compensate for the loss of the species or habitats affected.

“It is the inhabitants of the Natura 2000 sites that will have to support the costs of this protection”

It is the Member States' and Commission's duty to ensure that the costs of Natura 2000 are shared by all. That is why the Member States are asked, at the time of submitting their national list of sites, to evaluate the cost of managing those areas hosting priority species or habitat types and to communicate this to the Commission. The Commission will then be required to co-finance these costs.

There are a number of existing Community funds that may be used for this process (e.g. agri-environment measures, structural funds, LIFE etc ...). These are currently being re-assessed to ensure that they are available to assist in the maintenance of the Natura 2000 Network.

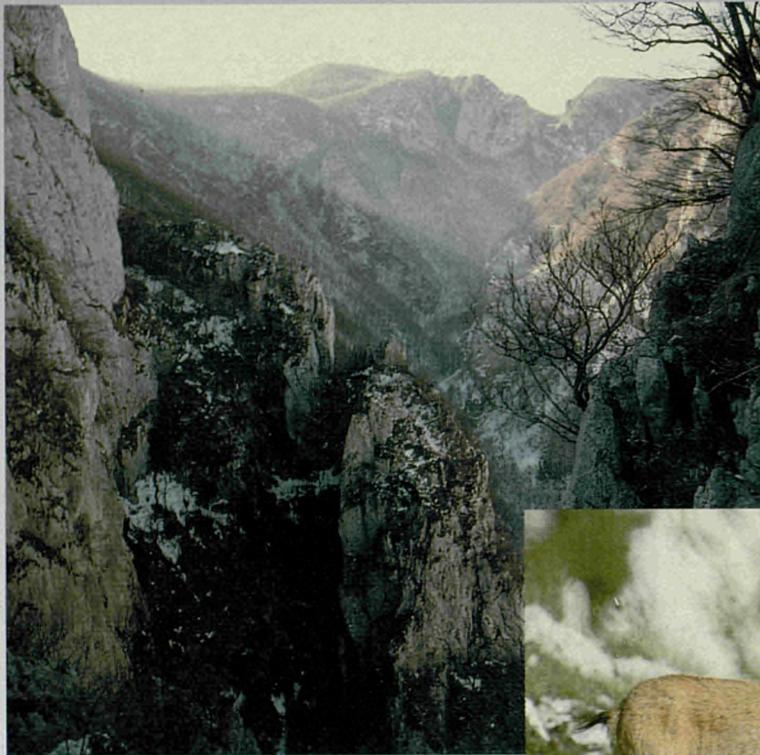
“There is a general lack of transparency on Natura 2000”

Every effort is made to ensure that the European Commission's activities as regards the establishment of Natura 2000 are as transparent as possible, that is why this newsletter, which now has a circulation of 14,000, is produced three times a year and is made available to all those who are interested in following this process.

The next 'in focus' article for this Newsletter will describe the activities currently underway within the biogeographical regional seminars to determine the list of Sites of Community Importance.

ON SITE

Abruzzo's chamois springs back to LIFE



ABOVE The Gran Sasso National Park.
RIGHT The Abruzzo chamois, an endemic subspecies of Italy. Photos: O. Locasculli



The Abruzzo chamois: a flagship species for the region

Two of these projects focused on the Abruzzo chamois (*Rupicapra pyrenaica ornata*) an endemic subspecies found nowhere else in the world but here. Labelled 'the most beautiful chamois in the world' by some because of its distinctive coat and long horns, it is an excellent climber, able to bound across rocky territory at over 50 km/hour and to jump over 6 metres.

Originally the Abruzzo chamois inhabited most of the central and southern Apennines, from the Monti Sibillini to Calabria, but hunting had almost completely wiped it out by the beginning of the 20th century. The last remaining population, saved by the establishment of the Abruzzo National Park in 1923, nonetheless underwent a further drastic reduction, a so-called bottleneck, between the two World Wars, dwindling to less than 20 individuals. After 1945 the park's work started to bear fruit and the population recovered to 450 animals by 1990. Nevertheless, the rate of increase has started to falter in recent years, exacerbated by concerns

Abruzzo: the land of mountains

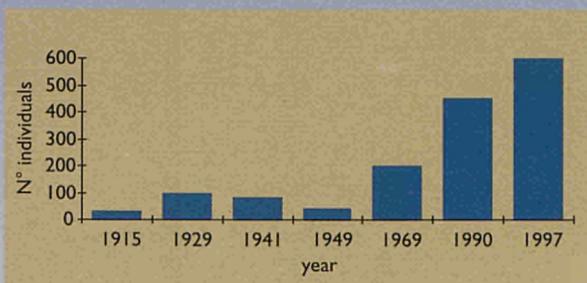
Bordering the Adriatic Sea in central Italy, the mountainous Abruzzo Region culminates in the two tallest peaks of the Apennines, the Gran Sasso and the Maiella (2700–2900 metres). Covered for 75% by mountains, Abruzzo has one of Italy's richest natural heritages, including many species and habitats listed in the Birds and Habitats Directives.

Over the last 5 years, LIFE-Nature has acted as an important 'pump-primer' to conserving many natural areas within this region and has provided seed money for activities that fall outside the scope of the Structural Funds. Altogether, there have been 7 LIFE-Nature projects in Abruzzo targeting three priority species of mammal (wolf, brown bear and Abruzzo chamois) found here, as well as at least three priority habitats: beech forests with *Taxus* and *Ilex*, beech forests with *Abies alba* and chasmophytic vegetation on limestone pavements. Substantial contributions have also been made to the development of management plans for two new national parks (Gran Sasso-Laga and Maiella).

that the population's genetic viability was eroding away. This small, homogeneous population

The mountainous Abruzzo region in central Italy.





Abruzzo chamois – historical population trends.

restricted to a single site for its world distribution, was therefore in great danger of succumbing to an epidemic or other catastrophe.

Back from the brink: re-introducing the species to the wild

In order to reduce this risk, WWF and the Abruzzo National Park proposed a LIFE-Nature project in 1992 which sought to re-introduce the chamois – according to guidelines given by the IUCN/SSC Reintroduction Specialist Group – to two other mountain ranges it had once inhabited: the Maiella and Gran Sasso.

The strategy was to first set up an 'area faunistica' (wildlife shelter) in which chamois taken from the resident population would be kept in semi-captivity in fenced-off areas in order to breed and acclimatise. These shelters could also play an important role in public information and awareness-raising, and were essential as genetic insurance policies for keeping a reservoir of chamois safe from external catastrophes which could afflict the wild populations. Animals could then be released at chosen sites, supplemented by individuals from the wild.

Actual reintroduction began with a preliminary operation in late 1991 (Maiella) followed by several more in the Maiella (28 released) and Gran Sasso (24 released) from 1992 to 1996. The success of the re-introduction programmes have more than anything else helped change the attitudes of the local residents toward wildlife. When the helicopter carrying the first chamois for relocation landed on the soccer field of Lama dei Peligni village, it was greeted by the peal of church bells!

Most of the released animals were fitted with radio collars to monitor their movements. Despite isolated incidents, by and large the local inhabitants held the reintroduction to be very positive: when an isolated male chamois occupied a rocky hill near Paganica (Gran Sasso), the villagers practically adopted the animal and opposed attempts by the park to recapture it and bring it back to the rest of the group. The Italian Alpine Club (CAI) also joined in, helping to produce a form for recording chamois sightings. Many animals were fitted with coloured ear tags so that they could also be identified by non-specialists such as shepherds and mountain hikers.

First signs of success

So far, the reintroduction co-financed by LIFE-Nature appears to be successful. The released Abruzzo chamois are reproducing spontaneously and their numbers are increasing steadily both in the Maiella (where 18 young were born) and the Gran Sasso (5 born since 1995), where their presence has contributed to their recent designation as national parks. According to the latest census the population is now around 600.

Nevertheless, these populations cannot yet be considered self-sustaining. For this reason, the Commission approved a new LIFE-Nature project in 1997 to release 10–15 more chamois in the Gran Sasso and ensure veterinary monitoring of the ones already there. Co-financed by the Gran Sasso National Park, this project will also have a significant effect on the future park management plan, as the chamois is one of its most important elements. Looking further ahead, research has identified a further 6 suitable sites for re-introduction in the Monti Sibillini and Sirente-Velino.

Can Abruzzo's economy benefit from its natural wealth?

In many ways the successful re-introduction of the chamois has helped to draw attention to Abruzzo's outstanding natural heritage and, perhaps more subtly, to the possible economic benefits that could be gained from managing this natural capital sustainably.

Today, Abruzzo, with 1.2 million inhabitants, has the highest proportion of legally protected territory among Italy's Regions; about 30% (297,000 ha), including three national parks, one regional park and 14 regional reserves. These attract over 2 million visitors per annum, with an evident impact on the local economy. It is estimated that an average tourist spends about 50 ECU per day whilst visiting a park, including room and board. This means that, altogether, around 150 million ECU a year is pumped into the local economy from tourism alone.

Recognising these natural resources to be a viable economic asset, recent administrations in the Region have also begun to promote a series of sustainable development initiatives including a bonus points system favouring applications from within protected areas when distributing cofinance for socio-economic projects, and to provide the basic funding to allow nature reserves to function, leaving the rest to the local bodies to build on. LIFE-Nature has therefore played a useful role: helping to save a species, promoting a long term regional policy for nature and, through this, contributing to the economic future of the area.

For further information on the project:

- *WWF Italia*
Mr Fulvio Fraticelli
Telefax: ++39-6-855.44.10

NATURA BAROMETER

(Situation as of 13/1/98 on the basis of information transmitted officially by the Member States)

Member State	Birds Directive SPA Classification					Habitats Directive SAC designation (stage I)				
	Number of SPAs	Total area (km ²)	Area Maps	Information	Progress	Number of sites proposed	Total area (km ²)	Site maps	Natura 2000 forms	National list
<i>België/Belgique</i>	36	4,313				102	903			
<i>Danmark</i>	111	9,601				175	± 11,000		0	
<i>Deutschland</i>	548	12,512				176	4,400			
<i>Ellas</i>	52	4,965				245	26,590			
<i>España</i>	152	25,229				174	8,015			
<i>France</i>	105	7,515				535	10,581	0	0	
<i>Ireland</i>	109	2,226				207	5,530	0	0	
<i>Italia</i>	108	4,530				2,262	46,074			
<i>Luxembourg</i>	6	14				0	0	0	0	0
<i>Nederland</i>	28	3,448				27	2,820			
<i>Österreich</i>	48	8,809				88	8,871			
<i>Portugal</i>	36	3,323				65	11,940			
<i>Suomi</i>	15	967	0	0		415	25,599			
<i>Sverige</i>	225	22,177		0		1,038	42,517		0	
<i>United Kingdom</i>	161	6,341				262	15,268			
EUR 15	1,740	115,970				5,771	220,138			

Note on SPAs: Some Member States, especially Denmark and the Netherlands, have designated significant parts of their coastal waters (= non land area). Certain SPAs in Germany have been classified for nature conservation values other than their importance for birds. Information on Austria is provisional.

- Keys:
- 0 no or insignificant classification
 - 0 list insignificant or not transmitted
 - 0 no transmission
 - classification notably insufficient
 - partial but insufficient national list
 - incomplete information or partial transmission
 - classification incomplete
 - substantial national list but information still incomplete
 - complete for all transmitted sites
 - classification complete
 - complete national list according to Member State, information transmitted is coherent
 - computerised and coherent
- ↑ significant progress being made since last Natura barometer

For further information contact: Micheal O'Briain, DG XI.D.2 for SPA classification and Fotios Papoulias, DG XI.D.2 for SAC designation.

NEWS ROUND UP

The Natura Barometer: commentary on progress

Since the last Newsletter, the most significant progress has been realised in the following countries:

- Germany has proposed another 96 sites under the Habitats Directive. It has also proposed 46 new SPAs, 40 of these are in Schleswig-Holstein and 6 in Brandenburg. Of particular note is the classification of the Schleswig-Holstein Wattenmeer which covers 2,738 km²;
- France has transmitted two first lists of sites representing an area of around 10,500 km²;
- Austria has almost doubled the total proposed area for Natura 2000 by adding 10 new sites to its national list;
- UK has proposed another 1,946 km² under the Habitats Directive.

Adoption of the revised annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive

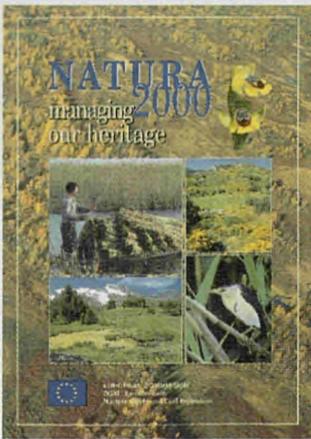
On the 27 October 97, the Council approved a proposal from the Commission to adapt annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive. These new lists will replace the original annexes. Modifications were made in three areas: inclusion of 18 habitat types (of which 7 are priority), 20 species of fauna and 49 species of flora for the boreal region of Finland and Sweden, correction of taxonomic anomalies and inconsistencies and tidying up of errors that crept in during the course of negotiation or translation (available on the DG XI Nature conservation home page).

Selection of proposed Sites of Community Importance (pSCIs) underway for the Alpine and Mediterranean regions

The first biogeographical seminar for the Alpine region was held in October in Salzburg (Austria). A similar meeting for the Mediterranean is organised in February in Thessaloniki (Greece).

The procedures for these meetings are identical to the ones already used for the Macaronesian region. On the basis of the sites proposed by the Member States and the corresponding scientific information (which is indispensable!), each seminar begins by establishing a reference list of all habitat types and species present in that region. Then each of these habitats or species is examined in turn to determine whether they are sufficiently well represented within the sites proposed by the Member States. If this is not the case, the Member State in question is invited to propose additional sites.

The next biogeographical seminar is planned for the Boreal region in Sweden at the end of March.



New brochure on Natura 2000

A new brochure destined for the general public has been produced by DG XI to explain briefly the background to the EU's nature conservation policy, the purpose of the Habitats and Birds Directives and the procedure for establishing the Natura 2000 Network. The last section deals with a series of questions and answers on what Natura 2000 will mean in practice. *Copies available in German, English, Spanish and French from Isabelle Venti, DG XI.D.2. The text is also on Internet (see below).*

New Swedish guide to natural habitats

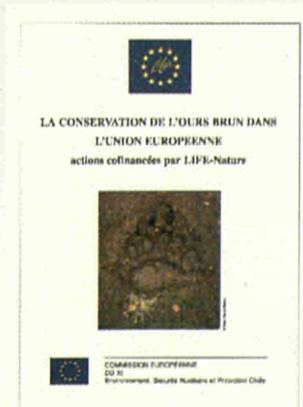
The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, Naturvårdsverket, has published an illustrated guide of natural habitats. This describes, in layman's terms, each of the habitats listed on Annex I of the Habitats Directive occurring in Sweden. The text includes a reference to the Natura 2000 code and to the common names of characteristic species and is accompanied by a photo of the habitat concerned. The practical guide is derived from the official Manual of Interpretation of the habitats of

the European Union and is destined for site managers. *Contact: Michael Löfroth, SEPA, S-10648 Stockholm, fax: +46 8 698 1402.*

Report on the conservation of brown bears in the EU

A review of the projects, funded under LIFE-Nature, for the conservation of the brown bear in the EU has been produced. This examines and compares each category of action undertaken to conserve the species and its habitat in the five countries that have LIFE projects (Austria, France, Greece, Italy and Spain). The different categories include measures to maintain and restore the threatened populations, to manage certain types of human activities (e.g. forest exploitation, hunting) and to gain acceptance of the bear's presence amongst local communities.

Copies (in French only) available from Isabelle Venti, DG XI.D.2.



Spanish NGOs attentive to Natura 2000

Boletín Informativo Habitats 2000 is published by WWF/Adena Spain with the support of DGXI and the Junta de Andalucía. Issue 2 gives a clear description of the selection procedure for Sites of Community Importance, using the example of the Macaronesian biogeographical region, notably for the Canary Islands. *Contact: Jorge Bartolomé/Guy Beaufoy, WWF/Adena, c/Santa Eugracia 6, E-28010 Madrid, fax: +34 1 308 3293.*

Mid-term review of the European programme for integrated coastal zone management

In 1996 the European Commission launched a four year demonstration programme on the integrated management of its coastal zones. Operated jointly by the Directorates General for Environment, Fisheries and Regional Development, this programme is financing - through LIFE, TERRA and INERREG IIC a series of demonstration projects across the EU. A publication has been produced to present the characteristics of the programme and to provide a brief summary of the 34 projects launched. An analysis of the results of these projects will be undertaken in 1999 once they have terminated. *Copies available in German, English, Spanish, French and Italian from Sabine Optatzy. DG XI.D.2.*

DG XI nature page on-line

The European Commission now has a home page on nature conservation. It is divided up into four main sections:

- **NATURA 2000 Network:** contains an introduction to Natura 2000 (text of the brochure on 'Natura 2000: managing our natural heritage' mentioned above), all the issues of the present Natura 2000 newsletter, the publication of the Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive and the Interpretation Manual of the EU's Natural Habitats;
- **EU Nature legislation:** contains the full legal text of both the Habitats and Birds Directives together with their annexes;
- **LIFE-Nature Fund:** provides a brief history of the Community's instruments for funding nature conservation since 1984 together with a list of pre-LIFE projects, it also gives a one page summary of each of the projects financed under LIFE since 1992 together with contact names and addresses of the beneficiaries. Thanks to a user friendly data base, projects can be selected according to country, year, or key words...Finally, the application brochure for LIFE-Nature is also presented together with the forms;
- **Nature Protection Services:** this gives a list of all the Member State representatives responsible for the implementation of the Habitats Directive and present at the Habitats Committees, it also provides a 'who's who' guide to DG XI.D.2.

WELCOME TO THE NATURE CONSERVATION HOME PAGE

EU Nature conservation policy is based on three main pieces of legislation - the Birds directive, the Habitats directive and the CITES regulation - and benefits from a specific financial instrument - the LIFE - Nature fund. Its priorities are to create the European ecological network (of special areas of conservation), called NATURA 2000, and to integrate nature protection requirements into other EU policies such as agriculture, regional development and transport.
More information on:



NATURA 2000 network



LIFE - Nature fund



EU nature legislation



Member States and Commission nature protection services



List of available documentation

DG XI Homepage
Commissions
EUROPA

This home page can be accessed through <http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg11/nature/home.htm>

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