



natura

EUROPEAN COMMISSION DG XI's NATURE NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

DG XI's Deputy Director General – Mr Tom Garvey – considers Natura 2000 and the enlargement process

In my visits to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that have applied to join the EU I have frequently been struck by their beauty and relatively unspoiled nature. I am aware that some of our eastern neighbours have a long tradition in nature conservation with extensive systems of protected areas. The enlargement of the Community to include the new applicants will greatly enrich the natural heritage of the Union. Nature protection therefore deserves special care during the negotiations.



Each of the accession countries is now in the process of approximating its legislation to that of the EU with a view to adopting the 'acquis communautaire' on accession. This includes, in the field of environmental legislation, the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives. Foremost in this regard will be their preparations to identify and protect sites to be included later on in the Natura 2000 network of

protected area.

At the same time the Central and Eastern European Countries are undergoing the transition to market economies. This will probably lead to increased pressures on nature in the years leading up to the accession.

Various Community funds are likely to become available during the pre-accession period and they will need to be carefully managed to avoid negative effects on the natural environment. Agri-environment measures, if properly designed and quickly put in place, should significantly contribute to preserving valuable semi-natural habitats.

I am convinced that early approximation of nature conservation legislation is the best and most cost-effective way to ensure that existing natural areas of high conservation value are not damaged or destroyed before accession. In this regard it will be necessary to pay attention to the protection regime of potential Natura 2000 areas to handle new developmental pressures in and around the sites, in line with the mechanisms foreseen in Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.

To achieve this objective the nature departments will have to collaborate closely with their colleagues in other ministries to ensure that nature conservation considerations are fully integrated into the definition and implementation of the different policies. The strengthening of non-governmental organisations and increased public participation should also help avoid damage to the natural resources.

Enlarging the Union is a unique opportunity to strengthen the protection of Europe's biodiversity. Natura 2000 has a key role to play in ensuring that this goal is achieved. Let us therefore make it a top priority in the accession preparations.



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.

Deputy Director General of DG XI

IN FOCUS

Selecting Sites of Community Importance (SCIs)

There are, according to the provisions of the Habitats Directive, three stages leading up to the establishment of the Natura 2000 Network.

First, each Member State proposes a list of sites for the conservation of the species and habitat types listed in the annexes occurring in their territory (national list). Then the Commission selects, in agreement with the Member States and on a biogeographical basis, those sites that are considered to be of Community importance (SCIs). Finally, the Member States formally designate the selected sites as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and introduce measures to ensure their favourable conservation state.

When adopting the Habitats Directive in June 1992, the European Ministers gave themselves three years to propose the national list of sites to the Commission. However, the first phase took longer than expected and for some countries it is still not complete. Nevertheless, by spring this year, more than 6500 sites covering altogether over 265,000 km² (equivalent to 8% of the EU territory) had already been submitted to the Commission. This meant that work could begin in earnest on selecting Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) for some of the regions.

A Community list according to biogeographical region

Stage two looks at the selection process from the perspective of the six biogeographical regions defined in the Habitats Directive. To be able to examine the proposed sites in a coherent manner at this level, the Commission, in close association with the European Topic Centre for Nature Conservation ETC-NC (part of the European Environment Agency), organises a series of seminars for each region.

These seminars are animated by the European Commission (DGXI) and the ETC-NC and attended by representatives of the Member States concerned (usually delegates from the Habitats Committee and



Caladonian forests, a priority habitat to be discussed in the forthcoming Atlantic biogeographical seminar. Photo: Forest LIFE Picture Library, Forestry Commission, UK.

Scientific Working Groups), a series of independent scientific experts chosen by the ETC-NC and 2-3 NGO experts appointed by the European Habitat Forum. If appropriate, observers from the Central and Eastern European pre-accession countries concerned by the same biogeographical region are also invited.

Their work is guided, first and foremost, by the scientific criteria established in Annex III of the Habitats Directive which identify a series of site attributes that should be considered to determine the importance of the proposed sites at a supranational level.

Procedures used to establish the Community list

Dealing with a suite of criteria for a range of habitats and species across several countries is a necessarily complex task. So, in order to be able to address all these issues in a limited space of time the Commission has introduced the following steps, applicable to each region:

1. Checking the information received

The very first task involves a technical analysis of the site information transmitted by the Member States in order to ensure that this is complete and coherent. For this the ETC-NC examines the Natura 2000 standard forms for each site to check that the obligatory fields are filled in and that the information plus maps are useable. Any omissions are communicated to DGXI who then takes contact with the Member State to request the necessary changes. Once sufficient information is available on sites submitted for a particular region, the process of establishing a Community list can begin.

2. Establishing a biogeographic reference list

In order to institute a framework for discussion at these seminars, it is important at the outset to establish, for each Member State, a definitive list of the Annex I habitat types and Annex II species that are significantly present within the biogeographical region concerned. This is prepared by the ETC-CN on the basis of information sent by the Member States, backed up by data from scientific publications, and subsequently discussed at the seminars. Once the

Participants at the Macaronesian biogeographical seminar in the Azores.

Photo: M. Avila Gomez.



list is finalised it is submitted to the Habitats Committee for formal adoption and, thereafter, remains as a permanent reference point for each region.

3. Analysing the representation of a habitat type or of a species

The next stage involves assessing the representativity of each habitat type or species: are they sufficiently well represented amongst all the sites proposed to ensure their favourable conservation state as required by the Directive? There is, unfortunately, no easy mathematical formula for this. Instead, the Commission relies on the best scientific expertise available, particularly from the experts in the biogeographical seminars. The analysis itself is based on the known distribution patterns, the ecological and genetic variations and the trends in distribution and abundance of the habitats and species concerned.

Once the views of the seminar participants have been sought, a document is drawn up to record the comments made on the representativity of the habitat types and species, indicating the ones that have either not enough sites proposed or not enough information available to make a proper assessment. This document is then addressed to the relevant Member States with a request to propose further sites or provide more information. The process continues in this way until the Commission is satisfied that sufficient progress has been made to move onto the next step of the selection process.

4. Selection of SCIs for the Community list

At this stage in the process the discussion comes down to the level of individual sites proposed. All those containing a priority habitat type or species are automatically selected. For the others 4 additional criteria are used:

- **uniqueness:** one single site proposed by a Member State for a habitat type or species
- **high value:** a site having a high national value as regards its representativity, relative surface area and conservation status
- **high diversity:** a site containing a significant number of habitat types or species
- **network coherence:** a site that will ensure the coherence of the network, e.g. on a migration route, relictual location, ecological corridor, foreseen restoration measures ...

In addition, there is a safeguard clause to avoid that, by eliminating a site, the representation of a habitat type/species would be jeopardised.

Again, depending on the views of the experts at the seminars, a proposed site may be assessed as being of Community importance (most frequently the case), of needing improvement (e.g. enlargement) or of not being sufficiently important to be on the Community list. Ultimately, the end result will be a draft Community list of sites for region x which will be submitted to the Habitats Committee for approval before being formally proposed to the Commission for formal adoption as part of Natura 2000.

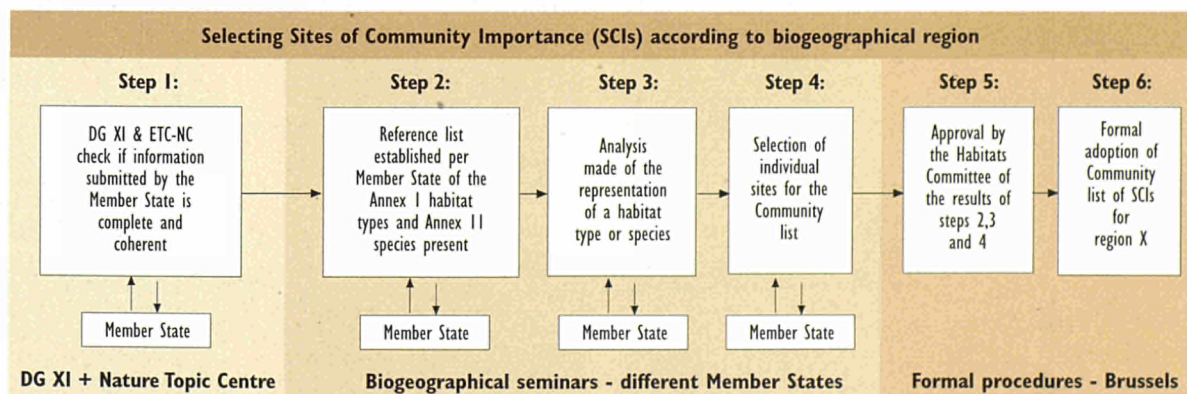
What happens if the Commission is not satisfied with the final outcome ?

Everything possible is done during the course of the biogeographical meetings to develop a scientific consensus on the Community list and a mechanism has been put in place, at every stage of the process, to encourage a Member State to come back with further or more complete sites if necessary. It may however be that, in some circumstances, the end result is still not satisfactory.

In such cases, the Commission will announce, in the Official Journal, a listing of the habitats and species that it considers to be insufficiently represented within a particular Member State for the biogeographical region concerned and will invite scientific comments on this over a period of two months. This additional information may eventually be used during the final negotiations with the Member States.

The situation so far – and plans for the future

To date the selection process has been launched for three of the six biogeographical regions – Macaronesian, Alpine and Mediterranean – and is expected to start for the remaining three regions before the end of the year, provided of course that the corresponding national lists arrive soon and in a sufficiently comprehensive manner. As illustrated above, this selection is a necessarily complex process but, with the present procedures in place, it is hoped that the exercise will not only ensure that the Community lists are technically sound but also that the whole process is undertaken in a spirit of consensus and collaboration ...



ON SITE

Coming soon: the sweet smell of success for a stinking beetle



ABOVE: The hermit beetle *Osmoderma eremita*. Photo: K. Antonsson.

RIGHT: Wooded pastures. Photo: M. Eriksson.



Cynics may claim that conservation efforts only focus on cuddly or spectacular birds and mammals and their habitats; if the more obscure and less lovable classes of the animal kingdom benefit at all, it is thanks to positive spin-offs from actions undertaken for the popular flagship species. So examples proving them wrong ought to be good news. Still, isn't a certain Swedish LIFE-Nature project, co-funded at 50% in 1997, going over the top when it invests 3.7 million ecu in preserving *beetles*?

Zero in on the smell

Before jumping to hasty conclusions, read on. The beetle in question is the hermit beetle alias *Osmoderma eremita*, one of the EU's most threatened insects. It spends most of its brief existence as a larva, feeding on the soft rotting wood within the hollows of old oak trees, and sometimes also other broadleaf deciduous trees. After 3–4 years it develops into a hefty 3 cm adult and on warm summer days in late July and early August crawls out onto the bark to find a mate. It seldom flies though, being incapable of covering more than 500–1000 metres. Because of its hermitic lifestyle, spotting this beetle is something of an acquired skill – indeed sometimes it is easier to locate it through its strong aromatic leathery smell (hence its Latin name) than through direct sightings.

To host the beetles, the oak trees have to be sufficiently large and old, preferably over 100–200 years. At some stage a branch will have broken off from the tree, resulting in a fungal infection at the point of fracture. With time this rots into a small hollow which becomes an ideal micro-habitat for the beetle and many other rare insects, fungi and

lichens (each tree will have a complex of micro-habitats together hosting as many as 700 species).

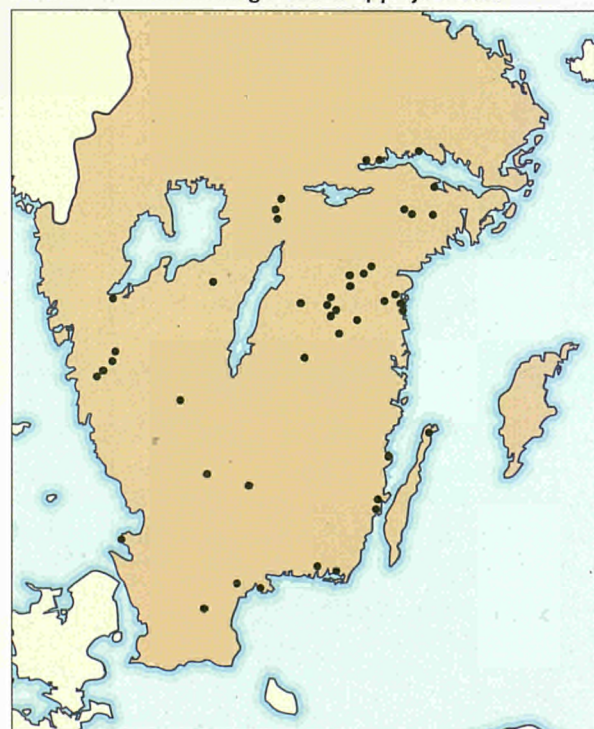
To get trees of this age and size, the vegetation surrounding them has to be closely cropped. In Sweden, such habitats, known as wooded pastures, have come about through centuries of grazing by domestic cattle. Also, according to a law dating back to the 16th–17th century, all oak trees were considered government property, only to be cut down by special permission when required for the construction of a new ship. So, many of the old oaks around today probably started life in King Gustav Adolph's hayday.

Time to save the old pastures and their beetles

Unfortunately, because of changing agricultural practices over the last decades, these habitats have lost much of their economic attraction. There are fewer and fewer of them left in Sweden. Those that remain have become largely overgrown, which not only stunts the development of the existing trees, but also severely reduces the chances of young oaks establishing themselves as their successors.

The hermit beetle is no better off. Indications are that there may be as few as 150–200 populations left in Europe, with half of these in Sweden, which is now one of its last strongholds. Against this background, the Swedish government decided to

Southern Sweden showing location of project sites.



propose a major LIFE-Nature initiative focusing on 45 sites in southern Sweden which together contain 40% of the EU population.

This project has 4 principal objectives:

1. to establish the management needs of this priority species in Sweden,
2. to protect the 45 sites in which it is still known to occur as nature reserves,
3. to restore these sites to a level favourable for both the species and the oak trees
4. to raise awareness of this anonymous creature amongst farmers and local communities.

Completing the ecological picture

Because so little is known about the species, one of the first steps is to gather all existing information on its distribution, biology and ecological requirements in order to develop a comprehensive action plan for its conservation in Sweden. Next, general management prescriptions will be drafted to guide the elaboration of a series of individual management plans for each of the 45 sites. The project is run jointly by the national conservation agency (SEPA) and a number of county administrations, which ensures that the overall strategy for the species set by the former is implemented and adapted according to local circumstances by the latter.

Finding landowner incentives to save the beetles

The next task is to establish nature reserves on the 45 sites and to agree the management plans with the landowners. Although any serious restrictions on using the land and its trees are to be compensated, once and for all, at the outset, this alone will not guarantee the long term economic viability of the wooded pastures. The solution is to render them eligible for long-term payments under the agri-environment scheme.

To achieve this, various actions will be undertaken, such as clearing overgrowth, removing shrubs from the vicinity of older hollow trees and building fences to enclose grazing animals. Most of this work will be done by 160 trainee workmen as part of a job creation scheme. Thereafter, a series of temporary grazing contracts will be established with the farmers to bring the land up to a suitable standard for permanent grazing and to encourage them to invest in cattle herds. By the end of the project almost all of the 45 sites should have entered into the agri-environment scheme.

Passing on the message

To encourage similar initiatives elsewhere in Europe, the project intends to organise an international workshop on the hermit beetle in 1999 to present its successes and failures to a wide audience of scientists and conservation managers from other countries and to discuss collectively what further actions could be undertaken. A report will also be produced on *Osmoderma eremita* in Europe so that

everything that is known about the species is compiled into one single document and can be used as a reference point for the future.

Why spend money on beetles?

Some may question the wisdom of spending 1,85 million ECU from the Community's budget to save an obscure little beetle. Naturally the conservationists are excited because within relatively small areas they can ensure the conservation of a high diversity of species and habitats. Yet the *Osmoderma* project has already, at this early stage, succeeded in capturing the imagination of both the landowners and the general public. Why? Farmers and landowners are interested because they can see an economic benefit to reviving ancient grazing traditions. The unemployed are keen because the restoration work, which is being carried out as part of a job creation scheme, builds up skills that will increase their chances of finding a job. Finally, the general public is interested because the old oak trees and wooded pastures, often connected to manors and estates, are not only scenically very attractive but also steeped in history. So, at the end of the day one gets a lot more for the money than simply a healthy beetle population ...

For further information on the project:

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Fax: ++46 13 19 63 33

The hermit beetle spends almost all its life inside the hollows of old trees. Photo: Brent Ola Falck.



NATURA BAROMETER

(as of 12/5/98)

Member State	Birds Directive SPA Classification					Habitats Directive Proposed SCIs (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
België/Belgique	36	4,313				101	908			
Danmark	111	9,601				63(175)	3,315 ~11,000			
Deutschland	552	13,253				295	4,967			↑
Ellas	52	4,965				230	25,745			
España	170	33,191			↑	588	70,250			↑
France	107	7,600				543	10,581 ⁽¹⁾		0	
Ireland	109	2,226				0(207)	0(5,530)	0	0	0
Italia	108	4,530				2,480	46,074 ⁽¹⁾			
Luxembourg	6	14				0	0	0	0	0
Nederland	28	3,448				27	2,820			
Österreich	58	11,333			↑	93 ⁽²⁾	11,130 ⁽²⁾			
Portugal	36	3,323				65	12,150			
Suomi	15	967	0	0		415	25,599			
Sverige	225	22,177		0		1,383	35,929			
United Kingdom	168	6,704				301	15,681			
EUR 15	1,781	127,645				6,584	265,149			

(1) Data for some sites missing

(2) This figure is an estimate

Notes: Several Member States have designated significant parts of their coastal waters. Certain sites have been, totally or partially, proposed under both Directives. Only sites that have been formally and definitively proposed are taken into account in the Natura barometer. Some Member States have however also transmitted provisional lists of sites; these are given in brackets.

- 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 transmitted sites
 - classification complete
 - complete national list according to Member State, information transmitted is coherent
 - computerised and coherent for transmitted sites
- ↑ significant progress since last Natura barometer

For further information contact: Micheal O'Briain, DG XI.D.2 for SPA classification and Fotios Papoulis, DG XI.D.2 for proposed SCIs.

NEWS ROUND UP

The Natura Barometer: commentary on progress

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

- Spain has significantly increased the number of proposed SCIs, which now total 588 and cover all biogeographical regions concerned, and has made further progress on the SPAs
- Germany has added another 119 pSCIs to its national list
- Additional sites have also been proposed by Italy (218 pSCIs), Sweden (341 pSCIs), Austria (10 SPAs covering an extra 2500 km) and the United Kingdom (39pSCIs)
- Denmark has now started officially transmitting sites (63 up to now)

It has to be noted that Ireland, like Denmark, has also submitted provisional lists of sites (indicated in brackets) but only official transmissions are taken into account in the Natura Barometer. Also, figures for certain countries have decreased since the last Barometer following the analysis undertaken by the European Topic Centre for Nature Conservation.

Where to go for information on sites proposed for Natura 2000?

DG XI is receiving more and more requests for information on the sites proposed by Member States under the Habitats Directive. At this stage it is worth reiterating the basic principals for access to information on the environment. It is in fact the author of the work who has the duty to make the information available to the public, or eventually, to justify its reasons for refusing access.

Hence, in the case of the Natura 2000 network, it is the Member States who are responsible for providing access to information on the sites it has designated under the Birds Directive or proposed to the European Commission under the Habitats Directive. Requests for information should therefore be addressed directly to the national competent authorities for 'nature'.

On the other hand, once a site is retained by the Commission for the biogeographical Community list, then DG XI becomes the author and will be the one responsible for replying to requests for information concerning these sites.

Bath Conference 'Natura 2000 and People: a Partnership'

There is a widely-held belief that Natura 2000 sites are untouchable and must be paid for by the local inhabitants. Nothing, in fact, is further from the truth. The last edition of this Newsletter attempted to dispel some of these myths.

Nature and economic activities must find a way to coexist. Natura 2000 sites can be a financial asset, rather than a burden. In order to explore how workable solutions to some of the problems have been found across the Community, the Commission and the UK Presidency of the Union during the first half of this year are organising a Conference on 29-30 June, in Bath in south west England. This Conference, entitled '*Natura 2000 and People: a Partnership*', will be opened by Mrs Bjerregaard, the European Commissioner for Environment, and Mr Meacher, the UK Environment Minister, and will bring together nature conservationists and local representatives of various socio-economic interests. The lessons to be learned will be explored in a series of workshops, and field trips will add a practical dimension.

The Conference is aimed at those who must make decisions in connection with the setting up of the Natura 2000 network at national, regional and local level. *For further details, contact Lewis Productions Ltd, Conference and Event Management, Thames Chambers, 2 Clarence Street, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, tel: (conference helpline) 0044 181 481 2045, Fax: 0044 181 481 2020*

Germany – Habitats Directive transposed

In December 1997 the European Court condemned Germany for not transposing the Habitats Directive into national law within the required time limit. After some tough negotiations between the Bundestag of the Federal Government and the Länder the German law transposing the Directive was finally passed in March 98.

The 1998 LIFE Application Round

At the close of the 1998 LIFE application round in January, the Commission had received 192 applications requesting a total of around 135 million ECU (available budget this year 50 million). Following a first assessment by the Commission, a short-list of eligible projects was presented to the Habitats Committee for deliberation at its meeting at the end of April. The final decision on projects chosen will be taken by the Commission by the end of June and all applicants should be informed of the outcome of the 1998 round by July.

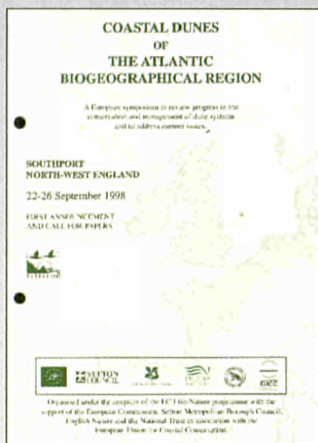
Audit of the LIFE II Programme

As required under the LIFE Regulation, the Commission has launched an external audit of the LIFE II programme. The contractors will evaluate the implementation of Regulation 1404/96 and assess whether it has met its objectives and led to tangible results. The exercise is due to be completed in early summer and the recommendations made will be taken into account when drafting the new Commission proposal for the third phase of LIFE.

A new Community biodiversity strategy

In February, the Commission presented a new Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on a Community strategy for biological diversity. The document forms part of the Commission's commitment to the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity and supports the new principal laid down in the Amsterdam Treaty for a better integration of environmental matters into other Community policies.

The document set out a series of general environmental objectives which should be integrated into the following eight sectoral policies: conservation of natural resources, agriculture, fisheries, regional policies and land planning, forestry, energy and transport, tourism and development and economic cooperation. It also sets the scene for developing, over the next two years, specific action plans for each of the sectors in turn to determine how in practice the biodiversity concerns will be integrated into the main policy areas. *Communication Com (98) 42. Copies available from DG XI.D.4.*



Conference on coastal dunes of the Atlantic biogeographical region

Coastal dunes are well represented in the Atlantic biogeographical region, ranging from the far north of Denmark to the coastline of Portugal. In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the special needs and actions required to achieve sustainable management of this important resource.

In 1995, a LIFE project was launched to prepare a nature conservation strategy for the sand dunes of the Sefton coast in north west England. This pSCI is one of the largest sand dune systems in Britain and, as such, demonstrates many of the current issues which are being addressed throughout Europe. As the project reaches its conclusion, the beneficiary is organising, from the 22nd–26th September, a European conference to discuss the management of dune habitats throughout north west Europe. Topics covered will include identification of the dune resource, habitat management and monitoring, multiple-use management and future concerns. A key theme will be the need to place coastal and dune management in its socio-economic context. The symposium should

therefore be of interest to national conservation agencies, non governmental organisations, private bodies, managers, researchers and students. *Further information: John Houston, Sefton Coast Life project, Council Offices, Freshfield Rd, Formby L37 3PG, UK, fax 00 44 151 934 2955, e-mail: lifeatscms.u-net.com*

Visitor payback: are visitors willing to pay for conserving the sites they visit?

Lack of money to sustain natural areas frequented by an ever increasing number of tourists is a growing problem in Europe and across the world. In June 1996, an organisation entitled the Tourism Company launched a project under the EU Action Plan for Tourism, called Visitor Payback, to see whether any more direct methods could be developed to persuade visitors to contribute to local conservation needs within the areas they visit.

A series of five practical initiatives were undertaken in different Member States (the French Alps, the Greek Ionian Islands, Tenerife in the Canaries; Stockholm City, Sweden and Devon, South west England). The intention was to test out a range of methods from donations and sponsorship to membership, merchandising, participation etc ... The main conclusion was that the visitor's willingness to pay for conservation is considerable but it is also highly dependent upon the methods of approach used and the locations involved. The successes and failures of the different pilot schemes are analysed in detail in a new report entitled 'Visitor payback: encouraging tourists to give money voluntarily to conserve the places they visit'. *Copies available from the Tourism Company, 3 the Homend, Ledbury, Herefordshire, HR8 1BN, UK, fax: 00 44 1531 635453*

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