



natura

EUROPEAN COMMISSION DG ENV NATURE NEWSLETTER

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IN FOCUS
Exclusive interview with
Margot Wallström,
European
Commissioner in charge

LEARNING TO MANAGE

The selection of Natura 2000 sites may still be far from complete (cf. the Natura barometer on pages 6–7), but this should not stop us from deciding, already now, how they should be managed.

Margot Wallström, European Commissioner in charge of the Environment reminds us of this in an exclusive interview (see pages 2–3). Measures favourable for Natura 2000 sites should be integrated as of now into the regional and rural development programmes. The range of possibilities is vast, whether it is done through contracts with farmers and foresters, or through the commercial and touristic promotion of local products. To help prepare such projects, authorities responsible for Natura 2000 could find inspiration in the experiences gained from LIFE-Nature projects (see page 8

10 on the management of unusual areas under an international bat protection project).

Preserving sites of Community interest assumes not destroying them in the first place. This is the aim of the now famous 'Article 6' of the Habitats Directive. To help understand how to interpret this article, the Commission will be publishing an explanatory guide on the subject during the course of this month. The full document will be made available on the Natura website (address on back page) and you will be able to read more about it in the next issue of this newsletter.

Let us not, however, reduce Europe's nature to a mere set of articles in a Directive, no matter how important they are. All this discussion and energy surrounding Natura 2000 has a specific purpose: to maintain the extraordinary diversity of sites and species present within the Union. Who, for instance, knows about *Gulo gulo* (see page 5)?

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The NATURA 2000 Newsletter is produced by the Nature Conservation Unit of the Environment Directorate General (DG ENV.D.2) of the European Commission.



Margot Wallström,
European Commissioner in
charge of the Environment.

INSET A recent 'internet
chat' with the
Commissioner.

Photos: CE/Lambiotte,
Christian



“Natura 2000 is a fantastic challenge” Commissioner Wallström

Last summer you announced your priorities to the European Parliament. These included climate change, water, pesticides, the interface between the environment and health, but not nature. Why?

This is a misunderstanding! All the themes you mentioned are, for me, new priorities for the Commission, ones where it must take the initiative, both politically and in legislative terms. The situation with nature protection is different. The legal texts exist but they are poorly implemented. So rather than invent new provisions, the emphasis should be on designating and managing sites according to their natural values. I had promised the European Parliament I would ensure that existing legislation would be properly implemented and this is where nature conservation fits in. I made this clear during a recent meeting with the major European NGOs for nature.

Natura 2000 has advanced at very different rates in different Member States. Why?

The national context is usually the determining factor. In Greece, for instance, the authorities proposed a very complete list, based on their scientific value. Many local authorities are conscious of the interest that protecting sites can

bring to developing nature tourism. Other Member States have opted for consulting landowners (in Finland) or the municipalities (in France) already at the scientific stage of site selection. This has the advantage of involving the populations concerned, but the risk is that it may delay the whole process, especially if it is not properly explained at the outset. Certain countries, such as the United Kingdom and Sweden, chose initially only to propose sites already protected under national law. This would facilitate the process but has limited interest in a European context. After all, what would the added value be of a European network made up only of already protected sites?

What would you reply to people who ask: why is Brussels meddling in the management of our forests and estuaries?

I would say this. In 1992, the Member State ministers adopted, unanimously, a Directive foreseeing a common effort for the protection of the Union's natural heritage. Today, I am putting that decision into effect, with the help of my services. I am well aware that this has been met with some reticence. We do our best to be open about this process, the Natura 2000 newsletter being a case in point.

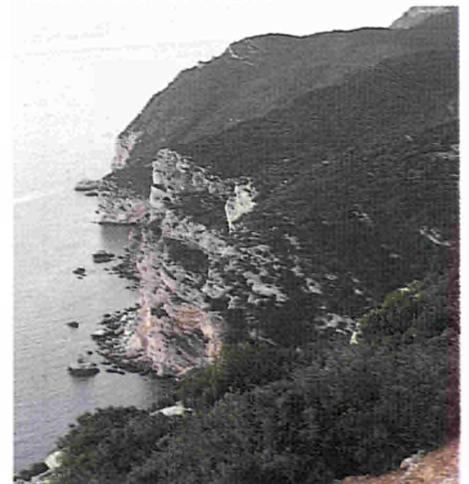
What about subsidiarity?

The Habitats Directive is almost a textbook example of this:

1. Member States agree collectively on what they want to protect. These are the habitat types and species listed in the annexes to the Habitats and Birds Directives;
2. Each one contributes by proposing sites for the Natura 2000 network;
3. The Commission checks that the proposals are coherent and, if necessary, notifies any gaps;
4. Each Member State then decides the best means of managing the sites, and, of course, puts this into practice.

To come back to your previous example, it is in fact the Member States who decide how to manage their forests and estuaries.

Arrabida pSCI, Setúbal, Portugal.
Photo: M. Lucio do Rosario.



Does this mean the Commission leaves everyone free to do what they want?

Quite the contrary. For nature, as for any other directives adopted by the Council of Ministers, Member States have a choice of the means to be used but the Commission is responsible for checking that the objectives are finally met. Again, the Habitats Directive is a good example of this. It foresees that Member States take appropriate regulatory, administrative and contractual measures. Managing a wetland or forest habitat may, for instance, be best achieved through an agri- or sylvi-environmental agreement with the farmer. On the other hand, regulations will be needed to prevent the construction of a port or motorway which may destroy an estuary or steppic zone. If the Member State fails to do so, the Commission will have to remind it of its obligations.

Brussels has been heavily criticised for blocking structural funds because insufficient Natura 2000 sites have been proposed, especially in Germany. How do you react to this?

Let us be clear about this. If Germany – and it is not the only country concerned – is late in proposing sites for Natura 2000, it is first and foremost because of internal politics. The Länder decided not to transmit their sites to the national authorities as long as there were differences between them over the new German nature protection law. My colleague

Michel Barnier, in charge of regional policy, and myself cannot ask Member States who have proposed Natura 2000 sites – and so done their duty – to protect these sites whilst there is still a risk of structural funds being used to destroy other equally valid sites, simply because another Member State is behind schedule. It is a question of taking the necessary precautions and ensuring fair treatment amongst Member States.

Public opinion, however, sees it as eurocrats blocking projects submitted by democratically elected bodies.

I find this sort of criticism levied at my technical services particularly unfair. Believe me, if it were up to them they would much rather be approving good economic development projects, respectful of Natura 2000, than having to deal with hundreds of complaints, or blocking funds. Their duty as civil servants is to implement the directives, which have been approved, not by them, but by politicians, ministers and European parliamentarians.

Having said this, I make sure to remind the national authority representatives whom I meet, that both my services and myself are there to help Member States. After several months as Commissioner, I realise that we receive a tremendous amount of information here at the Commission. I would like to see our role as one of passing on good practice between the Member States.

Natura 2000 seems to be faltering precisely over the future financing of site management.

What do you propose?

At the risk of surprising you, I do not consider the issue of finance to be the main problem. Above all, we are missing people who can initiate projects and ensure that there is sufficient integration into other policies. Significant sums of money are already available through the structural funds and the rural development regulation to favour a concerted effort in managing Natura 2000 sites. It would be a shame to miss this opportunity and to have to come back later for additional funds. As everybody knows, these were not foreseen in the financial perspectives agreed by the Heads of State at their Berlin Summit.

What do you consider to be the specific role of LIFE-Nature?

I like to think of LIFE as a sort of 'big mini-fund'. Granted, LIFE-Nature is no more than a financial drop in the ocean compared to the structural or agricultural funds, but it is often the first drop of water that heralds the arrival of a good nourishing rain shower. LIFE-Nature allows techniques to be tested and brings people together who may otherwise not have known of each other's existence. It is a school for policy integration. It is also a visible sign that Brussels is interested in local issues. This is why I intend to continue visiting projects in the field and to encourage my services to link their day-to-day work on the implementation of the directives with the follow-up of specific projects.

When you took up your functions, did you anticipate having to spend so much of your time on nature conservation?

Frankly no. But I have no regrets. Natura 2000 is a fantastic challenge: creating one of the most important networks in the world, not of nature reserves, but rather of sites which are managed taking their natural values into consideration. We will gain credibility for this, especially vis-à-vis our neighbours in the East who are at this moment preparing themselves to contribute to Natura 2000. This is worth dedicating a few years to.

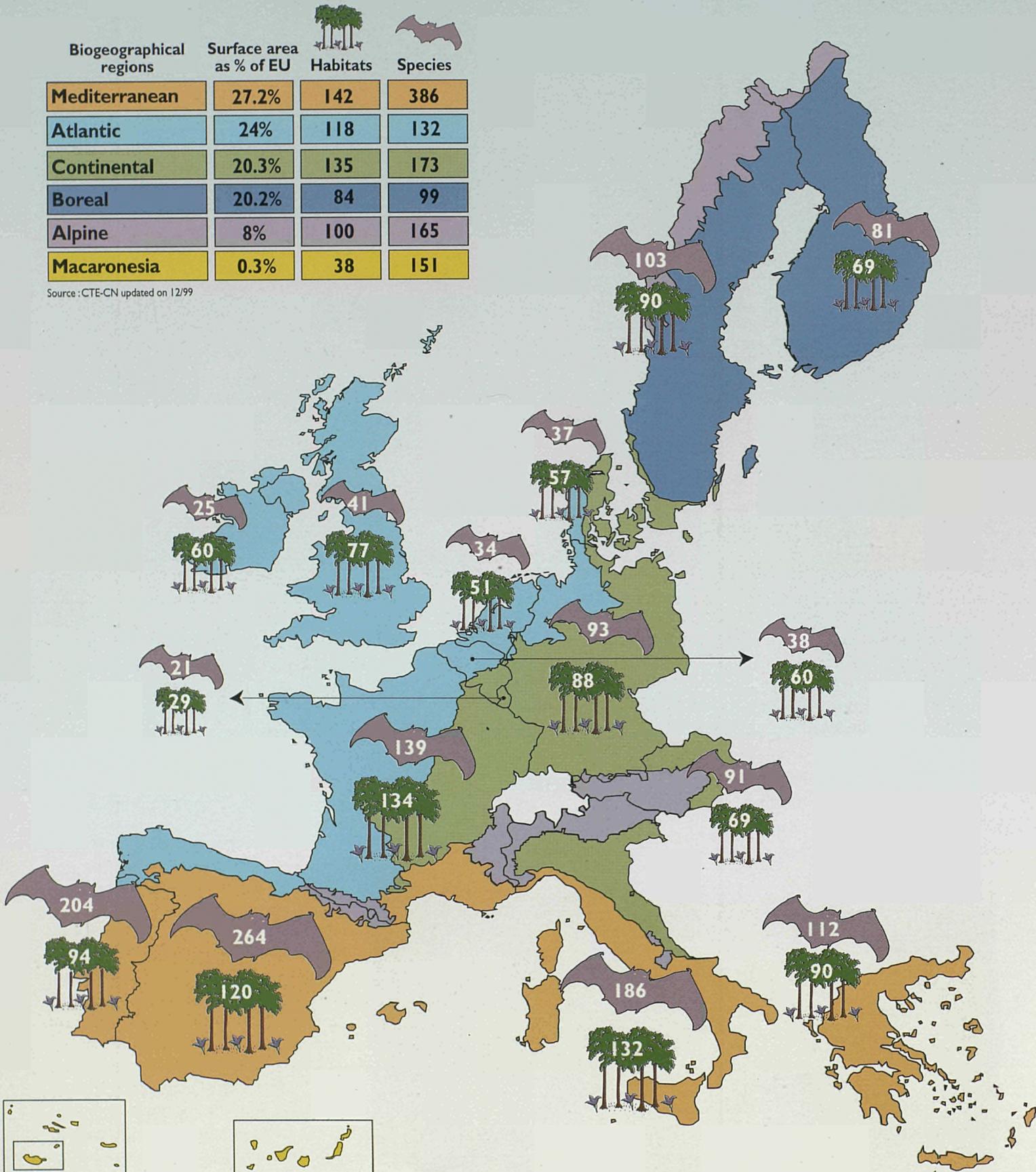
Albufera de Mallorca SPA, Majorca, Spain. Photo: A.F. Inglada, Atecma



Distribution of habitat types and species listed in the Habitats Directive according to biogeographical region and Member State

Biogeographical regions	Surface area as % of EU	Habitats	Species
Mediterranean	27.2%	142	386
Atlantic	24%	118	132
Continental	20.3%	135	173
Boreal	20.2%	84	99
Alpine	8%	100	165
Macaronesia	0.3%	38	151

Source : CTE-CN updated on 12/99



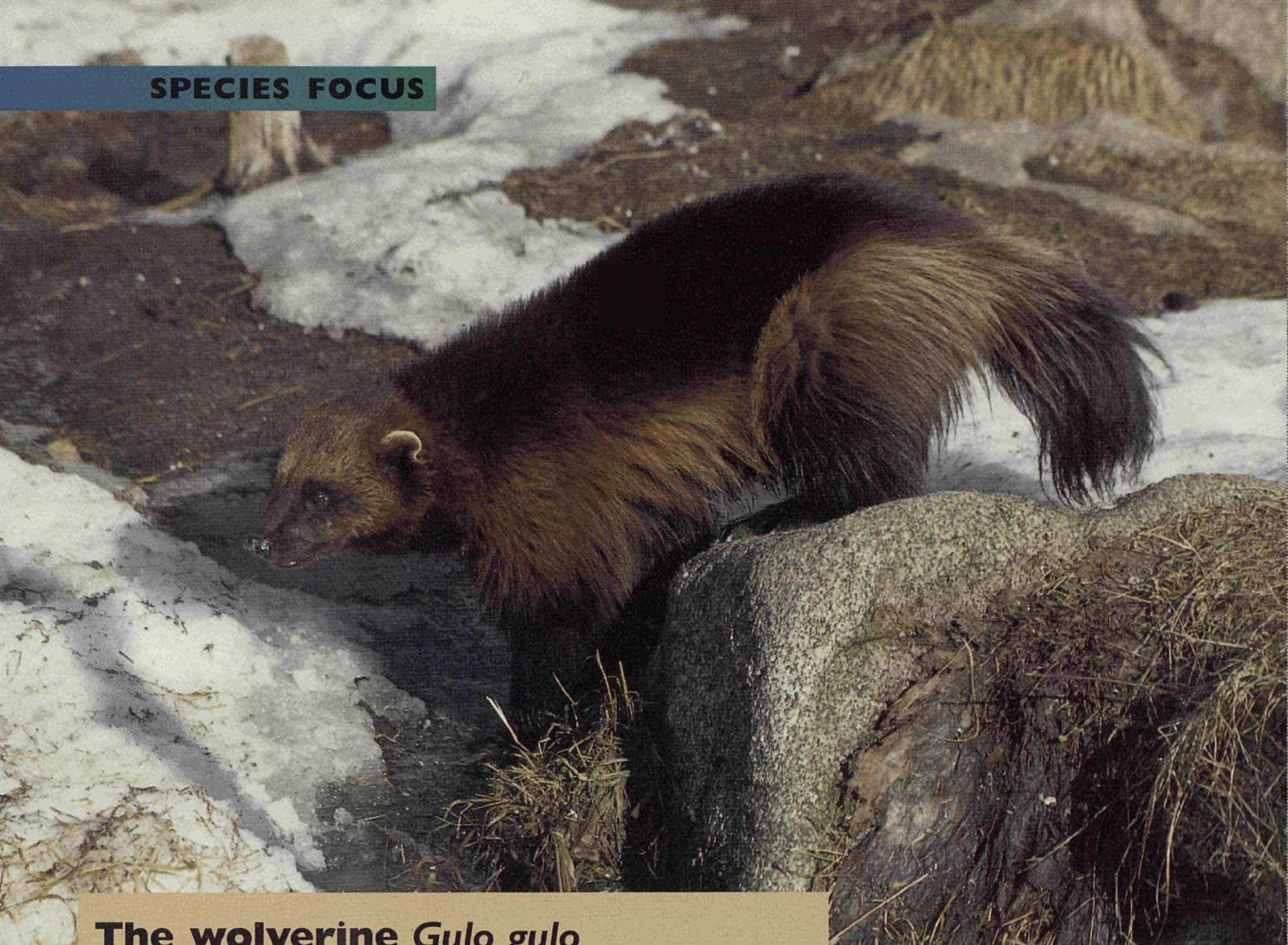


Photo: Bill Coster/NHPA.

The wolverine *Gulo gulo*

Can it be that, in this crowded little continent of ours, there are still large mammals roaming around that we may never have heard of? – well, how many people can describe a wolverine?

The largest member of the Mustelidae family, this animal strongly resembles a little bear, weighing in at around 10–30 kgs, but with smaller ears and a longer tail. That so few people have actually seen it is not all that surprising when one considers that the species lives in the sparsely populated boreal forests of northern Scandinavia – where you have a chance of coming across one in every 200–500km²!

Sweden and Finland are the only countries in the EU to host this endangered species (estimated population: 250–500 individuals). Although protected in both countries since the 1960s, its numbers have not increased for at least 30 years. This is because the animal has an unfortunate penchant for reindeer meat, which is the economic mainstay of the Sami (Lapp) Communities. So, although the law allows problematic individuals to be shot, poaching remains the greatest mortality factor amongst adult individuals in the reindeer herding areas. This seems to be borne out by the fact that in Finland the population outside these areas is finally beginning to show a slight increase.

To try to resolve this dilemma, a new compensation system has recently been introduced for damage caused by carnivores within each of the 51 reindeer herding districts in Sweden. The novelty of this new system is that it is based on the number of carnivores present in the area and not on the number of reindeer killed. So a wolverine family, for instance, would bring in a revenue equivalent to the market value of 200 reindeer. This innovative system should encourage a greater tolerance of the species in the future. In the meantime, more research will also be needed to understand the other basic conservation needs of this obscure little predator.

NATURA BAROMETER

(as of 17/3/00)

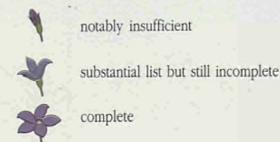
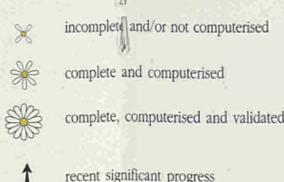
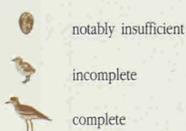
Nota Bene:

- The Natura Barometer is based on the information officially transmitted by Member States.
- Numerous sites have been designated according to both the Birds and Habitats Directives, either in their totality or partially; the numbers given may therefore not necessarily add up.
- The % in surface area is indicative. It relates to the total surface area, terrestrial and marine, in relation to the terrestrial surface area of the Member State. Various Member States (DK, NL, ...) have designated substantial portions of their coastal waters.
- Certain Member States have proposed large areas including "buffer zones" while others have only proposed the core areas. In both cases Article 6 of the Habitats Directive also applies to new activities which are foreseen outside a Natura 2000 site but likely to affect it.
- The global assessment of national lists may be revised, upwards or downwards, following more complete scientific analysis of the data, particularly at the relevant biogeographical seminars.



Member State	Birds Directive						Habitats Directive						Member State
	Number of sites classified	Total classified area (km ²)	% of national territory	Site Maps	Natura 2000 Forms	Assessment of SPA classification	Number of sites proposed	Total proposed area (km ²)	% of national territory	Site maps	Natura 2000 forms	Assessment of national list	
België/Belgique	36	4,313	14.1%				102	913	3%				België/Belgique
Danmark	111	9,601	22.3%				194	10,259	23.8%				Danmark
Deutschland	553	16,013	4.5%				1126	10,956	3.0%				Deutschland
Ellas	52	4,965	3.8%				234	26,522	20.1%				Ellas
España	179	34,876	6.9%				867	88,076	17.4%				España
France	115	8,112	1.5%				1029	31,440	5.7%				France
Ireland	109	2,236	3.2%				259	3,007	4.3%				Ireland
Italia	268	11,279	3.7%				2,507	49,364	16.4%				Italia
Luxembourg	13	160	6.2%				38	352	13.6%				Luxembourg
Nederland	30	3,552	8.5%				76	7,078	17%				Nederland
Österreich	73	11,931	14.2%				113	9,450	11.3%				Österreich
Portugal	47	8,468	9.2%				65	12,150	13.2%				Portugal
Suomi	440	27,500	8.1%				1,381	47,154	13.9%				Suomi
Sverige	301	22,820	5.1%				1,919	46,300	11.3%				Sverige
United Kingdom	198	7,895	3.2%				340	17,660	7.3%				United Kingdom
EUR 15	2,525	173,691					10,250	360,681					EUR 15

For further information contact: Micheal O'Briain, DG ENV.D.2 for SPA classification.



For further information contact: Fotios Papoulias, DG ENV.D.2 for proposed SCIs.



The Natura Barometer: commentary on progress

- There is little progress since the last issue of the Natura Newsletter in terms of sites of Community interest proposed under the Habitats Directive. The most notable increase relates to the already substantial Spanish national list which has increased by 183 sites (+13169 km²), mainly due to additions in the Canary islands. Ireland keeps adding, slowly but steadily, new sites to its still substantially insufficient national list (121 sites added). A few additional sites were proposed by Germany and Greece.
- Likewise, there has been little progress in SPA classification. The only substantial addition relates to 4 new sites (1012 km²) in Aragón, Spain.



Rhinolophus ferrumequinum. Photo: F. Schwaab.

LIFE goes underground

Imagine a field trip to the LIFE-funded transnational programme for bats in Germany, Belgium, France and Luxembourg: venturing down long dark tunnels pitted with yawning chasms and littered with piles of rubble, hemmed in by walls of rotting concrete, damp brick or jagged bedrock, dodging the water dripping from the ceilings. Here and there, rusting scrap metal. When the torches go out, inky blackness.

Why would LIFE sink its limited funds into this lifeless, spooky warren of subterranean maggot

holes? Because they are choice locations for hibernating bats. Every year between November and March the flying mammals seek secluded nooks and crannies where temperatures and humidity are as constant as possible. There they sleep, with their metabolism only just ticking over. This is the riskiest time of year in the bats' life cycle; any disturbance during this period of suspended animation can be fatal.

Keeping it all quiet on the Western Front

Throughout north-western Europe, bats are declining, hammered by a fatal triangle of factors: disturbance during hibernation, disruptions during breeding in summer and loss of foraging opportunities because of changes to their habitat. In a one-step-at-a-time strategy, the beneficiary of this LIFE project, a small bat conservation NGO called 'Association transfrontalière pour la protection des chauves-souris', decided to tackle the disturbance during hibernation, technically the most straightforward threat to deal with.

Their approach was truly 'European', looking at a biogeographically coherent area

covering 125,000 km² in all. Despite being administratively complex, this made ecological sense as 20 out of the 30 bat species native to Europe occur within this zone. Eight of

BAT SPECIES TARGETED (ANNEX II + ANNEX IV HABITATS DIRECTIVE)

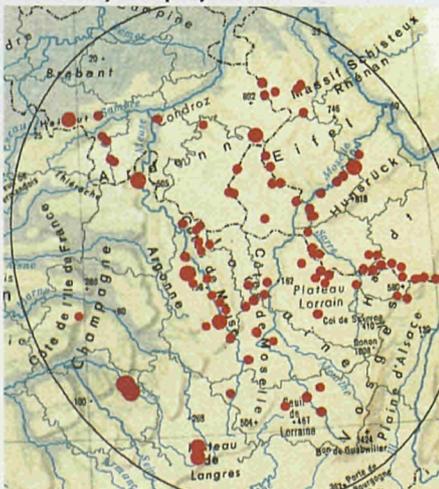
ANNEX II & IV

Rhinolophus ferrumequinum
Rhinolophus hipposideros
Myotis myotis
Myotis emarginatus
Myotis dasycneme
Myotis bechsteinii
Barbastella barbastellus

ANNEX IV ONLY

Myotis mystacinus
Myotis brandtii
Myotis daubentonii
Myotis nattereri
Plecotus auritus
Plecotus austriacus
Eptesicus serotinus
Eptesicus nilsonii
Pipistrellus pipistrellus
Pipistrellus nathusii
Nyctalus noctula

Network of protected bat quarters covered by the project.



Plecotus austriacus
 Photo: F. Schwaab.



these species are listed on Annex II of the Habitats Directive. Although some large colonies occur, most of the populations targeted are small. Yet that belies their importance: 7 out of the 8 species have their northern or western range limit across the project area. Here, populations react most sensitively to ecological changes and disturbances.

People playing Batman

Traditional hibernation refuges (such as caves or cellars) in this region have become inhospitable through intensified human use, but thanks to history there is no shortage of alternatives. The land is riddled with subterranean forts and bunkers from the battlefields of Europe's Great Powers: 1870–71, 1914–18 and 1939–45. Galleries and shafts of disused mines dot the region as well, plus abandoned railway tunnels, empty vaults under abbeys etc.

Wonderful for bats to sleep in, but it is amazing how many people are irresistibly drawn towards subterranean environments: curious children and daredevil teenagers, speleologists and mineral collectors, war-games enthusiasts, weirdos shunning the light of day to hold black masses. Hard-headed investors see development opportunities as cultural and tourist attractions.

Ending disturbance by closing such bat hibernation quarters to people, whilst at the same time leaving openings for bats, was the main purpose of the project. Some quarters were bought first, but usually agreements were made with the owners allowing such work. Even though every effort was made to consult and inform stakeholders and local citizens, a sinister discovery made by the project was just how desperately some people wanted to go underground, judging by the remarkably violent and tenacious reactions when entrances to bunkers or mines were closed. Even heavy tools were used to smash open doors and bricked-up entrances, or tunnels were simply dug around them. The LIFE project

soon dropped the rather light structures it had developed, and invested in bars and steel doors strong enough for a bank vault (the silver lining: 400,000 € worth of orders for engineering SMEs).

Overwhelming success

The original 1995 application identified 140 hibernation quarters, half of which, it conservatively estimated, could be secured by the LIFE project. Yet, over the project's three years 143 sites (plus another 22 carried out with funds from a variety of public and private sources attracted under the impetus of the LIFE project) were made safe for roosting bats. Talk of being successful ...

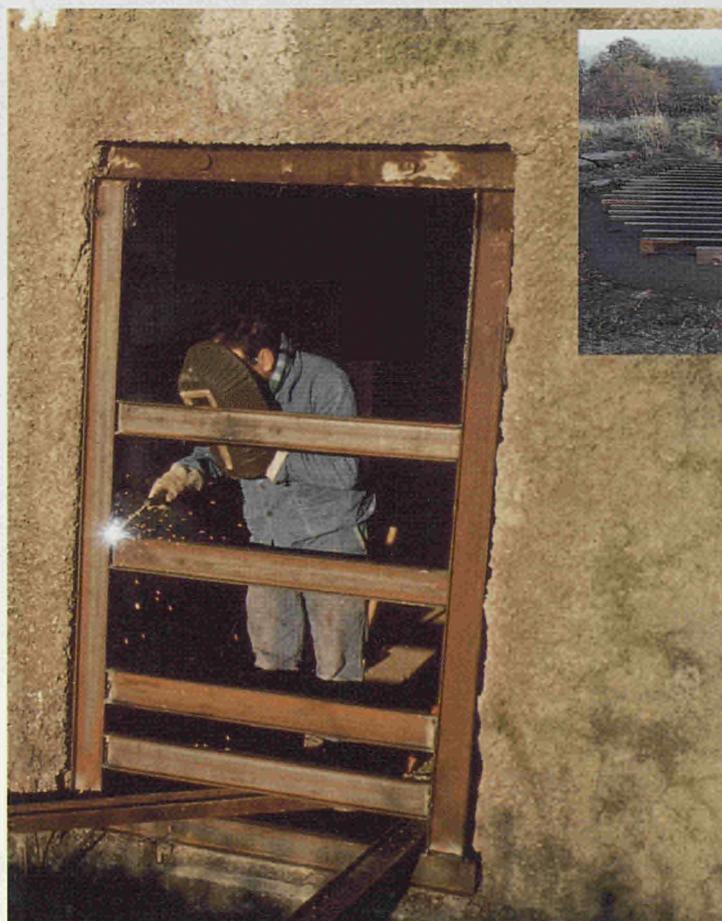
LIFE opens doors to close them

One of the reasons for this incredible success is an effect observed in other LIFE projects too: EU support, expressed through LIFE co-financing, gave the beneficiary the aura of credibility. Many authorities (military, mining, Treasury etc) did not even want to speak to these 'batty'

conservationists when they had first come to see them. But when they returned with an official EU blessing and a respectable sum of financial support expressed via a LIFE-Nature contract, the whole attitude changed ... The Association has now managed to build up excellent working relationships with a host of competent authorities in the area, including several military authorities.

This led to some win-win situations. The best example of this is the city of Luxembourg, honeycombed by the Kasematten, a maze of 17th century military fortifications. After long talks with the authorities and interest groups wanting development of cultural tourism, underground parking lots, art galleries and discos, a management plan laying down which parts must be kept exclusively for bats and which may be developed, was agreed, with the city authorities guaranteeing implementation.

Because of these conflicts with other users, and the general public's prejudices, the project



Heavy security is required to keep bat quarters closed.
Photos: F. Schwaab.

ON SITE continued

invested heavily in communication. Its efforts were recognised via the LIFE Award in October 1999. Some of its main outputs include an interactive exhibition touring the region, already visited by 200,000 people, and two broadcast-quality videos. Project staff also held over 150 public meetings in villages where measures were going to be taken, to win over citizens, and thus 'spread the word'. Through these, people were encouraged to report dead or injured bats or even imminent disasters – as a result two breeding quarters about to be destroyed in Lorraine were saved.

Wings over Europe

In conservation terms, the project has been an unmitigated success: hibernation quarters of between 50% (Nordrhein-Westfalen) and 85% (Champagne-Ardenne) of all the known individuals of all the bat species occurring in each of the seven project subregions were secured. Several new quarters were

THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE BAT



In summer the females of the colony become very fussy about their lodgings, which have to be overheated, tranquil and with an abundance of food. Juveniles and males are provisionally separated from the females during this time.



An ideal winter quarter for bats is one that has a stable temperature, high humidity and almost no air currents. Underground locations (caves, grottos) generally provide such conditions but still some species prefer to spend the winter in a hollow of a tree or in a building.

Illustrations: Hervé Fagnier. Source: Chauves-Souris sans frontières.

also opened or restored, providing extra hibernating roosts and filling gaps in the existing network. In several secured roosts, a sharp increase (up to 100%) in the number of wintering individuals has already been observed.

For further information, contact (French, German and English spoken) Mme Christine Harbusch, Orscholzerstraße 15, D-66706 Keßlingen, tel +49-6865-93934, fax +49-6865-93935, e-mail: meyer_harbusch@t-online.de

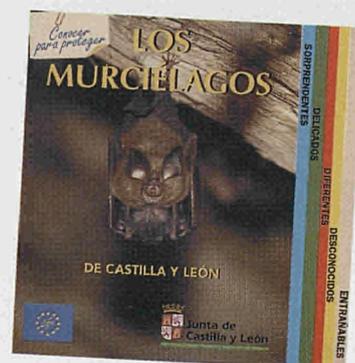
LIFE-NATURE PROJECTS TARGETING BATS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

The **Castilla y León** region in north-western Spain hosts 24 of the 25 bat species found on the Iberian Peninsula. These populations, including 10 species on Annex II of the Habitats Directive, are suffering from disruption during hibernation and loss of foraging opportunities because of habitat change. Since 1996, a LIFE-Nature project has been closing hibernation quarters to people and providing artificial roosts to serve as nurseries. As with the northwest European bats, man-made objects have become important refuges. Thus, several abandoned railway tunnels were closed off and the lofts of old churches repaired to make breeding easier. Amongst the more unusual sites targeted is an underground refuge located in the palatial gardens of the Spanish Royal Family.

A 1998 LIFE-Nature project in the **Canary Islands** targets a strange habitat – subterranean lava tubes – which shelter a rich array of peculiar cave-dwelling invertebrates and a bat species endemic to the Canaries (*Plecotus teneriffae*). Studies of it and the 6 other bats which use the tubes will allow conservation prescriptions to be integrated into the management plans of pSCIs on the surface. The project will also install gates and hire specialised wardens to protect the 15 most threatened tubes.

Two *Rhinolophus* species and a third Annex II bat are the target of a LIFE-Nature project in **Lombardy, Italy**. Having mapped the important bat caves in the region, the project purchased some of the more vulnerable slopes where caves occur so that they could be managed appropriately. A pilot project on managing grassland and scrub to favour bat populations has also begun. An awareness programme about the ecological function and significance of bats was targeted at schools and local residents and met with a positive feedback – local people are becoming more interested in, and involved with, active bat conservation.

As part of a larger 1993 project to prepare for Natura 2000 in **Portugal**, LIFE-Nature began the implementation of a national bat plan. Main measures included regulating access to breeding quarters, habitat improvement and publication of information material.



The LIFE week – a heartening success

The Commission hosted its first LIFE week in Brussels on 21–23 October 1999. Over 2000 people attended the three day event. They came from all walks of LIFE – Portugal, Finland, NGOs, public administrations, LIFE-Nature, LIFE-Environment, LIFE-Third Countries ... Such a heady mix of different backgrounds led to some interesting discussions in the various workshops and in amongst the dozens of project exhibition stands. If there is to be one take home message from the event, it is that LIFE III should put greater emphasis on promoting the results of the projects and encouraging better exchange of experiences. This should happen at all levels from local to European.

Errata

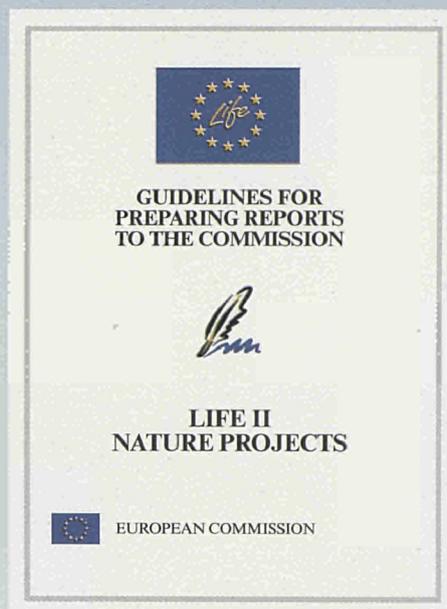
The photo at the bottom of page 6 of the last newsletter should have read *Sterna paradisaea* – not *Sterna albifrons*.

LIFE III under preparation

Contrary to what was stated in the previous newsletter, there will be no application round for LIFE III this spring. Prolonged negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, for instance on the financial envelope, have prevented the Commission from launching an early call for project proposals. To keep up-to-date on the latest developments, we suggest you consult DG Environment's website (address on page 12).

Reporting guidelines

Here is some good news for those of you who find writing technical activity reports for LIFE-Nature projects an onerous task. The Commission recently produced a series of informal practical guidelines on how to present such reports. The intention is not only to facilitate both the Commission's and the beneficiary's task in monitoring and managing the projects, but also to encourage a better quality of report. This in turn should help to



ensure that important findings are widely disseminated and that there is more extensive networking between projects. The guidelines will be sent to all LIFE beneficiaries and can be downloaded from the DG Environment website.

Birds Directive seminar

To mark the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Birds Directive, the Danish National Forest and Nature Agency organised a conference in Hamlet's hometown of Helsingør on 18–20 November. The purpose was threefold: to take stock of the last 20 years of implementation, set perspectives for the future, especially in light of the EU's forthcoming enlargement, and focus on positive interactions between birds and people. The main conclusion was that there was still much work to be done to implement the Directive, and priority should be allocated to this and the establishment of the Natura 2000 Network before considering any adjustments to the legislation.

Using the structural funds to conserve nature and create jobs

The Institute for European Environmental Policy has prepared a series of information dossiers on how to tap into funding opportunities for nature conservation through the new generation of Structural Funds 2000–2006. The dossiers are divided into

two parts, the first provides general information on the policies and Funds, the second contains a series of case studies drawn from different Member States. These illustrate the key issues and benefits as well as some of the obstacles that may arise in using Structural Funds to promote nature conservation and jobs. As such they should serve as a useful guide for highlighting the range of different options available.

Documents produced in all EU languages. Contact Janet Dwyer, IEEP, Dean Bradley House, 52 Horseferry Rd, London SW1 2AG, UK. Fax +44 171 799 2600; email: jdwyer@ieeplondon.org.uk

France condemned for failure to adequately protect 'Marais Poitevin'

In its latest Judgement concerning the Birds Directive, the European Court of Justice on 25 November 1999 (Case C-96/98) has condemned France for its failure to adequately protect 'Marais Poitevin', a major wetland of international importance for migratory birds along the Atlantic seaboard. It ruled that France had failed in its obligations under Article 4 of the Directive by:

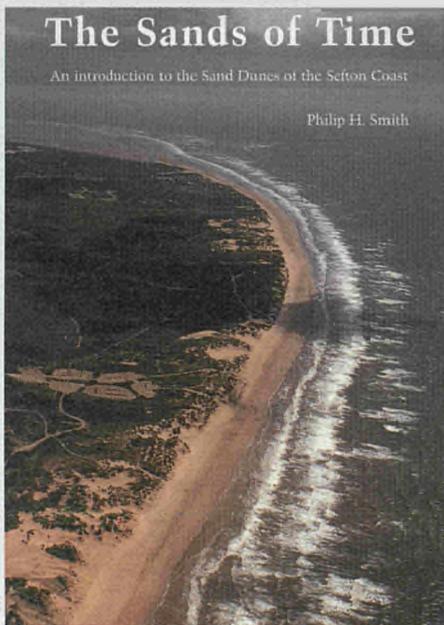
- not classifying a sufficient area of the site as a Special Protection Area (SPA);
- not adopting measures conferring sufficient legal status on the existing SPA there;
- not taking appropriate measures to avoid deterioration of the SPA as well as areas of the 'Marais Poitevin' which should be given such protection.

There had been a serious deterioration of natural meadows, a key habitat type for birds in the Marais Poitevin, arising from drainage and reclamation for cultivation and other new agricultural practices. In response to France's arguments that Community aid measures for agriculture were disadvantageous to agriculture compatible with the conservation requirements of the Birds Directive, the Court declared that, even if this were the case, it could not authorise Member States

to avoid the obligations of the Directive, in particular as regards the need to take appropriate steps to safeguard the SPAs.

Sands of Time

This book was produced as part of the award-winning LIFE-Nature project on the sand dunes of the Sefton coast in Northwest England. Beautifully illustrated with photographs, maps and diagrams, it introduces the reader to the land use history of this coastline and explains how sand dunes form and develop over time. It goes on to describe the special plants and animals present in this internationally important area and the work that is currently underway to conserve and manage them for the future. Contact John Houston, Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council, Balliol House, Stanley Precinct, Bootle L20 3AH, UK. Tel +44 151 934 2959; Fax +44 151 934 2955.



Freshwater fish conservation – options for the future

More and more LIFE projects are targeting freshwater fish species. A conference is being organised as part of the LIFE-Nature project focusing on the fate of the tiny endemic Saramugo, *Anaocypris hispanica*. The intention is to bring European experts together to exchange experiences in all aspects of freshwater fish conservation in temperate and tropical regions. Discussions will start on issues relating to the biology and distribution of rare and endangered species and then go on to focus on the constraints and opportunities for fish conservation. *The conference will be in Portugal in November 2000. Contact: Prof. M.J. Collares-Pereira, Centro de Biologia Ambiental, Faculdade de Ciencias da Universidade de Lisboa, 1749-016 Lisboa, Portugal. Tel +351 21 7573141; fax +351 21 7500028; email mcolares@fc.ul.pt or consult the project's website: <http://i.am/anaocypris>*

What's new on the Commission's website

There are developments afoot on the Commission's website too. A new programme has been installed on Europe's most threatened birds. Focusing on the species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive, you can now find out, for each bird, its common name, what it looks like, where it occurs, how many there are and why it needs protection. For those bird species that are considered a priority for funding under LIFE there is also a full copy of the action plans developed by



BirdLife International and partly funded by the European Commission. This ties in well with the latest update of the report on SPAs, which can also be found on the website.

It should be noted that the website address has changed slightly to <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm>. Also, if you want to contact any Commission officials by email you can now do so using the following standard address: firstname.surname@cec.eu.int – all in lower case.

Other websites

Here is the latest set of other LIFE-Nature internet sites that have come to our attention recently:

- Conservation of fauna and flora in the Canaries. <http://www.gobcan.es/medioambiente/biodiversidad/>
- Recovery plan for the Balearic Shearwater, *Puffinus puffinus mauretanicus*. <http://www.life-puffinus.org/introd.htm>
- The Waddensea National Park in Schleswig-Holstein. <http://www.sh-nordsee.de/nationalpark>
- Orford Ness in the UK. <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/orfordness>

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