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natura 2000

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Dei Teide National Park, Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain. Photo: M. Thauront

INTO THE HOME STRETCH?

'What counts is not to win but to participate' This popular sporting proverb could apply equally well to nature. If the Natura 2000 network is to be effective in maintaining the habitat and species diversity of the Union it must encompass sites from all Member States and regions.

After a somewhat uneven start, competent national authorities have succeeded in speeding up the process for proposing substantial lists of new sites. The latest Naturabarometer, in the centre pages of this issue, will testify to that.

And now that the Community list of Natura 2000 sites for Macaronesia (Azores, Canaries and Madeira) is ready, Member States and the Commission can concentrate, over the next months, on evaluating the sites proposed in the other five regions: Alpine, Mediterranean, Boreal, Atlantic and Continental. The ultimate aim: to cross the finishing line at the latest by 2002.

Natura 2000 will then become a tangible reality, a European network of sites that are managed in accordance with their natural value. The size of the network alone (without a doubt over 13% of the EU territory – an area equivalent to the size of Germany !) should reassure those who feared initially it would mean putting everything under 'lock and key' within strictly protected nature reserves.

The next challenge will be to put in place the management of these thousands of sites. It is here that the experience gained through the LIFE-Nature projects will come into its own and where integration with other policies will play a crucial role. Implementing the Water Framework Directive, described in this issue, could provide an ideal opportunity to pass from theory to the practice !

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The NATURA 2000 Newsletter is produced by the Nature Conservation Unit of the Environment Directorate General (DG ENV.B.2) of the European Commission. This newsletter is produced three times a year and is available in English, French, German, Spanish and Italian.

Hoces del Duratón. Photo: S. Picchi.

The new Water Framework Directive: implications for Natura 2000

Hailed as a major addition to Europe's arsenal of environmental legislation, the new Water Framework Directive represents a fundamental rethink of the Community's sustainable water policy. For the first time, the protection of a whole range of aquatic ecosystems will be brought together in one single Directive. As a result, Member States will also have to adopt a more global approach to their conservation. Gone are the days of decisions being dictated by political or administrative boundaries – now all parties, including nature conservationists, must work together to develop a coherent programme of measures at the most appropriate management level – that of the river basin itself.

The consequences for nature conservation and the Natura 2000 Network in particular should be significant. There is now a clear legal link established between the Habitats and Birds Directives and the new Water Framework Directive. As a result, the requirements of the former have to be taken fully into account when devising actions to improve water quality. This could provide a multitude of benefits: more stringent monitoring for a start but also the opportunity to place Natura 2000 in a wider spatial context, and to plan actions across different policy sectors.

Why a framework Directive?

European legislation on water has been trickling through at a steady rate since 1975. By 1995, over a dozen different Directives had been adopted to tackle one form or another of water pollution. Yet, whilst some improvements were being observed, Europe's waters still faced many problems. This provoked a major rethink. And by 1997, the general consensus was that the time had come for new all encompassing piece of legislation to ensure an overall consistency and coherence of the Community's water policy. This led to a proposal for a Water Framework Directive, which, after years of negotiation, was finally adopted on 23 October 2000.

Setting an overall environment objective

This Directive covers all Community waters (inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater) and is aimed not only at preventing their further deterioration but also at protecting and enhancing their present status. The overall environmental target is to achieve a good water status by 2015 in all categories.

There are detailed instructions as to how to establish whether this state has been reached. In the case of surface waters (e.g. rivers, lakes etc.…), it is based on the sum of both their 'ecological status' and the 'chemical status'. The former is measured according to the quality of the aquatic ecosystems associated with the surface water (e.g. quality of hydro-physical and hydromorpholoigical elements, biological elements such as species abundance and diversity) whilst the latter is essentially determined by the levels of specific pollutants present. A surface water body has reached a *good* water status when the results of the above analysis show only a low level of distortion

resulting from human activity (e.g. slight changes in the composition and abundance of phytoplankton, macrophytes, benthic invertebrate fauna, fish fauna…).

In the case of groundwaters, there is an obligation to monitor the core parameters (oxygen, pH conductivity, nitrates…). If any significant and sustained upward trend in the concentration of any pollutant resulting from human activities is detected, the Member States are required to take appropriate measures to reverse this trend. The 'quantitative status' of the groundwater is also important – i.e. how much water is being extracted compared to how much is being recharged or used naturally. In this case, *good* groundwater status is achieved when the rate of abstraction and level of pollution do not cause any significant damage to the terrestrial ecosystems which depend directly on the groundwater body.

In both cases, the Directive is likely to have major positive benefits for wetlands and other terrestrial habitats associated with these different aquatic ecosystems. Not only is the link clearly established between the water body and its ecological state in terms of biological diversity, structure and function, but the needs of the wetlands that depend on these water bodies is also recognised and taken fully into account. What is more, the stringent monitoring requirements under the Framework Directive are sure to make a valuable contribution to determining the conservation state of Natura 2000 as well.

Working at the level of river basin districts

So, how will this goal of 'good water status' be achieved in practice?. The most fundamental change brought about by the Water Framework Directive is that all decisions have to be taken at the level of the river basin itself – and no longer according to administrative or political boundaries. Thus, the first step will be to assign the individual river basins to a 'river basin district' (RBD) – (this process has already been adopted with success in some countries - see box). If the river crosses national borders then an international river basin district will need to be set up. The second step will be to identify the appropriate competent authority responsible for the application of the rules of this Directive. Again, if several countries are involved Member States are obliged to try to coordinate their work for the whole river basin – eventually through existing international structures such as Danube or Elbe Conventions etc.

There then follows a period of categorisation and information gathering on the different water bodies within each RBDs to determine their existing status. This is complemented by an analysis of the human impact which will determine how far the different water bodies are from their environmental objective. At this point, the effect on the problems identified of fully implementing all existing legislation will be considered. If the provisions of the existing eleven Directives (including the Habitats and Birds Directives) provide sufficient ammunition to be able to tackle these problems well and good, a programme of measures can be established to attain the objectives of the Directive by 2015. If not Member States will be obliged to design whatever additional measures are needed to satisfy these objectives.

Drawing up river basin management plans

All the elements gathered through this process will then have to be set out in a river basin management plan. This should describe the results of the analysis, the objectives established and the actions foreseen within a set timetable. By gathering all information relevant to the management of the RBD in a single document – the task of coordinating across so many different sectors and regions should be facilitated. It also provides a vehicle for seeking public consultation in the management of the river basin - this is another major new element of the Framework Directive.

Links with Natura 2000

And where does Natura 2000 fit in? As stated above there are a number of specific provisions concerning protected areas in the Framework Directive, so Natura 2000 now really forms an integral part of this

WATER MANAGEMENT IN FRANCE

Since 1964, water management has been organised according to six main catchment areas in France. Within each river basin a 'River Basin Committee' (representing a cross section of interests) and a public Water Agency were set up. The Committee decides on the objectives for water management and fixes a budget for this. Money raised through a system of payments is then used for co-financing activities that are of collective interest such as water purification plants, actions against agricultural pollution…

In 1992 two new planning tools were adopted:

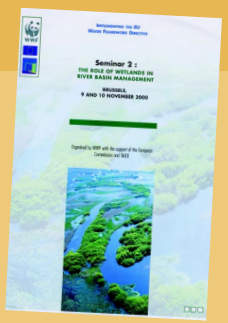
- *Policy guidelines for water management, to be drawn up by the Basin Committees that define targets and objectives at the level of the whole river basin for 15 years*
- *water management plans: to be elaborated by local Committees in order to plan water management activities at the level of the sub-basins*

Since that time, French Water Agencies have provided a significant amount of financial support for nature conservation projects – and LIFE-Nature projects in particular – on condition that the activities within LIFE contribute to managing both the qualitative and the quantitative aspects of the water resources. Projects targeting the conservation of aquatic habitats (rivers, mires, fens…) and species (Acipenser sturio, Zingel asper, Salmo salar…) are especially popular. Between 1996 and 1999 ten LIFE-Nature projects received almost 1.6 million euro in co-finance from these Agencies. They also fund other related actions, such as contracts with farmers to reduce nitrates levels… which will have benefited the local ecosystems as well. In summary the French system clearly demonstrates that the management of water quality and biodiversity are inextricably linked and can often be mutually advantageous.

Directive as well. For instance a register of protected areas – and specifically Natura 2000 sites – must be drawn up and kept under review. These protected areas should also be mapped out, together with the different water bodies, and such maps placed in the management plan.

Moreover, the impacts and pressures on these areas also have to be assessed as part of the human impact analysis. And the basic measures to be proposed for the water basin as a whole must include those that are deemed necessary to implement the provisions of the Habitats and Birds Directives. By the same token if a wetland needs to be restored to bring about a good water status this would also be expected to figure in the programme of measures.

WWF SEMINARS ON THE WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE



With the support of the European Commission, WWF has been organising a series of three seminars on key issues relating to the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

- *Water and agriculture: 10–11 February 2000*
- *The role of wetlands in river basin management: 9–10 November 2000*
- *Good practice in river basing planning: 29–30 May 2001*

The main output will be a guidance document that will identify tools and approaches that can assist river basin managers in complying with the specific aspects of the Water Framework Directive. This document will be available in October 2001 but in the meantime more information, including synthesis notes on each of the seminars can be found on http://www.wwffreshwater.org/seminars/seminars.html

Assessing the cost – can wetlands help?

One further requirement within the River Basin Management plan is the need to produce an economic analysis of water use. The principal intention with this is to enable a rational discussion on the cost-effectiveness of the various possible measures – which could be quite considerable. And here may be an opportunity to put forward some economic arguments for restoring wetlands. Not only are they amongst the most productive and 'attractive' ecosystems in the EU but they are also known for their positive role in water purification and in providing effective natural retention areas for floods. An economic analysis, which takes into account the financial value of these functions, might well consider that restoring a wetland is in fact one of the more cost effective solutions to obtaining good water status.

A timetable for implementation

So clearly the benefits are mutual – Natura 2000 not only stands to benefit from the provisions of the New Water Framework Directive but it can also help to bring about some of the solutions for sustainable water resource management. Now comes the litmus test, Member States have, what appears to be, a long lead in time for achieving 'good water status' for all Community waters by 2015 (see box). But when one considers the complex range of different sectors, administrations, organisations, etc… that need to be involved in this process, it is clear that this is an ambitious and challenging prospect. For each of us now to contribute as we can to making it a workable and effective scheme.

SUMMARY OF THE TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTING THE WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

2003 – SET UP RIVER BASIN DISTRICTS
- Identify individual river basins lying within the territory of each MS and assign them to a River Basin District (RBD)
- Identify the appropriate competent authority for applying the rules of the Directive within each RBD

2004 – UNDERTAKE ANALYSES OF THE RBD
- Analyse the characteristics of the RBD and establish a register of protected areas (to be kept under review)
- Review of the impact of human activity on the status of the waters
- Undertake an economic analysis of water use

2006 – MONITORING
Implement the monitoring programmes

2006–2008 – PUBLIC CONSULTATION
- Publish timetable and work programme for producing the river basin management plan
- Publish draft copies of the River management plans with a programme of measures for comments by the public and all interested parties

2009 – ADOPTION OF MANAGEMENT PLAN
Publish the final River Basin management plan

2012 – IMPLEMENTATION
Implement the programme of measures identified in the management plan

2013 – REVIEW
Analyses of river basin characteristics, human activity impacts and economics reviewed and if necessary updated

Before 2015 – INVESTIGATE EFFECTS
Investigate the causes of possible failure where monitoring or other data has revealed that the objectives of the Directive have not been achieved

By 2015 – GOOD WATER STATUS

2015 and every 6 years thereafter – UPDATE MANAGEMENT PLAN
Review and update the river basin management plan

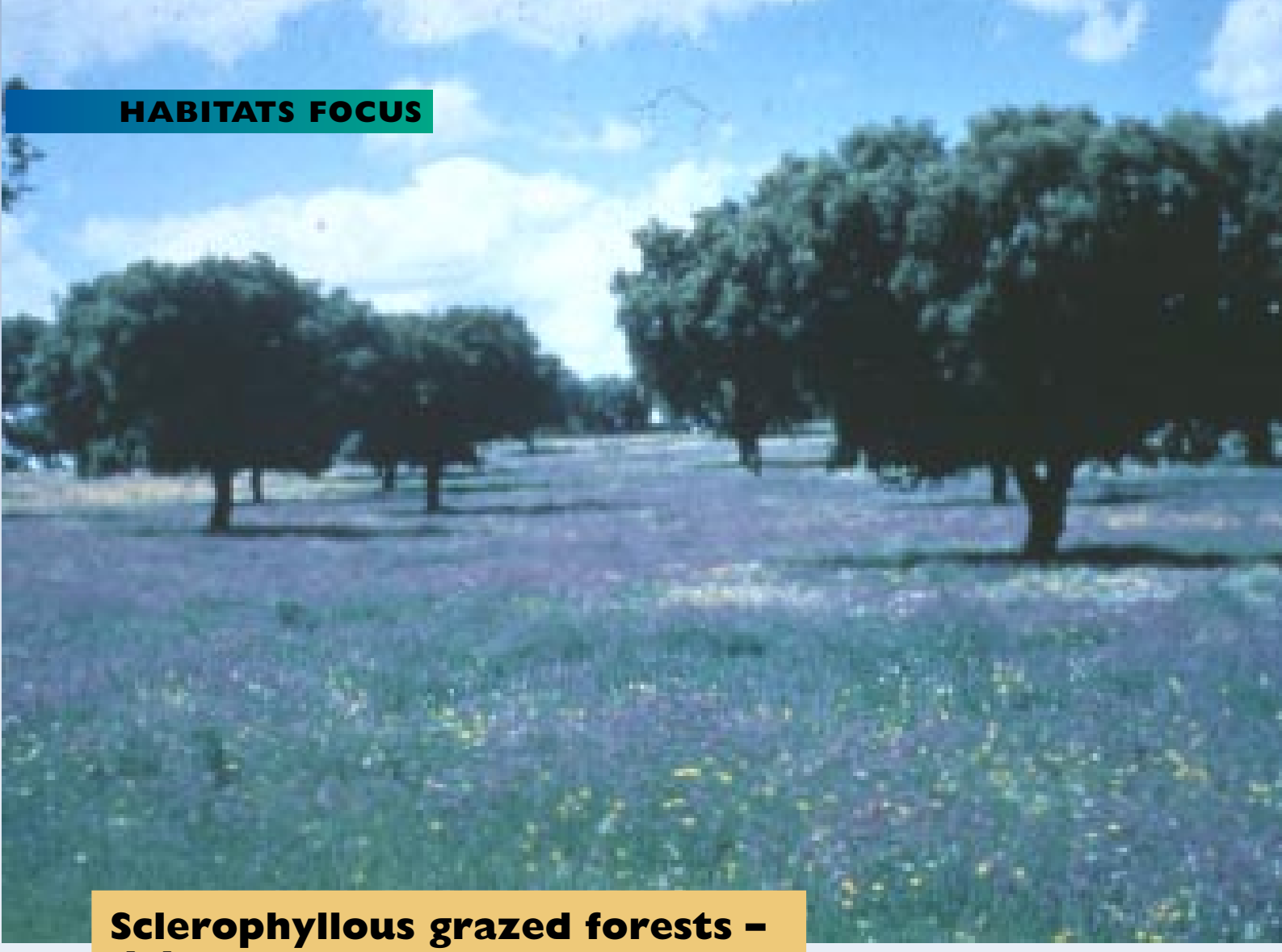


Photo: Atecma

Sclerophyllous grazed forests – dehesas

Remnants of the once extensive Mediterranean wooded pastures are found in most southern countries of the EU but it is on the Iberian peninsula that this very special habitat can still be seen in its full glory. More often referred to as a dehesa or montado, these man made habitats have been formed by centuries of human intervention – striking a fine balance between forests and grasslands, and between conservation and productivity.

The resulting biodiversity is quite astounding. The grasslands are estimated to have the highest plant diversity of any temperate area. Insects are also very prolific and provide nourishment for thousands of migrating birds. The native evergreen oaks (*Quercus ilex, Q. suber)*, meanwhile, provide refuge for some of the rarest raptors in the EU such as the Iberian imperial eagle *Aquila adalberti* and the black vulture *Aegypius monachus* to name but a few. Even the elusive Iberian lynx *Lynx pardina* can sometimes be spotted in the under growth.

Much of this is due to the way the dehesas are traditionally managed using an intricate mix of grazing and harvesting. Sheep graze here in the late autumn and early spring before starting their long journey back to the cooler mountain pastures along the centuries old transhumance routes. Pigs on the other hand stay all year round feeding off the sweet acorns from the oak trees. Harvesting of cork and natural products such as honey, berries, wild herbs etc… provide important additional sources of income as do game hunting and charcoal production. Tragically, vast tracks have been lost lately through mechanised farming, massive irrigation projects and afforestation schemes. The remainder is under severe threat from the abandonnement of traditional management practices. There is however a glimmer of hope, people are finally waking up to the value of these remarkable habitats and making such measures as the agri-environment regulation available to try to help save what is left.

Iberian lynx.

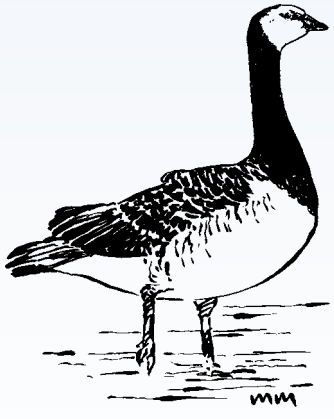
NATURA BAROMETER

(as of 1/3/01)

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					
	Number of sites classified	Total classified area (km^2)	% of national territory	Site Maps	Natura 2000 Forms	Assessment of SPA classification
België/Belgique	36	4,313	14.1%			
Danmark	111	9,601	22.3%			
Deutschland	617	21,672	6.1%			
Ellas	52	4,965	3.8%			
España	260	53,602	10.6%			
France	117	8,357	1.5%			
Ireland	109	2,236	3.2%			
Italia	342	13,707	4.6%			
Luxembourg	13	160	6.2%			
Nederland	79	10,000	24.1%			
Österreich	83	12,080	14.4%			
Portugal	47	8,468	9.2%			
Suomi	451	27,500	8.1%			
Sverige	394	24,647	5.5%			
United Kingdom	230	11,165	4.6%			
EUR 15	2,941	**212,473**				



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

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largely complete

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Habitats Directive						Member State
Number of sites proposed	Total proposed area (km^2)	% of national territory	Site maps	Natura 2000 forms	Assessment of national list	
209	1,105	3.6%				*België/Belgique*
194	10,259	23.8%				*Danmark*
2,196	20,434	5.8%				*Deutschland*
236	27,228	20.7%				*Ellas*
1,208	115,505	22.9%			↑	*España*
1,030	31,444	5.7%				*France*
362	9,907	14.1%			↑	*Ireland*
2,507	49,364	16.4%				*Italia*
38	352	13.6%				*Luxembourg*
76	7,078	17.0%				*Nederland*
127	9,144	10.9%				*Österreich*
94	16,502	17.9%				*Portugal*
1,381	47,154	13.9%				*Suomi*
2,455	50,908	12.4%				*Sverige*
499	21,658	8.4%			↑	*United Kingdom*
12,612	**418,042**					**EUR 15**

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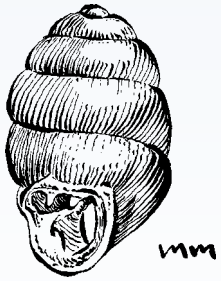
substantial list but still incomplete

complete

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

The Natura Barometer: commentary on progress

- Under the Habitats Directive, significant progress can be reported for the following countries: Spain has added 271 new sites relating to the Mediterranean biogeographical region and Ireland has added 45 new sites to its national list which now accounts for 14,1% of its territory. The UK meanwhile has proposed a further 113 sites, which, together with modifications to existing sites, increases the overall surface area to an equivalent of 8.9% of its territory.
- Under the Birds Directive there has been very little progress. There are a few additions for the UK for which the overall total has also been corrected.



Naardemeer seen from the air. Photos: Natuurmonumenten.

An integrated approach to site hydrology

"A complex of worthless and infertile lakes" – or so they said, a hundred years ago. Now Naardermeer, a large lake surrounded by reedbeds and species rich hay meadows, is the pride and joy of Natuurmonumenten, the biggest nature conservation NGO in the Netherlands. It is also a showcase of integrated water management.

The lake was originally drained in 1883 and for three long years farmers tried to cultivate barley and rape on its soft muddy bottom. However, the cost of having two steam engines pump out the water (new technology back then!) was far too high. Farming was abandoned and the lake filled in once more, so with time the wildlife slowly returned. But then in 1904 the site was again under threat – this time from the growing environmental problem of domestic waste disposal. The mayor and aldermen of Amsterdam proposed to the city council to buy Naardermeer in order to turn it into a municipal dump. A new railway to Naarden already bisected this wetland, so transporting waste by train was an elegant and simple (or "quick and dirty") solution.

But they hadn't counted on the resolution of a local botanist, Jac. P. Thijsse, who was determined to prevent this natural oasis from ending up as rubbish heap. He founded Natuurmonumenten in order to lobby against the plan and, against all odds, succeeded in buying Naardermeer, all 300 ha of open water and 400 ha of surrounding reedland and brook forests. And so the first Dutch nature reserve was formed.

Insidious invisible threats

What awaits today's visitor to this nature reserve? It depends on where you look. In one direction, reedlands, maybe a purple heron, exactly what Jac. Thijsse would have seen. In the other, a modern Dutch landscape with polders, busy highways, power lines, housing complexes and dykes bringing with it less visible but more insidious threats. As the local population boomed, increasing urbanisation meant more and more rainwater was draining into the sewer system instead of seeping into the lake via the soil. Extraction of drinking water reduced the natural flow from nearby sandy ridges (Het Gooi). On top of this, intensifying grassland exploitation in the nearby polders required high drainage levels which led to a substantial (40 cm) drop in the groundwater level, so much so that water began leaking out of the Naardermeer.

What the steam engines failed to do a century ago, was now happening – the ecosystem started to desiccate, destroying species-rich hayfields and reedlands around the lake. So, although the Naardermeer core has been protected since 1906, Natuurmonumenten could not stop "progress" around the site from slowly strangling the wetland, hydrologically speaking. True, Naardermeer had not become the "gigantic dunghill" Amsterdam wanted, but "dung", now from intensive farming in the polders, was

affecting it all the same. Algae in the water flourished on these nutrients, shading and killing most vulnerable plants such as the stoneworts (*Chara* and *Nitella)*. Ironically, the ecologically beneficial small-scale farming inside the nature reserve also went into decline as reed and hay production was no longer viable.

A holistic strategy

Clearly, water was desperately needed to save this desiccating wetland. However, this was a catch-22 situation. Even the cleanest locally available water, from the Ijmeer, was now polluted with phosphates. Refusing nutrient-rich water meant allowing the nature reserve to desiccate further! During summer, there was no alternative but to use polluted water to save Naardermeer from complete destruction. Things improved in the 1980s when the authorities built a treatment plant to remove phosphates from the incoming water, but the damage had already been done by then. Nutrients had settled into the silt on the lake bottom. Structural solutions had to be found to solve the hydrological impasse.

Under these circumstances, meaningful restoration could only succeed if Natuurmonumenten collaborated with all stakeholders. So, in 1994 an agreement was signed between Natuurmonumenten, the state, provinces, municipalities, water boards and the Dutch railways (NS) to implement an integrated water management concept to restore the ecosystem. In 1996, LIFE-Nature support was sought to tackle the three main problems: the continuing loss of water from the nature reserve, the nutrient-enriched silt on the lake bottom and the degraded, acidified reedlands and hayfields.

Restoring the water levels

Because of drainage from the surrounding polders, the water table in the Naardermeer was higher than that of the land around it; not the most appropriate situation for a wetland, but one that couldn't be reversed easily. Under the restoration plan, the stakeholders agreed to raise water levels in a buffer zone and to increase seepage towards the lake from the sand ridges to the east.

Natuurmonumenten used national funding to buy land in this buffer zone and then deployed LIFE-Nature to turn it from intensive grassland into a wetland. Drawing on old maps, the micro-topography was restored, culverts were installed and new levees were constructed to protect farmland still in use against rising water. There was opposition from one farmer, which had to be resolved through a court decision, but once these preparatory works were ready the water level in the new buffer zone was raised by some 40 cm to create 200 ha of new nature, rapidly colonised by ducks and waders. The spoonbill, which once bred in Naardermeer, also returned.

From the start the interests of the local inhabitants and tourists were catered for too. Thus, the new wetlands in the buffer zone were designed specifically to allow easy observation of the birds and were integrated into a local network of cycle tracks, thereby alleviating pressure on the core area of the nature reserve.

Cleaning up the bottom of the lake

Although the treatment plant succeeded in stopping the inflow of nutrient rich water with a high suspension level, the silt that had settled on the bottom of the lake beforehand continued to have a crippling effect on the habitat – effectively blocking any natural development of the aquatic vegetation. It was therefore imperative to find a way to remove this poison from the lake. Using a mixture of ingenuity and common sense, Natuurmonumenten built a special dredging boat, equipped with underwater camera and sensors, which could literally "vacuum clean" the silt off the bottom. In total, LIFE-Nature paid for the removal of 300.000 m³ of

CENTRE ***Chlidonias niger.***
BELOW ***Boating and birdwatching are now popular activities.***
Photos: Natuurmonumenten

sludge. Where the water was once murky, visitors peering over the edge of a boat can now see straight down to the sand exposed on the lake bottom. And the rich water plants, in particular the stonewort flora are back in their full glory (11 out of the 20 Dutch stonewort species are now present in Naardermeer).

Where did this huge amount of silt go? Well it also had a role to play in improving the general hydrology of the wetland, because it was deposited on nearby farmland so that groundwater levels could be raised without hindering existing land uses. This also helped to lower the loss of lake water through seepage.

Nieuwkoopse Plassen. Photo: Natuurmonumenten

Restoring acidified reedlands

The final piece in the jigsaw concerned the restoration of the degenerated reedlands which were gradually being taken over by brook forests. These reedlands acidified because they were hydrologically isolated, receiving only rainwater. Now that the water in the lake was clear again thanks to the dredging work, it was time to re-link the reeds and the lake In order to give the latter a chance to recover as well. Thus 3 kms of ditches were re-opened to feed the reeds with fresh water, almost immediately the rare floating plant *Stratiotes aloides* started to expand across the newly created waterways. To speed this process up even further LIFE-Nature also paid for the removal of topsoil from about 8 ha of acidified reedland. This helped to create the early succession stages where water lilies and pond weeds could develop, fish could find new spawning areas and where, over the next decades, species-rich hayfields or quaking bogs could form.

The dredging boat 'vaccuums' silt off the lake bottom. Photo: Natuurmonumenten

Towards a future hydrological network

Looking ahead, the state and provincial authorities are now collaborating with Natuurmonumenten to link Naardermeer to another nature reserve nearby, the Ankeveense Plassen. When this is done and drinking water extraction is reduced, the objectives of the Naardermeer Restoration Plan will essentially have been reached.

Meanwhile, Natuurmonumenten and the Dutch Government are already working on further joint ventures, the most ambitious of which is to create a long 'wet axis' from North to South to link up the most important fen areas between Rotterdam and the Province of Friesland and improve water quality. LIFE-Nature is already contributing significantly to the restoration of two other building blocks within this network : Nieuwkoopse Plassen and the Wieden-Weeribben, both fen areas of outstanding natural interest under the Birds and Habitats Directives. Once restored it is anticipated that sustainable farming and tourism will help to support the nature conservation objectives of this network over the long term.

THE GRAND LIEU

A similar operation was undertaken, within the framework of another LIFE-Nature project, on the Grand Lieu near Nantes in France. This vast lake covering 6000 ha of shallow water suffered similar problems – a reduction in water levels and pollution from agricultural run-off. In addition to restoring the hydrology of the lake to a more natural system which allowed for spring flooding in the surrounding meadows, the beneficiary – the National Society for Nature Protection – also attempted to remove the bottleneck of silt which prevented the lake from discharging its sediments naturally. To do this they enlisted the services of another Dutch engineering firm to dig a hole in the silt of around 30 ha and slowly 'suck up' the sediments in order to discharge them in diluted form in the river downstream. All in all some 170 000 m³ of silt were removed from the lake which was enough to restore its natural self cleaning function: in 1998, for the first time, the lake rid itself of more sediments than it received.

Enlargement – Amending the Annexes of the Birds and Habitats Directive

Work is underway to extend the nature Directives eastwards. One of the main challenges for the Commission's nature conservation Unit at this stage is the adaptation of the annexes to ensure that they are in line with the needs of an enlarged Europe. In 2000, all 12 candidate countries put forward over 800 proposals. These not only included requests for the addition of new species or habitat types but also requests for geographical restrictions (exceptions). Once the proposals had been scientifically assessed with the help and advice of the European Topic Centre for Nature Conservation in Paris, a first round of technical consultations took place in the second half of 2000. This involved intense discussions with Member States (via the Scientific Working Groups and Committees formed under the two Directives) and with Candidate Countries. A 2nd round of consultations is currently underway in anticipation of reaching a preliminary Commission position by autumn 2001. These will then be incorporated into the draft Accession Treaty at a later stage in the negotiations.

New organigram for DG ENVIRONMENT

At the beginning of February, a new organisational structure was put into place for the European Commission's Environment DG. Nature related activities are now managed as follows:

- Unit Env.D.1 is responsible for all LIFE projects (Nature, Environment and Third Countries). The Head of Unit is Bruno Julien, and the deputy Head is Angelo Salsi.
- Unit Env.B.2 "Nature and Biodiversity" continues to handle the Natura 2000 Network and is now headed by Nicholas Hanley. Bertrand Delpeuch remains deputy Head of Unit and editor of this newsletter.

LIFE III project selection is underway

A total of 310 project applications were sent to the Commission under LIFE-Nature III by the deadline of 31st October 2000. Some are coming for the first time from Estonia, Latvia, Hungary and Slovenia who will be competing with Member States and Romania for funds on equal terms. There is no ceiling on the level of funds they can receive so all will depend on the quality of the project and the importance of the conservation work being proposed. The applications are currently being evaluated with a view to having a Commission Decision on the selected projects by May.

European Environmental Initiatives: Implications for Military Forces

This was the subject of a meeting co-hosted by DG Environment and the US Department of Defence on the 17–18th January 2001. Bringing together the Heads of the environmental sectors within the military services of thirteen nations and officials from the European Commission, the aim of the meeting was to improve mutual understanding of these issues so that environmental obligations can be better met. As far as EU Nature legislation is concerned, both the presentation and the ensuing discussion aimed to help clarify the site designation and management requirements arising out of the Habitats and Birds Directives.

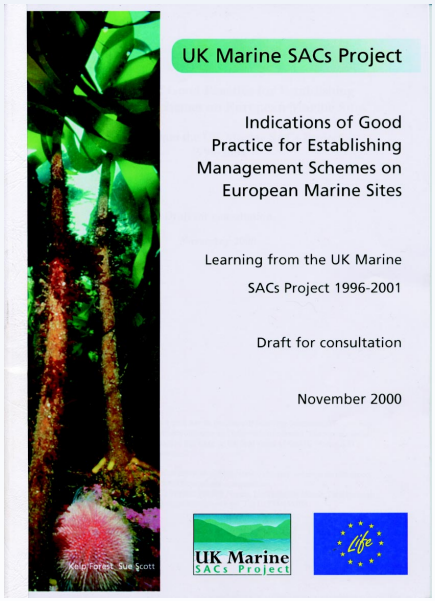
International Fish symposium

Over 180 fish experts from 27 different countries gathered for a six-day symposium in Albufeira, Portugal last November. Discussions revolved around two main themes: identifying the principal threats to conservation – such as stocking with non-native fish species, dam construction, pollution and over-exploitation – and defining priorities for conservation action. In order to be effective, fish conservation and especially migratory species conservation has to be considered at a catchment level. Hence, the urgent need for closer interaction between scientists and site managers to raise the awareness of

the particular needs of the different species. Examples can be drawn from the eight LIFE-Nature projects that are currently working on endangered fish species in various parts of the EU. *Contact Prof M.J. Collares-Pereira, Centro de Biologia Ambiental, Faculdade de Ciensias da Universidade de Lisboa. 1749-016 Lisboa, Portugal. Tel +351 21 7573141; fax +351 21 7500028 email mcolares@fc.ul.pt*

Conference on Marine SACs

As mentioned in issue 12, a conference was held in Edinburgh, UK in November 2000 to present the results of a four-year LIFE-Nature project on the conservation and management of 12 UK marine SACs. Attended by over 300 people the conference gave a comprehensive overview of the different aspects of the project from identifying information needs and building partnerships to determining management measures. These are well summarised in a best practice



NEWS ROUND UP continued

guide which is available from *John Torlesse, UK marine SACs project; English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA, UK. Tel: +44 1733 455308; fax +44 1733 568834 email john.torlesse@english-nature.org.uk. Other scientific reports and project outputs are available from their website: http://www.english-nature.org.uk/uk-marine*

Saving the Balearic shearwater

Part of the LIFE-Nature project on the recovery of the Balearic shearwater *Puffinus puffinus mauretanicus* is dedicated to raising awareness over the plight of this endangered bird. Amongst the panoply of interesting material produced are several that deserve special mention for the way they incite school children to learn about the species. There is, for instance, a CD-Rom game where the player must combat all the threats facing the species in order to help the young bird star –Miquelet – reach his nest. There is also a colourful comic telling the tale of the bird's life story. For those wanting more details a twenty page leaflet and video have also been produced, the latter contains some of the best footage ever filmed on this species. *Contact Catalina Massuti, Conselleria de Medio Ambient, Govern Balear, Forners, 10, E-07006 Palma de Mallorca, Tel: +34-971-17 68 00, fax: +34-971-17 68 01*

Eurosite awards 2001

Eurosite is once again launching two awards this year for sites of excellence which could act as models of good management practice. The first : the Eurosite Natura 2000 award is for sites designated as SPA or proposed as SCI which have, over the last two years demonstrated, a high degree of success in achieving favourable conservation status and put in place innovative plans for their future management. The second Eurosite management award will go to the one who can demonstrate an exiting programme of management activities to encourage access by the public and to maximise the learning and enjoyment of their visits. The deadline for submissions is 2nd May 2001. *Entries to be sent to Lesley Nudds, RSPB, the Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK tel +44 1767 680551 fax + 44 1767 692365 ; email Lesley.Nudds@RSPB.org.uk*

LIFE-Nature websites

Here is further selection of project websites that may be of interest. As of LIFE III, all projects are obliged to set up a website, this will hopefully greatly facilitate the exchange of information and experiences gained under LIFE-Nature:

- Conservation of cetaceans in the Madeira Archipelago: http://www.madeira.dyndns.org/cetaceos (in Portuguese, French and English)
- Habitat conservation in the Bucegi Natural Park, Roumania http://www.cem.ro/life-en.htm (in English)
- Protection of priority plant species on the Aeolian islands in Italy http://web.tiscalinet.it/ecogestioni/eolife/ (in Italian)
- Conservation of Stagno di Cagliari, Sardinia's largest coastal wetland http://www.gilia.net (in Italian)
- The Rhön habitats of Thuringia, Bavaria and Hessen in Germany http://www.biosphaerenreservat-rhoen.de/ (in German)

Erratum

Contrary to what was stated in the article on *Bombina bombina* in the last issue of the newsletter, the fire-bellied toad is not a priority species under the Habitats Directive.

NATURA 2000 NEWSLETTER

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