



natura

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Foresters working in a Lappish Natura 2000 site. Photo: Pauliina Kulmala

WE'RE BACK!

After a short break, the Natura 2000 newsletter is back on a regular basis. From now on, each expanded issue – to be produced twice a year – will examine a particular theme relating to Natura 2000 in detail. We start the ball rolling with forests...

The intention is to keep you up-to-date with the most recent developments. Now that Natura 2000 is moving from vision to reality and the biogeographical lists of SCIs are beginning to take shape, the Commission is turning its attention towards the future management and funding of the network. To assist in this process, it has recently launched a series of informal working groups with Member States and stakeholder groups to study specific issues relating to this unique European Network. Topics include: the provisions of articles 8 and 12 of the Habitats Directive, sustainable hunting, marine SCIs, monitoring and communicating Natura

2000.... We will dedicate a special issue to each of these in due course.

Meanwhile, Natura 2000 was given a significant political boost last year when the Environment Ministers of all Member States and Accession Countries signed up to the El Teide Declaration "Natura 2000: a partnership for Nature". Recognising that Natura 2000 makes a key contribution to global nature conservation, all 28 countries committed themselves to finalising the full implementation of the network in the shortest delays. They also undertook to promote partnerships involving a broad range of stakeholders in the conservation and management of Natura 2000 and to support the sharing of experience and good practice. Thus, thanks to this timely Declaration, the momentum behind Natura 2000 remains strong.

For copies of the El Teide Declaration, go to DG Environment's Nature website (address on back page).

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A natural boreal forest in Ylläs SCI, Northern Finland. Photo: Kerstin Sundseth, Ecosystems
Great spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*. Photo: Phil McLean

Natural and semi-natural forests in Natura 2000

Natural and semi-natural forests are amongst the richest ecosystems in Europe but few of these valuable habitats have survived into the 21st Century. What remains is generally very restricted in range and highly fragmented. The Habitats Directive lists no less than 59 forest types in urgent need of conservation which, together, account for just 6.4% of the total EU forest resource. Because of their complex structure and composition, they present a number of challenges in terms of management. This article explores the range of forests covered by Natura 2000 and the management options available.

Biodiversity trends in Europe's forests

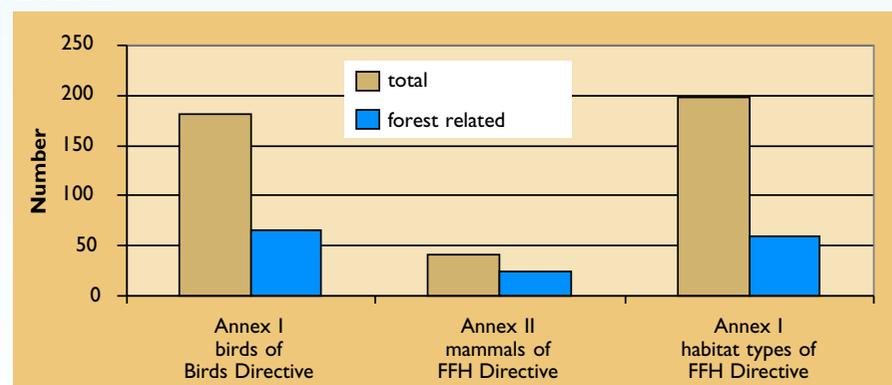
Today, around a third of the European territory is covered by forest, although the extent varies significantly between Member States (up to 72% in Finland and down to 8% in Ireland). The majority is termed "available for

wood supply" and is subject to varying degrees in intensity of human use. Since the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden, the EU has become the world's second largest paper and sawn wood producer employing some 2.2 million people and generating over €300 million a year. In addition, forests perform a number of other important functions ranging from erosion prevention, water retention and carbon sequestration to recreational and amenity use, which, in many respects, is

considered as important as timber and cellulose production.

Their environmental and economic value is therefore without question. But the scenario is somewhat less positive when it comes to their biodiversity. Although the absolute area of forest continues to expand – mainly through replanting and land abandonment – the combined effects of intensified silvicultural practices, increased uniformity and the use of exotic species has meant that the environmental quality of

Proportion of habitat types/species listed in FFH and Birds Directives that are forest related.
Source: EEA



the forest ecosystems is generally in decline.

Very little of Europe's truly natural forest, untouched by humans, remains (probably less than 1–3%). Most of it will have been gradually cleared over the centuries to make way for agriculture, replaced by commercial plantations of significantly less ecological interest or changed by management to semi-natural forest. Others would have been lost through massive fires and severe overgrazing, especially in the Mediterranean region.

Semi-natural forests have suffered a similar fate, as traditional techniques, such as selective cutting, coppicing and woodland grazing, became increasingly uneconomical in the face of modern forestry practices. This left only small isolated patches of natural or semi-natural forest dotted around the landscape, often in the remoter and less accessible areas. In England, for instance, where there was once a single continuous tract of natural forest, there are now 28,000 separate woods, most of which (83%) are under 20 ha.

This scenario has also led to a dramatic decline in many woodland dependent species. Because of their structural complexity, forests provide ideal habitats for a particularly rich array of plants and animals and a natural refuge for many large carnivores, such as bears and wolves, which were once a characteristic feature of Europe's wooded landscapes. The situation is further exacerbated by the severe fragmentation of the remaining resource and the loss of associated habitats such as pastures, hedges, stream banks etc., which would have allowed woodland species to move through the landscape by means of 'ecological corridors'.

Thus, without determined efforts to ensure a minimum plot size and a certain degree of connectivity between the remaining forests, their prognosis remains poor. The same is true of the woodland species. According to the European Environment Agency, 40% of threatened bryophytes and 30% of breeding birds that are considered to have an unfavourable conservation status are forest-related.

With statistics like this, it is clear that Europe as a whole has a particular responsibility to conserve what remains of its natural and semi-natural forests, be it through active management agreements, strict protection and/or a greater integration of biodiversity concerns into forestry and other land use practices at a landscape level. Later on, we explore possible management options for these habitats and illustrate how they have been put into practice through LIFE project examples. But first it is important to clarify what exactly is at issue here. There have been many fears expressed that protecting these habitats will result in a general block on all economic exploitation

of forests or a reversion to old-fashioned practices which were abandoned years ago because they were unprofitable. Whilst this may be true for certain critical areas, it is by no means the general rule, semi-natural forests, by and large, need active management. The key then is to find a way forward with the forest owners concerned as to how this can be achieved for the benefit of nature *and* the stakeholders.

The type of forests included in Natura 2000

The Habitats and Birds Directives lie at the heart of the EU's efforts to conserve threatened natural and semi-natural forest habitats and their related species. Together, they form

PALM FOREST OF VAI IN CRETE

Many of the forest habitats listed in the Habitats Directive have a very restricted range. None illustrate this better than the rare Palm groves of Phoenix (code *9370). This unusual, almost tropical, habitat harbours the only two endemic palm trees found in the EU. It is so rare that no more than a handful of sites have been identified in the Canaries and on the island of Crete. Only on Crete does it reach sufficient proportions to merit the title of 'forest'. Stretching over 2 km along a beautiful golden sandy beach, the Vai Palm forest is a truly luxuriant grove, harbouring 5,000 palms (*Phoenix theophrastii*) and attracting over 200,000 visitors a year. Legend has it that the forest began after Phoenician merchants arrived on the island and scattered date seeds, which produced the famous palm trees (*vagia*) and gave the forest its name.

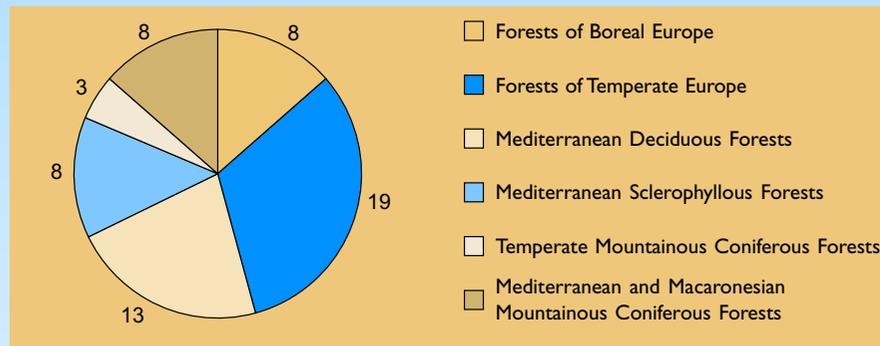
At one time Vai covered over 300 ha but with time it gradually shrunk to 20 ha, under the combined pressures of land reclamation and tourism. Until a few years ago, the forest was hemmed in on all sides by agricultural activities and poorly planned tourist infrastructure, preventing it from regenerating or expanding. This critical situation prompted the Greek Biotope-Wetland Centre and the local Monastery of Toplou to combine forces, through a LIFE-Nature project, to motivate local stakeholders to swap their land around the forest for agricultural plots further away and to channel visitor use more sensitively around the forest. The Monastery's involvement has been crucial, not only has it given over 17 ha of its own land next to the forest for replanting, so that it can double in size over time, but it has also raised the profile of this rare habitat locally and set the example for others to follow.

Vai palm grove and neighbouring beach. Photo: Nikos Kyfonidis, EKBY

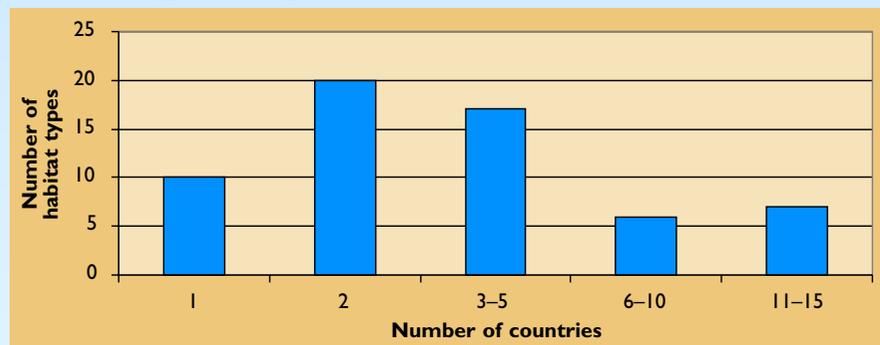


IN FOCUS continued

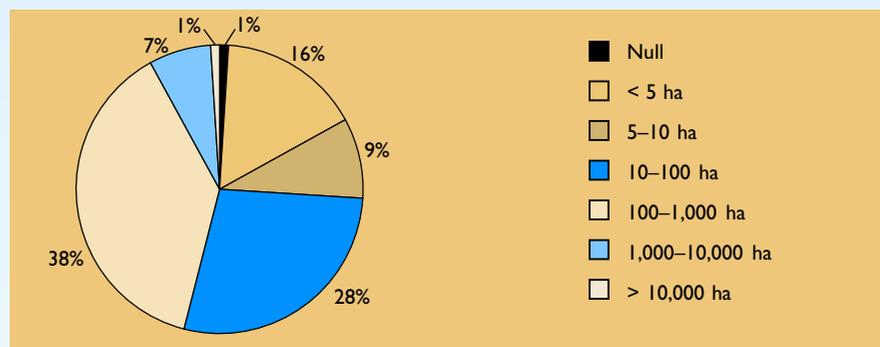
Forest habitat types in Annex I of FFH Directive. Source: ETC-NC



Forest habitat types occurring in one or more Member States. Source: ETC-NC



Average size of forest habitats in Natura 2000. Source: ETC-NC



Remnants of old sessile oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum*, endemic to the British Isles, in Killarney National Park, Ireland.

Photo: Kerstin Sundseth, Ecosystems

the Natura 2000 Network of sites, which to-date covers around 15% of the European territory.

Listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive are 59 different forest habitat types, of which 22 are classed as priority. According to the Directive, these are described as '(sub) natural woodland vegetation comprising native species forming forests of tall trees, with typical undergrowth, and meeting the following criteria: rare or residual, and/or hosting species of Community interest'. Altogether, they correspond to a third of all the habitats covered by the Directive. With the accession of the Candidate Countries in 2004 this is likely to increase even further (bringing the total up to 72).

The large number of habitat types in Annex I does not imply an abundant resource. On the contrary, it goes to confirm their generally rare and residual nature. Over 50% are restricted to just one or two countries (and in some cases to just one or two locations – see box).

Typical examples include: Fennoscandian wooded pastures found only in Finland and Sweden, Canarian endemic pine forests, Nebrodi fir forests of Sicily.... Only a handful of the more 'common' and well known forests such as residual alluvial forests, oak woods and a variety of beech forests for instance, are present in the majority of Member States.

The lady's slipper orchid, *Cypripedium calceolus*. Photo: Veikko Vasama



To help select sites for Natura 2000, Member States and the Commission agreed that they should focus specifically on the following: forests of native species, forests with a high degree of naturalness, forests of tall trees, presence of old and dead trees, forests with a substantial area and forests having benefited from continuous sustainable management over a significant period. These principles indicate that preference should be given to autochthonous forests with little human interference and/or to those already subject to sustainable management practices favouring biodiversity.

By February 2002, approximately 11,500 sites, covering around 400,000 km² had been proposed for Natura 2000, 69% of these sites included at least one forest habitat type, which suggests they tend to form part of a complex matrix of habitats within a larger area. In terms of surface area, however, they represented less than 20%. This is probably because the forest areas are generally very small, a quarter of those included in Natura 2000 are no more than 10 ha, and over half are less than 100 ha. At the other end of the scale, those exceeding 1,000 ha (a mere 8%) correspond essentially to a few large sites of relatively untouched Mediterranean mountainous coniferous forests and old growth

BELOW **Kalkalpen National Park, Austria.**
Photo: Frank Vassen, Ecosystems

RESIDUAL ALLUVIAL FORESTS (ALNION GLUTINOSO-INCANAE)

Residual alluvial forests, as the name implies, are found on river floodplains in the majority of Member States in a range of situations from islands in river channels to low lying wetlands running alongside watercourses. Once upon a time, these habitats fringed all the major European rivers and provided not only a safe haven but also safe passage across the landscape for species. They are, in fact, amongst the richest and most complex ecosystems in Europe, hosting an exceptional diversity of tree species and an abundance of fauna and flora. This high value is due to a combination of factors, including the richness of the soil and an abundance of light in the understorey, which give them their complex structure. Unfortunately, these very factors have also led to their dramatic decline. Originally, alluvial plains were the choice location for human settlements, providing transport, energy and rich agricultural soil. Then a whole series of other threats appeared, ranging from river straightening and embankment to water pollution, flood prevention etc.... As a result, almost 90% of Europe's alluvial forests have disappeared. What is left is very fragmented and often in critical condition. Several LIFE projects are working to restore parts of this valuable resource along various rivers in Europe.



Photo:
Peter Creed

Western Taiga forests in Finland and Sweden, or traditionally managed dehesas on the Iberian peninsula. Almost all of the proposed forest areas occur in three of the six biogeographical regions Mediterranean (ca. 3.6 million ha) Alpine (2.4 million ha) and Boreal (ca. 1 million ha).

DG Environment guidance on forests in Natura 2000

In summary, forests within the Natura 2000 Network represent around 6.4% of the total European forest resource. Yet their sheer diversity, isolation, and often tiny

size, combined with the fact that a significant proportion is privately owned, means that their management requirements are both complex and highly dependent on wider land use policy issues.

In a bid to clarify the role of forests and forestry within Natura 2000, DG Environment will soon produce an informal guidance document on the subject. The specific objectives of this document are:

- to inform private and public forest owners, forestry operators, nature conservation authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders of

Pastures with cork oaks in Alentejo, Portugal.
Photo: Kerstin Sundseth, Ecosystems



IN FOCUS continued

existing experiences across Europe in the field of Natura 2000 and forestry, from national policies to individual case study examples;

- to initiate and facilitate communication between different stakeholders;
- to give a framework for non-mandatory guidelines for management of Natura 2000 forest sites, based mainly on existing initiatives to promote sustainable forest management as defined by the Ministerial Conference for the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE);
- to inform stakeholders of existing and forthcoming funding opportunities that could be gained for forests and forestry by the establishment of Natura 2000.

The document is essentially a compilation of existing information on forests, protected area management and silvicultural practices, which could be relevant for Natura 2000, rather than a series of detailed generic habitat management prescriptions. The aim is to facilitate the understanding of the mechanics of the Habitats Directive amongst concerned stakeholder groups and so complement any detailed guidelines drawn up by Member States who,

The multifunctional role of forests includes increased recreational interest.

Photo: Heidi Dolecek



Foresters and biologists inspect forests in the Kalkalpen National Park, Austria.

Photo: Frank Vassen, Ecosystems

after all, have the ultimate responsibility for their conservation management.

Thus, based on the understanding of articles 4 and 6 of the Habitats Directive, a number of general recommendations are made for managing forests within Natura 2000. The first stresses the multifunctional role of the forests and the need to take an integrative – rather than an isolationist – approach to their management wherever appropriate. This is especially relevant for semi-natural forests (e.g. wooded pastures) or for certain woodland species (e.g. white-backed woodpecker) where their conservation is dependent on a

certain degree of intervention and active management. In these cases, it is preferable to designate large enough areas to allow the conservation objectives to be integrated into existing management plans and compatible sylvi-pastoral practices.

Next is the issue of recognising that forests are dynamic rather than static ecosystems. Even natural forests, untouched by humans, are subject to natural changes resulting from windblow, lightning fires, death of old trees etc...which are all important factors in maintaining a variety of habitat structures, mosaic-like distribution of different age classes and consequently high levels of biodiversity. Again, this dynamism, and the concept of change over time and space, should be considered an integral part of any conservation strategy for the area.

Particular attention should also be paid to the way in which these conservation objectives are put into practice, depending on their ownership – whether state or private. Some forest sites in Natura 2000 will require active management and can tolerate varying levels of exploitation. Others by contrast, are best 'left alone'. In state owned forests, provided the political will is there, these management practices can be integrated into the overall strategy of maintaining multifunctional forests. For private forest owners, however, the situation is rather more complex. In this context, DG Environment's report



strongly recommends that long-term management plans are drawn up, at an early stage, in close collaboration with the stakeholders concerned in order to identify what can and cannot be done within these forests. Once this is in place it will be easier to determine how these objectives can be achieved, be it through maintaining the status quo, or initiating incentive schemes for active management or compensation schemes for passive management and income foregone.

Funding opportunities for Natura 2000 forests

Financing then becomes an important part of the equation, and here the EU can make a significant contribution. With the adoption of the Rural Development Programme in 1999, new opportunities have been created for providing financial support to private forest owners or municipalities for ecologically oriented forests, including those in Natura 2000 (Articles 30 and 32). It is now up to the Member States, in their national and regional plans, to incorporate concrete measures for conservation orientated forest management within and around Natura 2000. Some countries like France have already made significant advances in this area (see box).

Meanwhile the Commission is exploring all other possible options for financing Natura 2000 and will be coming up with a Communication on this issue later in the year (see news round up).

Copies of the DG Environment Guidance document on forests and Natura 2000 will be available shortly on the Nature website (address on back page).

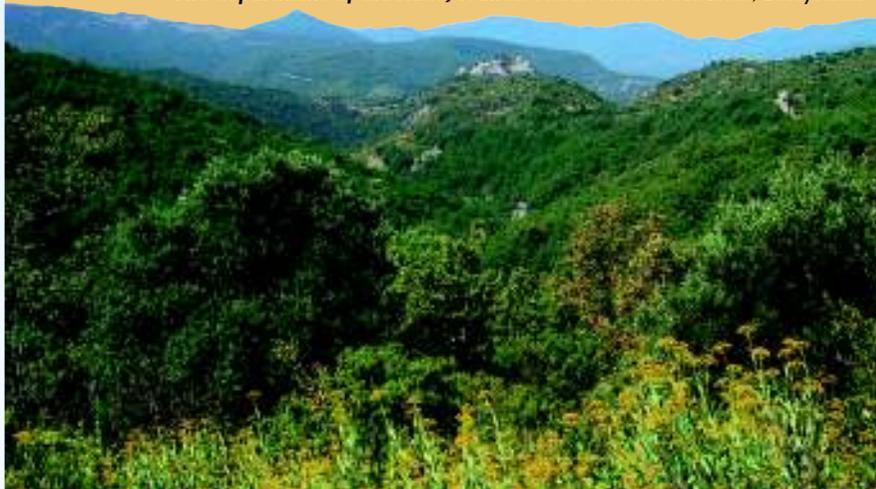
USING RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME TO FINANCE NATURA 2000

Because France straddles three biogeographical regions, it harbours no less than 28 of the 59 forest habitat types listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive. As a result over 40% of the Natura 2000 sites proposed for France have a forest component. The majority is in private ownership – not big forestry companies but small private landowners with an average parcel size of 4 ha. Faced with this complex situation, France has chosen a legal mechanism based on voluntary cooperation at the very local level to help implement Natura 2000. Thus, for each Natura 2000 site, management guidelines are drawn up, under the supervision of the local authority, to determine the specific conservation needs of that site and the practical measures (including funds) required. The resulting recommendations are then discussed at a formal Steering Committee set up to involve local stakeholders, before being adopted by local Decree.

The local authority and stakeholders are assisted in this task by a comprehensive forest habitat reference guide produced by the French Ministry of Environment. Not only does this provide detailed information on the conservation interest and needs of each of the forest types and associated species covered by Natura 2000, but it also outlines their production capacities and economic use, which is useful in determining appropriate levels of commercial forestry activities.

Once the management guidelines are in place and depending on the kind of extra management required, the local authority can issue public service contracts, called Natura 2000 contracts, to remunerate local stakeholders for 'services rendered to the community'. The contract defines the precise tasks to be done, over a minimum of five years to maintain or restore the targeted species and forest habitats and the method of payment, be it investment subsidies or annual aid per hectare. These contracts are partially funded by the EU through the new Rural Development Programme, (articles 30 and 32). In this way, substantial financial resources can be drawn down to enable local stakeholders to actively manage forested Natura 2000 sites which might otherwise have been abandoned or cut down. This in turn should facilitate their acceptance and full integration into local land use policies.

The department of the Aude, France. Photo: Kerstin Sundseth, Ecosystems



Article 32 of the Rural Development Programme – Regulation 1257/99

1. With a view to:

- maintaining and improving the ecological stability of forests where the protective and ecological role of these forests are of public interest and where the costs of maintenance and improvement measures for these forests exceed the income from forestry,
- maintaining fire-breaks through agricultural measures

payments for relevant measures shall be granted to the beneficiaries provided that the protective and ecological values of these forests are ensured in a sustainable manner and the measures to be carried out are laid down by contract and their cost specified therein.

2. Payments shall be fixed between the minimum and maximum amounts set out in the Annex, on the basis of the real costs of the measures carried out, as previously stipulated in the contract.

NATURA BAROMETER

(as of 28/3/03)

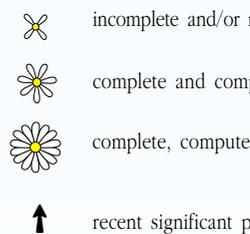
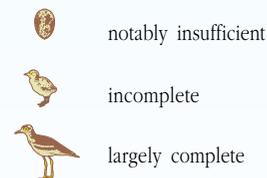
Nota Bene:

- 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 proposed
	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%				27
Danmark	111	9,601	22.3%				19
Deutschland	457	28,857	8.1%				3,53
Ellas	110	8,111	6.1%				23
España	384	74,158	17.8%			↑	1,22
France	117	8,989	1.6%				1,17
Ireland	109	2,236	3.2%				30
Italia	358	21,400	7.1%			↑	2,30
Luxembourg	13	160	6.2%				3
Nederland	79	10,000	24.1%				7
Österreich	95	12,353	14.7%				10
Portugal	47	8,671	9.4%				9
Suomi	451	27,500	8.1%				1,62
Sverige	436	23,306	5.2%				3,42
United Kingdom	239	14,164	5.8%				53
EUR 15	3,042	235,819					15,45

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



Assessment of SPA classification	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	
	270	3,178	10.4%				België/Belgique
	194	10,259	23.8%				Danmark
	3,535	32,143	9.0%				Deutschland
	236	27,641	20.9%				Ellas
	1,276	118,496	23.5%				España
	1,174	40,632	7.4%				France
	364	9,953	14.2%				Ireland
	2,369	41,266	13.7%				Italia
	38	352	13.7%				Luxembourg
	76	7,330	17.7%				Nederland
	160	8,896	10.6%				Österreich
	94	16,500	17.9%				Portugal
	1,671	60,090	17.8%				Suomi
	3,420	57,476	12.8%				Sverige
	576	24,064	9.9%				United Kingdom
	15,453	458,276					EUR 15

incomplete and/or not computerised



notably insufficient

incomplete and computerised



substantial list but still incomplete

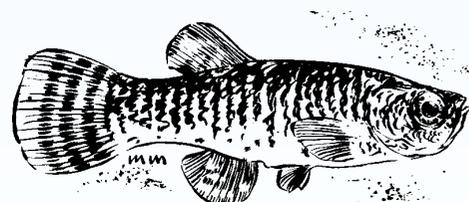
complete, computerised and validated



complete

recent significant progress

For further information contact:
Michael O'Briain,
DG ENV.B.2
for proposed SCIs.



The Natura Barometer: commentary on progress

- As regards the Birds Directive, during the past year, there has been important progress in Spain where 81 new sites have been designated. Germany, Italy, Austria, Sweden and United Kingdom have also designated some additional sites. However, overall progress in completing the network of Special Protection Areas has been poor and this is reflected in the fact that, in the past year, three Member States, France, Finland and Italy have been condemned by the EU Court of Justice for failing to designate all their "most suitable territories" as SPAs pursuant to Article 4 of the Birds Directive. There are also still significant gaps in the information for SPAs, especially for Belgium, Spain, Ireland and Germany.
- Under the Habitats Directive the most significant additions has been for Germany (183 sites), Finland (290 sites), Spain (57 sites), France (65 sites) and Belgium (which has doubled its surface area). There have also been additions for Austria and the United Kingdom. Further additions are expected as a result of follow up by Member States to the Biogeographic Seminars for which meetings have taken place over the past year for the Atlantic, Continental, Mediterranean and Boreal Regions.



Capercaillie, Tetrao urogallus, in Finland. Photo: Jorma Luhta

Seeing the wood for the trees: LIFE in a Natura 2000 forest

LIFE-Nature provides a small but significant source of funds for conservation work on forests within Natura 2000 sites. Since its inception in 1992, it has financed no less than 150 forestry related projects with a total EU contribution of over €100 million. This article provides a flavour of the types of projects funded, involving both private and state-owned land, and of the kind of management options chosen for conserving these valuable yet complex habitats and their associated species.

LIFE-Nature actions for forests

The range of actions undertaken for forests within LIFE projects is almost as diverse as the habitat types themselves. Many involve initial one-off restoration actions in order to bring the forest back up to its original high conservation state. Most also develop management plans in close collaboration with local stakeholders. Some go on to try out innovative ways of marrying

conservation with economic activities. Yet others focus instead on wildlife management issues, for instance, creating suitable habitats and corridors for woodland species such as bears and grouse. But, the way these actions are undertaken counts as much as what is being done. The following examples, taken from LIFE-Nature projects, illustrate some of the approaches that have proven to be particularly successful so far.

Planning nature friendly forest management in Central Finland

Central Finland lies at the heart of the country's timber industry, most forest plots here are privately owned, partly by large companies, partly by private individuals with a few hectares of land. It is hard to imagine, under these circumstances, that the mention of Natura 2000 would get anything but a hostile reception. Yet, a recent LIFE-Nature project has shown that, through close dialogue with the private stakeholders concerned, it is possible to create not only acceptance but

also support for Natura 2000. How?! Read on to find out....

It all started with the Regional Environment Centre of Keski-Suomi deciding to change from the normal Finnish practice of selecting sites for Natura 2000 only on the basis of the national Nature Conservation Act. It chose instead to select them also according to the National Forest Act. This means that there are, a priori, no restrictions on land-use but if a forest owner wants to do work on his land he would first need to seek permission from the authorities. This is in sharp contrast to the Nature Conservation Act where there are strict, and to some, unpalatable restrictions on land use from the outset but also an automatic right to compensation.

To demonstrate how this could work in practice, the Environment Centre and Forestry Centre initiated a joint LIFE-Nature project targeting ten Natura 2000 sites over an area of 100 km² hosting important remnants of species-rich boreal forest habitats (e.g. western Taiga, herb rich forests...). Part of the project involved state-owned land,

part private forest plots. In the case of the latter, their objective was to offer private owners the possibility of having forest management plans, which took account of the forest's natural values, drawn up for them free of charge. The advantage would be that the land-owner would know straight away what he can and cannot do in his forest and merely has to inform, rather than seek approval from, the relevant authorities for any new forest initiatives.

Initially, 27 owners were approached. Their response was far from positive, exposing a deep rooted suspicion of Natura 2000, but, after a number of information meetings and some gentle encouragement, a handful were eventually persuaded to join. Having carried out an in-depth scientific inventory of all the forests in the ten Natura 2000 sites, the next step was for the project officer to go around each private forest plot with the owner to show him the different natural features of interest and to discuss their conservation needs and implications. Although a time consuming and labour intensive exercise, this did much to win the owner's trust and interest, many were indeed surprised to learn that being in Natura 2000 did not necessarily mean taking all the forest out of production. In some cases it meant only minor adjustments to their existing practices.

Once this had been done, it was time to draw up a management plan. Following a thorough review of the forest's composition, conservation interest, development stage, timber value and projected income and expenditure over the next 10–20 years, areas were identified and plotted out on a detailed map according to three main categories. These were: commercial forestry operations (clear cutting, thinning and selective felling), forest maintenance (ditching, clearing undergrowth, plantations...) and finally special conservation actions. For the latter, this might entail taking an area out of production altogether or simply introducing additional actions such as ringbarking unwanted trees, adjusting the age structure or light intensity... Either

way the owner would be entitled to additional compensation for this under the Forest Act.

By the end of the project, private landowners became increasingly supportive of the project and its actions, so much so that they eventually agreed to commit themselves to implementing the management plans over a total area of 446 ha. In one case, the private owner was a large forestry company who decided to implement the plan rather than sell the land because it could use these efforts to help win a Forest Stewardship Council certificate, which is, in turn, good for their public image. To this day, the forestry service continues to get numerous requests from private landowners for these management plans, even outside Natura 2000 areas.

Why was the project eventually so successful? First, because it engaged the interest and trust of the forest owner through one-to-one dialogue. Not only did this remove any misperceptions about Natura 2000 blocking all commercial activities but it also raised their understanding of, and genuine interest in, the conservation of their forest. Second, it gave the owners something in return, a management plan that would help them to manage their own forestry resource more effectively and additional income for conservation orientated activities. It is unlikely that many would have invested in such a detailed plan of their land otherwise.

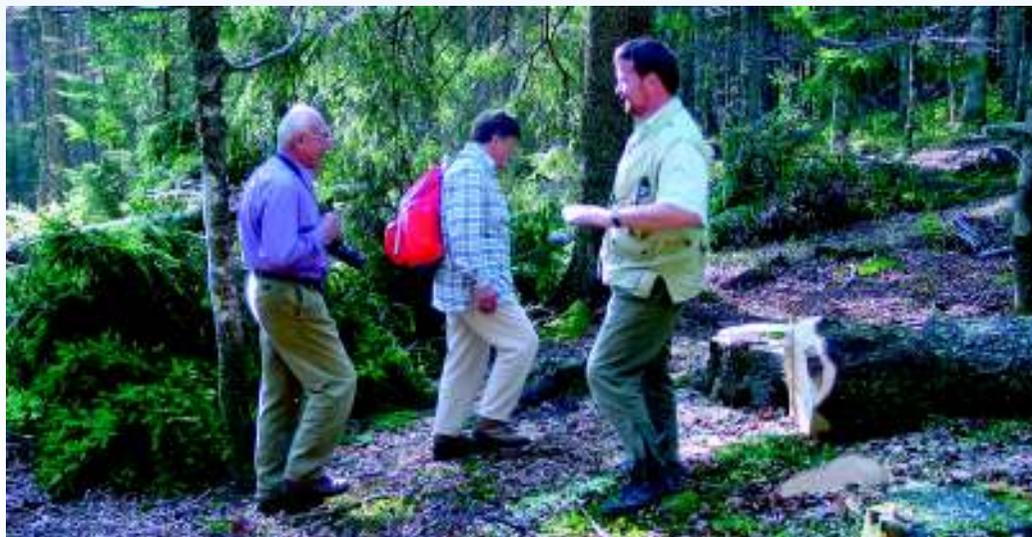
Grouse management in the Black forest

Protecting the different forest habitat types in their own right is only part of the equation, there are also the needs of the species that live in the forests to consider, it is their presence after all that determines the biological richness of the forests. The trouble is that different species require different conditions for their survival. The right environment for plants on the woodland floor may, for instance, be inappropriate for saprophytic insects, just as the needs of the flying squirrel are different from those of woodpeckers. If the forest area is large and diverse enough it may provide the full range of conditions but, often, additional measures are needed for conserving certain species, especially when dealing with smaller fragmented forests.

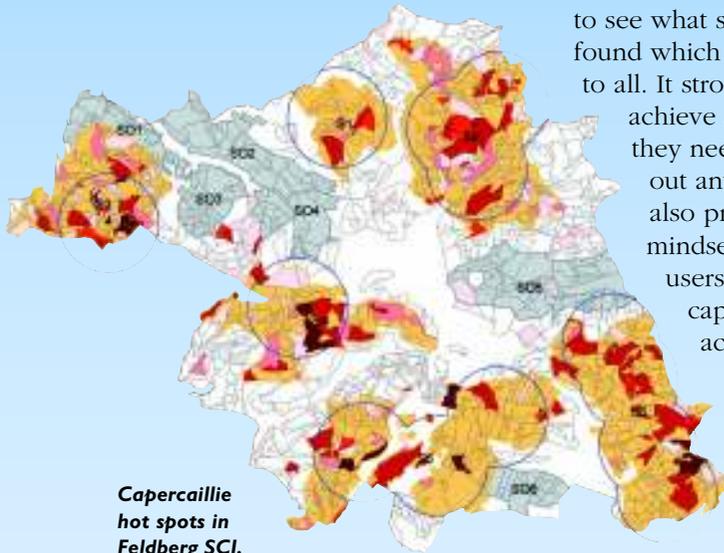
These issues were investigated in full during a recent LIFE-Nature project on the Capercaillie, *Tetrao urogallus*, in the Black Forest mountains of southern Germany. At 1,493 m, the Feldberg is the highest mountain in Baden-Württemberg and a popular year round destination for over two million walkers and skiers. The area, which covers over 80 km², was once also a high yield commercial forest, but recently, the public bodies who own most of the land, have reduced forestry activities in order to allow the area to revert back to a more 'natural' state.

This is, however, not necessarily good news for the capercaillie. The Feldberg forest no longer provides

Stakeholder dialogue: a key to success. Photo: Heidi Dolecek



ON SITE continued



Capercaillie hot spots in Feldberg SCI.

the complex mosaic of habitat types and conditions needed for the species to survive. There is, for instance, a notable lack of open patches where their favourite food source, bilberry, can grow. Especially since forestry was restricted, the forests have simply become too old, uniform and dense for many woodland species. On top of this, the increase in recreational pressure is beginning to take its toll.

To address this problem, the project set out to inventory the forest structure, the occurrence of Capercaillie and the dense network of walking and skiing tracks throughout the area. This led to the development of a GIS map which highlighted the Capercaillie's focal areas and the range of habitat conditions and threats within these. The beneficiary, the Regional

Forestry Institute, then took contact with each stakeholder group in turn to see what solutions could be found which would be acceptable to all. It strongly believed that, to achieve sustainable results, they needed not only to iron out any existing conflicts but also provoke a change in mindset by convincing land users to take the capercaillie's needs into account in their daily work.

Forest management was tackled first. Visits were organised to each of the capercaillie hot spots in turn so that their

conservation needs could be discussed on site with local foresters, hunters and other interested individuals. Thereafter, a rolling programme of habitat restoration measures was drawn up and implemented by the foresters themselves with constant support and back up from the project. The same approach was taken with the tourism sector to try to reduce disturbance in these same areas. Again, instead of imposing restrictions unilaterally, meetings were held with stakeholders to thrash out alternative options so that if one trail was taken out of use, it could be replaced by another upgraded and improved route.

The strategy appears to be working. The dynamic forest management approach was greatly appreciated by the foresters and

local municipalities and did a lot to win support for expanding the SPA to include the whole capercaillie metapopulation. It also makes conservation sense, thanks to the LIFE project, it could be demonstrated that not 100% of the SPA had to be optimal habitat for grouse; 30–45% would be enough, with this proportion moving gradually across the area over time. This needn't cost a lot either, much of the work can be done on the sidelines of normal forest management practices whilst some would generate immediate income from the sale of timber from the removal of mature stands, leaving only a proportion that goes over and above normal duties.

As regards Feldberg, the long term management programme of works drawn up under the LIFE project for capercaillie has now been integrated into the long term forest plans for the state owned forests and work is continuing to bring the other owners on board. Attention is now turning towards networking and sharing experiences with other capercaillie LIFE-Nature projects across the EU. Thanks to the recent approval of a coop project under LIFE, the beneficiary is able to hold regular meetings with similar initiatives in France, Austria, Germany, Finland and UK to discuss their respective findings and experiences.

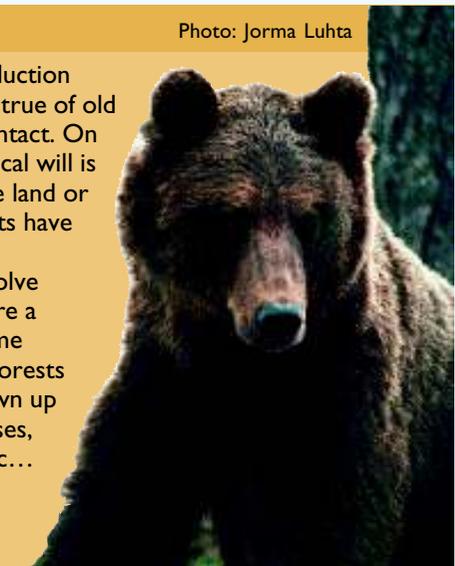
Contact details for both projects can be found in the LIFE website (address on back page).

TAKING FORESTS OUT OF PRODUCTION

Photo: Jorma Luhta

Some habitats are so valuable that they need to be taken out of commercial production altogether and managed primarily for the conservation interest. This is especially true of old growth forests where the natural dynamics of the ecosystems are still relatively intact. On state owned land it is usually possible to set these areas aside, provided the political will is there. But for privately owned forests often the only option is to offer to buy the land or the forestry rights. Thanks to LIFE-Nature, over 286 km² of priority boreal forests have been purchased in Finland and Sweden alone.

Once purchased, it is sometimes enough to 'do nothing' and let the forest evolve naturally, especially with large areas. But more often than not, the site may require a helping hand, even if it has not seen any significant forestry activities for a long time. Several LIFE-Nature projects aim to mimic the effects of natural disturbances in forests by carrying out a heady cocktail of restoration techniques based on carefully drawn up conservation plans. The methods range from removing unwanted trees with horses, blowing them up with explosives, undertaking controlled burning, ring barking etc... to simulate effects of lightning and windblow. As many of these techniques are relatively new, they are carefully monitored and any best practice experiences passed onto others via workshops, reports, or the web.



GREEN DAYS 2003



Green days walk in Picardie, France. Photo: Eurosite

Natura 2000 ... Nature for you!

The first week of June will see a return of the successful 'Green days' initiative launched by DG Environment to promote events in and around Natura 2000 sites throughout Europe. The objective is to facilitate an understanding and acceptance of Natura 2000 at a local and regional level. Activities include guided walks, conferences and exhibitions, meetings and workshops aimed at giving people

living close to Natura 2000 sites an opportunity to experience first hand the richness of Europe's natural heritage and to learn how human activities can work hand in hand with nature conservation.

Last year over 430 events, many of them related to LIFE-Nature projects, took place in 15 countries and attracted altogether 22,000 people from all walks of life. This year, the aim is to build on this initial success and organise an even greater number of events to bring more people into contact with the Natura 2000 network at a local level. We are therefore looking for everybody's support and participation! Whether you are a site manager, LIFE project coordinator, local authority representative, NGO, communication officer or interested individual, you are all most welcome to join in....

The Commission has enlisted the support of the organisation Eurosite to help coordinate this year's initiatives. They have created

an online dynamic calendar in which all Green day activities can be recorded. Not only will this help promote the events Europe-wide but it also provides a means for searching for activities according to a particular area. Event organisers will also receive a Green Days toolkit, containing leaflets about Natura 2000 for visitors, and items such as posters to assist in the promotion of an event.

So be inspired! Capture the imagination of your visitors with information about the nature value of your site, how you manage and protect it, and how the public can help. All events will automatically be considered for the Eurosite Green Days Award which will go to the most imaginative and best organised events this year. The awards will be presented by Margot Wallström, the European Commissioner for Environment, during Eurosite's Annual General Meeting on the 2nd October.

For full details go to www.eurosite-nature.org or contact Gavin Whitmore gwhitmore@eurosite-nature.org tel +31 (0) 13 5 944 970 for further information or assistance in registering events.

Green days in Arad, Romania.
Photo: Eurosite



NEWS ROUND UP

Progress with the biogeographical seminars

Over the past 18 months, final seminars were held to draw up the Community lists of Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) for each of the five remaining biogeographical regions: Alpine (Oct 2001), Atlantic (June 2002), Continental (Nov 2002), Mediterranean (Jan 2003) and Boreal (March 2003). Habitats and species for which Member States have to make additional efforts in designation were identified and a timetable set for their submission. It is now expected that the remaining Community lists will be formally adopted during the course of 2004, with the Alpine list probably seeing the light of day already during 2003.

Nature Directors from the EU and Candidate Countries meet

The Nature Directors of the 15 EU Member States and several Candidate Countries met in North Jutland in early October 2002, under the Danish presidency, to discuss the future management of the Natura 2000 network. A wide range of issues were covered, from the application of the Habitats Directive in the marine environment, the understanding of article 12 of the Directive, sustainable hunting to financing Natura 2000 and monitoring. The second day was dedicated entirely to Natura 2000 and forests (see 'in focus' article). This was the first time the Nature and Forest Directors met to share information on nature conservation and forest management practices. *Full details of the presentations and conclusions can be found on the Danish presidency's website under <http://sns.dk/skov/tby/default.htm>.*

Financing Natura 2000

The working group, established last year on article 8 of the Habitats Directive, has published its final report on financing

Natura 2000. It sought to arrive at a broad based estimate of the total future funding that is likely to be required by Member States to support the different types of activities necessary for the effective management of Natura 2000 sites. Their estimate is based on existing research studies and direct expenditure estimates supplied by the Member States. It concluded that between €3.4 billion and €5.7 billion per year would be needed between now and 2013. The report goes on to recommend a series of options for using and adapting existing EU funding sources over the short and longer term. These will be used to draw up DG Environment's own Communication on financing Natura 2000, due out later in the year. *The report can be downloaded from the DG Environment's nature website: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm>.*

Using agri-environment for Natura 2000

As a contribution to the current debate on the CAP reform process, DG Environment organised a one-day seminar in Brussels on 23 October 2002 to examine the use of the agri-environment regulation in managing Natura 2000 sites. Presentations were made on 17 best practice examples from LIFE-Nature projects across the EU. These illustrated the variety of practical techniques that have been used successfully for tapping into agri-environment within NATURA 2000 sites – as well as the constraints and limitations encountered. Parallel working groups in the afternoon examined these issues in greater detail according to specific habitat categories. A report of the seminar is currently being drafted and will include a series of practical recommendations, based on real LIFE experiences, of how the agri-environment regulation could be better geared towards Natura 2000. *Copies of the report will be available from DG Environment's LIFE website shortly.*

European Parliament conference on Natura 2000

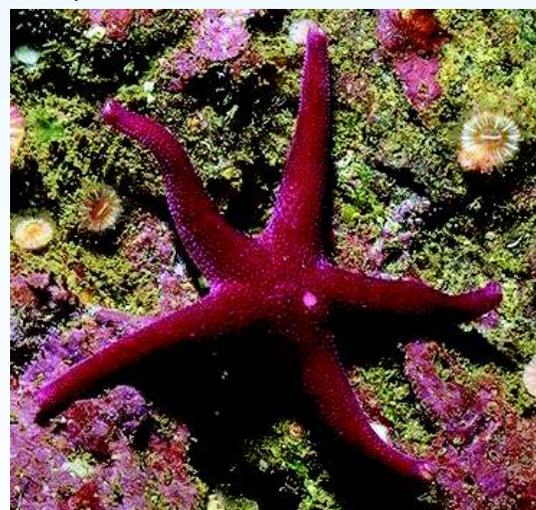
Marking tens years of the Habitats Directive, the European Parliament's Green Group organised a one day conference on the 12 December 2002 to initiate a political debate on the EU's nature conservation policy and its integration into other EU policies. Over 650 participants attended the event, which concluded in the adoption of a manifesto calling for an increase in, and redirection of, existing Community funds to help manage Natura 2000. The manifesto also emphasised the need for special attention to be given to Accession Countries with their rich natural heritage and for the creation of adequate ecological corridors and buffer zones between isolated sites. *Full details can be found on <http://greens-efa.org/>.*

Designation of offshore marine Natura 2000 sites

The application of the Habitats and Birds Directives in the offshore marine environment has been the subject of a lot of debate recently. At the heart is the thorny question of how to identify Natura 2000 sites in offshore waters. Having recently produced a detailed analysis of this problem, the UK authorities organised an international workshop in June 2002 to present their findings and exchange experiences with other Member States, Candidate

'Bloody Henry' starfish, *Henricia oculata* on rocky reef.

Photo: Joint Nature Conservation Committee





'Fireworks anemone' Pachycerianthus multiplicatus.
Photo: Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Countries, NGOs, and scientists as well as the European Topic Centre for Nature Conservation and the Commission. It seems that the difficulties are the same in most countries, and are largely due to the lack of basic scientific data. The workshop went on to draw up a series of concluding principles to help guide further developments in this area.

In addition, the Habitats Committee agreed to set up an informal Marine Working Group, which met for the first time in Brussels in March 2003. Its main objective is to develop a common understanding of the provisions of Natura 2000 relating to the marine environment in order to facilitate the designation and future management of these areas by the Member States. NGOs, fishing professional organisations and the European Topic Centre as well as Member State representatives were invited to participate. *The summary of the UK workshop, incorporating details of the state of play in different Member States, can be found under <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/marine>*

Promoting the socio-economic benefits of Natura 2000

Delays in creating the Natura 2000 network are often due to concerns that designation will damage prospects for economic development. In practice, however there is increasing evidence that

Natura 2000 can offer significant economic and social benefits. A recent study concluded by WWF and IEEP explores these benefits further through a detailed review of six case studies. The report identifies a variety of potential socio-economic benefits within Natura 2000 sites ranging from direct employment creation, rural development as well as purely environmental benefits. These findings were discussed at a workshop in Brussels last November and led to further recommendations on how to better promote the socio-economic benefits of Natura 2000. *Full details can be found on <http://www.ieep.org.uk>*

Best practice guide on natural heritage tourism

Tourism is often cited as an important means of deriving economic benefits from Natura 2000. With more and more people seeking out nature based holidays, the prospects have never been better, but, to be successful – and sustainable –, tourism development requires careful planning. To assist in this process, DG Enterprise has just published a best practice guide on 'using natural and cultural heritage to develop sustainable tourism in non-traditional areas'. The report examines recent trends in heritage-based tourism in Europe, the opportunities and constraints they present, and provides step by

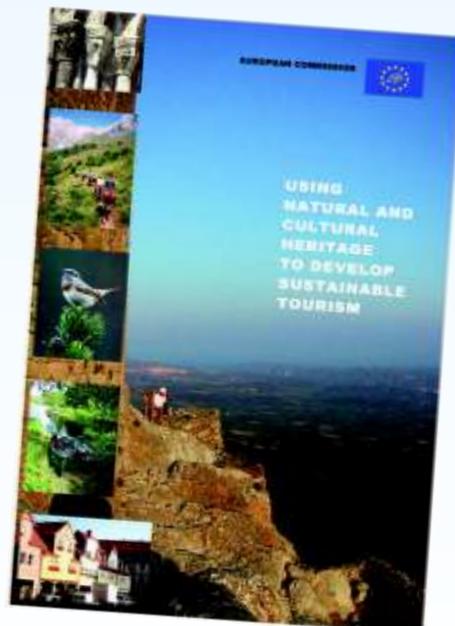
step guidance on how to go about developing such forms of tourism in a sustainable manner. The key success factors are further illustrated by five case studies from different parts of the EU. As such, the report is likely to be of particular interest for those wanting to develop tourism around Natura 2000 sites. *The report is available in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish from DG Enterprise http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/services/tourism/studies/ecosystems/study_sustainability.htm.*

LIFE Nature supports a further 70 projects

In July 2002, The Commission agreed to co-finance a further 70 nature projects through the LIFE III programme. Together these represent a total investment for nature conservation of €130 million, to which the European Union will contribute up to €72 million. The conservation and management of rivers and wetlands proved to be particularly popular this year, but the range of habitat types and species targeted remains vast – from extensive aapa mires in the far north to endemic geckos in the far south. Over half of the beneficiaries this year were new to LIFE, which suggests that the instrument continues to break new ground. *Summaries of the projects can be found on DG Environment's LIFE website.*

Starter and Co-op measures

For the first time last year, a number of small-scale accompanying measures were financed under LIFE-Nature to promote international initiatives and to help strengthen cooperation between projects. Twelve 'Starter' projects received 30,000€ each to help them prepare an international LIFE-Nature bid for the 2004 application round. The four 'co-op' measures approved will encourage LIFE-Nature projects to share experiences on particular conservation problems and/or habitats and species. This time, the focus is on conflicts between



NEWS ROUND UP continued

grouse management and tourism, wetland management techniques in Finland, control of exotic animals on Spanish and Portuguese islands, and the development of techniques to minimise damage from wolf and bear. *Full details can be found in DG Environment's LIFE website. Another call for proposals, this time for co-op measures only, will be launched again in early summer 2003.*

LIFE website remodelled

The Commission's LIFE website has had a facelift! The three elements of LIFE – LIFE-Environment, LIFE-Nature and LIFE-Third countries – have been brought together in one site and new sections added to improve information flow. You can now consult the news section to find out about the latest LIFE related events – be it a workshop organised by a project or recent happenings in Brussels. Or you can review the latest project results and EU publications. Alternatively, if you are a LIFE beneficiary, you may wish to add your own news, or request feedback from other LIFE projects, in the partnership section. The information is regularly updated, so why not add <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/home.htm> to your list of favourites.

Subscribing to this Newsletter

Free subscriptions to the Natura 2000 newsletter are now also available through DG Environment's Nature Home page.

Just log on to http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/news/natura/index_en.htm and fill in your coordinates. The next issue will be on its way to you in the post!

Award for a positive rural environment

For the second year in a row, the Anders Wall Foundation, together with the Royal Swedish Academy for Agriculture and Forestry and DG Environment, are offering an award to individuals who have made a special contribution towards the rural environment. The judges are looking for practical positive achievements, such as conserving and enhancing the landscape, providing biodiversity, preserving rural cultural heritage and/or contributing to local sustainable economic development, anywhere in the EU. The winner will receive 10,000€ and be invited to an award ceremony at the Royal Academy in Sweden in the first half of 2004. Applications and nominations should be sent in English to the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry, PO Box 6806, SE-113 86 Stockholm, Sweden. Contact person: Professor Bruno Nilsson bruno.nilsson@ksla.se.

Natura 2000 in Italy

Talking of newsletters, the Italian Ministry of Environment has launched its own newsletter on N2000 as part of a LIFE Nature project on 'the Natura 2000 network in Italy: management models'. Regular updates are provided on the distribution of pSCIs and SPAs across the regions and reviews are published on key topical issues



relating to its implementation. The newsletter is produced annually in Italian and English and can be downloaded from http://www.minambiente.it/Sito/settori_azione/scn/rete_natura2000/docs/natura2000_italia_informa.pdf

New Head of DG Environment

Catherine Day has been appointed Director General of DG Environment, taking up her new post in June 2002. She places high priority on biodiversity issues. On Natura 2000, she says that "this is a truly ambitious undertaking which puts Europe in a leading position as regards biodiversity conservation. The Natura 2000 network will also help us to meet the target we set ourselves of halting the decline of Europe's biodiversity by 2010. We will continue to work with local communities throughout Europe to set up an effective conservation network at the earliest opportunity."

NATURA 2000 NEWSLETTER

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Alternatively you can consult DG ENV's homepage: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm> where you will find this newsletter and other documents relating to the EU's conservation policy.

For details on LIFE projects go to <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/home.htm>

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