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EUROPEAN COMMISSION DG XI's NATURE NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

Commissioner Fischler discusses the relationship between farming and nature



THE SHIFT OF VALUES which has been taking place in our society has led us to see that economic activity that works against the natural world is neither sensible nor possible. This applies to farming, too. The relationship between the farmer and his environment is of fundamental importance to his survival. This is why over the last few years there has been a reorientation of agricultural policy,

which now favours sustainable and environmentally friendly methods of food production over methods dictated by purely quantitative objectives. Other aims, such as maintaining biodiversity and taking care of the countryside, have also moved up the scale of priorities.

The common agricultural policy has incorporated these new objectives by prioritizing sustainable farming

through support for environmental programmes and extensive livestock farming. The protection of the environment has now been integrated into the common agricultural policy, as provided for in the Maastricht Treaty. For instance, the package for farming and the environment introduced in Regulation (EEC) N° 2078/92 includes general measures to encourage farmers to reduce their use of fertilizers and the size of their herds as well as assistance for ecologically sound farming. And these reforms are already

having an impact: the use of fertilizers containing nitrates has fallen on average by a quarter since 1988, and that of fertilizers containing phosphates by as much as a third. Use of plant protection products has also fallen by about 15%. The package also includes measures designed for particular types of location, flexible enough to be adapted to specific regional characteristics. These include support for protecting ecologically valuable biotopes, setting aside land for environmental reasons and creating ecologically managed land strips.

But reforms need to go further. There is still a great deal to do: conservation of the countryside also falls within the scope of an environment-oriented agricultural policy. Fresh air, well-tended fields, or simply a beautiful view over an unspoilt valley are all aspects of the leisure environment to which our society attaches great value. How many tourists stop to think that were it not for the hard work of the farmers, the fields they stroll through would be stony and pitted? Here we need a policy that ensures that farmers' contributions to conserving the environment are also appropriately rewarded.

There is also a great future ahead for renewable raw materials, because using biomass rather than non-renewable materials as a source of energy has been shown to be significantly better for the environment. Much thought is therefore now being given to how to create better incentives to farm such alternative products, in order to bring us a step closer to the great objective of environmentally friendly farming.

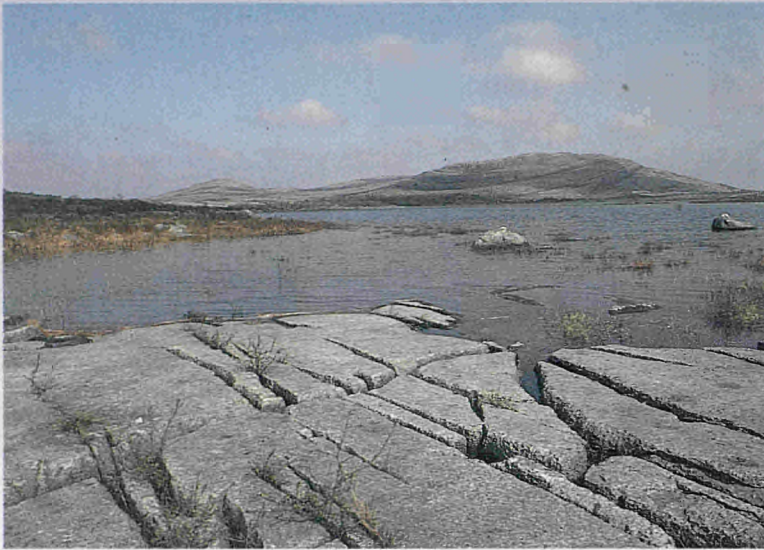


The NATURA 2000 Newsletter is produced by the Nature Conservation Unit of the Environment Directorate General (DG XI.D.2) of the European Commission. It provides regular updates on the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives and the establishment of the NATURA 2000 Network.

F. Fischler

Franz Fischler
Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural
Development

Managing NATURA 2000 sites, what does it mean?



Mullaghmore Mountain, The Burren, County Clare, Ireland.

Photo: Ian Hepburn Naturdata Library

Habitats Directive requirements

The Habitats Directive requires Member States to establish the necessary measures for Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to ensure their favourable conservation status. Although not necessary in all cases, Article 6 (1) also identifies management plans, specifically designed for the site or integrated into other development plans, as a valuable tool in achieving this objective whilst at the same time providing a framework in which the different interests influencing the sites can be addressed.

The Directive does not specify what the management plan should contain or how it should be devised. This is left entirely up to the Member States. Also its elaboration is not foreseen until stage 3 of the designation process (see Newsletter issue 1) once the Commission and the Member States have selected the Sites of Community Importance (SCI). From that time on Member States have another 6 years to protect the sites as SACs and, if appropriate, to draw up management plans for them.

It may therefore seem somewhat paradoxical that the issue of management planning should be discussed at this early stage and in a European context. However, fears have already been expressed in many quarters over the implications of designating areas under NATURA 2000. What are the 'ecological requirements' of a particular site, will it mean a block on socio-economic activities within the areas, if so how much and where?. Many land owners and interest groups, quite understandably, are reluctant to lend their support to this process if they have little information on why it is necessary and what the eventual consequences will be.

Galway seminar on management planning

In light of these concerns, a seminar on management planning was organised last year in October in Galway by the Irish National Parks and Wildlife service, under the aegis of the Irish Presidency and with the support of the European Commission. The objective of this seminar was to examine the different approaches being taken to management plan preparation and implementation in the Member States. From this it was expected that there would not only be an exchange of experiences and ideas between the different bodies involved in this process across Europe but also a consensus on the ingredients of a good management plan for a NATURA 2000 site.

Around 80 participants attended the meeting, mainly from the EU member states but also from neighbouring Eastern European countries. Amongst them were representatives from the competent member state authorities who are responsible for the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives in their country, statutory conservation agencies, representatives of economic actors (farmers, land owners, port developers...) and umbrella NGOs. In addition, a selection of LIFE Nature project managers were invited to present their approach to management planning.

The first part of the seminar was dedicated to a series of national presentations on management planning in 5 EU states and one Eastern European country. Thereafter, participants split into three workshops. Having visited a proposed Irish SCI close to Galway – Coole Garryland – each group was asked to devise an ideal model management plan for it.

Contents of an ideal management plan

The elements of the management plan considered were:

- the plan structure
- data collection
- aims and strategies
- implementation and consultation
- review and monitoring

It was recognised that the basic structure of the plan was already fairly standard throughout Europe, modelling itself on 3 or 4 prototypes developed by conservationists over the last 20 years.

However, a plan should be written in a clear and concise language that makes it accessible to all concerned parties, not just the scientists and authorities but also to the land users and interest groups. Moreover, there should be one single

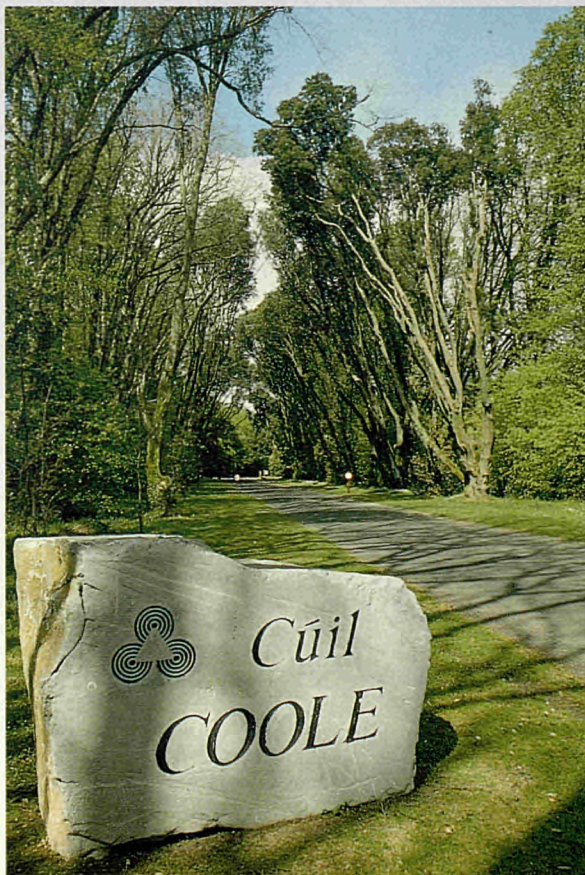
unified plan for each site, even if there are multiple designations, so as to avoid a plethora of conflicting rules and regulations.

As far as data collection goes, the idealist's approach was to collect all the data possible for a site before the plan, whereas a pragmatist would formulate the plan first then identify further information needs. Either way a minimum threshold of information is necessary if the objectives of the plan and its prescriptions are to be specific and implementable. For larger sites where information collection is particularly difficult, a system of zoning the site according to similar management requirements was recommended.

Bearing in mind the concerns of the land owners and economic interest groups, the objectives of the management plan should not only be realistic but also, as much as possible, quantifiable. In other words, giving the 'actors' a clear understanding of what it is that needs to be saved and how. The objective should also optimise the benefit both for nature conservation and for socio-economic activities.

In connection with this is the fundamental issue of consultation with the other land users. This vital step should be done at various stages in the production of the plan. This would avoid presenting the affected parties with a 'fait accompli' but also discourage discussions before it is clear in the conservationist's own mind what the objectives should be from a nature point of

Coole Park, County Galway, Ireland. Photo: Dept. of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, Ireland



SUGGESTED MANAGEMENT PLAN STRUCTURE

An ideal management plan should contain the following elements:

- policy statement with reference to Article 6 of the Habitats Directive
- site description, including a historical land use analysis
- statement of objectives, including long term and short term goals
- statement of the constraints, including identification of the actors involved
- list of realistic implementation actions, with time schedules and financial planning
- a detailed consultation process
- monitoring and evaluation

view. Besides the consultation, there should also be a formal system of appeal against elements in a plan.

In terms of implementation, the NATURA 2000 management plans should not be academic documents that are filed somewhere on a shelf. To have any meaning they must be practically orientated tools. There must also be a clear commitment from the conservation and other relevant authorities to their implementation. This means including cost estimates for the various proposed actions and setting a time limit on their implementation.

Finally, monitoring is an essential part of a plan. Without this it would be almost impossible to understand the effects of the management actions on the condition of the site. However, this should be simple and cost effective. Monitoring cannot hope to cover all sites in detail but should concentrate on indicators or key factors which can act as alarm bells in case of deterioration.

Conclusion

Although not legally required under the Habitats Directive a management plan is recognised as a useful tool for maintaining or restoring future NATURA 2000 site at a favourable conservation state. Not only do they provide a framework and action plan for managing the site but, equally importantly, they provide a vehicle for consultation and cooperation with economic groups present on the site. As such it also has the potential to be a confidence building measure for those who engage in socio-economic activities within or around a NATURA 2000 site. However, these benefits can only come about if the plans are objective, realistic and implementable. It is hoped that the conclusions of the Galway will further that process for NATURA 2000.

Copies of the seminar conclusions are available from Pat Warner, NPWS, 51 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland. Fax : +353 1 6620283.

ON SITE

Liminganlahti Bay LIFE Project: a bottom up approach to management planning



Liminganlahti bay: the higher peaks of the seabed begin to break the water's surface, creating dozens of islets speckled along the foreshore.

Photo: Raimo Hämeenaho

Liminganlahti's natural wealth

Around the Gulf of Bothnia, on some of the oldest rocks in Europe, one of the continent's youngest landscapes is still emerging from the waters. Titanic Ice Age glaciers covered this region only a few thousand years B.C., pushing down the bedrock and scraping the land smooth. Once the ice melted, the sea flooded in creating a vast shallow bay extending over 116 km² – this is Liminganlahti bay, one of Finland's finest wetlands.

Liberated from the weight of the icecaps, the bedrock is now slowly rising back towards its original level – a process called isostatic uplift. Almost one third of the bay is less than 1 metre deep and the higher peaks of the seabed are

already beginning to break the water's surface, creating dozens of islets speckled along the foreshore. In such a flat terrain the coastline, too, is moving forward at the tremendous rate: 18 metres a year or 1.5kms per century, reclaiming land as it goes along.

With this isostatic uplift comes a distinctly characteristic range of habitats from low lying soft silty areas to extensive reedbeds and shore meadows and eventually, through succession, to thicket and woodland. These habitats are further

influenced by the brackish waters of the Gulf of Bothnia, the long periods of ice cover and the striking water level fluctuations.

The exceptional natural wealth of Liminganlahti bay is reflected also in the presence of a particularly rich and diverse wildlife. 250 species of bird breed or stage in the area; 31 are on Annex I of the Birds Directive, including the globally threatened lesser white fronted goose *Anser erythropus* which has one of its last footholds in the EU here. The flora includes not only southern and northern species, many of which are threatened, but also 20 that are endemic to the Baltic. The human element is important too. Centuries of old-fashioned hay mowing, reed cutting and driving cattle out to pasture have maintained the shore meadows, vital for many birds and rare plants, as open grasslands against their tendency to succeed into forests.

Thus, Liminganlahti bay and its big offshore island of Hailuoto certainly have the scientific credentials to qualify for inclusion in Natura 2000. However, although not far from the Arctic Circle, Liminganlahti is far from uninhabited. Four townships (Lumijoki, Liminka, Kempele, Oulunsalo) plus settlements ring the bay, privately owned farmland goes almost to the water's edge and even the new lands risen from the sea are, under ancient law and custom, collectively owned by the landowners bordering them.

Human land uses

Moreover, waterfowl hunting and fishing have always been a popular activity here, attracting around 2000 and 1000 people respectively each year. Added to this is the increasing number of tourists coming into the area during the summer months, in recent times some 20,000–30,000 people were counted, many attracted to the area precisely because of its outstanding natural beauty and interest.

This is a familiar situation and, when dealing with such a vast area, one that requires not only a strategic and integrated approach to the different land uses but also a clear and extensive process of consultation with all interested parties. The ideal vehicle in such a case is a management plan that reconciles the conservation needs of the site with the socio-economic requirements of the local community and the interest groups (Article 6-1 of the Habitats Directive).

Public consultation and debate

However, the key to success is often as much dependent upon the way in which this consultation is conducted as on the contents of

Situated in the Gulf of Bothnia, Liminganlahti bay is one of Finland's finest wetlands



the plan itself. The Liminganlahti LIFE project approved in 1995 has taken a particularly interesting bottom up approach towards this. The project is a partnership between the Finnish Environment Ministry's regional office, the five municipalities which govern Liminganlahti and Hailuoto, two NGOs (WWF and Birdlife), two scientific institutes, several local schools and the regional council for the District concerned. Any project steering committee with such a large cross section of local society should already be able to air, and hopefully solve many of the conflicts. But this LIFE project has gone one step further in involving the local residents and interest groups as well.

The bay, its shores and islands have been divided into five subregions. For each subregion, a working group is set up, bringing together the relevant authorities, conservationists, landowners, hunters, farmers, fishermen etc... Using the knowledge already acquired on the ecology of the area each working group is given the task to thrash out a plan for its sustainable use, i.e. find a consensus on practical ways to combine nature conservation with the livelihoods and pastimes of the local population.

18 months have been allocated to this task so as to allow for a sufficient number of meetings in each sub-region. By splitting the area into five, problems in one corner of the bay should not hamper progress elsewhere.

A sustainable land use plan for the whole area

Plans from the subregional working groups will then be examined by the LIFE project steering group, which may request amendments. After this period of negotiation, a general assembly of all five working groups and the steering group will establish a general plan for the management of the future Liminganlahti Natura 2000 area and the designation of strict nature reserves within it. This plan, representing the consensus, or nearest thing to it, of all citizens and interest groups affected by the Natura 2000 process in Liminganlahti, will be the LIFE project's most important output.

To have force of law, this general plan must be integrated into the official land use plans drawn up by the municipalities. This is why the active participation of the five local municipalities in the LIFE project is so important.

So far meetings have been lively, with attendance often higher than expected. People with very different backgrounds and agendas, many of them not used to formal meetings or policy debate, are voicing their opinions without coming to blows. The very fact that all interest groups are being heard by the authorities (the hunters in particular claim they were previously ignored) is seen as positive by the local community.

THE LIMINGANLAHTI LIFE PROJECT

The management planning process is a key element of the project, but other activities are also foreseen for the site over the 3 years:

- purchase or leasing of 850ha in the most ecologically valuable area of the site;
- re-establishment of the natural water level in drained coastal wetlands, notably in the shallow coastal lagoons
- 14 sites within the most sensitive zones will be mowed, grazed, coppiced and cleared of reeds and shrubs in accordance with the ecological requirements of the habitats and wildlife
- the reeds in particular are a main threat and specialised equipment will be used to cut and remove these within key areas
- finally, environmental education, this is targeted principally at all school children within the region, who, as part of their school work will investigate the natural values of the site and create information packs for the different land users

That is not to say the process will be an easy one – far from it whilst most agree that hunting for instance should be restricted in some areas, there is still a long way to go before deciding where this should take place, for how long, whether compensation is due, who will pay etc... But at least the debate has been launched now and even though one might argue that it is a costly and time-consuming process, one can be sure that the final plan will be a practical and implementable one that has the backing of the majority of the local community. Citizens often complain about top-down styles of government. Hopefully, the Liminganlahti LIFE project will succeed in making the bottom-up approach work for Natura 2000.

For further information on the project:

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Long-eared owls and chicks nesting in the Liminganlahti forests.

Photo: Raimo Hämeenaho












NATURA BAROMETER

(Situation as of 17/3/97 on the basis of information transmitted officially by the Member States)

Member State	Birds Directive SPA Classification			Habitats Directive SAC designation (stage I)				
	Number of SPAs	Total area (km ²)	Progress	Number of sites proposed	Total area (km ²)	National list	Site maps	Natura 2000 forms
<i>België/Belgique</i>	36	4,313		102	903			
<i>Danmark</i>	111	9,601		175	± 11,000			—
<i>Deutschland</i>	502	8,598		9	128	0		
<i>Ellas</i>	29	1,930		164	18,969			
<i>España</i>	150	25,208		122	3,078			
<i>France</i>	105	7,360		—	—	0	—	—
<i>Ireland</i>	106	2,054		—	—	0	—	—
<i>Italia</i>	101	4,530		± 2,800	± 33,250			
<i>Luxembourg</i>	6	14		—	—	0	—	—
<i>Nederland</i>	26	3,411		27	2,820			
<i>Österreich</i>	44	2,482		97	± 3,620			
<i>Portugal</i>	36	3,323		30 (Madeira + Azores only)	414			
<i>Suomi</i>	15	967		415	25,599			
<i>Sverige</i>	225	22,177	 ↑	1,047	43,736	 ↑		
<i>United Kingdom</i>	140	5,046		255	13,322			
Total EUR 15		101,014			156,839			

Note on SPAs:

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

Keys:		classification complete		complete national list, information transmitted is coherent		maps and forms coherent and computerised
		classification still incomplete		substantial national list but information still incomplete		maps and forms for all transmitted sites
		classification notably insufficient		partial but insufficient national list		maps and forms incomplete
			0	list insignificant or not transmitted		
	↑	significant progress being made since last Natura barometer				

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

NEWS ROUND UP

The NATURA barometer : commentary on progress with pSCIs and SPAs

Since the 6th November 1996 the most significant progress has been realised by:

- the Netherlands who, in December 1996, transmitted their first list of sites
- Sweden who, in January 1997, transmitted a further 407 pSCIs covering an additional area of 3,025 km². Sweden also submitted a further 150 SPAs covering more than 22,000 km². This represents the most significant single classification decision yet taken by a Member State.

Macaronesia, the first biogeographical meeting

The Habitats Directive foresees three stages for the selection of NATURA 2000 sites. On the basis of the sites proposed by the Member States (stage 1), the Commission should establish a list of Sites of Community Interest for each of the 6 biogeographical regions (stage 2). The Member States then have to designate these sites as Special Areas of Conservation (stage 3).

This second stage has now started, with a first meeting in Tenerife last December to discuss the Macaronesian Region (the Azores, Canaries and Madeira). At that occasion the Commission, Spain and Portugal evaluated – with the scientific assistance of the Thematic Centre for Nature (European Environment Agency) – the sites proposed so far. Those habitat types and species for which Spain and Portugal still had to propose new sites in order to guarantee their protection were also identified.

The second meeting for Macaronesia is foreseen for July at which time the list of sites considered to be of Community interest should be finalised. Similar meetings for the other 5 regions will be held before the end of this year. Hence the urgency for Member States, who have not yet submitted their lists of proposed sites, to do so, in order that they can be taken into account during this selection process.

Directive proposed for EIAs on certain plans and programmes

Until now the Member States have been required, under EU legislation, to assess the effects on the environment of certain public and private development projects. However, such project level assessments often come too late in the decision making process. It is the designation of whole areas or zones for particular development activities in a regional land use plan which need to be considered as well. With the Commission's new proposal, environment impact assessments would now be required at the land use planning and programme stage. This should ensure a better integration of environmental considerations into the development consent decision taking process.

Life-Nature opens up to CEECs

From 1998 onwards, the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) associated with the Union will have an opportunity to access to co-financing under LIFE for their nature conservation projects. Each CEEC will have to decide whether or not they wish to participate in LIFE. In contrast to Member States, each CEEC will also have a part of the budget reserved for them ... provided that they have transferred an equivalent amount of money into the LIFE Nature fund, if necessary by deducting this from Community aid received under PHARE. The selection criteria for projects will be equivalent to those used for Member States.

1997 LIFE selection procedure

By the deadline of the 31st January, the Commission had received 174 applications requesting a total of 128 million ECU (available budget: 45 million ECU). These will now be evaluated by the Commission and a short-list of eligible projects presented to the Habitats Committee for deliberation at its meeting at the end of April. The final decision on projects to be selected should be taken, and subsequently communicated to, the successful applicants by July.

1996 LIFE projects funded

63 projects were agreed for funding last year. A one page description of each project in its original language and English and French has been produced and is now available from DGXI in the form of a consolidated report. The short introduction explains the selection procedure for 1996 and the type of projects funded. *Copies available from I. Venti DG XI.D.2*

Nature and employment

In order to determine whether conservation actions could be having positive spin-offs for employment, an analysis has been made of the 63 projects funded under LIFE Nature in 1996. It is estimated that at least 1300 people will work at sometime on these projects during their implementation. Translated into equivalent full-time employment this represents +/- 500 jobs over 3 years. The majority (2/3rds) are to be found in Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy). Bearing in mind that many LIFE projects are located in isolated rural areas or economically deprived regions, where every additional job opportunity is important for the local community, the impact of LIFE on employment could be quite significant.

Annual LIFE Bears Meeting

The Commission is currently contributing 16.2 MECU, under LIFE Nature, to 8 projects for the conservation of the brown bear in 5 of the EU Member States. Each year these LIFE beneficiaries meet, at one of the project sites, to exchange experiences on their actions and to discuss any technical or scientific matters relating to the bear's survival in Europe. In 1996, it was the turn of the Italian 'mammiferi' project. Situated in the Eastern Alps, the principal objective of this project is to facilitate the spontaneous re-colonisation of the Italian Alps by the Slovenian bear population. Amongst the issues discussed was a draft action plan for the brown bear in the Alps. Next meeting: Austria/Graz.

Workshop on Reedbeds

A technical meeting will be held at the end of April at one of the LIFE project sites in France to discuss the latest technical findings of reed bed conservation in Europe. Organised by Eurosite in the Regional Park of Marais de Contentin, the workshop has 4 principal themes: the role of reed beds in improving water quality, in creating habitats for birds and for fish, and in the production of reed beds for thatching. The aim is to disseminate the latest scientific findings, allow exchange of experiences and find pragmatic solutions for management. **Contact:** J.B. Wetton, Regional Natural Park of Marais de Contentin Fax +33 2 33 71 61 91

Manual of interpretation of the habitats of the European Union

In the first issue of the NATURA 2000 Newsletter, it was announced that a manual of interpretation of the habitat types listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive had been agreed and published in English. This has now been translated into French and will be available in April. **Contact:** I Venti DG XI.D.2.

Update of report on SPAs classified under the Birds Directive

The Commission, with the assistance of the European Topic Centre for Nature Conservation has updated its status report on the classification of SPAs under the Birds Directive. This gives the latest information per Member State of all SPAs (name, size, coordinates, location on country map) classified up to the end of 1996. **Contact:** Micheal O'Briain DG XI.D.2

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