



natura

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Photo: Sue Scott/MNCR/SNH

MARINE ISSUES MOVE CENTRE STAGE

Last month, the Commission came forward with a proposal for a coordinated European strategy to protect the marine environment across Europe. Its aim is to achieve a good environmental status of EU marine waters by 2021. The Habitats and Birds Directive will play an important role in achieving this overall target and in promoting a more ecosystems based approach to managing Europe's marine resources, whilst safeguarding its rich biodiversity.

Implementing the nature Directives in the marine environment presents a number of challenges though. Part of the problem lies in the lack of basic information on the distribution and conservation of the habitats and species under threat and the difficulties of collecting such data in such a remote inaccessible environment. Part also lies in the complexities surrounding legal rights and ownership of the seas around Europe and in the patchwork of highly sectoral legislation that is currently in force.

Recognising these problems the Commission set up a marine expert working group in 2003 to examine the implementation of Natura 2000 in the marine environment in detail. Its conclusions are now being used to elaborate an informal guidance document on the subject which is due to be published early next year.

In this newsletter we explore some of the issues under discussion, for instance how to select marine sites for Natura 2000 and ensure their management (pages 2–5), how to work with the Common Fisheries Policy (pages 6–7). A review is also made of key marine projects funded under LIFE-Nature (10–13).

As marine issues finally get the attention they deserve, it is essential that any new opportunities for conserving Europe's rare marine species and habitats are explored to the full.

Nicholas Hanley
Head of Nature and Biodiversity Unit
DG Environment, European Commission

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Starfish and sea anemones, St Kilda, Scotland. Photo: Sue Scott/MNCR/SNH

Natura 2000 in the marine environment

Implementing the Natura 2000 network in the marine environment presents a number of challenges. Whilst the duties on Member States are the same as for the terrestrial environment – that is, to maintain and restore the marine species and habitat types listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives to a favourable conservation status – the level of progress in designating and protecting marine sites is not nearly as well advanced as on land.

According to June 2005 figures, Member States have so far designated 459 marine SPAs under the Birds Directive and 1250 pSCIs with a marine component under the Habitats Directive. The majority are located in coastal waters and usually form a natural seaward extension of the land site. Very few qualify as offshore marine sites.

Part of the problem lies in the lack of available data. The amount of quantitative information on species populations and distribution tends to decrease rapidly the further one goes from the shore. Not only are offshore marine surveys difficult to do but they also tend to be very expensive. Yet, this basic level of knowledge is essential if suitable marine sites are to be selected for the Natura 2000 network.

Another problem lies in the legal complexities of who ‘owns’ the sea. Some countries only claim the coastal waters to be their ‘territory’, usually 6–12 nautical miles from their shores. Others work on the basis of Economic Exclusive Zones (EEZ) which extend up to 200 nmiles out to sea and allow the countries concerned to explore and exploit the resources in this zone.

Then there is the question of what they own. Different jurisdictions apply depending on whether it is the sea floor or the water column above it that is being explored..

Recognising these complexities and the general lack of progress so far, the Commission set up a marine expert working group in 2003 to look in detail at the provisions of the two Directives as they apply to the marine environment. The conclusions of the group are currently being used by the Commission to elaborate a guidance document on Natura 2000 in the marine environment, which is due to be published early in the New Year.

The following are some of the issues and concepts under discussion.

Where do the Directives apply?

The first question to consider is how much of the sea around the EU falls under the obligations of the two Directives. For both, the area of application is defined as being ‘the European territory of the Member States to which the Treaty applies’ – but what does this mean in practice?

Originally, several Member States worked from the premise that it applied only to their territorial waters (6–12 miles from the shore). A UK High Court challenge in 1999 however refuted this, concluding instead that the Directives apply, in the case of the UK, to their Exclusive Economic Zone (i.e. 200 miles out to sea).

The rationale, supported by the Commission, is as follows: recognition by a coastal state of an EEZ – or equivalent economic claims – brings not only rights but also obligations. If rights are exercised over natural resources, then obligations must also exist to apply the appropriate national or Community legislation. This is much more in line with the spirit of the Directives. Were they limited to the coastal waters only, the ability of the Natura 2000 network to conserve the species and

habitats listed would be severely compromised.

The application of the Directives in the EEZs has since been accepted by all Member States during a Fisheries Council in 2001.

Site selection

Having determined where the Nature Directives apply, the question then turns to how to select marine sites for Natura 2000. There are nine marine habitat types and 18 species listed in the Habitats Directive for which Member States are required to propose sites for the network. In the case of the Birds Directive, SPAs should be classified for 29 seabird species listed in Annex I and for significant populations of migratory marine birds.

Again, the procedures are the same as on land. Assessments must be made on the basis of the size and population of the target habitats and species, their conservation state and their overall contribution to the Natura 2000 Network. Considering how little is known about the marine environment, this may seem a daunting prospect at first. Yet, a number of steps can be taken to facilitate the process and narrow down the selection.

A distinction can already be made between those species and habitats that are found mostly in shallow inshore waters and those that are truly pelagic. Saline lagoons, posidonia beds, endemic fish like the *Valencia hispanica* or Italian sturgeon *Acipenser naccarii*, or coastal birds like the Mediterranean shag *Phalacrocorax*

a desmarestii all fall into this first category. Their site designation should not be more complex than on land since they are close to the shore and therefore relatively straightforward to locate and survey.

Natura 2000 sites can also be readily identified for the part of a marine species' life cycle that is spent on land, for instance, nesting beaches for loggerhead sea turtles, remote cliffs and islands for seabirds, mudflats for seals, upstream rivers for migratory fish etc....

Identifying offshore sites

This leaves a somewhat shorter list of species and habitats for which offshore marine sites need to be designated in order to ensure their survival.

In the case of habitats such as cold water reefs which tend to be located on the edge of the continental shelf at a depth of 100 m or more, it is not realistic to survey the whole sea floor. Nor is it always necessary, the field of search can be narrowed down considerably by mapping existing information from geological, bathymetric (sea depth) or oceanographic surveys (salinity levels, temperature variations, currents, nutrient upwellings...) to identify potential reef areas which can then be investigated further through detailed field surveys.

For species, the situation is rather more complex unfortunately as they are so mobile and range over large areas. GIS modelling may help to identify certain areas with

regular concentrations of fish or other important food sources like sand eels or blue mussel beds but this in itself is unlikely to be enough. Too little is known about the species distribution patterns and behavioural characteristics to be able to define, let alone locate, areas that merit inclusion in Natura 2000.

The only answer is to carry out more intensive on board surveys and satellite/ radio tracking experiments to build up a picture of the animals' distribution patterns and behaviour and to corroborate this with additional sources of information such as bycatch records from fishing vessels...

BirdLife International is currently undertaking just such a survey to identify important Marine Birds Areas (IBAs) in the offshore waters around the Iberian Peninsula. Once completed it intends to use the information and experience

HABITATS TYPES AND SPECIES LISTED IN THE HABITATS DIRECTIVE REQUIRING SITE DESIGNATION

Habitat types in Annex I

- 1100 Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time
- 1120* Posidonia beds (*Posidonia oceanica*)
- 1130 Estuaries
- 1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide
- 1150* Coastal lagoons
- 1160 Large shallow inlets and bays
- 1170 Reefs
- 1180 Submarine structures made by leaking gases
- 8330 Submerged or partially submerged sea caves

Marine species in Annex II

Tursiops truncatus
Phocoena phocoena
Halichoerus grypus
Phoca vitulina
Monachus monachus
Phoca hispida bottnica
Caretta caretta
Petromyzon marinus
Lampetra fluviatilis
Acipenser naccarii
Acipenser sturio
Alosa alosa
Alosa fallax
Aphanius iberus
Aphanius fasciatus
Valencia hispanica
Pomatoschistus canestrini
Valencia letourneuxi

Grey seal pup resting on the beach at Tentsmuir NNR, Fife. Photo: Lorne Gill/SNH



IN FOCUS continued

gathered from this work to develop a standard methodology for identifying IBAs, and eventually SPAs, throughout European waters (see box).

Similar international efforts are required for the other marine species listed in the Habitats Directive.

Managing marine Natura 2000 sites

Threats to the marine environment come from a variety of different sources: fishing, dredging, shipping traffic, extraction of oil, gas and other materials (sand, gravel), coastal developments (harbours, windfarms, etc...), tourism, recreation, industrial effluents, agricultural run-off, aquaculture, alien species, underwater military operations....

So far legislation has been adopted on a very sectoral basis to control and reduce the impacts of these activities. This has resulted in a patchwork of laws, programmes, action plans at national, European and international level, none of which are specifically designed to protect the marine environment as such.

Recognising these concerns, the Commission recently came forward with a thematic strategy on the protection and conservation of the marine environment. This aims to establish a coherent European policy for Europe's seas which is based on the integrated management of marine ecosystems as a whole.

Its overall objective is to ensure that all EU marine waters are environmentally healthy by 2021. Whilst common objectives and methods for achieving this environmental status will be set at EU level, implementation will take place at the level of the regional seas (Baltic, North-East Atlantic, Mediterranean).

This encourages Member States sharing a marine area to work together to develop regional strategies and plans for their respective seas. It also builds on the already substantial work done under existing regional Conventions

for the protection of the sea – HELCOM (for the Baltic Sea), OSPAR (for the North Atlantic and North sea, and Barcelona (for the Mediterranean) – but, which until, now lacked the force of law.

As far as Natura 2000 is concerned this new strategy is good news for a number of reasons. For a start, it places Natura 2000 firmly in the wider policy context. The move away from sectoral legislation towards one of integrated ecosystems management should also facilitate the task of elaborating and implementing management plans for marine Natura 2000 sites whilst the

regional seas approach will encourage greater cooperation between different stakeholders and legislators within a given geographical area, irrespective of national, administrative or political boundaries.

The fact that the existing regional Conventions have been actively involved in marine conservation for many years also bodes well for Natura 2000, as they are well placed to take this process forward.

The Commission's guidance document on implementing Natura

IDENTIFYING MARINE IBAs



Fea's petrel *Pterodroma feae*,
Ilhas Desertas, Madeira.
Photo: F. Olmos/BirdLife International

In 2004, two projects submitted by SEO and SPEA (BirdLife partners in Spain and Portugal) were approved under LIFE-Nature to identify IBAs in the Spanish and Portuguese waters off the mainland and in the territorial waters around the Canaries, Madeira and the Azores.

Collecting data

Following a detailed desk top review of all available information on abiotic and geophysical variations within offshore waters, the projects will carry out detailed marine surveys to collect raw data on seabird distribution and behaviour patterns. In Spain, this will involve:

- satellite tracking of c.40 individual *Calonectris diomedea* and c.20 *Larus audouinii* and radio tracking of c.26–30 *Bulweria bulwerii*, c.16–20 *Puffinus assimilus*, 26–30 *Oceanodroma castro* and 26–30 *Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmerestii* during 12 months.
- intensive surveys of waters around *Larus* and *Sterna* breeding colonies in the Ebro Delta and Albufera de Valencia (2000hrs during the breeding season).
- Observers on board fishing vessels (300 days in various fisheries sectors).
- a newly database of beached seabirds and
- analysis of 16.000 recoveries of ringed seabirds in Spain.

Similar surveys are planned in Portugal, but this time concentrating on other species as well such as *Calonectris diomedea borealis*, *Pterodroma feae*, *Pelegodroma marina* and possibly *Sterna dougallii* in the Azores.

GIS Mapping

As the information comes in, the data will be fed into a GIS database in order to build up a picture of potential distribution patterns of seabirds at sea. Maps will be produced showing areas of interactions with human activities, correlations with distinctive abiotic or geographical features as well as key feeding, resting or moulting sites.

From this it should be possible to identify, and draw boundaries around, the most suitable areas that could qualify as IBAs. Such pre-selected areas will then be described in detail, their threats identified and recommendations made for their conservation. Two publications will be released by the end of the project in 2008 – one on marine IBAs in Spain and the other on marine IBAs in Portugal.

Four categories of marine IBAs are currently being envisaged:

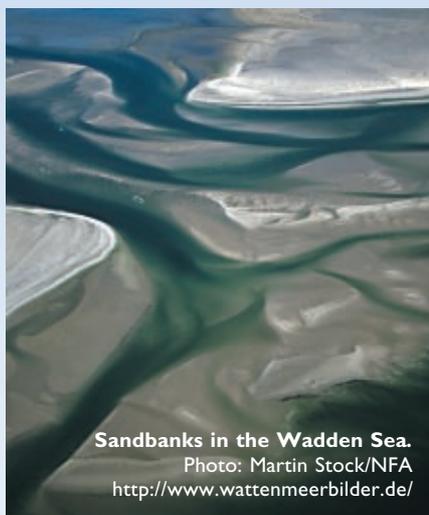
- Important Feeding areas at sea
- Areas with important regular concentrations of seabirds
- Seaward extension of breeding colonies
- Migration hotspots where due to the geographical position, seabirds fly in large concentrations during the migrating season

2000 in the marine environment will be available from the nature homepage in early 2006 – <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm>

The Thematic Strategy on the protection and conservation of the marine Environment (Com (2005) 504 final) and the proposal for a Directive establishing a Framework for Community Action in the field of Marine Environmental Policy (Marine Strategy Directive – Com (2005) 505 final) are available from: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/water/marine.htm>



Parrot fish in the Azores. Photo: Peter Wirtz/ImagDOP



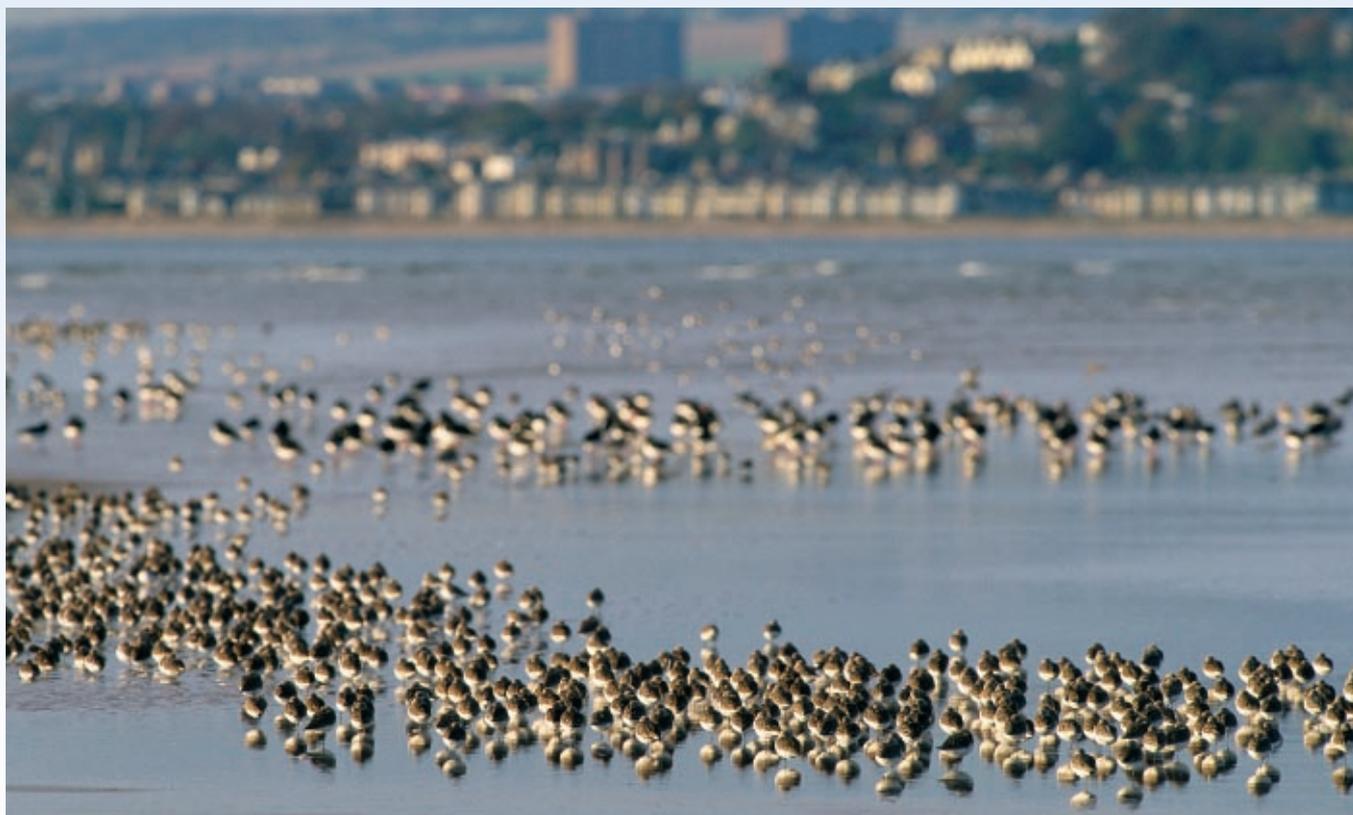
Sandbanks in the Wadden Sea.
Photo: Martin Stock/NFA
<http://www.wattenmeerbilder.de/>

THE WADDEN SEA

The Wadden Sea is a vast ever-changing landscape of intertidal mudflats, saltmarshes, shallow seas, sandbanks, creeks and channels stretching across three countries: Germany, Netherlands and Denmark. It covers 25,000 km² (8500 km² of which is in Natura 2000) and is of immense biological and commercial value. The shallow waters act as important nurseries for commercial fish stocks such as sole, herring and plaice whilst the extensive mudflats provide rich pickings at low tide for over ten million birds that flock here at different times of the year. The seas also host large concentrations (over 14,000) of harbour seals and harbour porpoise.

Its location in one of the most densely populated and intensively used regions of Europe puts it under heavy pressure from a whole range of uses. To ensure the sustainable management and use of this vast area, the three countries signed a trilateral agreement to coordinate their conservation actions. The seal management plan is an example of this international cooperation. The implementation of this coordinated plan is widely recognized as having played a major part in securing the recovery of the harbour seal following a massive population crash in the 1990s due to a distemper virus.

Flocks of waders in the Firth of Tay. Photo: Lorne Gill/SNH





Fishing in the Wadden Sea. Photo: Martin Stock/NFA <http://www.wattenmeerbilder.de/>

Marine conservation and the Common Fisheries Policy

In 2003, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) underwent a major reform. This opened up new opportunities for the conservation of rare marine habitat types and species listed in the Nature Directives, both inside and outside Natura 2000 areas.

Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy

After years of expansion, the European fishing fleet grew so large that it was persistently over-exploiting the available resource. This in turn led to major socio-economic and environmental problems. Recognising these concerns, the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was reformed in 2003 to ensure a more sustainable management of fishing activities.

The new approach, which is governed by the precautionary principle, is based on a gradual application of a multi-annual, multi-species approach to fisheries management designed to take account of the whole marine ecosystems, not just the commercially valuable fish stocks.

One of its first priorities is to tackle the chronic overcapacity of the fishing fleet by reducing this to a level that matches better the available resources. Another is to implement long term management and recovery plans to help rebuild

collapsed fish stocks and maintain others at safe biological levels.

The reform was also an opportunity to ensure greater integration of environmental concerns into the CFP, particularly relating to marine biodiversity.

Community Action plan for environmental integration

The Commission adopted a specific Community Action Plan in May 2002 to put these environmental objectives into practice. This sets out the guiding principles for ensuring greater environmental integration and identifies a series of priority management measures to be adopted according to a detailed work programme. The main areas targeted are:

- Reducing the overall fishing pressure in EU waters to more sustainable levels. This alone will have significant environment benefits, helping to restore the equilibrium and robustness of the marine ecosystem as a whole;
- Limiting certain fishing gear and improving fishing methods with a view to reducing discards, incidental bycatch and impacts on valuable marine habitats;
- Implementing Community Action plans to manage sharks and protect seabirds in the context of FAO international plans of action.

The Action plan also calls for:

- further consideration to be given to stimulating more environmentally friendly fishing practices through financial incentives under the new European Fisheries Fund (2007–2013) and
- further research under the 6th (and 7th) Framework Programme for Community Research in order to gain a better understanding of the interactions between fisheries activities and marine ecosystems.

Links with the Habitats and Birds Directives

The Community Action plan also recognizes the need for cross compliance between the CFP and the Habitats and Birds Directives. This has potentially important repercussions for the conservation of the marine species and habitats listed in the two Directives. Because the Community has exclusive powers over the management of the EU fisheries resource, it is also responsible for taking measures, at EU level, to regulate fishing practices that adversely affect marine habitats and species, both within Natura 2000 sites and outside.

The 'Darwin mounds' Regulation is a typical example. In 1998, an extensive cold water reef system was discovered in deep waters 180

km off the North West Coast of Scotland. The UK proposed the site for inclusion in the Natura 2000 network. However, one of the principle threats to the site came from the use of certain types of fishing gear which drag along the reef's surface, destroying the coral.

As the UK does not have the legal competence to regulate fisheries in these waters, it addressed instead its request for a complete ban on bottom trawls and other similar gear within the Natura 2000 site to the Commission. The latter proposed a Regulation which was subsequently adopted by the Council. As a result no EU vessels, British or otherwise, are allowed to use bottom trawls or other similar gear in and around the Darwin mounds.

Similar measures have been adopted banning the use of damaging fishing gear in Posidonia beds in the Mediterranean and along the coral reefs around the Azores, Madeira and Canaries.

Reducing bycatch of vulnerable marine species

The CFP also provides for the possibility to adopt measures to limit the impact of fishing activities on vulnerable marine species outside Natura 2000 sites. This is in line with the provisions of article 12 of the Habitats Directive, which requires Member States to establish a regime of strict protection for species listed in Annex IV (in the case of marine species: all cetaceans, sea turtles and the monk seal).

Common dolphins. Photo: Ana Cañadas



A number of Community measures have been adopted in this respect. Driftnets have been prohibited in the Atlantic and Mediterranean since January 2002 and are being phased out in the Baltic Sea.

In June 2004, the Community made it compulsory for all gillnet fishing vessels over 12 m to use acoustic deterrent devices ('pingers') on their nets. A scientific report from ICES had identified gillnet fishing as a major cause of mortality for non-target species, such as the harbour porpoise (4000 drowned annually in Danish gillnet fishing alone). Attaching pingers to the nets makes it possible to reduce this level of bycatch significantly because these devices emit a low frequency sound which has been proven to ward off cetaceans.

The same Council Regulation made it a requirement for Member States to design and implement monitoring schemes to record the incidental catches of cetaceans using independent observers on board pelagic trawls, bottom set gillnet or entangling nets and high opening trawls in various parts of the Atlantic and Mediterranean.

This will contribute to the implementation of article 12 (2) of the Habitats Directive regarding the monitoring of the incidental capture and killing of marine animals in Annex IV. It also opens the way for further conservation measures or

research to be taken to ensure this incidental capture does not have a significant impact on the species concerned.

Opportunities for the future

These measures represent the first few steps taken by the Community to tackle the problem of fisheries activities on marine biodiversity. Now that the legal and policy mechanisms are in place, the door is open for further measures to be adopted to help implement Natura 2000 in the marine environment and to safeguard vulnerable marine species, once more information emerges on the impact of different fishing activities.

One area that deserves further consideration is the use of economic incentives in encouraging more environmentally friendly fishing practices. This could, for instance, play an important role in stimulating a greater uptake of more selective fishing gear, or in designating 'no take' zones in exchange for additional quotas or effort allocation, especially in coastal waters where fishing activities are still small scale and potentially environmentally friendly but so far undervalued by society.

Communication from the Commission setting out a Community Action plan to integrate environmental protection requirements into the Common Fisheries Policy – Com (2002) 186 final – on http://europa.eu.int/documents/eur-lex/index_en.htm

Observers on the tracker platform, vessel Skagerak. Photo: Tono Vasquez



SCANS II – ESTIMATING ABSOLUTE ABUNDANCE OF HARBOUR PORPOISE

The process of environmental integration of the CFP requires the input of several other disciplines. As an example, fisheries management aiming at reducing bycatch of cetaceans to limits compatible with their conservation status (such as those advocated by the Agreement on the Conservation of

Small Cetaceans in the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS)) necessitates estimates of total abundance of cetacean populations.

The Sea Mammal Research Unit in Scotland set out to find out. In partnership with 12 institutes in other EU countries and with financial support from LIFE-Nature, it surveyed the entire EU Atlantic shelf waters in July 2005. Seven ships, three aircraft and a team of over 70 observers were recruited to undertake 30,000 km of sea survey transects. The results will now be used to develop a robust management framework for setting safe levels of bycatch for harbour porpoise within EU Atlantic waters. <http://biology.st-andrews.ac.uk/scans2/>

NATURA BAROMETER

(as of 20/06/05)

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 relates only to the terrestrial area that has been designated which is the overall SPA/SAC area minus the marine area. Some Member States (DK, NL, ...) have designated substantial portions of their marine water, these are included in the number of sites and areas proposed but not in the % surface area or indications of progress. These assessments are therefore subject to a general 'marine reserve' as further work is needed for the successful application of Natura 2000 under both the Birds and Habitats Directives.
- 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 ten new Member States had a duty to classify SPAs from the date of their accession on 1 May 2004. All countries have submitted their list and an evaluation of their completeness is underway.
- 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	SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS					
	Number of sites	Total area (km ²)	Terrestrial area (%)	Number of marine sites	Marine area (km ²)	Progress
BELGIË/BELGIQUE	229	2,964	9.7	0	0	
ČESKÁ REPUBLIKA	38	6,936	8.8	—	—	↑
DANMARK	113	14,709	5.9	59	12,173	
DEUTSCHLAND	497	32,080	6.4	17	9,171	
EESTI	67	12,063	12.5	26	6,394	
ELLAS	151	13,703	10.1	4	405	
ESPAÑA	502	86,537	17.0	20	574	↑
FRANCE	193	16,546	2.6	52	2,225	↑
IRELAND	131	2,815	2.9	66	810	
ITALIA	503	24,865	8.1	13	396	
KYPROS	2	108	1.2	0	0	
LATVIJA	97	6,751	9.6	4	520	
LIETUVA	40	3,570	5.5	0	0	
LUXEMBOURG	12	139	5.4	—	—	
MAGYARORSZÁG	55	11,376	12.2	—	—	↑
MALTA	6	8	2.4	0	0	
NEDERLAND	77	10,109	12.5	7	4,913	
ÖSTERREICH	94	9,275	11.1	—	—	
POLSKA	72	33,156	7.8	3	8,794	
PORTUGAL	50	9,956	10.1	10	622	
SLOVENIJA	27	4,656	23.0	1	3	
SLOVENSKO	38	12,295	25.2	—	—	
SUOMI	452	28,373	6.8	65	5,511	
SVERIGE	509	28,648	6.2	107	3,017	
UNITED KINGDOM	257	14,909	5.8	5	749	
EU	4,212	386,547		459	56,277	

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

notably insufficient

incomplete

largely complete

recent significant progress

SITES OF COMMUNITY IMPORTANCE

Number of sites	Total area (km ²)	Terrestrial area (%)	Number of marine sites	Marine area (km ²)	Progress	Member State
278	3,221	10.0	0	0		BELGIË/BELGIQUE
864	7,244	9.2	—	—	TBE	ČESKÁ REPUBLIKA
254	11,136	7.4	118	7,959	 ↑	DANMARK
4,596	53,123	9.8	46	18,034	 ↑	DEUTSCHLAND
509	10,591	15.9	34	3,419	TBE	EESTI
239	27,641	16.4	102	5,998		ELLAS
1,382	119,122	22.6	88	5,191	 ↑	ESPAÑA
1,222	42,675	6.9	88	5,000		FRANCE
413	10,561	10.2	92	3,386		IRELAND
2,255	43,977	13.9	162	2,227		ITALIA
26	510	5.0	5	50	TBE	KYPROS
331	7,651	11.0	6	556	TBE	LATVIJA
276	1,409	2.1	1	20	TBE	LIETUVA
47	383	14.8	—	—		LUXEMBOURG
467	13,025	14.0	—	—	TBE	MAGYARORSZÁG
23	39	12.5	0	0	TBE	MALTA
141	7,509	9.5	24	3,553		NEDERLAND
164	8,884	10.6	—	—		ÖSTERREICH
192	13,124	4.2	0	0	TBE	POLSKA
94	16,503	17.4	23	490		PORTUGAL
259	6,360	31.4	3	0.2	TBE	SLOVENIJA
382	5,739	11.8	—	—	TBE	SLOVENSKO
1,660	47,932	12.7	94	5,142		SUOMI
3,903	62,356	13.6	320	5,833	 ↑	SVERIGE
610	25,100	6.5	42	9,109		UNITED KINGDOM
20,587	545,815		1,249	76,150		EU

 notably insufficient

 incomplete

 largely complete

↑ recent significant progress

TBE To be evaluated in context of biogeographical seminars

For further information contact:

Micheal O'Briain,
DG ENV.B.2

for proposed SCIs.

The Natura Barometer: commentary on progress

The current barometer covers the latest state of play for all 25 countries as regards both the Habitats and the Birds

Directives. As can be seen the ten new Member States have all submitted their lists of SPAs and proposed SCIs to the Commission. Some such as Slovakia and Slovenia have proposed very significant areas under Natura 2000, covering a quarter to a third of their respective territories.

The proposed SCIs will now be evaluated through the biogeographical seminars to determine whether they are sufficient. For two of the biogeographic regions (Alpine and Pannonian), the first seminars for the new Member States have been held. For Cyprus and Malta, bilateral consultations have been held.

In the case of the SPAs this process is not required but the recent publication of IBA lists for all new Member States will nevertheless provide a valuable scientific reference to assist in the evaluation of the designation process.



Monitoring posidonia beds in Majorca. Photo: Conselleria de Medi Ambient

LIFE under the waves

Over the last ten years, LIFE-Nature has contributed some €40 million to around 50 marine projects across the EU.

Many have focused on the conservation of highly endangered marine species such as the monk seal *Monachus monachus* and the loggerhead sea turtle *Caretta caretta* or rare seabirds such as the roseate tern *Sterna dougallii* and Audouin's gull, *Larus audouini*. Alternatively, they have focused on marine habitats such as posidonia beds, reefs and sea caves.

Some projects have taken a more generic approach to developing effective techniques for large scale Natura 2000 surveys in offshore waters or elaborating marine management plans. In all cases, major efforts have been made to raise awareness and to engage local stakeholders in the complex management processes.

This has led to a wealth of information and experiences in establishing and implementing the Natura 2000 network in the marine environment. In this article we look at some of these activities and their

impacts on the species and marine areas concerned.

Surveys and data collection

It is well known that the level of knowledge on marine biodiversity lags far behind that of terrestrial ecosystems. Recognising this, LIFE-Nature made an exception to its normal rule of not funding preliminary studies and surveys. As a result, most of the 50 projects had an important component of information gathering and survey work. In many cases it was the first time that such surveys were undertaken on a large enough scale and with sufficient resources to produce tangible results.

One of the important outputs of this survey work has been the identification of sites for inclusion in the Natura 2000 network. In Madeira, for instance, a detailed survey of the sea turtles in the surrounding waters revealed that most animals were juveniles from the Mediterranean that were stopping over in the nutrient rich waters of Madeira to feed and rest before travelling onto the Caribbean

and other parts of the Atlantic to start their adult lives.

Their conservation during this vulnerable period is therefore of utmost importance. Thanks to the LIFE project the first offshore seamount in Madeira was identified for protection. Long line fishing was also subsequently banned and guidelines issued to reduce the impact of black scabbard fishing.

In the Canaries, a similar survey, this time of local cetacean populations, found that the waters around these islands were amongst the richest in the EU for bottlenose dolphins (c.1,000 individuals). The boundaries of existing Natura 2000 marine sites were altered in function of the new survey results and the standard data sheets updated to reflect the presence of dolphins in the existing marine sites.

In Greece, where very little was known about the distribution of the rare Mediterranean monk seal outside the Northern Sporades, a LIFE-Nature project surveyed other potential sites for the species in 1996. Through this six new sites were identified, two of which were

found to host up to 25% and 10% of the total estimated population of monk seal (c.500) in Greece. These remote island complexes in the South Aegean sea were subsequently added to the Greek Natura 2000 list and documents prepared for the adoption of national protection laws and management plans for the areas concerned.

Awareness raising and management planning

The detailed information gathered on the distribution, conservation state and threats of the targeted species and habitats was also used by many LIFE-Nature projects to develop comprehensive management plans and national action plans for the species/sites concerned in order to kick start the process of protection and management.

Most found this process of developing marine management plans particularly complex and delicate. The range of interests at stake tends to be very diverse and uncoordinated. What is more, few of the stakeholders concerned had previous experience of marine conservation issues and so were starting from a limited information base. The projects found that any attempt to change existing practices or attitudes was best accompanied by a targeted campaign to inform the stakeholders of the issues at stake and the potential impacts for them.

This was done with considerable success along the southern coast of Spain. Previously the beneficiary – the Spanish Cetacean Society – had identified several potential marine Natura 2000 sites along the narrow passage of sea that links the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. However, it realised that, without extensive dialogue, the protection of these sites would meet with great resistance from local interest groups who, in the absence of any information, would feel their livelihoods unjustly threatened.

It therefore launched a major awareness raising campaign, co-financed by LIFE, to target all potential stakeholder groups along the coast. The aim was to explain why the rich seas around Andalucía

and Murcia needed protection and to engage the different interest groups in discussions over the ways to conserve these natural values whilst respecting their socio-economic needs.

Starting in 2002, three old sailing vessels traveled the length of the coast, stopping at 19 ports along the way to deliver a comprehensive series of events, talks, activities and excursions aimed at local stakeholders and their families. The first journey focused on awareness raising – informing people of the marine areas and their main threats. The second journey, a year later, took the process one step further and engaged local stakeholders in discussions over the protection of these valuable resources, especially in areas of potential conflicts with existing human activities.

The final journey, which is currently underway, is seeking to reach a consensus on the draft management plans which have been prepared on the basis of the extensive consultation process. So far all signs are encouraging. The discussions are being held in a spirit of cooperation and constructive dialogue. The fact that everyone is now fully aware of the issues at stake means that they can concentrate on finding practical solutions in specific areas of conflict without putting the whole concept of marine protected areas into question again.

Stakeholder involvement

A similar project was undertaken in the UK to develop a standard methodology for elaborating marine management plans. Until the adoption of the Habitats Directive, the UK government had few protected marine sites. Now it has 80 in the Natura 2000 network which meant it needed to find a coherent approach to their protection and management.

First, all existing information was reviewed on the marine habitats and species listed in the Habitats Directive and on potential conflicts with certain human activities. The results were written up in a series of reports which were to act as an important reference source throughout the management planning process.

The project then set out to develop model management plans for 12 very different demonstration sites. A management group was established at each, composed of local

Awareness raising in southern Spain.

Photo: Spanish Cetacean Society, SEC



Sea turtle monitoring in the Pelagian islands, Italy. Photo: A. Zannetti



ON SITE continued

stakeholder groups and different government bodies with a say in marine issues. A dedicated project officer was also appointed to facilitate the work of the group.

The process started with an intensive information gathering exercise on the site's natural values, current legislation and human activities. Where necessary, gaps were filled through targeted surveys and input from the management group. The results were mapped to identify areas of conservation interest against key human activities and any potential conflict areas were discussed in detail within the group.

Once everyone had had an opportunity to contribute their views, formal conservation objectives were drawn up and circulated for comments. These set the legal base for developing the detailed management plan and identifying specific actions needed to maintain or restore the species and habitats for which the site is designated. An opportunity was also taken to identify the organisations responsible for implementing these actions.

Despite the laborious processes involved, the project proved to be a resounding success. Effective management plans were adopted at all 12 sites and signed off by the

local stakeholder groups who now felt a sense of ownership and responsibility for these plans.

Using local management groups to elaborate the plans meant that decisions were made in the full knowledge of those most likely to be affected by them and were backed up by solid scientific surveys and analysis. This successful technique is now being used for other marine SACs across the UK.

Interaction with fisheries

Another key issue addressed by many LIFE-Nature projects concerns the negative interactions between fisheries and threatened marine habitats and species. Again numerous surveys were undertaken and information gathered on the extent of the problem and the type of fisheries considered most damaging in specific marine areas. This has been used to start up a dialogue with the fishermen and authorities concerned.

In Greece, the NGO Archelon, has been working closely with local fishermen for several years through a series of LIFE-Nature projects targeting the main feeding and resting bays for sea turtles along the Peloponese (Amvrakikos bay, Lakonikos bay, Kyparissia) as well as on the islands of Crete and Zakynthos (latter not funded by LIFE).

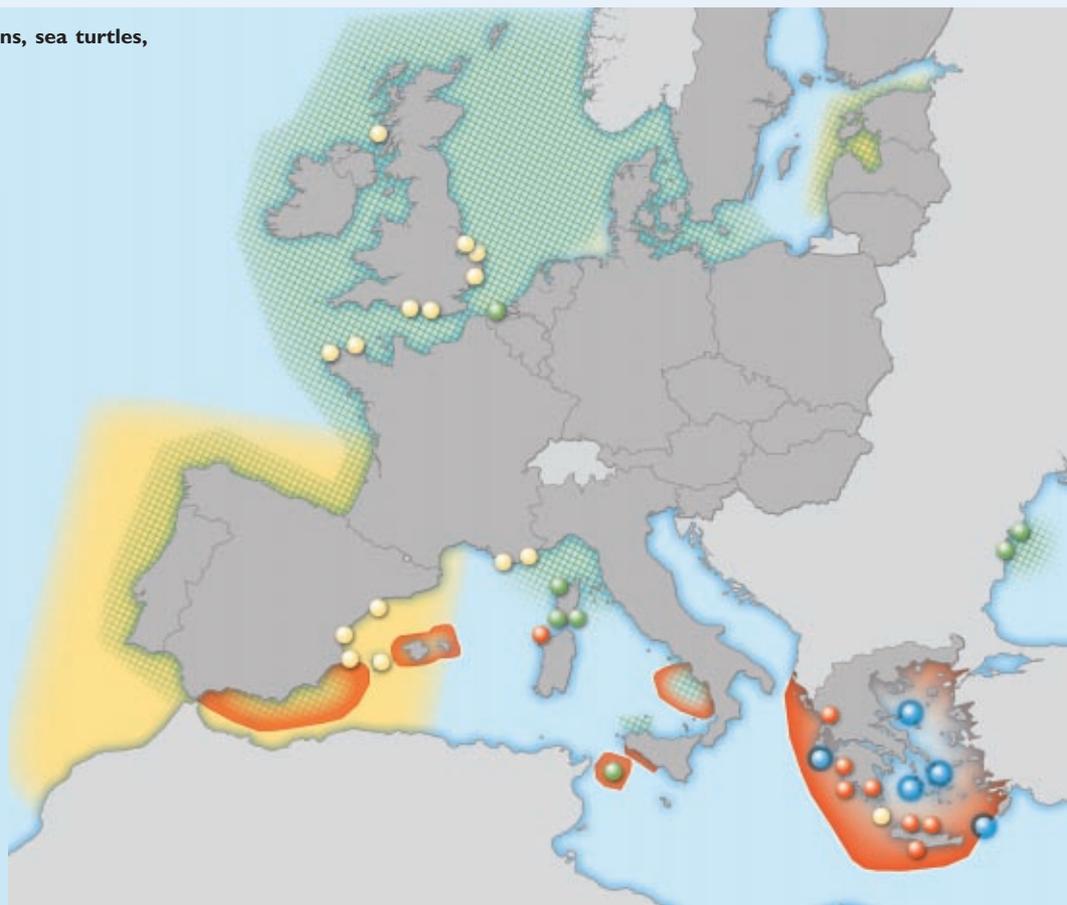
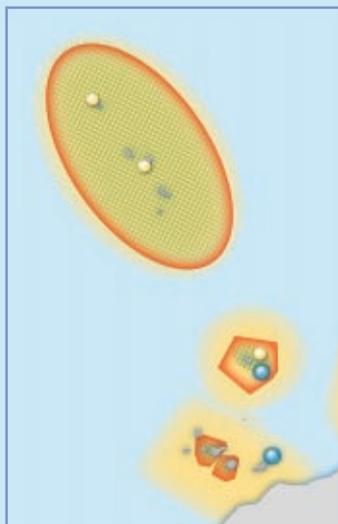
They found that animals were being lost not just through accidental capture but also through deliberate killings. Fishermen's attitudes towards marine animals were clearly hostile. Not only were the animals potentially damaging their nets but they were also competing directly for increasingly scarce resources. As a result, any turtles accidentally caught in their nets were more likely to be killed than released.

Through a concerted awareness raising campaign and intensive dialogue with the local fishermen in each area, Archelon succeeded in reducing the level of deliberate killings in these areas considerably. It had managed to persuade local fishermen to release the animals caught in their nets, rather than kill them and to report any injured individuals to the NGOs so that they could be dispatched to a series of newly constructed rehabilitation centres along the coast.

Part of the process was to get fishermen to recognize that neither they nor the marine animals were the main cause of depleted fish stocks. Industrial scale fishing operations in the international waters around Greece were mostly responsible. In exchange for cooperation over the release of turtles, Archelon is now working closely with the local fishing groups

LIFE-Nature projects targeting cetaceans, sea turtles, sea birds and monk seal.

Green = Cetaceans
Red = Sea turtles
Yellow = Sea birds
Blue = Monk seal





ABOVE Whale watching in the Azores. Photo: R. Prieto ImagDOP

LEFT Monk seal with loal fisherman. Photo: MOm

to lobby for better recognition of their activities and, where appropriate, devise compensation schemes for any losses incurred through the accidental bycatch of marine animals such as turtles.

Similar LIFE funded initiatives are currently underway in Italy (Tartanet) and for the monk seal in Greece. In the case of the latter a new LIFE-Nature project has just begun to look at interactions between monk seal and fisheries throughout the Greece. Ultimately it aims to formulate the first ever monk seal – fisheries action plan for Greece in consultation with the fisheries authorities.

In other parts of the EU, LIFE-Nature projects have focused instead on trying to reduce the level of bycatch in fishing operations through the use of prototype deterrents or decoys. In the international cetacean sanctuary between Italy, France and Monaco, work is underway to test the effectiveness of pingers on nets (used to scare cetaceans away). In the Pelagean islands off southern Sicily, new decoy baits are being tried out to reduce the impact of long line fishing on sea turtles whereas, in the Azores, work is underway to adapt the shape of the hooks on long lines to make them less dangerous for the sea turtles if swallowed.

Regulating whale watching

The increasing recognition of, and concern for, marine mammals in European waters has also had a number of positive economic spin offs. None is more evident than the significant increase in whale and dolphin watching operations in recent years. In the Canaries, alone, it is estimated to bring in around €30 million a year. This type of

development, based on the natural heritage of the islands, is good news for conservation, since it creates a vested interest in protecting the resources. However, it is equally important to ensure that it does not become a victim of its own success.

In the Azores, the local government developed, through a LIFE-Nature project, a code of conduct regulating whale watching operations in its waters. The law received the full backing of the operators themselves. Why? Because the law was not only based on sound scientific studies and subjected to intensive public consultation but also because the operators got something in return.

Under the new law a special four-day course became compulsory for all operators. In addition to covering conservation issues, the course also provides valuable training in business management, first aid, boat repairs and advertising. This not only prevents unscrupulous operators from setting up business overnight but also increases the capacity of legitimate operators to develop a successful business.

Reducing visitor impacts on marine areas

Elsewhere, however, increasing visitor attraction is destroying the very nature the people are attracted to. Such is the case for the extensive posidonia beds in Majorca. Covering 10,000s of ha, these underwater prairies are immensely rich in fish, acting as a nursery for juveniles and a refuge for rare marine animals such as sea turtles and dolphins. Unfortunately in the Balearics, they have become a prime attraction for thousands of pleasure boats. The damage caused by the anchors as

they drag along the sandy seagrass bottom is considerable.

In partnership with the Departments of Fisheries and Marine, the local government's biodiversity unit is currently running a LIFE-Nature project to establish a protection regime for the posidonia beds within 17 marine SACs in the Balearics. Having mapped the beds and assessed their conservation state, a zonation scheme has been devised to separate out areas of strict protection from those where pleasure boats can be tolerated provided they are made to anchor exclusively on the newly installed buoys (520 buoys in total).

At the same time the project is drawing up individual management plans for each site to address additional activities affecting the posidonia beds, including fisheries, constructions works and pollution etc...

One interesting spin-off of the project so far is that the local diving clubs have become interested in the conservation of these valuable underwater prairies and have set up a volunteer network of divers to carry out regular health checks of the beds. So far some 100 divers have joined up. Their reports are fed into a dedicated website and will make a major contribution to the long term monitoring of these valuable marine habitats.

Further information can be found on these and other marine LIFE projects can be found in the forthcoming guidance manual on implementing the Habitats and Birds Directives in the marine environment and in the good practice website on DG Environment' nature homepage.



Alpine, Continental and Boreal lists adopted

A further three biogeographical lists of Sites of Community Importance have been adopted in

the last year. The Atlantic and Continental lists were both approved on the 7 December 2004. They added 2,419 sites (93,811 km²) and 4,958 sites (49,194 km²) respectively to the Natura 2000 Network. The Boreal list was adopted on 13 January 2005 and included 5,026 sites covering 82,377 km².

This leaves only the Mediterranean and the Pannonian lists still to be adopted. The former is expected for early 2006. As regards the latter, a first biogeographical workshop was held in September 2005. This concluded that progress was good enough not to require a second workshop, instead the remaining insufficiencies will be addressed through bilateral contacts between the Commission and the Member States concerned (Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic) with a view to having the Pannonian list adopted in the second half of 2006.

Meanwhile, the Commission has produced a series of biogeographical brochures to explain the characteristics of each region, the typical habitats and species present as well as the key management issues for Natura 2000. *For copies go to the Commission nature home page (address on page 16).*

A new Rural Development Regulation adopted

On the 20 September, the Council of Ministers adopted the new Council Regulation on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for the programming period 2007–2013.

Following a major reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in 2003, the Rural Development (so called Pillar II) has been broadened, simplified and strengthened. For the

first time, one of its specific objectives is to help improve the environment and the countryside by supporting land management measures (Axis 2). This has wide reaching implications for Europe's biodiversity and for the Natura 2000 network in particular.

Now farmers and private forest owners can receive extra financial support for being in Natura 2000. This is to compensate for the costs incurred and income foregone resulting from the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives on their land. Such payments can be further topped up by voluntary agri-environment or forest-environment schemes that go beyond the mandatory requirements and undertake positive land management measures to maintain and enhance biodiversity, *inter alia* for species and habitats covered by the EU nature Directives.

Further, agri-environment and forest-environment schemes can be developed and tailored in such a way so to provide for species outside Natura 2000 sites and for the protection of biodiversity in general in areas that the Member States will define as High Nature Value Areas.

Support can also be granted for:

- Drawing up protection and management plans relating to Natura 2000 sites and other places of high natural value
- environmental awareness actions and investments associated with maintenance, restoration and upgrading of the natural heritage and with the development of high natural value sites
- non-productive investments where they are necessary to

achieve the commitments undertaken under these voluntary land management schemes or where they enhance, on-farm, the public amenity value of Natura 2000 areas and other areas of high natural value.

Discussions are currently underway to adopt the Community's Strategic guidelines for Rural Development. These will identify the priorities to be given within the each of the axes. In the case of axis 2 – land management, the Commission has proposed that one of the three priorities should be 'biodiversity and preservation of high nature value farming and forestry systems'. The Commission is also currently working on the preparation of implementing rules for the Rural Development Regulation.

It will then be up to Member States to develop their own national Rural Development strategies, taking account of the EU priorities and the implementing rules. Following that, Member states will start to develop their Rural Development Programmes and detailed measures and schemes needed to implement the RDP in their respective countries, in time for 2007. *Council Regulation N°1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) Official Journal L 277/1 of 21/10/2005; Proposal for a Council Decision on Community strategic guidelines for Rural Development Com(2005) 304 final – both can be found on http://europa.eu.int/documents/eur-lex/index_en.htm*

Grazing meadows in Untersee, Germany. Photo: E. Stegmaier – RP Frieburg



'Financing Natura 2000' guidance and workshops

In October of this year, the Commission issued a contract to WWF/IEEP to advise and support Member State nature authorities in the use of new opportunities for Natura 2000 under the Rural Development Regulation and other EU funds in the forthcoming financing period 2007–2013. A detailed guidance will be produced on how Community funds can be used to support the Natura 2000 network. This will then be presented at a series of workshops in each of the 25 Member States. It is expected that the guidance document will be ready in early 2006 in all 20 languages.

Reporting on conservation status of species and habitats

Article 11 of the Habitats Directive requires Member States to monitor the conservation status of species and habitats of Community Interest. A general framework on how to assess and report on this conservation status was approved by the Habitats Committee in April 2005 and is now available from the nature homepage. According to Article 17, Member States must deliver their first assessment in their next report to the Commission on the implementation of the Directive which is due in June 2007. A standard reporting format is being developed for this, together with guidelines on how to present the information in a way that will allow an overview to be developed at EU level.

EU ratifies the AEWA Agreement

On the 1 October 2005, the European Community became a contracting party to the African-Eurasian Migratory Agreement (AEWA). This agreement establishes a framework in which 117 countries can work together to save 235 migratory bird species across their entire range, from the northern reaches of Canada and the Russian Federation to the southernmost tip of Africa. At its third meeting of Parties in Senegal in October, the contracting parties

adopted a number of single species actions plans for species such as the ferruginous duck *Aythya nyroca*, the white headed duck *Oxyura leucocephala* and the corncrake *Crex crex*. It also agreed to the international implementation priorities for the period 2006–2008. More information on http://www.unep-aewa.org/index_original.htm

Good management practices for Natura 2000

As the selection of sites for the Natura 2000 Network nears completion, attention is increasingly focused on the issue of management in accordance with the provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. With over 20,000 sites in the Natura 2000 Network, covering almost a fifth of the EU territory, the prospect may seem rather daunting at first. Not only do the ecological requirements of the species and habitats vary significantly from one site to another, but the proposed management options must also take account of economic, social and cultural requirements of the areas concerned as well as their regional and local characteristics.

Recognising this concern, the Commission has developed a special website on its nature homepage to help illustrate the different forms of management that can be used in a range of circumstances across Europe and to encourage exchange of good practices. Some 25 practical examples of successful management processes and

solutions are presented within five different sectors – farming, forests, rivers, marine and wetlands – mostly taken from LIFE projects.

The aim is to encourage other nature managers across Europe to submit examples of their good management practices to the Commission in order to encourage an exchange of experiences. The Commission intends to review the examples submitted and post the most relevant ones on its website, with the aim of building up a comprehensive library of good management practices.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/nature_conservation/natura_2000_network/managing_natura_2000/index_en.htm

"Flying Over Natura 2000", a project of discovery...

"Flying Over Natura 2000" is a project run by WWF and co-financed by the European Commission aimed at discovering the Natura 2000 network through the eyes of a black stork as it migrates across Europe. The movements of 16 different storks from 8 EU countries can be followed on a dedicated website thanks to a radio transmitter, attached to the stork and relayed by satellites. Every day during their long journey, these 'ambassador' storks send a postcard, or small TV clip. These tell the story of a particular Natura 2000 site they have recently flown over. To view the postcards and follow the storks' progress log on to: <http://www.flyingover.net/>

Black stork. Photo: J. Hlasek



NEWS ROUND UP continued

New projects funded under LIFE-Nature

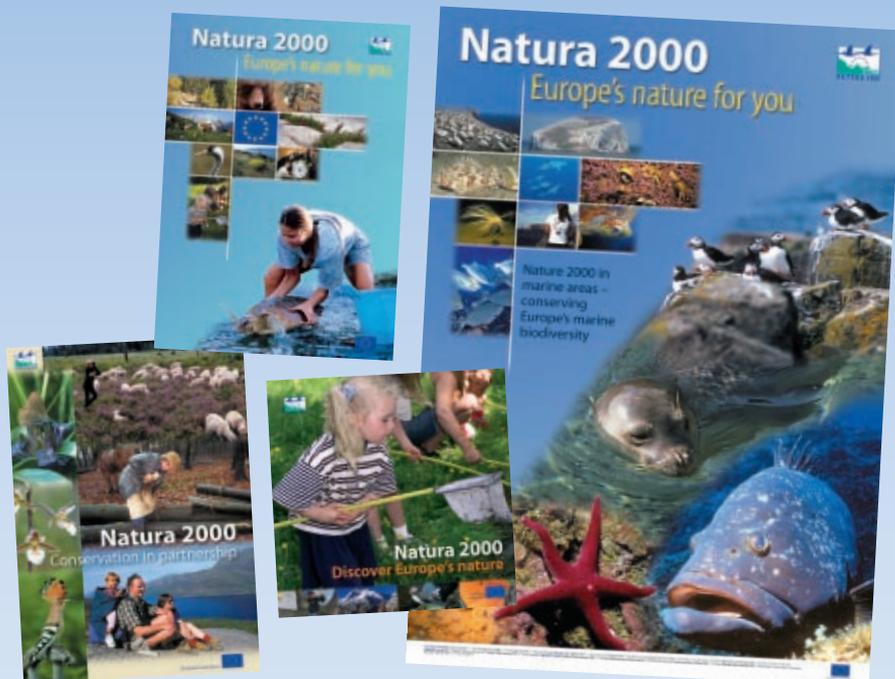
54 nature conservation projects, situated in 20 Member States, have been approved for funding under the 2005 round of LIFE-Nature. They represent a total investment of €125.7 million, of which the EU will cover 69 million. This year has seen a marked increase in the number of transnational projects across two or more countries. Two projects target the conservation of the lesser white-fronted goose *Anser erythropus* and the red footed falcon *Falco vespertinus* across a significant proportion of their natural range in the EU whilst a third focuses on marine conservation in the Baltic sea. *A brochure giving a one page description and contact details for all 2005 LIFE-Nature projects is available on the LIFE webpage.*

LIFE, Natura 2000 and the Military

In Europe, the Armed forces own significant tracts of land which they use for military practice. These tend to be of high conservation value, having escaped the pressures of agricultural intensification and other developments over the last 50 years. As a result many have been included in Natura 2000 and have received LIFE-Nature funding for their restoration and management. The experiences of these LIFE projects are summarised in a new in focus LIFE report which can be downloaded from the LIFE homepage.

LIFE coop best practice guides

Over the past 2 years LIFE has funded ten co-op initiatives to



encourage greater networking between LIFE projects working on similar themes. Amongst the topics covered are the conservation of European mink, the evaluation of best practices for bustard conservation in Western Europe, and the exchange of ecological knowledge and practical experiences in managing raised bogs and sand dunes. Several projects have produced reports, for instance, on 'integrating grouse conservation with tourism in Natura 2000 areas', 'best practice techniques for managing Natura 2000 sites in the Baltics' and 'methods for controlling invasive animals species on islands in Spain and Portugal'. For full details and links to the reports go to the LIFE Database on the LIFE homepage.

New publicity material on Natura 2000

The Nature Unit of the European Commission has produced a series

of attractive new brochures on 'Natura 2000 – Europe's nature for you' and 10 colourful posters on different themes relating to Natura 2000. These are destined for the general public all over Europe to help explain what Natura 2000 is and how it works. The brochures and posters are currently available in English but will be translated into all EU languages by the end of the year. To order copies go to the Commission's nature homepage.

A final note

After nine years as principal author and co-editor of this newsletter we say goodbye to Kerstin Sundseth. Kerstin will continue to work in the field of nature conservation and Natura 2000 but would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to this newsletter over the years and to wish you all continued success in your conservation work. Thank you and good luck!

NATURA 2000 NEWSLETTER

Editors: Kerstin Sundseth (Ecosystems LTD., Brussels) and Nicholas Hanley (DG ENV B2)

The following contributed to this issue: Placido Hernandez-Aguilar, Isabel Lourenco da Faria, Micheal O'Briain, Andras Demeter, Concha Olmeda, Marc Thauront, Oliviero Spinelli, Frank Vassen, Angelika Rubin, Alexandra Vakrou.

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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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