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Theme of this issue:

EUROPE'S LARGE CARNIVORES

CONTENTS

The Natura 2000 Newsletter is produced by the LIFE and Nature & Biodiversity Units of the Environment Directorate General (DG ENV) of the European Commission.
The newsletter is produced twice a year and is available in English, French, German, Spanish and Italian.

Editorial

Challenges of protection and conservation

The Habitats Directive requires the protection of large carnivore species (such as brown bear, wolf, wolverine, Iberian lynx and Eurasian lynx) on the basis that in many areas they are endangered. The Iberian lynx, for example, is the most threatened wildcat species in the world. The protection of these species is also part of our overall commitment to biodiversity protection and Europe's declared intention to halt biodiversity decline by 2010.

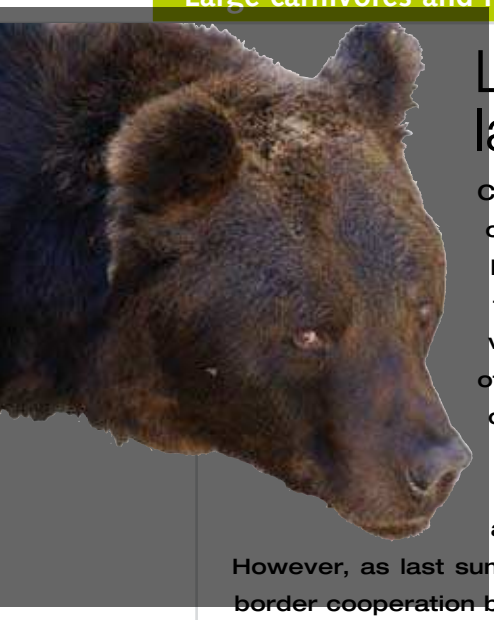
However, in trying to protect and conserve these species we cannot ignore the challenges associated with promoting a successful co-existence between human populations and large carnivores. These challenges are particularly severe in areas where these species are re-colonising, or being re-introduced after absences of tens or even hundreds of years and the local human population is therefore no longer accustomed to living in close proximity to large and, in the case of the bear and the wolf, potentially dangerous predators.

The Habitats Directive is a flexible piece of legislation that allows exemptions from the general, strict regime of protection in the interests of human safety and the protection of livelihoods and livestock. In addition, Member States and the European Commission, through LIFE projects and other initiatives, are working hard to promote awareness and to provide local people with the means to protect their livestock, pets and hunting dogs (e.g., electric fences, guard dogs, compensation for stock losses, and protective jackets for pets and hunting dogs).

The Commission is aware that the protection of large carnivores generates strong feelings among stakeholders. Collectively, we as Europeans have declared our commitment to protect and conserve these species. However, at the local level, these species can cause significant losses of livestock, pets and game species, as well as giving rise, in some regions, to fears about human safety.

We need to provide the right balance between our overall conservation objectives and the legitimate concerns of local people: we will not be successful in promoting our conservation policies if they are not supported by the people who live in Europe's wilder, nature-rich areas.

Patrick Murphy, *Head of Nature Conservation & Biodiversity Unit, DG Environment*



Learning to live with large carnivores

Conservation of Europe's five species of large carnivores is increasingly a cause of debate in a number of Member States. Many age-old conflicts with humans have reignited in recent years. Within Europe there are very different attitudes towards the conservation and management of large carnivores, especially between 'new' and 'old' Member States. The enlargement of the Natura 2000 Network and the Commission's upcoming publication of guidelines for population level management plans for large carnivores should encourage and aid coordination and cooperation between Member States in maintaining the populations at a favourable conservation status, and help to aid the development of scientific knowledge of the species. However, as last summer's shooting of 'Bruno' the brown bear in Germany illustrates, cross-border cooperation between nations needs to be improved.

Europe boasts five species of large carnivores: brown bear *(Ursus arctos)*, Eurasian lynx *(Lynx lynx)*, Iberian lynx *(Lynx pardinus)*, wolf (*Canis lupus)* and wolverine *(Gulo gulo)* whose priority conservation status in most European countries is assured by the EU's Habitats Directive and resulting Natura 2000 Network, and by the pan-European Bern Convention[1].

'Favourable Conservation Status' and 'social carrying capacity'

The legal basis of the Natura 2000 Network[2] are the Birds and Habitats Directives[3], which fix a target of restoration and maintenance of designated sites and their associated species – and achieve a Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Member States are free to decide how they achieve these targets. However, the Commission is aware of the need to find operational definitions of FCS that are relevant for large carnivores, which occur at low densities and move over vast areas, often across national borders. The 'social carrying capacity' of large carnivores also needs to be taken into consideration – that is, how many wolves or bears for instance, a country can potentially support, compared with what its inhabitants are willing to accept. See the LIFE-Nature project in Romania (page 4), as well as other examples illustrating different ways of dealing with this issue in Central and Southern Europe (pages 10 and 11-13), and in Finland (page 10).

A number of LIFE-Nature projects have succeeded in devising special agri-environment measures to encourage greater acceptance of Natura 2000 among local farming communities. In Greece, for instance, two projects run by the NGO Arcturos were able to lobby for significant increases in national compensation schemes for livestock losses, while at the same time, measures were implemented to reduce the extent of large carnivore depredation on livestock. As a result, the ministry of agriculture decided to include these measures in the Rural Development Plan for Greece (2000-2006).

Project reference:
LIFE96 NAT/GR/3222 and LIFE99 NAT/GR/6498
Website:
www.arcturos.gr

Status and threats

According to the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE) – a working group within the Species Survival

Electric fence funded by the Croatian LIFE-Third Countries' project

Photo: LIFE02 TCY/CRO/014

1 Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, Bern 1979.
2 To date, the Natura 2000 Network includes 25,000 sites covering close to 20% of EU territory.
3 Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds and Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

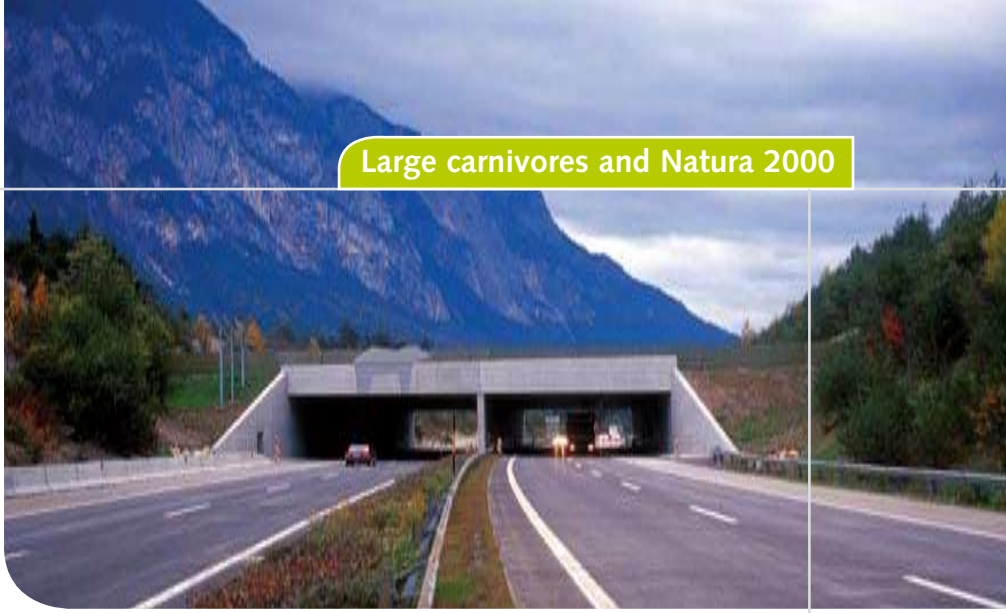


Photo: Krainer@Arge NATURSCHUTZ

Austrian LIFE-Nature project aids safe passage for bears

Commission of the World Conservation Union – across Europe, most large carnivore populations are currently recovering from their restricted ranges and overall numbers are generally increasing.

For information about Europe's large carnivores
LCIE website: www.lcie.org

However, according to the LCIE's John Linnell, the "picture is not good everywhere". He cites several bear populations, such as those in northern Spain, the Pyrenees, the Alps and the Apennines that are very small and effectively isolated. Also, he says, the population of Eurasian lynx that has persisted in the southern Balkans is of uncertain status, but is definitely very small. And "most endangered of all" is the Iberian lynx, a species endemic to the Iberian peninsula, currently found in two tiny remnant populations in Andalusia (see page 15 for news of LIFE-Nature efforts to conserve the world's most endangered cat species).

Even in areas where large carnivores are doing well, many long-standing conflicts with human interests have resurfaced in recent years. Says Linnell: "Depredation on livestock is the most widespread conflict." He also notes that the extent of the conflict "varies dramatically between regions". In areas where traditional protective systems with shepherds, livestock guarding dogs and night-time enclosures have persisted, the numbers of livestock killed are minimal. In areas where sheep are kept fenced, losses are rarely high. But if livestock are grazed unattended in forests or mountain pastures, then losses can be severe.

He underlines a theme that reappears throughout many parts of Europe: conflicts with large carnivores are almost always most severe when animals return to areas from which they have been absent for decades or centuries. "People who are used to their presence generally get along with them, but in their absence we have forgotten how to share our living space with big, furry, potentially dangerous, large animals. When large carnivores return, we have to readapt the way we keep our livestock."

Although depredation on livestock is the most common conflict, there are many others. Europe is also home to five million hunters who do not often welcome the return of wolves, bears and lynx that compete with them for their valuable game animals – large herbivores. Wolves and bears can also kill dogs, both hunting dogs and household pets, and can induce fear in some rural populations, especially in areas that have forgotten how to live with them. A consequence of these conflicts is not just a local annoyance. Conflicts with large carnivores can spill over into national politics where they come to symbolise deep urban-rural conflicts. Conflicts also motivate poaching, which remains a major cause of death among large carnivores throughout Europe. These issues can also generate disagreements between neighbouring countries on how to manage their shared populations.

Conscious of what it terms a "supranational problematic", the Commission has launched an initiative for the preparation of guidelines for population level management plans for large carnivores in Europe, focusing on the species with the widest distribution and thus the largest number of cross-border populations: brown bear, wolf, Eurasian lynx and wolverine. The guidelines, which are being prepared for the Commission by the Istituto di Ecologia Applicata (IEA), are due to be published in spring 2007.

One particularly lively media debate concerned the death of 'Bruno', the brown bear, shot in Bavaria in June 2006. Bruno (real name: JJ1) was born to a mother brought to Italy from Slovenia by a LIFE-NATURE project designed to improve the conservation status of bears in the Italian Alps. He was the first wild bear in Germany since 1835. However, he was classified as a 'risk bear' due to problems associated with his habit of foraging for food too close to humans (e.g, raids on stables and housing areas). Despite considerable efforts, the usual

Photo: LIFE99 NAT/IT/6244

Brown bear (Ursus arctos) *and footprints in the snow, Italy*

Photo: Koralm/Gulleb WWF

Photo: LIFE00 NAT/H/7162

Eurasian Lynx (Lynx lynx)

trapping methods were unsuccessful. This case also highlighted a need to improve co-operation between neighbouring countries: while there had been coordination via the LIFE-Nature project among Austria, Italy and Slovenia, this was not the case with Germany.

Conservation challenge to new Member States

In terms of nature conservation policy, it is clear the issues facing the new Member States, in particular those from Central and Eastern Europe, are different from those faced by the 'old' (EU15) Member States. A number of updates have been made to the Annexes of the Habitats Directive in order to accommodate an enlarged Union. Concerning large carnivores, some Member States negotiated exemptions to Annexes II and IV, where certain species are considered to be less threatened in new Member States and therefore not in need of such strict protection or site designation.

For example, in Lithuania, wolves are a game species hunted within a quota and limited season. Lithuania negotiated for geographical restriction from Annexes II and IV of the Habitats Directive and will not establish wolf special conservation areas for wolves within the Natura 2000 Network.

For newcomer Romania, the country's Carpathian mountain ranges have always hosted important populations of large carnivores. During the last decades, these populations have even been slowly increasing. In 2005, the country's total bear population was estimated at 6,900. Not surprisingly, bear numbers in the EU have almost doubled following the country's accession on 1 January 2007.

Thanks to a LIFE-Nature funded project, the core habitats for large carnivores in western Vrancea (located in the historical heartlands of Romanian Moldavia) have recently been identified and mapped. Most of these have already received a national protection status and are now being proposed as Natura 2000 sites. The preparation of the future management plans is also ongoing.

Project reference:
LIFE02 TCY/CRO/014
Website:
www.life-vuk.hr

Large carnivore protection in Vrancea County, Romania

Bears and wolves are part of rural life in western Vrancea, but conflicts cannot always be avoided. From a human perspective, the occasional depredation by wolves on sheep and dogs, and the damages caused to crops and orchards by bears are the main nuisances. Every year, several bears are caught in snares laid to protect crops against wild boar damage. Some of the trapped bears are badly injured, but, thanks to the LIFE project team, most are nowadays released unharmed.

With EU accession come new challenges: Rural Development funding is expected to become available to compensate landowners for the economic loss that arises through the Natura 2000 protection status of some of the forest lands, but could also be used for the compensation of damages directly caused by large carnivores. The Local Environmental Protection Agency of Vrancea, the project beneficiary, has already demonstrated to local shepherds the effectiveness of electric fences against wolf attacks.

But LIFE and Rural Development funding are not the only sources for financing conservation. The large-carnivore intervention unit set up by the project is expected to become self-supporting, being financed by the collection of fines from poachers.

In western Vrancea, the local economy is based on forestry and agriculture. Sadly, population losses through emigration are quite high. Wildlife-based ecotourism has the potential to become a major economic driver in the area in the next few decades, and a strong incentive for the successful coexistence between carnivores and people to keep the countryside alive.

Avoiding conflicts: a project team member talks to a local shepherd

Project reference:
LIFE02 NAT/RO/8576
Website:
http://www.carnivoremari.ro

Photo: Frank Vassen

Bear *Ursus arctos*

As humans have occupied more and more land in Europe, the brown bear *(Ursus arctos)* has become much less common. Bears have been seen as a threat to human safety and to livestock. While bears were once found all over Europe, they are now extinct in many areas, and the main populations are now concentrated in the Carpathian and Dinaric-Pindos ranges of southeastern Europe, and in the northeast of Europe including Russia and Fennoscandia.

A few small populations, however, are scattered throughout central and western Europe – the Cantabrian Mountains of northern Spain, the Pyrenees, the Italian Alps and the Apennines, for example – but these are struggling to survive. Bears from Slovenia have been introduced to the Pyrenees and the Alps to enhance these populations and also to help interconnect the Slovenian, Austrian and Italian populations. By contrast, the large populations in the Carpathians, Estonia, Finland and Sweden are so abundant they can withstand sustainable hunting. In the EU25 together with Bulgaria and Romania, there are between 13,500 and 16,000 brown bears. The populations of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania are the most important.

The European brown bear is the same species as the North American grizzly bear, which tends to be much larger in some regions. It has a large head and a heavily built body – the mass of males is between 140 and 320 kg, and females between 100 and 200 kg. Its diet consists of nuts, fruit and many types of vegetables, as well as meat. It can also take a young moose, or calf and unprotected livestock.

In winter, bears generally hibernate for between three and seven months in dens dug in the ground or under rocks.

Credit: LIFE99 NAT/IT/6244

The varied diet of the brown bear

Logging and forest clearance in much of Europe has resulted in the loss of much of the bear's preferred denning habitat. Such human activity also decreases food sources, leading to bears preying on sheep and goats. As a result, traditional livestock guarding techniques need to be reintroduced, particularly in those areas where bears are threatened.

It is vital that bans on poaching are strictly enforced. Furthermore, endangered populations have become isolated through the construction of main roads. Some conservation groups warn that these isolated populations may become extinct in the near future. However, bears in Europe have become more adapted to people than those in North America and Asia and have learnt to live close to human activities.

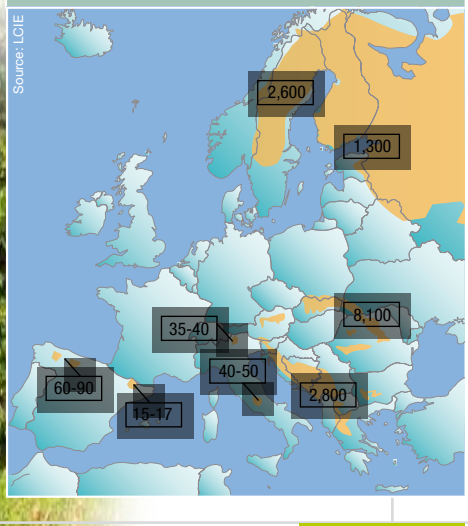
Conservation efforts include a LIFE-Nature-funded project in Slovenia, where measures are being taken to direct bears away from towns and sanctuary areas are being created. Security fences are also being constructed and waste dumps that attract bears are being removed. Other measures include habitat restoration and the reintroduction of deer.

Project reference:
LIFE02 NAT/SLO/8585
Website:
http://www.sigov.si/zgs

The population of bears in Austria is so small that it depends of the migration of bears from other countries for survival and to prevent inbreeding. In cooperation with the WWF Austria, a LIFE-Nature project is investigating the possibilities of creating a secure "corridor" for the bears. The project is also coordinating measures with the highway authorities and forest management.

Project reference:
LIFE02 NAT/A/8519
Website:
http://www.wwf.at/bearlife

EU25 plus Bulgaria and Romania - between 13,500 - 16,000 bears



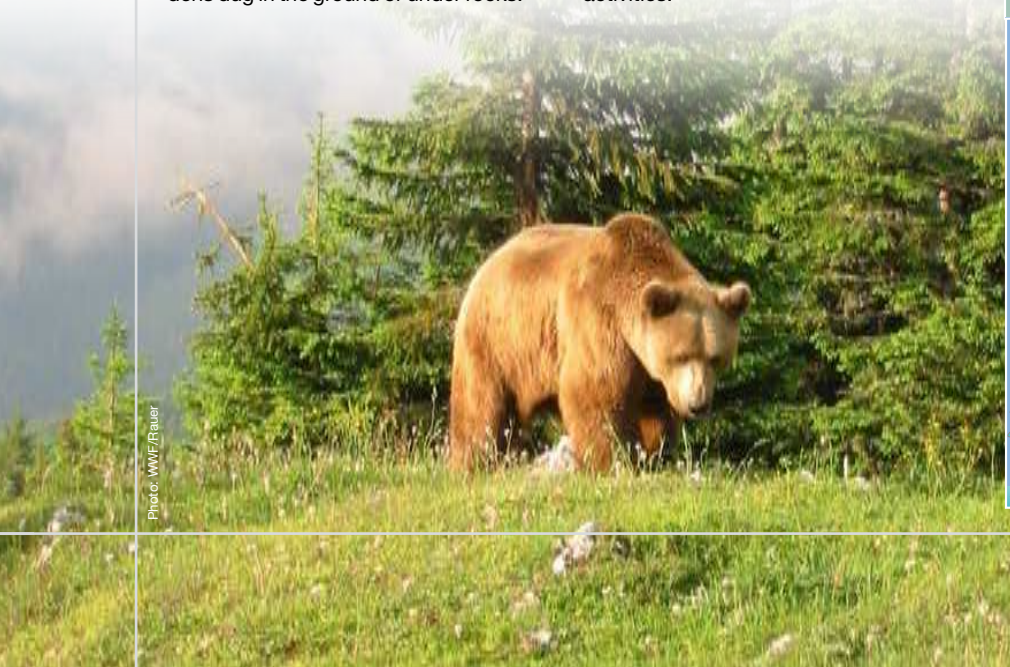


Photo: WWF/Rauer

Photo: J. Andalucía/ M. Medio Ambiente

Iberian lynx *Lynx pardinus*

The Iberian lynx *(Lynx pardinus)* is the large carnivore species in Europe that has been worst hit by habitat change, loss of prey and poaching. Numbers have been dwindling since the 1960s, and they have declined by over 80% in the last 15 years alone.

Current estimates put the total Iberian lynx population at between 150 and 160. Without concerted conservation efforts, it is perilously close to extinction and is already extinct in Portugal. The remaining cats are found in two locations in southwest Spain: the Doñana area and in the Sierra Morena mountains.

The Iberian lynx is half the size of the Eurasian lynx and has long legs and a short tail. A medium-sized feline weighs between 8 and 14 kg. It is a heavily spotted solitary animal, whose young are born in March, usually with two cubs in a litter. Though it does occasionally feed on birds, rodents and young deer, it mostly preys on rabbits. The massive depletion of the numbers of rabbits in the Iberian Peninsula due to disease – the myxomatosis epidemic and, more recently, Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD), – and habitat changes has reduced rabbit levels today to just 5% of those in the 1950s and has probably contributed to the plight of the lynx.

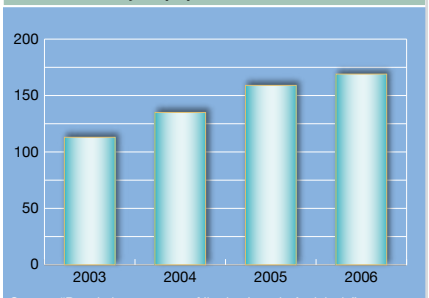
EU25 plus Bulgaria and Romania - between 150 - 160 Iberian lynx

The home range of the lynx is comparatively small, between 4 and 20 km^2. Its preferred habitat is scrubland and dense woodland interspersed with open land, and conservation has focused on protecting designated Mediterranean scrubland areas. Such ideal lynx areas should also be away from main roads and be free from traps and poisons. In the 1980s, road accidents accounted for 7% of Iberian lynx mortalities.

Several LIFE co-funded projects have been carried out in Spain and Portugal. One particular project aimed to improve the conservation status for the Iberian lynx in Andalusia. The project attempted to connect isolated groups of lynx and to increase the availability of prey by leasing the rights to hunt rabbits and among other methods, through effective restocking. The problem of animals being incidentally snared or run over was also addressed. Measures were carried out through management agreements with landowners, the majority of whom are private individuals.

Moreover, a new LIFE-Nature project aims to develop a comprehensive strategy for lynx conservation in Andalusia. The project, which is coordinated by the regional government (Junta) of Andalusia, will run until 2011.

Evolution of the estimated size of the Iberian lynx population (2003-2006)



Source: "Population recovery of Iberian Lynx in Andalusia" (LIFE02 NAT/E/8609)

The reduction trend observed, until 2000, on the lynx numbers of the Doñana and Sierra Morena populations has stopped. Nowadays the number of lynxes has stabilized for the Doñana population and has been increasing at Sierra Morena since 2002.

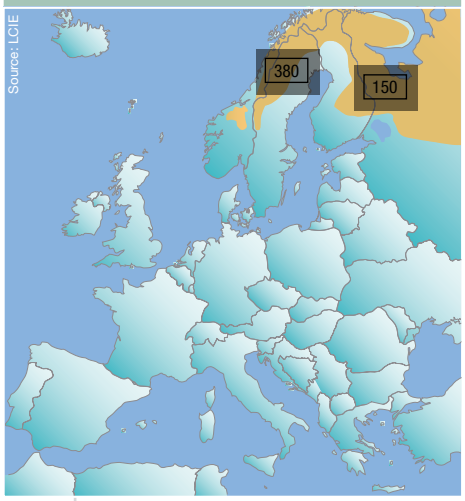
More research is needed on the species. The LIFE project in Andalusia is monitoring the lynx and patrolling important conservation areas. Awareness-raising is also essential for the survival of the species.

Project reference:
LIFE02 NAT/E/8609 and LIFE06 NAT/E/209
Website:
http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/medioambiente/LIFE_lince/infogeneral/introduccion.html

Wolverine *Gulo gulo*

Though they look a little like bears, with brown coats, head markings and powerful bodies, the wolverine (*Gulo gulo)* is actually a member of the weasel family. In Europe, populations are only found in Scandinavia, Finland and Russia.

EU25 plus Bulgaria and Romania - between 500 - 600 wolverine



Numbers in the northern European countries (excluding Russia) are estimated at around 500.

Wolverine scavenge from kills abandoned by wolves and lynx and prey on hares, sheep, semi-domestic reindeer, rodents and very occasionally on large animals such as moose. Recent studies have shown that these solitary animals have very large home ranges, between 200 and 1,500 km², in habitats ranging from alpine tundra to taiga. Vulnerability to human activity and slow reproductive rates add to their struggle for survival.

Wolverine predation on semi-domestic reindeer (throughout the year) and on untended sheep (during the summer) has prompted the control of their numbers in Norway (rather than protecting livestock using traditional means) and poaching in Sweden, although reindeer owners in Sweden are compensated by the occurrence of wolverine in the reindeer herding area. In Finland attempts have been made to move wolverines from conflict areas in the north to central forested areas. The loss of other carnivores, such as wolves, also affects wolverines by depriving them of an important source of carrion.

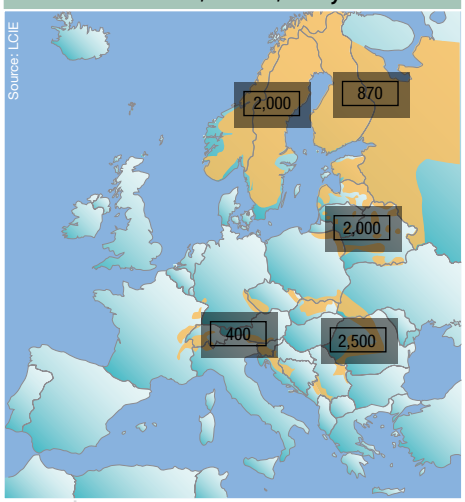
Photo : Arild Landa

In Europe the wolverine is only found in Scandinavia, Finland and Russia

Eurasian Lynx *Lynx lynx*

The Eurasian lynx *(Lynx lynx)*, meanwhile, has been successfully reintroduced into France, Switzerland, Slovenia and the Czech Republic after extermination in the mid 20th century in western and central Europe. Populations are also being re-established in Germany and Poland. Fennoscandia's populations have also greatly expanded in recent decades. There are between 5,000 and 8,000 Eurasian lynx in Europe.

EU25 plus Bulgaria and Romania - between 5,000 - 8,000 lynx



It is larger than its endangered Iberian cousin and preys mainly on wild ungulates such as roe deer and chamois and hares. It occurs at very low densities owing to the size of its home range – varying from 100 to 1,000 km² – and the fact that animals of the same sex do not share the same territory. The third largest predator in Europe, the Eurasian lynx measures around one metre in length and 60-65 cm in height. Humans are still a major threat to the lynx, particularly to small populations, or populations of reintroduced animals. The conservation of these populations can be jeopardised by losses due to traffic accidents or poaching.

The LIFE-Nature project, "Priority measures for the conservation of large carnivores in the Alps", has enabled farmers to protect their flocks with guard dogs. The beneficiary, the World Wildlife Fund Italia, reported good results: a reduction of predation will lead to a decreased motivation to poach lynx. Conservation efforts should also concentrate on ensuring that the Eurasian lynx has suitable habitat and prey for its continued survival.

Photo: LIFE00 NAT/H/7162

The Eurasian lynx is larger and much more common than its Iberian cousin

Project reference:
LIFE97 NAT/IT/4097
Website:
http://www.wwf.it/lavoro/progettilife/carnivori.asp

Natura 2000 BAROMETER - December 2006

Nota Bene:

- The Natura Barometer is managed by the European Topic Centre for Biodiversity and based on information officially transmitted by Member States.
- Numerous sites have been designated according to both nature Directives, either in their totality or partially; it is therefore not possible to combine these numbers to get an overall figure for Natura 2000
- The % in surface area relates only to the terrestrial area that has been designated, which is the overall SPA (Birds Directive), proposed SCIs, or SAC (Habitats Directive) area minus the marine area. Some Member States have designated substantial portions of their marine waters. These are included in the number of sites and areas proposed but not in the % surface area or indications of progress. The sufficiency of national proposals for several marine habitats and species cannot be concluded as further work is needed for the successful application of Natura 2000 under both directives, especially to the offshore marine environmnent.
- 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 10 new Member States had a duty to classify SPAs and propose SCIs by the date of their accession (1 May 2004). All countries have submitted their lists 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.

SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS (SPAs)

MEMBER STATES	Number of sites	Total area sites (km²)	Terrestrial area (%)*	Number of marine sites	Marine area (km²)	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	568	48,102	8.9	14	16,216	↑
EESTI	66	12,161	12.8	26	6,394	
ELLAS	151	13,703	10.0	16	567	
ESPAÑA	512	92,378	18.3	20	574	
FRANCE	369	45,500	7.7	62	3,260	↑
IRELAND	131	2,815	2.9	66	810	
ITALIA	566	34,683	11.3	18	763	↑
KYPROS**	7	788	13.4	1	21	↑
LATVIJA	97	6,751	9.6	4	520	
LIETUVA	77	5,435	8.1	1	171	
LUXEMBOURG	12	139	5.4	_	_	
MAGYARORSZÁG	55	13,519	14.5	_	_	
MALTA	12	14	4.5	0	0	↑
NEDERLAND	77	10,109	12.5	7	4,913	
ÖSTERREICH	95	9,413	11.2	_	_	
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	12,236	25.1	_	_	
SUOMI	467	30,868	7.5	66	5,567	↑
SVERIGE	530	28,764	6.2	107	3,033	↑
UNITED KINGDOM	258	14,967	5.8	3	710	
EU	4,617	454,723	9.9	484	65,111	

**** % of SCI or SPA terrestrial area compared to Member State terrestrial area.***

***** This area of the MS and the % corresponds to the area of Cyprus where the Community acquis applies at present, according to protocol 10 of the Accession Treaty of Cyprus.***

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

notably insufficient

incomplete

largely complete

↑ recent significant progress

SITES OF COMMUNITY IMPORTANCE (SCIs)

Number of sites	Total area sites (km²)	Terrestrial area (%)*	Number of marine sites	Marine area (km²)	Progress	MEMBER STATES
278	3,221	10.0	1	181		BELGIUM
864	7,244	9.2	_	_	BE	CZECH REPUBLIC
254	11,136	7.4	118	7,959		DENMARK
4,617	53,294	9.9	48	18,086	↑	GERMANY
509	10,591	15.9	34	3,419	BE	ESTONIA
239	27,641	16.4	102	5,998		GREECE
1,380	119,104	22.6	88	5,191		SPAIN
1,305	48,942	7.9	90	5,603	↑	FRANCE
413	10,561	14.2	92	3,386		IRELAND
2,286	44,979	13.9	160	2,244	↑	ITALY
36	711	11.5	5	50	BE ↑	CYPRUS**
331	7,651	11.0	6	556	BE	LATVIA
267	6,664	10.0	2	171	BE	LITHUANIA
47	383	14.8	_	_		LUXEMBOURG
467	13,929	15.0	_	_	BE	HUNGARY
27	48	12.6	1	8	BE	MALTA
141	7,510	8.4	9	4,025		THE NETHERLANDS
165	8,885	10.6	_	_		AUSTRIA
192	13,124	4.2	0	0.0	BE	POLAND
94	16,503	17.4	23	490		PORTUGAL
259	6,360	31.4	3	0.2	BE	SLOVENIA
382	5,739	11.8	_	_	BE	SLOVAKIA
1,715	48,552	12.7	98	5,460	↑	FINLAND
3,981	62,557	13.7	327	5,848	↑	SWEDEN
613	25,109	6.5	41	9,131		UNITED KINGDOM
20,862	560,445	12.2	1,248	77,807		EU

notably insufficient

incomplete

largely complete

recent significant progress

BE being evaluated in the context of biogeographical seminars

The situation regarding Natura 2000 sites is constantly evolving and therefore this barometer represents only a 'snap-shot' of the situation for December 2006.

The Natura 2000 Barometer: commentary on progress

The present barometer covers the current state of play as of December 2006, for all 25 countries regarding both the Habitats and the Birds Directives. There has been significant progress in SPA designations for Cyprus, Finland, France,Germany, Italy, Malta and Sweden. Likewise, there has been notable progress in proposing SCIs by Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Italy and Sweden.

With the adoption of the first list of Sites of Community Importance for the Mediterranean biogeographical region on 19 July 2006 there are now initial lists of SCIs for all EU15 biogeographical regions.

The proposed SCIs for the new Member States are being evaluated through biogeographical seminars to determine whether they cover the relevant habitats and species sufficiently. For four of the biogeographical regions (Alpine, Boreal, Continental and Pannonian) the first seminars for the new Member States have already taken place. Initial bilateral screening meetings took place in Malta and Cyprus in 2005 and a Mediterranean biogeographical seminar was held in December 2006.

In the case of SPAs there is no biogeographical screening process, but the published lists of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) together with other scientific references for all the new Member States provide valuable references for evaluating the completeness of national SPA networks.

Grey wolf *Canis lupus*

The wolf *(Canis lupus)* has had a mixed relationship with man and its conservation often arouses controversy. Hunted to extinction in many parts of Europe in the 19th century, it is nevertheless a great survivor, and spontaneous expansion and recolonisation has occurred in Scandinavia, Spain, Italy and Germany. Large populations exist throughout most of eastern and southeastern Europe.

The survival of the wolf has been assisted by its ability to adapt to many habitats. In the south of Europe, for example, wolves have learnt to rummage through rubbish for food and to prey on livestock. As a result, measures to protect sheep and cattle have been introduced in many areas as an alternative to simply killing wolves. Nevertheless, poaching remains one of the biggest threats to wolves in Europe. In many eastern European countries (where wolf is only included in the Annex V of the Habitats Directive), wolf hunting remains legal, but if properly managed should not be incompatible with maintaining the species' favorable conservation status.

In the north, wolves prey mainly on red deer and moose and tend to be larger. An average adult male wolf weighs between 40 and 50 kg (and measures up to 150 cm in length) while a female weighs between 30 and 50 kg. The wolf is the second largest carnivore in Europe after the bear.

Although the wolf is listed in the Habitats Directive, conservation efforts in many European countries have been hampered in the past by a lack of information on exact numbers and locations of wolf populations. LIFE-Nature projects to support wolf populations have aimed to provide such data and also to assess the impact that wolf populations have on their surrounding environment.

Photo: João Pedro Silva

The wolf has recolonised much of Europe in recent years

The image of wolves among local communities has also been addressed, and public awareness campaigns have been carried out to inform the public about the importance of conserving carnivores and their potential benefit to the community through, for example, eco-tourism. LIFE-Nature projects have demonstrated that human activities can coexist with carnivores. LIFE has co-funded the construction of electric fences and has trained farmers in the use of livestock guarding dogs in Central and Southern Europe.

Project reference:
LIFE04 NAT/IT/144
Website:
http://www.life-coex.net

Such initiatives have been coordinated across Europe. These projects have facilitated an increase in the populations of wolves in Croatia, Italy, Portugal and Spain. A LIFE-Nature project on wolf-conservation is also ongoing in Hungary.

Project reference:
LIFE00 NAT/H/7162
Website:
http://www.vvt.gau.hu

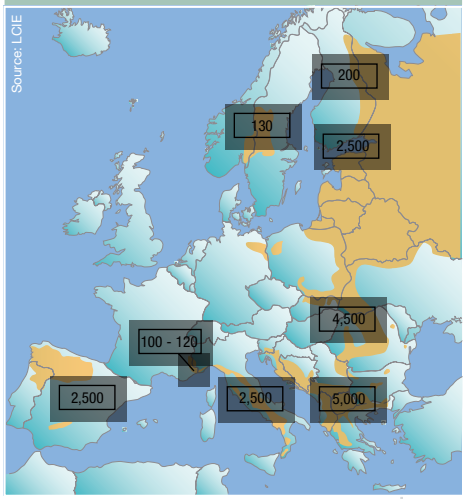
Wolf: the experiences of North Karelia, Finland

Many studies of the attitudes of local people have been carried out in Finland. For example, a 2001 study of hunters from North Karelia (the core area of Finnish wolf population) showed that wolves are still feared and there is demand for their numbers to be reduced. The author of the study says that while there has always been fear of large carnivores, as population numbers have grown in the past few years, this fear has increasingly become a subject of public debate. According to the study, the general atmosphere of uncertainty in today's society has created a need and a drive to control one's immediate environment: large carnivores represent an unknown threat in people's own environment and people feel a need to control it. The study concluded that local people also feel frustrated by a lack of influence over wolf management policy.

Finland has responded to these concerns by using public debate as a basis for a management plan. In addition, the plan foresees the establishment of regional discussion groups with different stakeholders.

Management plan for the Wolf Population in Finland
http://wwwb.mmm.fi/julkaisut/julkaisusarja/2005/MMMjulkaisu2005_11b.pdf

EU25 plus Bulgaria and Romania - between 12,500 - 14,500 wolves



Sheepdogs live with their flocks in order to form strong protective bonds

Howling wolves and hungry bears

In a recent film comedy, the owner of a struggling zoo decides to introduce "fierce creatures" to boost visitor numbers. While large carnivores may be very popular in caged enclosures, their presence in the wild can be a cause for concern, particularly among farmers worried about damage to their livestock.

After years of near extinction in many parts of Europe, however, people are learning to live again with carnivores. With a reversal of the decline in bear and wolf populations the need for preventative measures against attacks on livestock is becoming much more widespread.

In parts of Italy, for example, bears and wolves numbers have increased as a result of rural depopulation, reforestation and the introduction of laws protecting endangered species.

One cattle-farm manager in the largely agricultural province of Perugia in Umbria says that 10 years ago he didn't have a problem with wolves attacking his calves. Since then he has been losing on average about 10 calves a year. Although he receives damage compensation of around € 500 for each calf from the provincial authorities, he says that this amount doesn't reflect the real value of the animal. His farm's meat can fetch a higher price on the market.

While the total amount the authority pays out in compensation to farmers is substantial, it has not had the additional funds available for preventative projects. But thanks to a LIFE co-funded project, a solution has been found. LIFE Coex, "Wildlife and Agriculture: minimising the conflict through damage prevention", is now supplying partner organisations, such as the Province of Perugia, with the means to build electric fences that keep out the estimated 6-7 wolves in the area.

A farmer in the Abruzzo region shows damage to his beehives caused by bears

Before the construction of his fence, the cattle farmer had unsuccessfully tried using a gun simulation device (that the wolves quickly became accustomed to), but now wolf damage to his stock has been virtually eradicated. At the cost of € 1,700, the province was able to help him build a 7 ha fence which, though it doesn't cover the whole of his grazing pastures, does allow him to keep his pregnant cows within the protected area. With a stock of 500 cows, the farm has a new birth nearly every day.

But the legacy of the LIFE Coex project, which began in 2002 and is half-way through its duration, will not be simply the amount of fences it builds, but also a demonstration that it is possible to farm alongside the presence of carnivores.

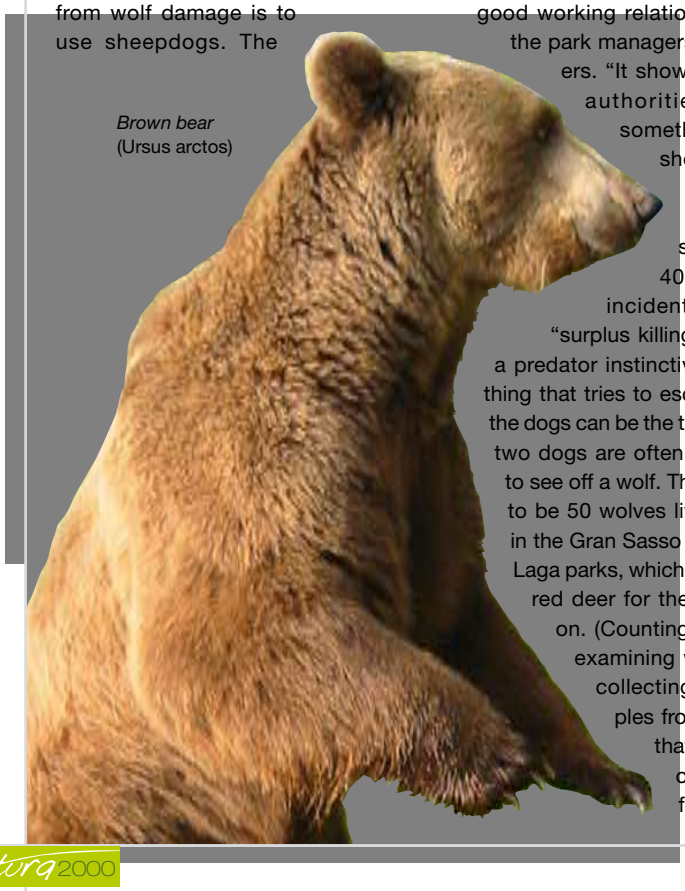
Park life

LIFE Coex is an ambitious, wide-reaching project that – as its name suggests – aims to demonstrate that human activities and carnivores can coexist. Coordinated by the Institute of Applied Ecology in Rome, it has partner organisations in Croatia, France, Portugal and Spain as well as Italy, where it operates in the two regions of Abruzzo and Umbria. In Abruzzo, its partners are the Gran Sasso (the highest peak in the Apennine mountains that stretches down mainland Italy) and Monti della Laga National Park, the Majella National Park and the vast Abruzzo Lazion and Molise National Park.

Electric fences are protecting orchards and beehives from beers in Abruzzo

Compensation for wolf damage has been reduced in the Gran Sasso Park by using LIFE funding to employ a vet. He can determine whether damage to livestock has been caused by a wolf or another animal such as a stray dog or a wild boar. The park says that the amount of compensation it has to pay has fallen "dramatically" by about 50% as a result. According to the project coordinator, Annette Mertens, however, compensation for farmers is "more of an emotional issue than an economic one". "The wolf has been used as a scapegoat," she says.

Another way to protect livestock from wolf damage is to use sheepdogs. The practice in some parts of Italy has disappeared. The project is donating Maremma Abruzzo sheepdog puppies to sheep farmers. These dogs grow up alongside their flocks and form strong bonds with the sheep. A strong identification with its flock is essential to ensure that the dog doesn't run off and leave its flock vulnerable to attack. Mertens believes that such donations are a significant step forward and help create a good working relationship between the park managers and the farmers. "It shows that the park authorities are doing something for them," she says.



Brown bear
(Ursus arctos)

One farmer says that he lost 40 sheep in one incident alone. (Such "surplus killing" occurs when a predator instinctively kills everything that tries to escape.) Although the dogs can be the target of attacks, two dogs are often strong enough to see off a wolf. There are thought to be 50 wolves living in 6 packs in the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga parks, which is reintroducing red deer for the packs to feed on. (Counting is possible by examining wolf howls and collecting genetic samples from special traps that snare a clump of the animal's fur as it passes.)

Farmers have welcomed the sheepdog initiative and farmers are intending to eventually use their puppies for breeding . One says that he likes having the dogs because as well alerting him to the presence of wolves, the dogs' barking gives a warning of all pending dangers. The specially bred dogs are a lot less wild than the currently used animals (i.e., those that haven't been donated by the project) and are much more accustomed to human contact. As the parks are visited by an increasing number of people, and interaction with people is more likely, such qualities are highly desirable.

Changes in the practice of hunting wild boar will also help protect wolves and bears in the national parks. In the Gran Sasso Park, managers are encouraging hunters to use a dog on a leash (rather than a pack of loose dogs) to flush out boar in a more controlled way. Such a practice, the park believes, will lead to fewer carnivores being shot by mistake. Osvaldo Locasciulli says that the park has benefited from being designated an area of special conservation interest by the EU. "SCI habitats give management the possibility to enforce a more stringent policy on hunting," he says.

Protecting crops

Estimates of the number of brown bears living in the region's national parks vary. Some suggest there could be between 35 and 60, most of these in the Abruzzo park. Although bears

Demand for electric fences in Umbria has increased as LIFE-funded fences are shown to be successful

are carnivores, they will also feed on fruit and honey, and farmers have suffered damage to their crops. As part of the LIFE Coex project, in Ortona dei Marsi the Abruzzo national park has been able to construct an electric fence to prevent bears from entering into an area of four private orchards. The wide variety of flora renders the area highly favourable for beehives, and it was important to also secure these sites. A bear can destroy a whole year's work, and this year one bear created €5,000 of damage in one night alone. Thanks to the fences, the national park has been able to sharply reduce the amount it pays out to farmers in compensation.

Similar examples of fence building can be found in Umbria, a region renowned for its wines. Electric fences near Orvieto are mostly protecting grapevines (among other crops) from wild boars. Although the province of Terni is paying out large sums in compensation, landowners say that reimbursements only take into account the damage to the grapes and not the value of the wine. Before the construction of the fence, one wine producer says that damage to his chardonnay grapes weakened the percentage of his controlled white wines. The fence has reduced the problem by "99%", and the odd stray boar that now occasionally intrudes doesn't do much damage.

Fence building is the result of a compromise between the interests of the hunting community and the farmers, providing protected enclosed areas that allow farmers to rotate their crops much more easily than before. A reduction of the damage caused by wild boar decreases hunting pressure, which can be a nuisance for wolves (i.e uncontrolled hunting can harm wolves that get caught up in it). Gian Paolo Pollini of the province of Terni says: "It was important from a social point of view to build up cooperation." The province is also encouraging changes in the hunting of wild boar similar to those of the national parks in Abruzzo.

Not all farmers have been receptive to fence building, and many were initially sceptical. But through word of mouth, interest in building fences has grown. While the province can't cover the cost of all the requests it is now starting to receive – at the beginning of the Coex project, the province targeted those farms that were suffering the most damage – it is developing a dialogue with local producers and is able to act as an advisor to further fence-building initiatives. Says Pollini: "Collaboration will continue after EU funding because people appreciate what is possible. They now know that there are solutions."

In Ortona dei Marsi, the Abruzzo national park has constructed a fence around four private orchards

Photo: IWRC/Artur V. Oliveira

Iberian wolf (Canis lupus)

Such a dialogue is a key element of the project that organisers are eager to emphasise. According to Simone Ricci of the Institute of Applied Ecology, conservation involves a compromise between the wolf (or bear) and human activity. "You have to start a dialogue, and you have to involve all the different people," he says. Initiatives in Terni show that wild boar hunting and agriculture are compatible, but they are also related to the wolf. They demonstrate the feasibility of coexistence.

Project reference:
LIFE04 NAT/IT/144
Website:
http://www.life-coex.net

Three years to stop biodiversity decline

Governments worldwide have promised to save biodiversity by 2010. One of the ways European countries are setting about reaching this target is through partnerships formed under Countdown 2010, an alliance of governments and NGOs. The initiative was set up in May 2004 and is supported by the European branch of the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

European leaders that met in Gothenburg in 2001 agreed to halt the loss of biodiversity by the end of the decade. The target recognises the increasing importance of preserving biodiversity – recent studies showed that two thirds of world's ecosystems are in decline. The EU aims to lead the world in finding solutions for biodiversity under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

In May 2006, the European Commission issued a Communication that sets out an ambitious roadmap to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010. It includes an EU Action Plan that detailed specific responsibilities for EU institutions and Member States, as well as indicators to monitor progress and a timetable for evaluations. It spells out what needs to be done to halt biodiversity loss in the EU and to meet the international commitments to reduce biodiversity loss worldwide. It also creates an advisory mechanism to help decision-makers make better use of existing knowledge.

Countdown 2010 is able to provide key support to this plan. As well as raising the profile of biodiversity and the 2010 target, Countdown 2010 gives visibility to the achievements of its partners. It also provides a platform for organisations that focus on different aspects of biodiversity to communicate and share experiences and knowledge. In order to assess progress towards the 2010 target, Countdown 2010 is developing a "Scorecard" that can easily communicate successes and highlight those areas that still require attention.

In 2005, the Countdown 2010 Scorecard was piloted in the Noord Brabant in the Netherlands, the first region to become a partner. Countdown 2010 works with stakeholders at all levels, including regional authorities. Activities taken at a local level can be very cost effective, particularly for generating public interest. Noord Brabant has developed a local strategy for biodiversity and a regional platform for exchange of expertise.

Photo: Arge NATURSCHUTZ – LIFE00 NAT/A/7055

Black-veined White Aporia crataegi

Lack of relevant expertise on biodiversity issues among local administrators is a common problem. To help overcome this problem, Countdown 2010 has promoted and supported twinning arrangements between local governments from different countries that allow the exchange of relevant experiences.

At the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Countdown 2010 and UNITAR launched a capacity building programme to provide expertise and knowledge on biodiversity for local authorities. In addition, the new programme, which was established in partnership with ICLEI, the network of local governments for sustainability, will support partners in developing local action plans to integrate biodiversity into urban planning.

Countdown 2010 will also help realise the goal of the Natura 2000 Network. Activities taken to reach the 2010 target will help publicise the need to preserve biodiversity. In addition, a tailored communication toolkit will be distributed to local governments to support them in raising awareness among citizens. These communications will highlight best practices in managing Natura 2000 sites that could serve as models for successful Countdown 2010 projects.

http://www.countdown2010.net
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/docum/pdf/9842en.pdf

natura News

European Parliament votes to amend LIFE+

The European Parliament has overwhelmingly voted against allowing Member States to control the majority of the LIFE+ budgets. The Commission had proposed that 80% of EU funds for the LIFE+ projects would be delegated to Member States. The regulation will now enter into conciliation.

The Parliament argues that environmental policy should be devised and implemented at the European level. At the Parliament debate, Green party MEP Marie Anne Isler Béguin, who was the rapporteur for the legislation, underlined the past successes of the Community's environmental policies and said that a re-nationalisation of these policies would be the start of a slow process of erosion of the whole idea of European integration.

The Council and the Parliament are also divided on the type of projects that should be supported. The Council's Common Position, which endorses the Commission's proposal, calls for 40% of budgetary resources to support nature and biodiversity. The Parliament, however, is pushing for a higher proportion, at least 55%.

Nature conservation good practice website

The Commission has developed a special website on its nature homepage http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/nature_conservation/natura_2000_network/managing_natura_2000/exchange_of_good_practice/index.html 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. Twenty-five practical examples of successful management practices and solutions are presented, taken from projects funded under LIFE-Nature.

They cover five different sectors: farming, forests, rivers, marine and wetlands.

Guidance Handbook out now

The Financing Natura 2000 Guidance Handbook has recently been published. Available in 20 languages, it can be obtained in hard copy from the Commission's nature homepage (see left), or in electronic version at: *http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/nature_conservation/natura_2000_network/financing_natura_2000/guidance/index_en.htm*

Natura 2000 Conservation in partnership

This brochure examines the management implications of Natura 2000 in various land-use sectors and explores the options available for working in partnership with different interest groups to protect Europe's rich natural heritage whilst promoting sustainable development.

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/nature_conservation/useful_info/documents_publications/pdf/stakeholder.pdf

Photo: European Commission

Soledad Blanco, DG ENV director, (left) and the project team check the road modifications carried out in Doñana by the project LIFE02 NAT/E/8609

Soledad Blanco visits Iberian lynx project

Soledad Blanco, DG Environment's director of International Affairs, recently visited an Iberian lynx LIFE-Nature project in Andalusia, southern Spain. The visit underlines the high importance the Commission is attaching to conserving the critically endangered cat species. The project, "Conservation and reintroduction of the Iberian lynx in Andalusia" will receive €26 million in EU co-financing – the largest budget ever committed to a LIFE project.

Launched in 2006, the project aims to develop a comprehensive strategy for lynx conservation in Andalusia and will run until 2011. It is coordinated by the regional government (Junta) of Andalusia, which coordinated an earlier project that concentrated on managing habitats and the lynx's main prey, the wild rabbit.

The new project develops this approach, preparing areas in Doñana for the reintroduction of lynx born in captivity. The project will also introduce measures to cut the number of road fatalities and raise support for the conservation of the species among the local population. While, numbers of Iberian lynx are perilously low, 58 new cubs were born in 2006, compared with 37 the previous year.

New EU Cohesion Policy (2007-2013)

From 2007, the EU will apply a new-look and more integrated regional policy. This will cover the period 2007-2013. Old and new Member States will no longer be treated separately. Procedures will be simplified and funding concentrated on the more needy regions of the EU25. For the new period, the combined budget of the Structural and Cohesions funds will be around €308 billion. This represents 36% of overall EU spending during this period.

For more information, read the text of the Communication:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/2007/osc/index_en.htm

Meanwhile, the scope of measures which can be financed under the Rural Development Regulation (RDR) have also been broadened. One of the objectives is to help improve the environment and the countryside by supporting local management measures that are beneficial for Europe's biodiversity and for the Natura 2000 Network in particular.
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/index_en.htm

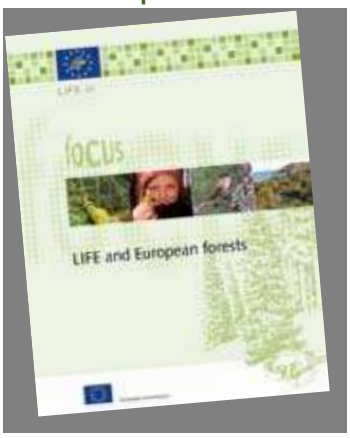
Natura 2000 Implementation and Administration

A training programme, contracted by the European Commission for new Member states and acceding countries, has been ongoing since 2005, to assist the authorities with the implementation of the two EU nature Directives. Meetings and national workshops have been held in order to exchange experiences (good and bad) and to examine practical examples on topics such as the Article 6 and environmental impact assessments, information campaigns, public participation etc.
http://www.umweltbundesamt.at/umweltschutz/naturschutz/nat_international/training_natura2000/.
Contact the project leader:
wolfgang.suske@umweltbundesamt.at.

LIFE-Nature Projects 2006 compilation

In 2006, the final year of the LIFE III programme, the LIFE-Nature strand of the programme provided over €70 million for 61 new nature conservation projects to support the implementation of Natura 2000 Network. The funding amounted to approximately 55% of the total project costs. This compilation provides details of the projects situated in 20 countries, including information on the sites and species covered and the main project objectives. Administrative information including contact details are also supplied for each project.
Available in English for download at the LIFE homepage:
http://ec.europa.eu/life

LIFE and European forests



Since 1992, LIFE-Nature, alongside other Community financial instruments, has funded projects aiming to restore, preserve or halt the decline of forest biodiversity in Europe in the context of the Natura 2000 Network. The publication provides background details on the EU forest sector, and gives details of how LIFE has contributed in terms of: forest restoration, forest biodiversity, forest management, and building partnerships to protect and improve forests.
Available in English for download at the LIFE homepage:
http://ec.europa.eu/life

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Alternatively, you can view this newsletter, together with other information and documents at the DG ENV Biodiversity website: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature_biodiversity/index_en.htm

For details on LIFE and LIFE-Nature projects see: http://ec.europa.eu/life/

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