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**25 years of LIFE—
supporting nature
in Europe!**

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News Round-up



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Editorial

Last April, the Commission adopted a comprehensive EU Action Plan on Nature, People and the Economy. The aim is to speed progress towards halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, mainly by improving the practical implementation of the Nature Directives. Almost one year after its adoption, I'm happy to report good progress. My services are delivering on all the actions contained in the Plan.

Guidance on permitting procedures and on species protection under the Habitats Directive is being updated, with a view to promoting smart and efficient implementation. New guidance documents on electricity transmission facilities and on hydropower will be adopted soon, and guidance on integrating ecosystem services into decision-making and on EU-level green infrastructure projects will also appear this year.

We are working closely with Member States to examine their specific needs. This enables us to identify any obstacles that are hindering the full implementation of the Nature Directives, and to agree roadmaps to improve the situation.

Extensive efforts are underway to help Member States make the most use of the EU funds available until 2023, with a greater share of the LIFE funds allocated to nature for the final three years of the programme. We are working together on a strategic plan for the future financing of Natura 2000 and to support Green Infrastructure, and updating Prioritised Action Frameworks to create better opportunities in the next EU funding period.

Numerous initiatives have been launched to engage the public, landowners, and other stakeholders involved in implementation of the Nature Directives, and preparations are ongoing for EU Natura 2000 Day on 21 May and the Natura 2000 Awards, which bring recognition to those who deserve it most. The European Committee of the Regions is organising events to reach out to local authorities as agreed in the Plan, and debates with rural development experts from Member States are also on the way.

Work has started inside the Commission on an EU initiative to improve the protection of pollinators, and to restore populations where necessary.

Nature needs strong protection, but it needs to be celebrated as well. As 2018 is also the European Year of Cultural Heritage, let us join forces to promote the rich, natural and cultural heritage that we share in Europe, and step up our efforts to safeguard it for generations to come.

Karmenu Vella

European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries



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Results-based agri-environment schemes pay farmers for the quantity and quality of biodiversity delivered.

Farming for biodiversity

Results-based Agri-environmental Payment Schemes (RBAPS)



The continuous and significant decline in species and habitats associated with agriculture has been largely attributed to the lack of effective integration of biodiversity requirements into day-to-day agricultural practices.

Even if, today, EU agri-environment schemes represent one of the most important means of delivering practical conservation measures on agricultural land, both in Natura 2000 sites and across the wider EU farmed environment, a step change is needed if the EU is to meet its farmland biodiversity targets and Natura 2000 objectives.

This calls for a better use of EU policy instruments and a better integration of biodiversity and Natura 2000 measures into the CAP in particular. There is also a need to improve cost-effectiveness and incite a more positive ethos among farmers,

conservationists and the public. Existing agri-environment schemes have come in for some criticism from farmers, public administrations and NGOs who perceive them as too prescriptive and inflexible, and overly complex to administer and control. There is also little evidence to date that they are actually having the desired effect on farmland biodiversity.

One alternative that has recently stepped into the limelight is the use of a results-based approach, as opposed to a management-based approach to agri-environment schemes. This pays farmers and land managers for delivering an environmental result or outcome (e.g. number of breeding birds, or number of plant species in grasslands) rather than simply imposing a series of predetermined management measures on the farmers.

Why choose a results-based agri-environment scheme?

A well-designed results-based scheme can offer several advantages for both the farmer and the managing authority. For a start, payments are only made where a result is achieved. There is therefore a much clearer link between the payment and the achievement of defined biodiversity outcomes (or other environmental results) on the ground.

Contracts with farmers are simpler in that they only specify the results required, rather than define the farm practices that should be carried out. This flexibility offers farmers the possibility to use their knowledge and experience to decide how best to manage the land in a way that benefits biodiversity alongside farming operations.

In these schemes, the 'production' of biodiversity also becomes an integral part of the farming system, which encourages farmers to take ownership of this resource. This can, in turn, lead to an enhanced awareness of the importance of biodiversity conservation as part of the agriculture system.

Lastly, results-based schemes can more easily meet the tougher EU requirements for verifying agri-environment-climate payments, thereby lightening the burden on both the farmer and the authorities responsible.

However, results-based payment schemes can only function correctly if the biodiversity objectives can be clearly defined and readily verified through clear indicators. In this way, farmers can be paid in function of the quantity and

quality of the biodiversity indicators present. There has therefore to be a sufficient level of expertise and environmental information available to be able to design and control a results-based scheme. As for the farming community, it has to be willing to accept a results-based approach.

A growing body of examples

There are already many results-based schemes operating in the EU. They range from whole farm schemes, such as those in England, to specific schemes, for instance for species-rich grasslands in Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany or for meadow birds in the Netherlands.

Other schemes operate at a landscape level rather than at the level of individual plots of

land, for instance for large carnivores in the reindeer herding areas in Sweden, or the golden eagle in Finland.

Encouraged by the initial successes of these schemes, the Commission decided to launch its own pilot on-farm projects with the financial support from the European Parliament (see box). The aim is to provide a better understanding of the key aspects of such schemes (design, implementation, controlling and verifying results, cost-effectiveness) and to explore opportunities for their wider application across the EU.

EU information platform and guidance on RBAPS

To assist those who are interested in designing an RBAPS, the Commission has

published a step-by-step guide on the practicalities of setting up and running an effective results-based scheme. The Guidance Handbook provides detailed advice, supported by good practice examples, and recommendations for designing a successful scheme under the Rural Development Programmes 2014–2020.

The Commission has also developed a searchable inventory of existing RBAP schemes and recently launched a web-based platform that brings together research, information and practical experiences, including detailed case studies and videos on RBAPS. In addition, there is an interactive blog where one can discuss the latest findings or share thoughts and experience.

Go to: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/rbaps/index_en.htm

THE BURREN: Farming for Conservation

The Burren is a very distinctive limestone landscape that extends over roughly 720 km² along Ireland's mid-west coast. Farming is integral to the character of the Burren and is central to the health and diversity of the area's exceptionally rich biodiversity.

Today, several hundred farm families continue to live and farm in the Burren despite the challenges posed in an era of efficiency-driven farming and by the rough, unforgiving terrain. The Burren Farming for Conservation Programme is a locally targeted conservation programme which invests in these Burren farmers, their land and livestock. It has pioneered a novel 'hybrid' approach to farming and conservation which sees farmers paid for both work undertaken and, most importantly, for the delivery of defined environmental objectives.

Farmers are helped to prepare their own simple farm plan (most only three pages and very visual) each year by their trained advisor

and the Burren team. The plan is tailored to suit the needs of the individual farm. Every eligible field of species-rich Burren grassland and heath is assessed annually with a user-friendly 'habitat health' checklist. Each field receives a score between 1 and 10: all fields with a score greater than three receive payment but higher scores receive higher payments. This gives farmers the incentive to manage their fields in ways that will improve their scores and their payment as well.

The results-based payment system allows farmers greater freedom to decide how to manage their land (with advice if needed) and guarantees the taxpayer better value for money – no delivery, no payment! The field scoring system also acts as a monitoring system which generates data that clearly demonstrates the positive environmental impact of the Programme.

<http://burrenprogramme.com/the-burren/>



© <https://blogs.ec.europa.eu/rbaps/>



© Alamy

EU-funded RBAPS pilot schemes

Three pilot results-based agricultural payments schemes in four Member States have been launched by the Commission with financial support from the European Parliament to provide a better understanding of the key aspects of such schemes and their potential success factors:

The Shannon Callows Breeding Wader Measure will test whether RBAPS can conserve and increase breeding wader populations, such as the curlew, and their habitats.



© David Kjaer/naturepl.com

The upland area of Navarra supports a mosaic of vineyards, olive and almond groves, arable plots and rough grazing areas which are of high biodiversity value.



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IRELAND AND SPAIN

This scheme works across three pilot areas: lowland semi-natural grasslands in County Leitrim and the Shannon Callows (both in Ireland), and the Mediterranean upland areas of Navarra, Spain. In each of the areas, pilot results-based payment schemes are being designed, implemented, monitored and assessed on some 50 working farms with a view to increasing the understanding of factors that contribute to the success or failure of such schemes and to promote awareness of the benefits of results-based schemes, particularly within the rural Community. More information on: <https://rbaps.eu>

Twenty-seven species or species groups are being used to test the RBAP pilot scheme for meadows of High Nature Value. These species only grow in hay meadows managed at low intensity.



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The pilot scheme in Norfolk and Suffolk is testing a measure that pays farmers to provide areas of flowering plants to boost essential food sources for beneficial pollinators.



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ROMANIA

This pilot scheme is being rolled out in two regions: Tarnava Mare and Pogany Havas/Muntil Ciucului. It targets hay meadows of High Nature Value (HNV) which are amongst the most species-rich habitats in the world. Under the scheme, farmers must mow their meadows at least once a year (first cut being after 10 June) and record, with the help of a checklist, those species that occur in the meadow along a straight line (transect) each year. See: <http://www.fundatia-adept.org/?content=rbaps>

ENGLAND, UK

This pilot scheme is being trialled in two locations in England: grasslands in Wensleydale and arable land in Norfolk/Suffolk. In Wensleydale the focus is on species-rich hay meadow and habitats for breeding waders, whereas in Norfolk and Suffolk the focus is on arable land in terms of providing winter bird food or maintaining pollen and nectar plots. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/results-based-agri-environment-payment-scheme-rbaps-pilot-study-in-england>



Incorporating Natura 2000 into spatial planning can play a major role in preventing potential conflicts with other land uses.

Natura 2000 and spatial planning

The Fitness Check of the Nature Directives concluded that one of the key shortfalls in effective implementation came from a lack of integration with other sectoral policies, such as transport, agriculture, tourism, energy, and urban development. It also noted that spatial planning could be an effective tool for reconciling nature conservation with other policy objectives, especially if it is used as a means of encouraging a more integrated and sustainable territorial development.

Until now, no-one has fully investigated the potential role of spatial planning and its instruments for the implementation of Natura 2000 at EU or Member State level. In order to bridge this knowledge gap, last year the Commission

launched an in-depth study to provide a clearer insight into the uses and functions of spatial planning policies in relation to Natura 2000, and Nature Directives more generally. Some of the key findings of the report, published in August 2017, are presented below.

Across the EU, spatial planning is essentially used as a sector-orientated regulatory tool to modify and approve land-use developments in various fields, be it transport, agriculture, urban planning, mining and extraction, etc. This approval process is often based on legal mechanisms which regularly involve complex permitting procedures, including Strategic Environmental Assessments or Appropriate Assessments under the Habitats Directive.

However, in many Member States, the spatial-planning policy has deliberately shifted over the years from focusing solely on economic development towards a more integrated approach that seeks to deliver environmental sustainability, including the achievement of nature conservation objectives. By coordinating and integrating policy objectives from different sectors, spatial planning can become an important overarching tool for establishing long-term, sustainable frameworks for social, territorial and economic development.

Also, in contrast to 'traditional planning' or 'statutory planning', where the impacts of plans and projects on the environment (including biodiversity) are addressed only in the later



stages of the process, integrated planning takes into account different societal and environmental needs from the outset and is founded on knowledge input from planners and environmental experts.

Such an approach tends not only to be more cost-effective in the long-run but also helps to create a more rational territorial organisation of land uses that balances demands for development with the need to protect the environment and achieve other social and economic objectives.

It does, however, also present a number of major challenges. This is because spatial planning is a dynamic and multifaceted governance process that requires not only the political will to forge interactions between different tiers of governmental authorities across different policy sectors, but also sufficient administrative and knowledge capacity to be able to effectively integrate the different goals, including those for Natura 2000, into spatial plans.

Towards an integrated spatial-planning approach for Natura 2000

As the best practice examples presented in the study show, many ways have been found to address and overcome these challenges. The following aspects in particular have helped to achieve a balance between sectoral policy

Involving different actors early on in the spatial planning process is good practice.



objectives and Natura 2000 policy.

Firstly, Natura 2000 needs to be an integral part of spatial planning and territorial development in order to better address the relationship between sectoral developments and the need to improve and maintain the functional connectivity of Natura 2000 areas.

Natura 2000 provisions should also be more explicitly embedded within long-term spatial plans (e.g. 5–10 years) at regional and local level.

Secondly, the preparation of spatial plans and projects for specific sectoral developments should be based on sound ecological principles and knowledge. They are therefore best developed by interdisciplinary teams of experts.

Early stakeholder participation and consultation in the spatial-planning process is also a key factor for ensuring the quality and legitimacy of, and public support for, spatial plans.

Next steps

The study concluded that incorporating Natura 2000 in spatial planning is indeed a challenging process but can also play a major role in preventing potential conflicts in relation to land uses in and around Natura 2000 sites. Therefore, continuous efforts should be made to raise awareness of the role of spatial-planning policy and its instruments in protecting and managing Natura 2000 areas.

Sharing best practices across the Member states, utilising the opportunities of the EU funding programmes and involving relevant actors and their knowledge are important in this process. The study hopefully provides a useful source of inspiration and ideas for taking this issue forward.

The report is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/guidance_en.htm

GIS technology and remote sensing as an aid to Natura 2000



Close-up of a Natura 2000 site in Germany.

The use of expert-based tools such as new GIS technologies can be highly effective in integrating Natura 2000 issues into the spatial planning process. GIS technologies allow the processing of large amounts of data and the exchange of information between specialised spatial data infrastructures and platforms.

Recently, a variety of approaches have been used to make GIS technology available and accessible to a wider range of stakeholders, including the public, in order to enhance broader participation in spatial planning, also in relation to the management of Natura 2000 sites. All approaches used in this regard are commonly referred to as 'Public Participation GIS' (PPGIS). The Natura 2000 Viewer, which is one of the largest organised, and to a great extent standardised, geospatial database initiatives at European level is also evolving in this direction (see page 9).

Remote sensing supplies accurate and objective information that cannot be collected through traditional methods. In the frame of the Copernicus programme, remote sensing data from the latest generation of European satellites provide new opportunities to assess and monitor land-use change in and around Natura 2000 sites.

Another sector with a vast potential for spatial planning in relation to Natura 2000 sites, is the use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), e.g. drones. UAS's can provide higher resolution images than satellites, thus enabling finer-grained analysis at a more local scale, thereby complementing the use of satellites which generate more systematic and larger scale datasets.

<http://natura2000.eea.europa.eu>

natura 2000 barometer

THIS NATURA BAROMETER is produced by DG Environment with the help of the European Environment Agency. It is based on information officially transmitted by Member States up to **23.11.2017**.

The Natura 2000 network is composed of sites under the Habitats Directive (pSCI, SCIs or SACs – labelled ‘SCIs’ in the barometer) and sites under the Birds Directive (SPAs). The figures relating to the total area of Natura 2000 sites (i.e. SPAs + SCIs) have been obtained through GIS analysis. This avoids any risk of double counting sites which have been designated under both Directives.

Arrows indicate increase in the area of the Natura 2000 network since the last update of the barometer in February 2017.

The table below indicates the extent to which the marine part of the network has been increasing over the last five years.

Marine network increase in past five years.

| Date of barometer | Marine N2000 network area in km ² |
|-------------------|--|
| June 2013 | 241536 |
| January 2014 | 249387 |
| February 2015 | 318125 |
| February 2016 | 360350 |
| February 2017 | 395528 |
| November 2017 | 444446 |

| Member States | Natura 2000 network (terrestrial and marine) | | TERRESTRIAL | | | |
|----------------|--|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| | Total N° Natura 2000 Sites | Total area Natura 2000 km ² | SCI | SPA | Natura 2000 network | |
| | | | SCI area (km ²) | SPA area (km ²) | Natura area (km ²) | % land area covered |
| AUSTRIA | 309 | 12701 | 9202 | 10170 | 12701 | 15.15% |
| BELGIUM | 310 | 5163 | 3282 | 3186 | 3892 | 12.75% |
| BULGARIA | 339 | 41048 | 33258 | 25226 | 38222 | 34.46% |
| CYPRUS | 63 | 1784 | 752 | 1534 | 1653 | 28.82% |
| CZECH REPUBLIC | 1153 | 11148 | 7951 | 7035 | 11148 | 14.14% |
| GERMANY | 5211 | 80802 | 33567 | 40248 | 55200 | 15.46% |
| DENMARK | 350 | 22647 | 3178 | 2605 | 3594 | 8.34% |
| ESTONIA | 567 | 14861 | 7806 | 6203 | 8106 | 17.92% |
| SPAIN | 1863 | 222276 | 117517 | 101327 | 137872 | 27.31% |
| FINLAND | 1865 | 55988 | 48556 | 24655 | 48847 | 14.45% |
| FRANCE | 1768 | 112304 | ↗ 48355 | 43872 | 70620 | 12.86% |
| GREECE | 419 | 42946 | 21388 | 27622 | 35747 | 27.09% |
| CROATIA | 779 | 25690 | 16040 | 17034 | 20704 | 36.58% |
| HUNGARY | 525 | 19949 | 14442 | 13747 | 19949 | 21.44% |
| IRELAND | 604 | 19488 | 7161 | 4311 | 9230 | 13.13% |
| ITALY | 2609 | 64101 | 42829 | 40103 | 57242 | 19.00% |
| LITHUANIA | 551 | 9649 | 6288 | 5530 | 8086 | 12.38% |
| LUXEMBOURG | 66 | 702 | 416 | 418 | 702 | 27.03% |
| LATVIA | 333 | 11834 | 7421 | 6610 | 7447 | 11.53% |
| MALTA | 48 | 3531 | 40 | 16 | 41 | 12.97% |
| NETHERLANDS | 195 | 20603 | 3136 | 4767 | 5520 | 13.29% |
| POLAND | 987 | 68401 | 34187 | 48394 | 61165 | 19.56% |
| PORTUGAL | 166 | 57062 | 15680 | 9204 | 19010 | 20.67% |
| ROMANIA | 597 | 60577 | 40310 | 36493 | 54214 | 22.74% |
| SWEDEN | 4084 | 75876 | ↗ 55141 | 25330 | 55647 | 13.41% |
| SLOVENIA | 355 | 7686 | 6637 | 5068 | 7675 | 37.86% |
| SLOVAKIA | 683 | 14633 | ↗↗ 6151 | 13105 | ↗ 14633 | 29.96% |
| UNITED KINGDOM | 933 | 150865 | 13175 | 16082 | 21001 | 8.58% |
| EU28 | 27732 | 1234314 | 603866 | 539895 | 789868 | 18.17% |

↗ Small increase in 2017 ↗↗ Moderate increase in 2017 ↗↗↗ Substantial increase in 2017

update November 2017

| MARINE | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|--------|------|
| SCI | SPA | Natura 2000 network | | |
| SCI area (km ²) | SPA area (km ²) | Natura area (km ²) | | |
| n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | | AT |
| 1128 | 318 | 1271 | | BE |
| 2482 | 550 | 2827 | | BG |
| 131 | 110 | 131 | | CY |
| n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | | CZ |
| 20938 | 19718 | 25603 | | DE |
| 16492 | 12184 | 19053 | | DK |
| 3883 | 6480 | 6754 | | EE |
| 54892 | 52063 | 84404 | | ES |
| 6800 | 6425 | 7140 | | FI |
| 27903 | 35543 | 41683 | | FR |
| 6689 | 1905 | 7199 | | GR |
| 4668 | 1112 | 4986 | | HR |
| n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | | HU |
| 9785 | 1584 | 10258 | | IE |
| 5801 | 4006 | 6859 | | IT |
| 958 | 1056 | 1563 | | LT |
| n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | | LU |
| 2664 | 4280 | 4387 | | LV |
| 1579 | 3221 | 3490 | | MT |
| 12074 | 8627 | 15083 | | NL |
| 4339 | 7223 | 7236 | | PL |
|  30918 | 8747 |  | 38052 | PT |
| 6188 | 1630 | 6362 | | RO |
| 20160 | 14448 | 20229 | | SE |
| 4 | 10 | 11 | | SI |
| n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | | SK |
|  121735 | 17619 |  | 129865 | UK |
| 362211 | 208859 | 444446 | | EU28 |

natura 2000 Viewer



Developed by the European Commission, with the assistance of the European Environment Agency (EEA) the 'Natura 2000 Viewer' enables the user to locate and explore Natura 2000 sites anywhere in the EU at the press of a button.

Various search options are available:

- **Locate a specific Natura 2000 site:** use the search tool to zoom in on the location of a specific Natura 2000 site.
- **Find a Natura 2000 site near you:** type in a location anywhere in the EU and the map will automatically zoom in on that area and highlight all the Natura 2000 sites present.
- **Look for a particular species or habitat type:** find all Natura 2000 sites designated for a particular species or habitat type by typing in its name or code.
- **Discover the distribution and conservation status of a habitat type or species:** as reported under the latest Article 17 report of the Habitats Directive or the latest Article 12 report of the Birds Directive.
- **Search according to different backgrounds:** The Viewer can be overlaid on some 250,000 different layers available under ArcGIS online (e.g. topography, land use, climate, demographics...).

The Viewer will be of interest to:

- the general public, teachers and school children interested in finding out more about the EU's natural heritage the Natura 2000 network;
- land owners, users and other stakeholders who would like to know about Natura 2000 sites in their area;
- developers preparing new plans or projects;
- non-governmental organisations;
- government authorities, land use planners and policy makers; and
- researchers and scientists.



By 2013, over 5,000 Natura 2000 sites had benefited from LIFE funding and more than 4.7 million ha of land had been restored or had their conservation improved.

25 years of LIFE and still going strong...

Adopted in 1992, at the same time as the Habitats Directive, the LIFE programme remains to this day the only EU fund dedicated entirely to the environment, nature protection and climate action. In the quarter of a century since it came into being, it has evolved from a very modest pioneering instrument to a much more substantial fund capable of addressing some of the most urgent environmental issues facing Europe today.

Its influence on the implementation of EU nature legislation, in particular, has been considerable. Since its start in 1992, LIFE has co-financed over 1,600 nature and biodiversity projects to the tune of nearly €2 billion.

The results speak for themselves: by the end of the LIFE+ Programme in 2013 over 5,000 Natura 2000 sites had

benefited from LIFE funding and more than 4.7 million hectares of land had been restored or had their conservation improved (6% of the terrestrial part of the Natura network). Almost 500 species covered by the Birds and Habitats Directives have also been targeted for conservation, some several times over.

Overall, LIFE has led to the implementation of almost 50,000 project actions. This has included the acquisition of 194,000 hectares of land, the running of over 95,000 training sessions, communication activities aimed at over 6 million people and implicating some 1.2 million pupils and students.

All in all, this is a truly impressive achievement for what remains after all a very small fund, representing less than 1% of the overall EU budget. And, even if the budget and scope has evolved over

time, the core objective of LIFE has remained essentially the same throughout: to accelerate the implementation of EU environmental legislation.

The Nature and Biodiversity component of LIFE in particular has acted as a catalyst for developing and demonstrating best practices and knowledge, building capacity, sharing experiences, raising awareness for Natura 2000 as well as implementing practical conservation actions on the ground.

In addition to contributing to the development of Natura 2000, LIFE has also fought against the introduction and spread of invasive alien species, worked to develop synergies between rural communities and nature, financed green infrastructure in cities, and supported planning instruments for good governance.





LIFE has reached out to millions of children and schools and helped raise awareness for Natura 2000.

Mid-term evaluation of LIFE

The continuing success of LIFE was highlighted once again in the Commission's recent mid-term evaluation of the current LIFE Regulation for 2014–2020, published in November 2017. The evaluation set out to assess whether the programme continues to be relevant in tackling the issues targeted, is operating in an effective and efficient manner that is consistent and coherent with other EU programmes, and is delivering an EU added value.

While acknowledging that it is too early to present the actual impacts of the present programme's cycle on the ground, the evaluation report has re-confirmed that LIFE remains as popular and as relevant as ever. The demand for 'traditional' projects, for instance, remains extremely

high. On average seven times more applications are submitted than can be funded every year under the priority area Nature and Biodiversity, despite there being a relatively low level of co-financing compared to other programmes.

The LIFE programme also remains very well perceived by all those involved. The participation of a wide range of beneficiaries demonstrates that the current programme is still capable of answering a diversity of needs and attracting different stakeholders from all governance sectors, be they small, medium or large organisations, public, NGO or private.

The interviews with project beneficiaries (including those that have been unsuccessful) and the recent open public consultation on LIFE further demonstrate that there is an overwhelmingly positive appreciation of the quality of the LIFE projects and of the programme itself, which places much importance on good management and on providing detailed guidance to beneficiaries in order to maximise the impact of projects.

A number of shortcomings in the current LIFE programme have nevertheless also been highlighted in the evaluation report. These will need to be addressed in the coming years, especially in terms of simplifying the grant procedures.

Changes are already underway, from 2018 onwards, a two-stage approach to project applications will be introduced. Proponents will be asked to

submit a 10-page concept note first and only those that are shortlisted will be invited to submit a full proposal.

The increasing popularity of Integrated Projects

Integrated Projects (IP), which were introduced in 2014 to encourage a more strategic programmatic approach to implementing key EU environment objectives, such as Natura 2000, have also proven to be popular and are starting to demonstrate their catalytic power.

The 11 IP projects adopted so far in the area of nature are helping Member States and their regions to implement a wide range of important conservation actions across a

broader geographic area, or even an entire region, in accordance with their Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAFs).

These strategic projects are also helping Member States to overcome obstacles to the full implementation of the Natura 2000 network, by bringing together stakeholders, building up capacities, addressing regulatory and institutional barriers and kick-starting a dynamic that will contribute to the good management of Natura 2000 beyond the scope and duration of the IP itself.

In addition, they are expected to leverage over €1.1 billion in complementary funding for nature from EU Agricultural and Regional funds, as well as from other EU, national and private funds.

The Fitness Check

The Fitness Check of the Nature Directives found that the limited availability of funding had a strongly negative influence on the implementation of the Directives. Managing Natura 2000 sites and species not only takes time but also requires an appropriate level of financing to bear fruit.

That is why the Action Plan for Nature, People and the Economy is calling for a 10% increase in budgetary resources for supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity under the current LIFE Programme. The Commission decision to increase the 55% budgetary resources allocated to projects under the priority area of Nature and Biodiversity to 60.5% for the period 2018–2020 has also just been adopted.

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018R0093>

Thanks to LIFE, scientific knowledge and good practice experiences in conservation management are being shared across the EU.



| | | N° projects | Total EU contribution |
|----------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------------|
| LIFE I | 1992–1996 | 288 projects | €183,639,111 |
| LIFE II | 1996–1999 | 247 projects | €155,635,442 |
| LIFE III | 2000–2006 | 456 projects | €437,047,179 |
| LIFE + | 2007–2013 | 547 projects | €874,308,572 |
| LIFE (ongoing) | 2014–2016 | 124 projects | €298,864,128 |

Looking to the future

Over the past 25 years LIFE has clearly shown its effectiveness and efficiency in supporting the development and implementation of EU environment and climate action policies. Yet the challenges we face today in transitioning towards a sustainable use of our natural capital and in preserving our resource base for present and future users are greater than ever.

As the EU moves towards establishing its financial framework for the years after 2020, there is a clear need to step up support for the implementation of the EU's environmental legislation in the EU budget.

While the bulk of this support needs to come from mainstreaming environment into other Union policy and programmes, a targeted LIFE programme continues to be of

vital importance in reinforcing complementarity and coordination with other EU policies and related funds, and is clearly identified by EU citizens as creating direct benefits for their local communities and for our continent's biodiversity.

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/>

LIFE has helped bring the Spanish lynx *Lynx pardina*, back from the brink of extinction.



© Roland Seifert/naturepl.com

LIFE 2014–2020

The current LIFE Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013 establishes the EU's financial instrument supporting environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects across the EU.

The budget for the current LIFE programme is €3.4 billion. It is split into two distinct sub-programmes: one for environment (around €2.59 billion), and one for climate action (around €864 million). Just over half of the budget under the environment sub-programme is earmarked for nature and biodiversity action grants, with a particular emphasis on Natura 2000. This translates into around €1.15 billion in total for the seven-year period.

The type of actions that can be supported has also expanded over the years. While traditional action grants remain at the core of the LIFE programme for 2014–2020, the fund has also seen the introduction of other types of projects such as integrated projects (see box), capacity building projects, operating grants for NGOs and technical assistance grants.

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/news.htm>

LIFE as a catalyst for rural development funding

Numerous LIFE projects have developed good practice initiatives on how to manage farmland in Natura 2000 sites under a range of different socio-economic and environmental conditions. Several of these have since been rolled out on a larger scale with the help of Rural Development funding. For instance:

In **Bulgaria**, a LIFE project on red-breasted geese successfully developed and trialled an agri-environment measure specifically for this priority species. National authorities have since included the scheme in Bulgaria's rural development programme. Already in the first year 240 farmers applied for funding for some 18,000 ha of wintering red-breasted geese habitats, mobilising €1.8 million in one year alone (€3.5 million and 40,000 ha if one includes the more general wintering geese measure). This is a great success for a highly endangered species whose overwintering population is to be found almost entirely in this small part of north-east Bulgaria.

Red-breasted goose *Branta ruficollis*, Durankulak, Bulgaria.



© David Tipling/naturepl.com

In **Estonia**, a successful pilot scheme was developed under a LIFE project to support low-intensity farming on semi-natural habitats located in Natura 2000 sites. The scheme has since been turned into a much larger scale EU agri-environment scheme targeting some 35,000 ha of semi-natural habitats. Since its launch, hundreds of management agreements have been signed, demonstrating the overall popularity of the scheme to farmers. If the overall target is reached then the management of all semi-natural habitats in Natura 2000 that are dependent on farming will be largely secured.

Lagoons and small harbour on the island of Hiiumaa, Estonia.



© Sván Zacek/naturepl.com

LIFE Integrated Projects

Integrated Projects were introduced to encourage a more strategic programmatic approach to Natura 2000 funding. They aim to help Member States and their regions implement a wider range of important actions identified in the Member States' Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAFs) across a broad geographic area or entire region. Eleven Nature Integrated Projects have been funded so far under LIFE 2014–2020. Examples include:

- **Atlantic Region DE** (€16.9 million – beneficiary: North Rhine-Westphalian Ministry of Environment, Agriculture, Nature and Consumer Protection). The Atlantic Biogeographic region of Germany covers the north-western lowlands of the country, an area of around 70,000 km². It is a very heterogeneous landscape subject to a multitude of pressures. Only 20% of the species and 17% of the habitats in the region are in a favourable conservation status. The project aims to implement the PAF for the Natura 2000 network in the region. In addition to drafting an overall strategy for improving the conservation status of habitats and species of EU interest present, it will also implement concrete actions for 15 habitats and 10 animal and plant species that are characteristic of the region's sand landscapes.
- **Deltanatuur** (€17.4 million – beneficiary: the Netherlands Ministry of Economic Affairs): In line with the Dutch PAF, the project aims to develop and implement an integrated governance approach for optimal coordination of interests in wet Natura 2000 sites in the Netherlands. By building internal and external capacity, optimising coordination between governmental bodies and involving stakeholders throughout, Deltanatuur expects to deliver a structured integrated approach for spatial interventions with better linkages to nature objectives in the Dutch delta, and with the broad support of relevant stakeholders. This integrated approach will be demonstrated through pilot projects in areas where tensions between nature, flood protection and economic interests have earlier led to a fragmented approach.
- **Intemares** (€27.2 million – beneficiary: Fundación Biodiversidad): The project aims to implement a PAF for the Spanish marine Natura 2000 network and ensure that, upon completion, Spain has a consolidated network of marine Natura 2000 sites managed in an effective and integrated way, with the active participation of all sectors concerned, and using research as a basic tool for decision-making. Specific objectives include ensuring a favourable conservation status for protected habitats and species, improving monitoring, boosting the knowledge and capacity of site managers and stakeholders to achieve conservation targets, promoting innovative approaches to site management (including funding), and encouraging sustainable tourism and employment in the marine Natura 2000 network.
- **BNIP – Belgian Nature Integrated Project** (Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos, Belgium – €19 million): The project will develop and manage the operational planning for the implementation of the Flemish and Walloon region's PAFs, and the execution of the Natura 2000 objectives of the Flemish, Walloon and federal governments. It will develop tools and expertise, enhance involvement of administrations, strengthen participation and empower stakeholders so that the outcomes for pilot restoration practices and management can be replicated in other Natura 2000 sites. In addition to sites in the Flemish and Walloon regions, the project will realise the targets identified in the federal marine PAF and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive for achieving favourable conservation status of species and habitats.
- **FRESHABIT LIFE-IP** (Metsähallitus, Parks and Wildlife, Finland – €24.4 million): aims to improve the ecological status, management and sustainable use of freshwater Natura 2000 sites in Finland, by tackling the problems they face at catchment level. The project will develop and demonstrate, in eight regional Natura 2000 networks, new biodiversity and ecosystem service indicators, with a focus on reviving populations of the key indicator species freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera*, alongside modeling methodologies for assessing the status of freshwater habitats.
- **LIFE IP GESTIRE 2020** (Regione Lombardia, Italy – €17.3 million): sets out to create an integrated management structure for achieving conservation objectives for the Natura 2000 regional network in Lombardy (242 sites) taking into account the economic and technical sustainability of the measures proposed. The project aims to coordinate management, integrate regional policies, carry out active management actions as well as train personnel working in Natura 2000 areas and raise public awareness.

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/projects/ip.htm>

A shoal of Golden grey mullet *Liza aurata*, swim in the surf breaking on the shore of El Hierro Island. Canary Islands, Spain, East Atlantic Ocean.



natura news

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European Year of Cultural Heritage

The European Year of Cultural Heritage was launched at the European Culture Forum in Milan on 7 December. Throughout 2018, events all over Europe will encourage people to explore our rich and diverse cultural and natural heritage. The European Year will also be an occasion to reflect on the place that cultural heritage occupies in all our lives and to remind ourselves of the need to protect such unique values, for instance by strengthening links with nature conservation areas.

Cultural heritage brings communities together and builds a shared understanding of the places we live in. So, why not get involved? Everyone is encouraged to join in, organise an event and celebrate the occasion. You can apply to use the European Year of Cultural Heritage label, slogan and hashtag by contacting your national coordinator or the European Commission.

To find out more, visit: <http://ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage>

For case study examples of creating synergies between nature and culture heritage go to: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/pdf/case_study_natura2000_cultural_heritage.pdf

Natura 2000 Award

The prestigious award launched three years ago aims to bring the success of the Natura 2000 network to the attention of the public and demonstrate its importance for protecting nature across Europe. This year,



the Award has attracted 75 applications from 26 Member States. The conservation category has once again proved to be the most popular (31 applications), followed by communication (22), reconciling interests and perceptions (10), socio-economic benefits (7) and cross-border cooperation and networking (5).

The winners will be announced by the Commissioner Karmenu Vella at a high-level ceremony on 17 May 2018, on the occasion of the European Natura 2000 Day.

Again this year there will be an opportunity for the public to vote online for their favourite application and determine who will be rewarded with the

'European Citizens' Award'. Be sure to cast your vote by going to the Award website or signing up for the award newsletter. http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/awards/index_en.htm

The EU platform on large carnivores

Set up three years ago by a group of stakeholder organisations, the EU Platform on Coexistence between People and Large Carnivores continues to discuss and promote ways to minimise, and wherever possible find solutions to, conflicts between human interests and the presence of large carnivores.

In June 2017, the Platform met in Brussels for the fourth

annual meeting. The discussion focused mostly on the analysis of case studies that demonstrate good coexistence practices. These have since been written up in a detailed report.

The Platform members also examined possible funding sources to support large carnivore conservation and coexistence such as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Two further regional workshops of the EU Platform also took place in 2017: the first in Romania (8–10 June) and the second (12–14 October) in Italy.

More information on all these meetings and all other related activities is available on http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/coexistence_platform.htm

B@B annual conference

The EU B@B Platform held its fourth annual conference 'Business, biodiversity & natural capital | Ambitions, risks & opportunities' on 4–5 October 2017 in Frankfurt. The conference brought together business front-runners and newcomers, as well as leading scientists, government officials and nature conservation organisations to discuss how natural capital and biodiversity can be better integrated in day-to-day business decisions.

Around 150 international company representatives and experts from more than 20 countries discussed how businesses can best integrate biodiversity into their activities. Should they focus on site level or supply chain measures? Should they adopt a

Some of the finalists for the 2016 Natura 2000 Award.



comprehensive Net Positive approach at site, product and/or organisation level? What can be a useful scale and which models ('blueprints') could be used for the successful delivery of investable projects?

These questions were explored through a series of concrete examples and discussions on the different approaches available to businesses.

Full details and a summary report of the conference is available on http://ec.europa.eu/environment/biodiversity/business/annual-conference/annual-conference-2017/index_en.htm

Fisheries and Natura 2000 in the Mediterranean

A successful workshop on fisheries management in marine Natura 2000 sites in the Mediterranean Sea was held in Croatia in October 2017, co-hosted by the Croatian authorities and the European Commission under the on-going biogeographical process.

At the three-day workshop, participants examined the interactions between Natura 2000 habitats and species and different types of fishing practices that take place in the Mediterranean. Approaches to developing management measures, such as risk assessment and co-management with individual fishermen and fishermen's organisations were also explored, as were opportunities for support through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

A number of recommendations were made, including examining whether there is scope in providing minimum standards for fisheries management in Natura 2000 under future multi-annual management plans, as well as promoting co-ordinated monitoring to collect multi-taxa bycatch data, and encouraging the

establishment of stakeholder platforms in the early stages of the development of management plans.

More information on http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/events/fisheries_management_measures_in_natura2000_mediterranean_sea_en.htm

Second Mediterranean Natura 2000 Seminar

A second Mediterranean Natura 2000 seminar was held in Limassol, Cyprus in November 2017. Hosted by Terra Cypria, the Cyprus conservation foundation, it provided a further opportunity for Natura 2000 experts across the Mediterranean region to discuss possible joint actions and concrete areas for cooperation to help optimise the contribution of Natura 2000 in achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of Mediterranean habitats and species of Community importance.

The discussions were organised around four large thematic clusters:

- Assessment and sustainable development of ecosystem services, including setting restoration priorities, interpretation of habitats, favourable reference values;
- Conservation objectives, monitoring and evaluation

where approaches to integrated planning, ways to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of conservation measures were discussed;

- Effective governance models for integrated approaches to implement Natura 2000;
- Addressing threats and pressures on Mediterranean habitats and species – ways to assess and mitigate negative impacts of land use pressures, dealing with ecological connectivity and others.

Full details can be found on: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/events/second_mediterranean_natura_2000_seminar_2017_en.htm

EU Green Week 2018

The next edition of EU Green Week under the slogan 'Green Cities for a Greener Future' will take place on 21–25 May 2018. It will explore ways in which cities can become better places to live and work, by showcasing approaches to improve air quality, reduce noise, better manage waste and water and protect urban nature. The Green Week will highlight participatory approaches to urban development, networking schemes and tools for sharing best practices, engaging local authorities and citizens, and

encouraging them to share their vision of a sustainable future.

For more information visit the dedicated website: <https://www.eugreenweek.eu/>

EU Red List of Ferns and Lycopods

A new European Red List – this time on Lycopods and Ferns – was published in October 2017. It assesses, for the first time, the extinction risk of all 194 European lycopod and fern species, 53 of which exist only in Europe. The report has found that a fifth of these ancient species are at risk of extinction, with the same proportion showing a declining trend. The main threats come from urbanisation and infrastructure, and the construction of roads and railroads. See: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/redlist/downloads/WEB%20IUCN%20RedList%20ERL%20Lycopods%20and%20Ferns%20FINAL%2024-08-2017.pdf>

Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species

A meeting of the Parties took place from 23–28 October 2017 in Manila, the Philippines. Over 1,000 participants attended the week-long event under the theme 'Their Future is Our Future: Sustainable



Fried egg jelly fish *Cotylorhiza tuberculata*, Mediterranean Sea.

Development for Wildlife and People.'

At the Conference 54 resolutions and a declaration on the links between sustainable development and migratory wildlife were adopted. Thirty-four new species were included in the appendices to the Convention, including the giraffe, chimpanzee, African lion, cheetah, leopard and African wild dog. Delegates also decided to give greater protection to a range of fish and bird species including the whale shark, angel shark, dusky shark, blue shark, the steppe eagle and the Christmas frigatebird, as well as 10 species of vulture.

In recognition of its efforts to address the illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory birds in the Mediterranean in 2015–2020, the Commission was awarded the prestigious title of Migratory Species Champion.

See: <http://www.cms.int/en/news/press-release-momentum-grows-save-world-s-migratory-wildlife>

Workshop 'How to reap nature's health benefits – Connecting citizens with nature'

A successful workshop was held in October 2017, during the European Week of Regions and Cities, to present how nature can contribute to addressing some key health and social



A young reticulated giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis reticulata* standing close to its mother, Samburu Game Reserve, Kenya.

challenges that our societies are facing. Many health-related activities are already taking place in Natura 2000 sites and in the wider green infrastructure. The speakers presented different case studies aimed at providing inspiration and stimulating others to follow suit. The workshop discussed how to replicate these successful initiatives in a wider range of cities and regions and highlighted the potential of the Natura 2000 network to connect citizens with nature.

See: <http://cor.europa.eu/EURegionsWeek2017/Pages/Workshops.aspx?organiser=European%20Commission,%20DG%20ENV>

The EU pollinators initiative: a new EU roadmap

Wild pollinators have declined severely across the EU. Almost one in 10 bees and many other pollinating insects now face extinction, according to the European Red List. An estimated €15 billion of annual EU agricultural output is directly attributed to pollinators.

A strategic approach is needed to address the multiple factors associated with pollinator decline in the EU. This is reflected in the roadmap for the EU Pollinators Initiative that the Commission launched on 1 December 2017. It focuses on

improving the knowledge base on pollinators, tackling the main causes of their decline, raising awareness of their importance and improving collaboration and knowledge sharing. An online public consultation is open until 5 April to collect the views of relevant stakeholders on the problem, its root causes and the actions needed to mitigate them.

See: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/pollinators/index_en.htm

https://ec.europa.eu/info/consultations/public-consultation-eu-initiative-pollinators_en

<https://twitter.com/KarmenuVella/status/951403171787804673>

European honey bee *Apis mellifera*.



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