



Environment fact sheet:

Natura 2000



- Natura 2000 is the EU-wide network of nature conservation areas set up to ensure the survival of Europe's most valuable species and habitats. It is not restricted to nature reserves, but based on a much broader principle of conservation and sustainable use, where people and wildlife can live together in harmony.
- By the end of 2008, the network will comprise more than 25 000 sites, covering around 20 % of the total land area of the EU — around 800 000 km² — plus 100 000 km² of marine environment.
- Natura 2000 is at the heart of EU nature policy and is a remarkable demonstration of Europe's commitment to act to preserve its rich native biodiversity for future generations.
- Europe's wildlife and ecosystems are under threat. The EU has pledged to halt the decline in biodiversity by 2010, and is part of a global agreement to significantly reduce biodiversity loss by that date. Natura 2000 is key to achieving this goal.
- The network is founded on two pioneering pieces of EU legislation: the 1979 Birds Directive and the 1992 Habitats Directive.
- Natura 2000 is still under development, covering an ever richer range of European flora and fauna. It already offers protection to over 1 000 rare and threatened animal and plant species and 200 habitat types across the 27 Member States.

Nine biogeographical regions

Alpine: mountain chains with high altitudes and cold, harsh climates, forests and rock peaks, including the Alps, Pyrenees and Apennine mountains.

Atlantic: Europe's western coastal areas, with flat lands and cliffs, plus some major river estuaries. The Gulf Stream system brings mild winters and cool summers.

Black Sea: the western and southern shores of the Black Sea, extending through Bulgaria and Romania. The Danube delta is a maze of marshes, lakes and islands, sheltering a wide range of fauna.

Boreal: Europe's far north, extending into the Arctic Circle; forests cover 60 % of this region, which shelters thousands of migratory birds.

Continental: the heartland of Europe — much of it agricultural — spanning 11 countries from France to Poland. Hot summers contrast with cold winters.

Macaronesian: made up of Europe's volcanic islands in the Atlantic Ocean: the Azores, Madeira and the Canaries. Covering only 0.3 % of EU territory, this region is home to 19 % of habitat types of EU concern.

Mediterranean: Europe's hot, dry, southern countries, with mountains, grasslands, islands and extensive coastlines.

Pannonian: the steppes of Hungary and southern Slovakia, the dry grasslands of the Carpathian basin, are home to 40 % of Hungarian plant species.

Steppic: stretching from Bucharest (Romania) in the west, across the lower section of the floodplain of the Danube and to the north of the Black Sea, with low-lying plains and wetlands.



Fact 1: It is in our interests to save biodiversity

Biodiversity in Europe is under threat: many of Europe's indigenous animal species are threatened. Around 800 plant species in Europe are at risk of global extinction and most fish stocks are below safe limits. Extinction is forever — it cannot be reversed.

There are many reasons to act now to stop the loss of biodiversity. We have a moral duty to look after the planet for future generations. Nature provides us with leisure, pleasure and inspiration. 'Ecosystem services' generate clean air, water, food, medicines and raw materials vital to our health and quality of life. And the natural environment provides work for countless numbers of Europeans through agriculture, tourism, fishing, and many other occupations.

It is very hard to put a financial value on these resources, but estimates point to hundreds of billions of euros a year.

The natural world is at the root of everything, and we depend upon it for our survival.

Fact 2: Natura 2000 is a partnership between people and wildlife

Natura 2000 is at the core of EU biodiversity policy: a unique and ambitious programme for sustainable development and preservation of Europe's exceptionally rich natural heritage.

When Member States and the European Commission identify and adopt sites of special value to become part of the network, this does not mean that people and economic activities are excluded — quite the reverse. Sustainable activities are encouraged. Natura 2000 is built on harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, creating a living and changing landscape: the product of 'conservation in partnership'. Human husbandry is needed to maintain many familiar habitats, such as meadows, heaths and woodlands, and people are part of the cycle of life.

Economic activities include farming, tourism, fishing, forestry, sustainable hunting, leisure pursuits and infrastructure projects. Member States have to ensure, however, that sites are protected from damaging changes, and managed in line with rules laid down in the Habitats Directive.

Local stakeholders should be fully involved, whether they are landowners, businesses, local authorities, community and environmental groups, or individuals. Without public support the scheme cannot succeed. This requires full transparency.

The Commission has set up a special website with details of the network's progress: http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/env/natura_2000/home

Fact 3: Natura 2000 reflects a long-term EU commitment

It is almost 30 years since the EU passed its first major nature conservation law in 1979.

Key dates for Natura 2000:

- 1979 Birds Directive: providing for Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds.
- 1992 Habitats Directive: establishing Natura 2000 and requiring Member States to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).
- 2001 In Göteborg, Sweden, EU leaders agreed to halt the loss of biodiversity in the EU by 2010.
- 2002 El Teide Declaration: Member States pledge to raise awareness about Natura 2000 and involve stakeholders.



Finland — forests for the future

The timber industry is big business in central Finland. This needs to be approached sustainably, to ensure the survival of forests. With Natura 2000, private owners and environmental authorities work together to draw up forest management plans balancing economic potential and conservation needs.

Azores — attending to assets



Whales and dolphins are a popular tourist attraction around the coasts of the Azores, in the Atlantic. But too many visitors could harm the mammals they come to see. The regional government of the Azores has put together a code of conduct for its Natura 2000 marine areas, and works with local whale-watchers to provide training in management and conservation. Visitors are satisfied, and everybody wins.



Fact 4: The network is growing constantly

The Member States designate the Natura 2000 sites in partnership with the Commission, and have six years to put the necessary management measures in place. The variety of natural habitats and species within the network has expanded with successive EU enlargements. In 1995 the accession of Sweden and Finland created the Boreal region. In 2004, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic added the Pannonian region, and in 2007, Romania and Bulgaria brought with them the Steppic and Black Sea regions, further expanding the network's rich diversity of fauna and flora.

Recent progress has been rapid:

- Sites in four regions (the Macaronesian, Alpine, Atlantic and Continental) were added between 2001 and 2004.
- Further areas in the Boreal region were added in 2005, and from the Mediterranean in 2006.
- In November 2007, the first Pannonian areas were added, and the Atlantic, Boreal and Continental regions updated. This incorporated sites for ten newer Member States into the network, and added a land area equivalent in size to Portugal.
- In January 2008, the Alpine and Macaronesian regions were updated, followed by the Mediterranean region in the spring.

The offshore marine Natura 2000 network is still incomplete, and further progress is necessary here.

By the end of 2008, Natura 2000 will cover a land area greater than the combined surface of Spain and Italy. Further updates are planned in 2009.





Fact 5: Natura 2000 is a blueprint for the future

Protecting biodiversity will be more important than ever in the coming years.

Climate change is raising global temperatures and affecting the pattern of the seasons, and will continue to do so even if greenhouse gas emissions are reduced. This is having a serious impact on ecosystems and wildlife.

- The natural timing of events such as breeding or migration is altering.
- Studies show changes in migratory bird communities.
- Most amphibian and reptile species could lose suitable habitats by 2050.
- European plants are budding and blooming earlier. More than half of European flora species could be vulnerable by 2080.

Natura 2000 sites represent critical space for nature, and must be big enough, and interconnected where possible, so as to enable species to survive or move to adapt to the changing climate. For example, in Spain, the few remaining Iberian Lynx suffer from inbreeding because road networks pen them into pockets of land.

Protecting biodiversity also helps to counter climate change, because forests, woods and peat lands absorb and store carbon. Natura 2000 provides vital ecosystem services and is therefore a key element of our life insurance for the future.

EU funding

The EU's financial support for Natura 2000 has risen substantially over the years. From 1992 to 2006, the LIFE-Nature strand of the LIFE programme provided key funding for demonstration and best practices projects. In 2007, the budget for LIFE+ (2007–2013) financed projects worth EUR 187 million, with 50 % of the funds earmarked for nature and biodiversity. However the main funding for site management is available for Member States through the Structural Funds and the Rural Development Fund.

Tracking the network

It is important to know whether Natura 2000 is succeeding in its objectives. A biannual Natura Barometer signals the latest progress. The Commission also assesses Member States' implementation reports every six years.

A Geographic Information System (GIS) is being developed to present on-line information about the entire Natura 2000 network.

Fact 6: Part of an international effort

Europe is not alone in its efforts to safeguard biodiversity. The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) came out of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. It called for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and adopted the global target of significantly reducing the rate of global biodiversity loss by 2010. Natura 2000 is the EU's major contribution to implementing the CBD programme of work on protected areas, aiming to set up well-managed national and regional systems of protected sites on land (by 2010) and in marine areas (by 2012).

Photos: Page 1: (from top) Loggerhead turtle – © Oikos Ltd LIFE project, Arnica grasslands – Frank Vassen, Aquatic Warbler – LIFE05/PL/000101, Page 3: Guillemots – Juan Pérez Lorenzo, Boreal forest – Kerstin Sundseth Ecosystems LTD, Dolphins – LIFE03/NAT/F/000104/, Excursion – LIFE00/NAT/A/007055, Brown bear – LIFE02NAT/A/008519, Page 4: Marsh Fritillary – LIFE00NAT/D/007058, Wet meadows – Frank Vassen, Training course for farmers – ©Ylläs LIFE project.

Further information

DG Environment Natura 2000 website
(http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/index_en.htm)

European Environment Agency
(http://reports.eea.europa.eu/report_2002_0524_154909/en)

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