



# NATURA 2000 ITALIA

## INFORMA

Issue 11 December 2017

**2** The EU action plan for nature, people, and the economy

**8** **Box**  
Alpine Biogeographical Seminar

**10** **Box**  
Mediterranean Biogeographical Seminar

**11** **Box**  
In Brussels we talk about RDPs and Natura 2000

**12** Presentation of the preliminary results of the "Ramsar and Pesticides" project

**13** **Box**  
The University of Padua promotes the study of Natura 2000: the docent's opinion

**15** **Box**  
Update on the designation of the SACs

**16** **News**



## The European Commission launches an action plan for nature, people, and the economy

The European Union has adopted a new Biodiversity Action Plan, tool to protect species and habitats of Community interest not only as a way to rigorously safeguard nature, but also to improve the quality of life of European citizens and to create opportunities for development and economic benefits. This is the focus of our Newsletter

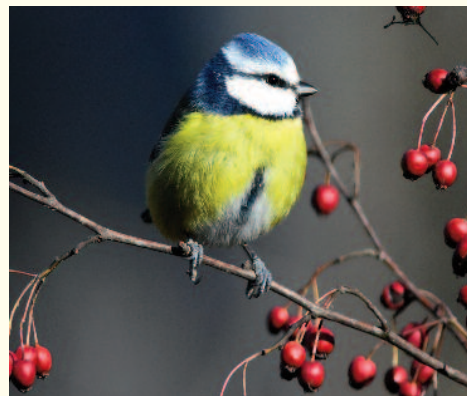
The novelty and strong suit of the Action Plan is that it is based on a shared Fitness Check approach, a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the Nature Directives that was launched by the European Commission and was detailed in issue 7 of this Newsletter (February 2015).

The evaluation concluded that, within the framework of broader EU biodiversity policy, the Nature Directives are fit for purpose, but the full achievement of their objectives will depend on substantial improvement in their implementation.

The new Action Plan was drafted to address these shortcomings, and among other things it calls for the implementation of 15 concrete actions that aim to strengthen the application of EU environmental laws.

This issue of the Newsletter details the progress made in complying with the provisions of the National Action Plan as concerns the sustainable use of pesticides (PAN); indeed, in order to identify the best way to implement the measures included

in the guidelines for its implementation, the Environment Ministry (MATTM) appointed ISPRA to carry out a study – described in one of the articles in the Newsletter – to achieve a fuller picture of agricultural activities and the use of pesticides in a sample group of Ramsar wetland sites located in intensively farmed areas, in order to assess



Cinciarella. Photo by G.Prola.

the problems and potential of agricultural activities carried out therein.

We also report on the outcomes of two biogeographical seminars (Alpine and Mediterranean) as narrated by two regional experts who participated in them and were interviewed. They discuss

the most significant aspects.

We then hear from a professor at the University of Padua who taught a course, offered for the first time this year and held in English, entirely dedicated to the study of the Natura 2000 Network in order to bridge the gap between the needs for science and training in the management and implementation of the Network itself. Indeed, universities have long been involved – often playing significant roles – in many of the activities mandated by the Birds and Habitat Directives.

Finally, a particularly important news item concerns the European Commission's launch of revised Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAF).

# The **EU action plan** for nature, people, and the economy

In April 2017, the European Commission launched a new action plan aiming to rapidly improve practical implementation of the Habitat and Birds Directives and to accelerate progress towards the goal of the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy: halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, including in relation to climate resilience and mitigation.

The Action Plan is the logical prosecution of the “Fitness Check” evaluation of the Nature Directives (Habitat Directive and Birds Directive) launched by the European Commission in 2014 and concluded at the end of 2016. The Fitness Check found that, as part of broader EU biodiversity policy, the Nature Directives are fit for purpose but that achieving their objectives and realising their full potential will depend upon substantially improving their implementation.

During the orientation debate on the findings of the Fitness Check of 7 December 2016, the Commission decided to develop a concrete action plan to improve the im-

plementation of the Directives, their coherence with socioeconomic objectives, and engagement with national, regional and local authorities, stakeholders and citizens.

Given the strong territorial dimension of the Directives, and the key role that regional and local authorities play in their implementation, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) has been closely associated in preparing this action plan and will play an essential role as regards engagement with and outreach to regional and local authorities.

The new Action Plan covers four priority areas that have been identified as essential for improving the implementation of the Directives:

- **Priority A:** improving guidance and knowledge and ensuring better coherence with broader socioeconomic objectives
- **Priority B:** building political ownership and strengthening compliance
- **Priority C:** strengthening investment in Natura 2000 and improving synergies

with EU funding instruments

- **Priority D:** better communication and outreach, engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities

A total of 15 concrete actions are planned, divided among the four priorities, and over 100 specific measures, many of which will be launched in 2017 so that the Commission can report on their delivery before the end of its current mandate in 2019.

Actions will be taken at the EU level, in particular by the Commission and the Committee of Regions, but Member States and the stakeholders concerned will also need to act, with increased support and assistance from the EU.

On the basis of the indications that emerged from the Fitness Check, the Action Plan aims to offer real opportunities to involve stakeholders and create effective, efficient partnerships across policy areas, with the ultimate goal of laying a solid foundation for reconciling and building bridges between nature, people, and the economy



The completion of the Natura 2000 Network, with specific reference to the marine environment, constitutes one of the actions envisaged in the Plan. Photo by E. Calvario.



Improvement in the involvement and awareness of citizens and in communication on the issues related to the conservation of Nature is one of the priorities indicated in the Plan. Photo by E. Calvario.

## Priority A: improving guidance and knowledge and ensuring better coherence with broader socioeconomic objectives

The Fitness Check showed that the different approaches adopted by Member States to implement the Directives can lead to unnecessary conflicts and problems. Inflexible application of the species protection rules, delays and unduly heavy burdens in site permitting procedures, and insufficient stakeholder awareness can create needless tensions between nature protection and socioeconomic activities.

The Action Plan provides practical solutions to these problems and promotes smarter participatory approaches to encourage the full involvement of landowners and users.

The Commission will improve its guidance and promote greater understanding of the legislation on the ground to help public authorities apply it better, and will support work to improve recognition of how healthy ecosystems contribute to well-being and economic development. For their part, Member States will need to improve knowledge and access to data necessary for the implementation of the Directives.

The Commission will implement the following three actions as part of Priority A of the Action Plan:

1. Update, develop and actively promote, in all EU languages, guidance on:
  - a) site permitting procedures in Natura 2000 sites, species protection and management as well as sector-specific guidance;
  - b) integrating ecosystem services into decision-making.
2. Establish a support mechanism to help Member State authorities address key challenges in applying the permitting requirements of the Birds and Habitat Directives for Natura 2000 and species protection rules.
3. Improve knowledge, including through enhanced and more efficient monitoring, and ensuring public online access to data necessary for implementing the Directives

(e.g. satellite imagery from the Copernicus programme).

## Priority B: building political ownership and strengthening compliance

While the Member States are ultimately responsible for implementing the Nature Directives on the ground, the Commission will work more closely with them to facilitate and promote the conservation and sustainable use of nature to ensure that a fully coherent and functional Natura 2000 network is in place and that species are protected and, where appropriate, used sustainably.

This priority will include bilateral dialo-

### Guidelines on the implementation of the Nature Directives

Over the years, the Commission has published numerous documents providing guidance and illustrating best practices on a series of topics related to the implementation of the Nature Directives.

Some of these documents have focused on the complex procedures established under article 6 of the Habitats Directive or on species protection rules. Others have followed a specific sectorial approach, providing indications and guidance on how to best reconcile economic activities – such as aquaculture, agriculture in quarries, wind farms, port development and dredging – with Community legislation requirements on the conservation of habitats and species.

The Fitness Check has uncovered an urgent need to update and further develop these guidelines, and to promote them more actively with the various interested parties and authorities.

The Action Plan thus sets out a series of measures to update guidance documents and translate them into all official EU languages, to make available clear and concise summaries, and to actively promote their wide dissemination in order to improve knowledge about them at the local level.

The first guidelines to be published will aim to promote better understanding on how to avoid or minimize the potential effects of economic activities on Natura 2000 sites, how to support strategic planning and early selection of plans and projects, and how to encourage more rational and streamlined evaluation procedures, in combination with other EU environmental rules.

Link:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/guidance\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/guidance_en.htm)

gue with Member States and stakeholders aimed at improving the implementation of Natura 2000 and promoting cooperation in its management across the different biogeographical regions of Europe. Habitat and species action plans will be developed and delivered.

For strengthening Member States' compliance with the Nature Directives, other measures in the broader area of environment policy, on training of national judges and prosecutors, access to justice, and assuring compliance with EU environmental law, will also be very relevant.

The following four actions are planned:

4. Completing the Natura 2000 network, especially filling gaps for the marine environment, and put in place the necessary conservation measures for all sites.
5. Using the new Environmental Implementation Review process for dedicated bilateral meetings with national and regional authorities to develop agreed roadmaps to improve implementation and consult with landowners and other stakeholders on implementation challenges.
6. Bringing together public authorities and stakeholders from different Member States at the biogeographical region level to address common challenges, including

on cross-border issues.

7. Further developing Species and Habitats Action Plans for the most threatened species and natural habitats as well as stakeholder platforms on the coexistence with conflict species (e.g. large carnivores).

### Priority C: strengthening investment in Natura 2000 and improving synergies with EU funding instruments

The Fitness Check has identified funding shortages as one of the main obstacles to the proper implementation of

the Natura 2000 Network; the cost of implementing of Natura 2000 has been estimated at EUR 5.8 billion per year, while its annual benefits are estimated at EUR 200-300 billion. However, funding shortages are preventing the network from delivering these benefits in full and are a major factor undermining the effectiveness of the Nature Directives. The action plan therefore aims at making better use of the EU funding available and making nature more attractive for private investment.

The Fitness Check has highlighted the worrying decline in species and habitats associated with agriculture and has pointed to the need for more effective integration of Natura 2000 and wider biodiversity with the common agricultural policy (CAP). The action plan proposes ways, under the current legal framework, to improve synergies with the CAP and other key EU policy sectors such as cohesion policy, the common fisheries policy, and research and innovation policy. It proposes an increase in dedicated funding for nature and biodiversity which would allow higher investment in Natura 2000.

It is also expected to update the format for Prioritized Action Framework that Member States should develop. Finally, it proposes ways to stimulate private investment and to better support connectivity between Natura 2000 areas, including through green infrastructure and nature-based solutions.

## EIR – Environmental Implementation Review: a new support mechanism for Member States.

The review process for environmental policies and rules (EIR) is a new instrument aiming to strengthen environmental policy and legislation in the EU. It aims to redress implementation gaps in the various Member States and to find solutions to problems before they become urgent.

The EIR is a two-year cycle of analysis, dialogue and collaboration between the European Commission, Member States, and stakeholders. It culminates in the publication of a country report for each Member States, which identifies a series of specific issues and the challenges that must be addressed, including recommendations on how they can be overcome and solved.

Concerning the EIR, the Action Plan calls for the Commission and Member States to hold dedicated bilateral meetings in which to discuss the main issues surrounding the implementation of the two Nature Directives, including the management and funding of Natura 2000 sites, the involvement of stakeholders, and the understanding of certain complex legal aspects. On the basis of the needs identified by the individual Member States, mutually agreed-upon key actions will be identified, and joint implementation paths will be established, with specific milestones and clear results.

Link: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/index_en.htm)

### EU Species Action Plans

Since 1993 the European Union has funded the development of Species Action Plans for around 50 bird species listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive; it has also drafted action plans for 13 species of game birds whose conservation status is unfavourable and are listed in Annex II of the Birds Directive, and for three protected species under the Habitats Directive.

For each species, the action plans provide information on status, ecology, threats, and conservation measures, and list the key actions necessary to improve their conservation status within their European range. They are the outcome of a broad consultation process involving expert scientists and competent authorities in the Member States, and international agreements and conventions.

While action plans have been drafted for several species listed in Annex II of the Habitat Di-

rective (Common Midwife Toad *Alytes obstetricans*, Danube Clouded Yellow *Colias myrmidone*, European Souslik *Spermophilus citellus*), no action plan has yet been drafted for the habitats themselves. Nevertheless, management models have been developed for 25 protected habitats, in order to support site managers in drafting site-specific management plans.

The new Action Plan calls both for drafting additional action plans for the most severely threatened species and habitats, and for creating an electronic platform for sharing experiences among stakeholders on the coexistence with conflict species such as large carnivores.

Link:

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/index_en.htm)



Implement conservation measures for species and habitats of Community interest is one of the actions envisaged in the Plan. In the image pulvinos of *Saponaria sicula* on Mount Etna, a species that characterizes the habitat 4090 (Gold-Mediterranean lands endemic to thorny brooms).  
Photo by E. Calvario.

More specifically, actions under Priority C aim to:

8. Strengthen investments in nature:
  - a) Help Member States to improve their multiannual financial planning for Natura 2000 through the update of their prioritised action frameworks (PAFs);
  - b) Propose a 10% increase in the LIFE budget dedicated to projects supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity, while keeping the overall budgetary envelope of the LIFE programme unchanged
  - (c) Stimulate private sector investment in nature projects.
  
9. Promote synergies with funding from the common agricultural policy, including effective use of Natura 2000 payments and agri-environment-climate measures, the development of result-based schemes, support to farmers through Farming Advisory Services, and innovation and knowledge transfer through the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability.
  
10. Increase awareness of cohesion policy funding opportunities and improve synergies.
  
11. Improve synergies with the common fisheries policy and the integrated maritime policy, including more effective use of the financing opportunities available.
  
12. Provide guidance to support the de-

ployment of green infrastructure for better connectivity of Natura 2000 areas; support nature-based solutions projects through EU research and innovation policy and Horizon 2020 funds.

ve, efficient management of Natura 2000 sites. This helps embrace sustainable approaches within the local socioeconomic context and suitable for local conditions. The Fitness Check also showed that biodi-

### LIFE integrated projects

Integrated Projects were introduced in 2014 in order to be able to implement environmental legislation and goals on a wider scale and to increase the impact of funding for plans drafted at the regional, multi-regional, or national levels.

The six projects selected so far (in Germany, The Netherlands, Spain, Italy - Lombardy, Belgium, and Finland) involve a broad variety of stakeholders, require the intervention of at least one other source of funding – whether private, national, or at the EU level – and were drafted to help achieve the goals of Community Directives in compliance with the Prioritized Action Frameworks (PAF) for the country

or region in question.

LIFE integrated projects were conceived to help Member States comply with EU legislation in four sectors: nature, water, air, and waste.

The Action Plan will support the preparation of LIFE integrated projects for Natura 2000, with a focus on the key priorities identified by the PAFs, and with the goal of launching at least one project in every Member State by 2019.

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

### Priority D: better communication and outreach, engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities

Improving awareness and commitment on the part of stakeholders has been identified as a key factor for achieving the goals of the Nature Directives. The best practices that emerged from the Fitness Check show that strong involvement on the part of landowners, users, and other stakeholders interested in the drafting of management plans or conservation measures is essential for the effecti-

versity conservation is dear to the hearts of EU citizens; indeed 61% of Europeans believe the EU should better inform its citizens about its importance.

In this regard, the Fitness Check also underscored the need to promote knowledge on the many ecosystem services protected by the Natura 2000 Network, in order to ensure that the conservation and sustainable use of Natura 2000 sites will also benefit local communities and their economies, especially by taking advantage of the potential of sustainable tourism and green jobs.



Highlighting and making known the good management practices of the Natura 2000 sites is one of the actions indicated in the Plan. In the image, pot cultivation of species typical of wetlands, coming from local ecotypes, to be used in micro-restoration interventions within the site. WWF Oasis Ponds of Focognano inside the SACs IT 5140011 "Ponds of the Florentine Plain". Photo by E. Calvario.

lence in the management of Natura 2000 sites and showcase the added value of the network for local economies. It pays tribute to all those who are working tirelessly on making Natura 2000 an operational success whilst drawing public attention to its substantial achievements. One of the actions proposed under Priority D of the Action Plan is to further develop this award in the coming years. The 2018 Natura 2000 Award was launched on 15 May 2017 and the winners will be announced on 21 May 2018, which has been officially designated

"European Natura 2000 Day". This special day will be celebrated each year through public events throughout Europe; in 2017, hundreds of local events and networking activities were held throughout Europe on this day, in order to celebrate the contribution of European policies on nature – especially those related to the Natura 2000 Network – in preserving our natural heritage. ■

Link: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/awards/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/awards/index_en.htm)

The action plan seeks to strengthen the involvement of the public, stakeholders, local authorities and communities. Protecting nature and its benefits concerns us all because it is our common heritage. The Commission together with the Committee of Regions will use all available platforms to raise awareness and promote local involvement and exchanges of knowledge. It will give more recognition to good management practices in Natura 2000 areas. Through the European Solidarity Corps the Commission will help young people to get directly involved in conserving nature and gain valuable expertise for their professional life.

As part of this priority, the Action Plan aims to:

13. Support knowledge exchange and engagement of local and regional authorities through a joint platform with the Committee of the Regions.

14. Support recognition of good management of Natura 2000 sites and awareness-raising of the Nature Directives through relevant fora, availing of new technologies and outreach activities, and strengthen links between natural and cultural herita-

ge, especially in the context of 2018 as European year of cultural heritage.

15. Involve young people actively in measures dealing with societal needs by giving them the opportunity to get involved in nature protection in Natura 2000 sites (European Solidarity Corps)

### The Natura 2000 Award

Launched in 2014, the Natura 2000 Award is designed to reward excel-

### The European Solidarity Corps and the involvement of young people in activities related to Natura 2000

In September 2016, the European Commission announced the creation of the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) to offer young people throughout the EU the chance to engage in a wide variety of activities, including environmental protection. In order to support this new initiative, the EU's LIFE fund recently issued a call for proposals to encourage the introduction of the ESC in the nature sector. The selected projects should last no more than 36 months, while the activities of volunteers should last between 2 and 12 months and focus on actions related to the conservation and restoration of natural areas, especially in Na-

tura 2000 sites.

In 2017 the European Solidarity Corps will have a dedicated legal base; it will give young people the opportunity to volunteer in another Member State and experience various practices to address the challenges of nature protection and catastrophe prevention, acquiring valuable experience for future employment. This is included in a specific measure of the Action Plan.

Link: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/funding/life2017/index.htm#esc17>

### Priority A: improving guidance and knowledge and ensuring better coherence with broader socioeconomic objectives

Actions	Timeframe	I. in C.
1. Update, develop and actively promote, in all EU languages, guidance on: a) site permitting procedures in Natura 2000 sites, species protection and management as well as sector specific guidance; b) integrating ecosystem services into decision-making.	2017-2019 2018-2019	COM / CoR / MS / stakeholders
2. Establish a support mechanism to help Member State authorities address key challenges in applying the permitting requirements of the Birds and Habitat Directives for Natura 2000 and species protection rules.	2017-2019	COM / MS / stakeholders
3. Improve knowledge, including through enhanced and more efficient monitoring, and ensuring public online access to data necessary for implementing the Directives (e.g. satellite imagery from the Copernicus programme).	2017-2019	COM / EEA / MS

### Priority B: building political ownership and strengthening compliance

Actions	Timeframe	I. in C.
4. Completing the Natura 2000 network, especially filling gaps for the marine environment, and put in place the necessary conservation measures for all sites.	ongoing	COM / MS / stakeholders
5. Using the new Environmental Implementation Review process for dedicated bilateral meetings with national and regional authorities to develop agreed roadmaps to improve implementation and consult with landowners and other stakeholders on implementation challenges.	2017-2019	COM / MS / stakeholders
6. Bringing together public authorities and stakeholders from different Member States at the biogeographical region level to address common challenges, including on cross-border issues.	2017-2019	COM / CoR / MS / stakeholders
7. Further developing Species and Habitats Action Plans for the most threatened species and natural habitats as well as stakeholder platforms on the coexistence with conflict species (e.g. large carnivores).	2017-2019	COM / MS / stakeholders

### Priority C: strengthening investment in Natura 2000 and improving synergies with EU funding instruments

Actions	Timeframe	I. in C.
8. Strengthen investments in nature: a) Help Member States to improve their multiannual financial planning for Natura 2000 through the update of their prioritised action frameworks (PAFs); b) Propose a 10% increase in the LIFE budget dedicated to projects supporting the conservation of nature and biodiversity, while keeping the overall budgetary envelope of the LIFE programme unchanged c) Stimulate private sector investment in nature projects.	2017-2019	COM / BEI / MS / stakeholders
9. Promote synergies with funding from the common agricultural policy, including effective use of Natura 2000 payments and agri-environment-climate measures, the development of result-based schemes, support to farmers through Farming Advisory Services, and innovation and knowledge transfer through the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability.	2017-2019	COM / MS / stakeholders
10. Increase awareness of cohesion policy funding opportunities and improve synergies.	2017-2019	COM / MS / stakeholders
11. Improve synergies with the common fisheries policy and the integrated maritime policy, including more effective use of the financing opportunities available.	2017-2019	COM / MS / stakeholders
12. Provide guidance to support the deployment of green infrastructure for better connectivity of Natura 2000 areas; support nature-based solutions projects through EU research and innovation policy and Horizon 2020 funds.	2017-2019	COM / stakeholders

### Priority D: better communication and outreach, engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities

Actions	Timeframe	I. in C.
13. Support knowledge exchange and engagement of local and regional authorities through a joint platform with the Committee of the Regions.	2017-2019	CoR / COM
14. Support recognition of good management of Natura 2000 sites and awareness-raising of the Nature Directives through relevant fora, availing of new technologies and outreach activities, and strengthen links between natural and cultural heritage, especially in the context of 2018 as European year of cultural heritage.	2017-2019	COM / CoR / MS / stakeholders
15. Involve young people actively in measures dealing with societal needs by giving them the opportunity to get involved in nature protection in Natura 2000 sites (European Solidarity Corps).	2017-2019	COM / MS / stakeholders

Abbreviations: COM – European Commission; CoR – Committee of the Regions; EEA – European Environment Agency; MS – Member States; I. in C. – Institutions in charge

## Alpine Biogeographical Seminar

Between 21 and 23 June 2017 the Department for the Territory, Agricultural, and Forest Ecosystems (TESAF) of the University of Padua hosted the “Second Alpine Biogeographical Seminar”, which brought together experts in the Natura 2000 network to identify and discuss shared actions and areas of cooperation to optimize the network’s contribution to helping achieve a favourable conservation status for Alpine species and habitats of Community concern.

The Seminar was organized around four core issues, each with its own Working Group:

- Defining the conservation status, objectives, and priorities for Alpine habitats and species of Community interest.
- Conservation measures and their efficacy.
- Monitoring and assessment.
- Actions to address the threats against Alpine habitats and species of Community interest.

Dr. Gianluca Salogni, an official with the Veneto regional government and an expert on these issues, participated in the Seminar as one of Italy’s representatives. We asked him several questions; his answers are below.

### Which of the aspects of the Alpine Biogeographical Seminar did you feel were the most effective and innovative?

Let me preface this by saying that although the seminar was by invitation, it involved nearly 120 people from 18 countries and a variety of backgrounds. This is rather unusual for ‘technical’ seminars, in part because it requires a significant organizational effort.

It lasted three days, and the programme itself was innovative in some regards. Let me explain myself: during the first day, after the opening remarks, we had a field trip to various different habitat types. This was a surprising and disorienting choice for some participants, as it may have appeared more appropriate to discuss technical aspects first, in order to be

better prepared for the field outings. Nevertheless, since the seminar’s main goal was to identify collaboration methods and opportunities to help improve the conservation status of Alpine species and habitats, the field trip on the first day allowed us to get to know each other better. Indeed, the need to better understand local situations in the places we were visiting encouraged the asking of questions and facilitated interactions between the participants.

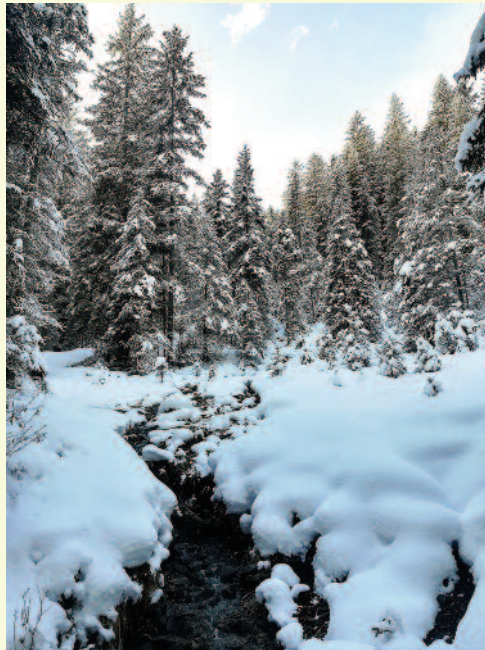
Perhaps this is a tried-and-true technique, but personally I found it a positive introduction.

Another effective aspect of the seminar concerned the diverse backgrounds of the participants, which forces them to pay more attention to one another as they approach the seminar’s issues from different – and sometimes discordant – viewpoints. The combination of these experiences helped everyone augment their knowledge and their skills.

Additionally, if you’ll allow me, I would say that one of the key aspects at the base of the seminar was the acknowledgment of the fact that the Natura 2000 network is a network of people. The opportunities are for people, as are the funds... and the norms. As such, an idea I found innovative was that of facilitative a process that can bring about opportunities to manage the sites in a collective manner, both in terms of local involvement and of links (both digital and personal) to the European levels. In other sectors, this might be called a multi-scale approach.

In order to achieve this, we began by sharing everyday problems. It was immediately evident that seminar participants were able to contribute with many practical

examples of actions and projects they developed over the years. The next step was successfully sharing priorities as well. This certainly meant reaching compromises, but also the obligation of defining strategic choices, either due to the ease of achieving results – the so-called ‘low-hanging fruit’ method – or because the importance of the action to be undertaken



Forests with prevalence of Spruce (*Picea abies*) and Larch (*Larix decidua*) in Val Casies. Habitat 9410. Mountain and alpine acidophilous forests of Picea.

Photo by E. Calvario.



The botanical gardens play an important role in educating the general public about the importance of flora. In the image, Paradisia Botanical Garden. Gran Paradiso National Park.

Photo by G. Prola.





The wild peony *Paeonia officinalis* is a predominantly mountain species included in Annex II of the Habitats Directive. Photo by E. Calvario.

was successfully shared. First and foremost, it was acknowledged that we do not yet know enough about how to achieve this, and that methods to acquire knowledge should be shared and comparable, for example with regards to monitoring efforts.

Another important aspect is the willingness to integrate results and experiences arising from the application of other directives. These comparisons are necessary, and they highlight the complementarities – and sometimes divergences as well – of the various instruments. The most obvious example concerns the Water Framework Directive and its effect on the wetland habitats and species protected under the Habitat and Birds Directives.

Finally, we must take into account the fact that while habitats are geographically confined and affected by local conditions, and thus their rigidly uniform management at the European level would be unsuitable, species require stronger trans-boundary management abilities, which can easily be incorporated into treaties and laws, but which require a network of people ensuring coordinated, long-term action to be fully effective.

**What were the most interesting and useful contributions that could be adapted and applied to your Region?**

First of all, the active presence of representatives from the European Commission and the European Environment Agency, who shed light of the strategies and upcoming initiatives for the implementation and management of the Natura 2000 network. This made it possible to directly discuss the coherence of regional policies with the sometimes wishful policies at the European level. With all the caveats that apply at the local level, this is of great help to properly set up effective actions to rapidly respond to the initiatives – most of which are technical – that have not yet been formalized by the working groups steered by the Commission.

Underscoring the importance of the network of people, the seminar made it possible to establish relationships between peers that I hope will be long-lasting, and most importantly able to attract new proposals and funds.

From a technical standpoint, the seminar was organized into four working groups focusing on conservation status, conservation measures, monitoring, and threats.

In this regard, I found the approach to conservation status indicators in monitoring efforts to be particularly enlightening. This made it clear that what is already being done is in keeping with expected results at the European scale, and makes it possible to develop efficient, reliable methods to steer site management policies.

I also believe it was essential to have shared the fact that a favourable conservation status for a habitat must also be matched by a favourable conservation status for individual species, thus highlighting the need of – for instance – taking ecotones into account when protecting structural diversity. This has implication for monitoring efforts as well, which are all too often approached in an excessively simplistic manner.

Another important perspective concerns traditional uses, which are often marginalized in spite of providing a wealth of knowledge. We should thus encourage additional initiatives to transfer knowledge between local communities, experts, and the relevant authorities.

Finally, we should take into consideration a more flexible approach in the application of agri-environmental policies, perhaps through a hybrid approach that ensures both payments for results in terms of improvements in conservation status, and payments for actions undertaken in compliance with conservation measures and management plans. Results-based approaches widen the market for biodiversity conservation, in part because when farmers are encouraged to understand the results expected from them, they are much more motivated in terms of achieving them.

**Which aspects/modalities do you feel should be added to further improve the efficacy of Biogeographical Seminars.**

In order to cooperate, one must leave pride and jealousy aside and be willing to work together until the task at hand is completed. The risk is that we are left with statements of good intentions while everyone, out of habit, continues to work the way they used to. This risk is all too real, and I have often experimented it first-hand – for example, a few years ago in the first European projects I was involved in. Precisely because these seminars are attended on a voluntary basis, participants should continue to be engaged and stimulated by a single coordination body, both through tools such as newsletters and through personal solicitations to encourage new contributions and ensure that the relationships established remain strong.

Concerning the results achieved by the working groups, the plenary session was too short to fully understand the findings of each group, and more time should be devoted to this aspect.

With regards to the documents summarizing the seminar's outcome, I believe they should be more operational in nature and serve as templates for technical working groups that ensure the governance of Natura 2000 sites.

## Mediterranean Biogeographical Seminar

On 14-16 the “Second Mediterranean Biogeographical Seminar” was held in Limassol, Cyprus, and brought together experts in the Natura 2000 network to identify and discuss shared actions and areas of cooperation to optimize the network’s contribution to helping achieve a favourable conservation status for Mediterranean species and habitats of Community concern.

The Seminar was organized around four core issues, each with its own Working Group:

- Evaluation and sustainable development of ecosystems (especially services related to water)
- Conservation, monitoring, and assessment goals
- Effective governance models for integrated approaches to the implementation of Natura 2000
- Actions to address the threats against Alpine habitats and species of Community interest

Dr. Gabriele De Filippo, the regional expert on these issues with the Campania regional government, participated in the Seminar as one of Italy’s representatives. We asked him several questions; his answers are below.

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/events/second\\_mediterranean\\_natura\\_2000\\_seminar\\_2017\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/events/second_mediterranean_natura_2000_seminar_2017_en.htm)

### 1. Which of the aspects of the Mediterranean Biogeographical Seminar did you feel were the most effective and innovative?

The seminar aimed to identify the strategies to be adopted in the coming years to facilitate the full implementation of the Natura 2000 network. It was interesting to note the lack of a ‘ready-made’ document to be discussed, while the seminar’s approach focused on coming up with a draft on the basis of the discussions between institutions and the experts who represented the various Member States.

This approach was followed from the preparatory phase, during which the Commission consulted various experts and asked them to indicate the main problems that have hindered the full implementation of Natura 2000 so far. On the basis of these indications, Seminar participants were able to concretely discuss many of these aspects and began drafting a strategic document that will be completed during the upcoming phases of the biogeographical process; indeed, the seminar was just one step in a broader process to share knowledge and experiences, culminating in the publication of the final document.

### 2. What were the most interesting and useful contributions that could be adapted and applied to your Region?

The discussions that were held during the seminar were part of four thematic workshops that highlighted some very important issues that could be taken up in Campania, already on the basis of the results of this initial seminar.

One of the most interesting strategies proposed called for focusing on “low-hanging fruit”, or the conservation goals that would be easiest to achieve in the short run. In practical terms, the idea is to identify a series of habitats and species for which easily-implemented actions can be adopted and which can quickly bring about (by the time of the next art. 17 report on the state of implementation of the Habitat and Birds directives) a significant improvement in conservation status on a biogeographical scale.

A second aspect concerns the need to correctly interpret the habitats in Annex I; failure to do so would hinder the application of conservation measures. Fortunately, in Italy we have a good handbook to help us interpret these habitats, which will be of great use when drafting the soon-to-be-pu-

blished habitat maps for Campania. Nevertheless, the need has emerged, at least for some habitats, to increase the number of diagnostic indicators and conservation status indicators to include abiotic and/or faunistic parameters.

Much work remains to be done on the methodologies for monitoring the effectiveness of conservation measures. In this regard, Campania is ready to serve as a field laboratory, as we are currently in the process of adopting our own measures for regional Natura 2000 sites and their monitoring plans.

In this context, the seminar highlighted the lack of a shared methodology to define Favourable Reference Values for each habitat and species within Natura 2000 network sites.

Another important indication concerned the need to coordinate the management plans for the various sites in order to better achieve conservation goals at the biogeographical level. To this end, it would be more efficient to create groups of experts at the regional level to serve as steering committees and analyze management plans – both those that are being drafted and final plans – in addition to the methodologies indicated in the plans still to be drafted. This would ensure a degree of homogeneity in the actions identified in each plan, thus adopting a broader vision on a biogeographical rather than strictly local scale.

A similar approach should also be adopted when implementing management plans, now that we no longer have ‘mediators’ between the plan and the stakeholders who can promote knowledge about conservation goals, facilitate the implementation of the plan’s actions, and help stakeholders

better appreciate the opportunities that these plans provide rather than focusing on the constraints.

Nevertheless, the importance also emerged of management plans following a landscape ecology approach – especially in a Mediterranean context – and in particular in order to identify conservation goals, Favourable Reference Values, and actions to be launched: separating target units, whether species or habitats, from their landscape context is thus something to be avoided. A very important aspect – and one that emerged in every workshop – is that although significant economic resources will

be necessary in order to address the problems, these funds are far from being forthcoming. Therefore, it is necessary for every institution involved to begin looking for alternative sources of support, for example by investing in training specialized operators who can contribute to monitoring through so-called citizen science approaches, using the best practices implemented by the Member States. In relation to this and other aspects, the need emerged to better involve NGOs, which may constitute a major resource in implementing the Natura 2000 network better and on a larger scale.

### 3. Which aspects/modalities do you feel should be added to further improve the efficacy of Biogeographical Seminars?

It may be useful to organize, at the national level, preparatory activities for the upcoming biogeographical meetings to ensure greater involvement on the part of institutions, NGOs, and experts. For example, the preparatory phase was organized on the basis of questionnaires submitted to the various Natura 2000 experts (those on the official list available on the Natura 2000 website); in the future, this could be combined with a national seminar attended by regional experts and officials in charge of the relevant regional offices, so as to better involve local networks in the preparatory phase. This would ensure a greater presence on the part of the regions in the discussions that take place during the seminars, even if regional representatives themselves are not in attendance, as was unfortunately the case during the Cyprus seminar.



Mediterranean scrub. Photo by Enrico Calvario

## RDPs and Natura 2000 on the agenda in Brussels. “Natura 2000: Making an effective use of the support possibilities under the Rural Development policy”

Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) are playing an increasingly important role in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Indeed, during the 2014-2020 funding programme, 118 national and regional programmes were funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for a total of about € 100 billion, in addition to about € 61 billion in public funds from Member States.

In this context, the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), instituted in 2008 by the European Commission, aims to evaluate, inform, and increase the involvement of the farming, environmental, and institutional sectors with regards to the opportunities provided by RDPs. For this reason, ENRD generates and shares knowledge and facilitates cooperation and the exchange of information through a Europe-wide rural network.

This is the background for the workshop titled “Natura 2000: Making an effective use of the support possibilities under the Rural Development policy” that was held in Brussels on 28 September 2017. In addition to Agriculture and Environment DGs of the European Commission. Over 70 participants from 22 EU Member States contributed to a lively debate on synergies between Natura 2000 and rural development programmes. They included European Commission officials, representatives of national and regional RDP management authority representatives,

management bodies, and environmental organizations. This wide variety of participants mirrors the broad goals of the RDPs, which for several years now have no longer been strictly limited to agriculture. Indeed, these programmes help define priority approaches and actions to help meet the needs of specific geographical areas (in Italy’s case, the Regions), which under the present funding

programme have seen an increase in natural history and environmental contents, giving Natura 2000 sites a key role.

In fact, Natura 2000 has long been the main tool through which the European Union pursues its biodiversity conservation goals, through a network of highly important areas comprising about 19% of Italy’s surface area.

Awareness of the opportunities and problems associated with the use of these funding tools has also emerged at the European level, and the Environment Directorate-General, with Delgado Rosa and Crespín, has highlighted the need to better implement Natura 2000 within the RDPs. It should be pointed out that the current funding programme has introduced important measures for the protection of Natura 2000 sites targeting a wide variety of subjects, from farms to protected area management bodies. These measures were lacking from the previous programmes, and although they require more courage from a financial standpoint, they are an important and pioneering tool that bodes well for the future.

This future will need to target its biodiversity conservation efforts outside of Natura 2000’s borders as well, through the introduction of the important issue of ecological connectivity in the RDPs. In this regard, a key role will be played by data on the actual situation on the ground and the drafting of effective indicators and monitoring tools, all while keeping in mind that agriculture needs to be front and centre. For this reason, the main tool

for achieving these goals both within and outside of agricultural areas is undoubtedly the RDP, which as Sulima (DG Agriculture) highlighted, makes available important resources such as measures 10 (agri-environmental climate payments), 11 (organic agriculture), 12 (Natura 2000 indemnity measures) and 13 (mountain areas indemnity measures).

The workshop provided a platform for local governments and representatives, who appreciated the opportunity to discuss the problems that have emerged and proposals for the use of these important financial tools at the European level. A shared element in this was the highlighting of bureaucratic barriers as an obstacle to the full implementation of biodiversity conservation measures. They also showed how administrative burdens were being reduced at the local level during the transposition phase for European directives. German, Polish, and French examples also highlighted innovative approaches for adapting rural development programmes to local conditions. The most common requests concerned the introduction of new measures for ecological connectivity and increased payments in order to make them more attractive for the agricultural sector. In this context, the need was reiterated to get away from the mechanism that links environmental payments to the concept of foregone earnings. For this reason, awareness

must be raised among stakeholders and society as a whole that the protection of biodiversity is a service that is worth far more than the mere revenues that have been forfeited in order to achieve it. In the past, Europe has proved to be up to the challenge of renewing agricultural production, by allowing the CAP to get away from the concept of payments linked to production. The time is ripe for an additional step forward that can reconcile the



Landscape beauty does not always coincide with naturalistic importance. Simplified and intensively managed farm environments are not favorable for biodiversity. Photo by E. Calvario

needs of farmers with the many services that ecosystems can provide to humans; after all, these are two faces of the same coin.

The parallel sessions – on large carnivores, knowledge about the Natura 2000 network, and the role of LIFE projects in the use and steering of Rural Development Programmes - also provided much food for thought. This latter aspect saw the involvement of the Lombardy Region’s Gestire 2020 LIFE project. Its efforts – including increasing the level of information on environmental measures in the farming sector, bringing stakeholders and institutions closer together, and supporting project activities through the help of professional facilitators – were much appreciated.

In conclusion, the workshop showed that while current rural development tools can be used effectively for biodiversity conservation, additional changes to the RDPs are both possible and necessary to better address the complex needs of Natura 2000. Sharing knowledge and experiences is an important tool for growing together. Such sharing must include both dialogue between similar entities with similar needs, and collaboration between the various decision-making levels, from the EU to the regions and local administrations. Events such as this one are a perfect example.

All of the workshop’s presentations can be downloaded here: [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-natura-2000\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/enrd-workshop-natura-2000_en)

# Presentation of the preliminary results of the **“Ramsar and Pesticides”** project at the Conference on the “National Action Plan (PAN) for the sustainable use of pesticides: the role of RDPs and of organic agriculture”.

On 26-27 October 2017, Palazzo dei Congressi in Florence hosted a two-day workshop on “The National Action Plan (PAN) for the sustainable use of pesticides: the role of RDPs and organic agriculture”. The initiative was promoted by CREA’s Centre for Policy and Bioeconomics as part of the National Rural Network Programme (Project 5.1), managed by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food, and Forestry Policies (MIPAAF) in collaboration with the Ministry of the Environment and the Protection of Land and Sea (MATTM) and the Tuscany regional government.

During the Conference, Dr. Susanna D’Antoni (ISPRA), Dr. Laura Pettiti (MATTM) and Dr. Lettieri (CREA) presented the preliminary results of the “Ramsar and Pesticides” project funded by MATTM and ISPRA.

Previous studies conducted by ISPRA on the

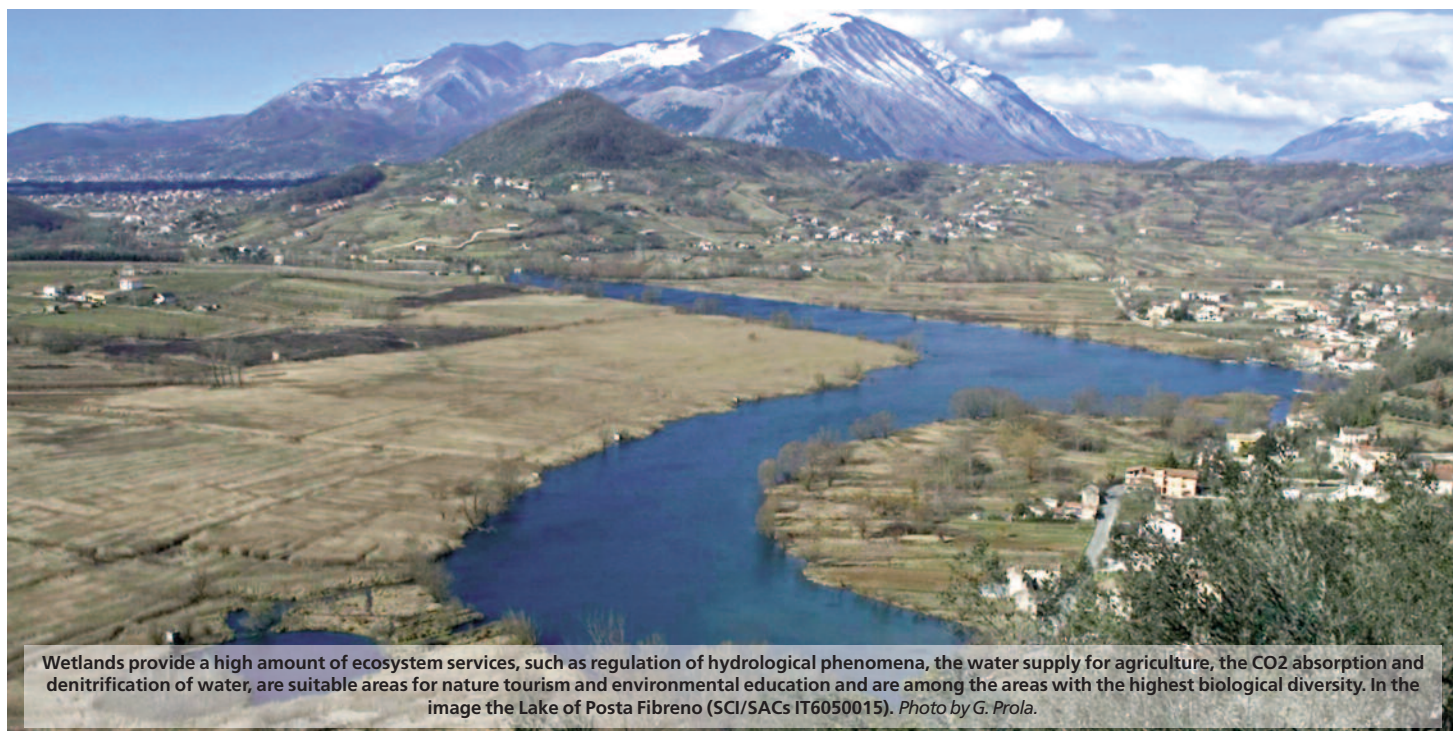
potential hazards arising from the use of pesticides on the conservation of habitats and species protected under the Birds and Habitat Directives found that about 92% of the habitats and 56% the bird species in question (respectively 133 and 109) are highly sensitive to pesticides; additionally, most of these species and habitats are tied to wetlands, are generally locally distributed, and their conservation status is poor (cf. ISPRA reports n°194/2014 “Specie e habitat di interesse comunitario in Italia: distribuzione, stato di conservazione e trend”, n°216/2015 “Valutazione del rischio potenziale dei prodotti fitosanitari nelle Aree Natura 2000”, n°219/2015 “Rapporto sull’applicazione della Direttiva 147/2009/CE in Italia: dimensione, distribuzione e trend delle popolazioni di uccelli (2008-2012)”.

Indeed, while agriculture contributes to main-

taining suitable alternative habitats for many species of Community interest, it can constitute a threat to wetland and farmland ecosystems if it uses pesticides and fertilizers, and/or it is highly mechanised and consumes large quantities of water.

For these reasons, the National Action Plan (PAN, DM 22/01/2014) that establishes the measures for the sustainable use of pesticides to reduce their impact on human health, the environment, and biodiversity in implementation of Directive 2009/128/EC and Legislative Decree 150/201 calls for measures to protect wetlands and regulate the use of products hazardous to biodiversity in Natura 2000 sites (SCI/SCAs and SPAs) and in protected areas, especially Ramsar sites.

The measure to protect species, habitats and apoidea in protected areas and Natura 2000



Wetlands provide a high amount of ecosystem services, such as regulation of hydrological phenomena, the water supply for agriculture, the CO<sub>2</sub> absorption and denitrification of water, are suitable areas for nature tourism and environmental education and are among the areas with the highest biological diversity. In the image the Lake of Posta Fibreno (SCI/SCAs IT6050015). Photo by G. Prola.

sites (Measure N. 13 of the PAN) states that in these areas, the type of agriculture to be encouraged should be organic and/or use pesticides whose labels lack standard phrases for safety precautions for the environment (SPe, defined by Directive 2003/82/EC), or that are labelled as safe for the environment (N).

In order to protect wetland species and habitats (listed in Annex V of the PAN), it is important to replace/limit/eliminate all pesticides labelled SPe3 and SPe4. In order to protect aquatic species living in caves (e.g. cave salamanders and olm), it is important to replace/limit/eliminate all pesticides labelled SPe1 and SPe2.

The PAN establishes that regions and autonomous provinces must take accompanying measures to minimize the potential negative effects of pesticides on species and habitats. Additionally, since high levels of biodiversity usually lead to fewer agricultural pests and thus

a lower need for pesticides, measure 16 of the Guidelines calls for a series of accompanying measures, including the creation of untreated strips of meadows around cultivated areas, the creation or restoration of wetlands, and the creation or restoration of corridors (riparian vegetation and scrub, strips of meadows, etc).

Additionally, the Guideline's Measures call for providing specific training on pesticides' effect on biodiversity to farmers in protected areas and Natura 2000 sites (Measure 17), and marketing actions for the promotion of products from farms and areas where little or no pesticides are used. Other actions include the creation of farm-to-table markets and retail outlets, plus awareness-raising activities targeting consumers.

In order to identify the ways in which to best implement the measures contained in the Guidelines for the implementation of the PAN (DM of 10/3/2015), MATTM appoint-

ed ISPRA to conduct a study on agricultural activities and the use of pesticides in a sample of Ramsar sites where significant agricultural activities take place ( $\geq 40\%$  of the protected area) in order to assess the problems and potential associated with these activities.

The Ramsar sites involved in the project (and the protected areas in which they are located) are: Lago di Mezzola-Pian di Spagna (Riserva Naturale Pian di Spagna e Lago di Mezzola/Lombardy), Lago di Nazzano detto La Meanella (Riserva Naturale Nazzano, Tevere – Farfa/Latium), Lago di Sabaudia and nearby areas (Parco nazionale del Circeo/Latium), Lago dell'Angitola (Parco Regionale delle Serre/Calabria), Laghi di Murana, Preola e Gorghi Tondi (Riserva Naturale Integrale Lago Preola e Gorghi Tondi/Sicily), Stagno di Cabras (Sardinia).

All of the above-named Ramsar sites are also part of the Natura 2000 network. Also collabo-

## The University of Padua promotes the study of Natura 2000: the docent's opinion

During this academic year, the University of Padua offered a course entirely dedicated to Natura 2000 and taught by Professor Tommaso Sitzia. The course is open to every student enrolled in the university, as well as anyone wishing to broaden their culture and improve their professional skills. The course, which will be held in English and begin in February 2018, will train Italian and international students on the legislative framework, goals, and implementation procedures for the Birds and Habitat Directives, as well as on the monitoring, evaluation, planning, and management methods applied to Natura 2000 sites. The course is mandatory for students pursuing a Master's Degree in Forest Science, and will thus have a heavy focus on Natura 2000 goals concerning planning and management issues related to forests and grazing land. Workshops and field trips will be used to illustrate the methods for studying the distribution of habitats and species of Community interest. As early as 2006 the University of Padua had paid special attention to Natura 2000, offering one of the first Italian experimental university courses on environmental implications assessments for two years running.

The University of Padua's experience is not the only one of its kind in Italy. For example, the University of Insubria recently offered a course on the management of the Natura 2000 network as part of its Master's Degree in Environmental Science. Although there are other degree courses and classes that include Natura 2000 among their topics, their integration in university curricula has only just begun.

According to the Natura 2000 lexicon, biodiversity conservation also requires training. The text itself of the Habitats Directive makes this clear, as it references «general information» and «education» in its last preamble and in Article 22 (c). Training practitioners and students required different educational approaches. The former have already been in contact, directly or indirectly, with the topics being taught, as site managers, administrators, or landowners. The latter lack direct experience, and during their university and post-university training they have tackled numerous disciplines for the first time, which must be coherent with one another. We may thus ask ourselves which of these two categories the Directive addresses.

A reading of a study prepared in support of the Fitness Check for the Habitat and Birds Directives (2016) shows that training is generally understood to refer to practitioners, since universities are rarely mentioned in the document itself. One of the few such references (p. 153) concerns the acade-

mic background of participants in a questionnaire on the factors that influenced the implementation of Natura 2000, which is seen as a factor to be taken into account together with the participants' limited experience with Natura 2000. At the same time, p. 206 of the study identifies those with a post-graduate degree as the most frequently employed in highly technical, scientific positions related to the Natura 2000 network.

The institutional goals of universities include both education and research. The latter is at the basis of the implementation of the Habitat Directives for a number of aspects: the identification of sites (art. 4 and 5), their management (art. 6), derogations (art. 16), and on the basis of art. 18 «Research», the general goals themselves (art. 2), surveillance (art. 11) and preservation of landscape connectivity (art. 10). There is thus no doubt that universities play a central role in the Directive's intentions, with regards to both education and research.

The LIFE projects institutional database (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/index.cfm>) currently contains 1,606 LIFE Natura project. About one-third of them - 564 to be exact - include the following keywords: "teaching", "capacity building", "learning", "student" and/or "education". Nevertheless, universities are the coordinating beneficiaries for only 3% of the projects, over half of which contain the keywords above. This shows how their task is in large part focused on education.

Finally, we must reflect on the apparent discordance between the needs for "science" and "training" that Natura 2000 requests, and the frequency with which universities - which are able to reconcile these two needs - are formally included in the implementation of Natura 2000 in a leadership role. Indeed, the lack of transfers of knowledge was bemoaned by the supporting study for the fitness Fitness Check (for example on p. 287, but also elsewhere in the text).

It is time for universities to work harder to address this shortcoming, but this means that docents should be required to have skills and experience in the operational aspects concerning the implementation of the Birds and Habitat Directives, or be put in a position to acquire them. This requires collaboration between universities, implementing authorities, and professionals working on Natura 2000, beginning with the training of university students. This will be the only way to bridge the gap identified by the study and prepare future generations for this crucial task.



**Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*** a rare Mediterranean duck of Community interest winters in some wetlands of the Natura 2000 Network.  
Photo by G. Prola.

rating with the project is the CREA National Rural Network, particularly with identifying agricultural best practices and the measures contained in Rural Development Plans (RDPs) to support the implementation of the Guidelines. The project also aims to collect useful data for assessing the ecosystem services related to the water cycle enjoyed by farms, so as to define various ways to take advantage these services while using a variety of plant-protection measures (organic, integrated pest management, and conventional) and the economic value of these services, in keeping with the principles of National Law LN 221/2015 ex art. 70 (environmental provisions). To this end, efforts are underway in the above-mentioned Ramsar sites to quantify ecosystem services such as the quantity of CO<sub>2</sub> absorbed by plants or nitrogen removal services provided by wetlands, including their monetary quantification.

The survey's preliminary results show that only 24% of the farms sampled are organic or do not use pesticides (out of a total of 105), while conventional farms use pesticides harmful to wetland ecosystems (83% environmentally hazardous – N).

The farmers interviewed – especially conventional farmers – are not aware of the threat that pesticides pose to biodiversity, or of the Guidelines on how to minimize their impact on wetlands, or of alternatives to pesticides.

There were few truly organic farms adopting short food supply chain approaches or focus-

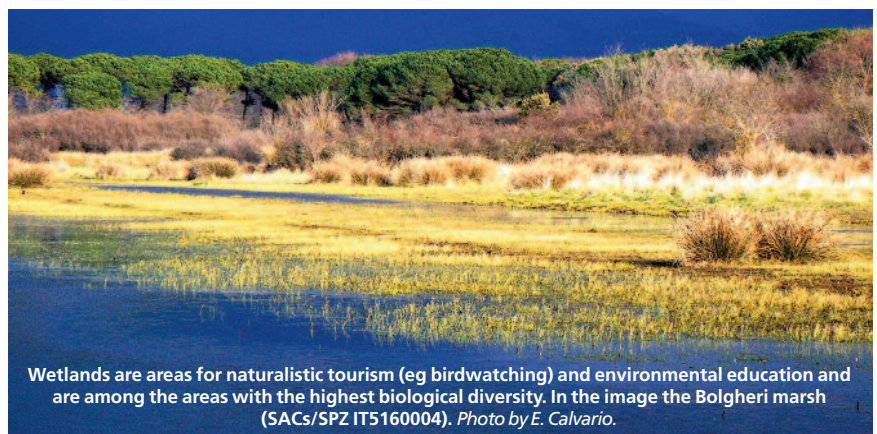
ing on promoting high-quality organic products. Additionally, there was insufficient knowledge about the RDP measures to support organic farming and the implementation of the Guidelines. In all cases, damage to crops from wildlife was recorded. Organic and biodynamic farms that sell their products directly and/or practice multifunctional agriculture are those that appear to be healthiest, with the fewest financial problems. Sustainable agriculture thus provides many opportunities for development in these areas.

First and foremost, farmers express a need for change, the ability to better promote their product, including through certificates of quality and origin, and an interest towards less conventional farming practices, including in light of the economic opportunities that may arise from a better use of RDP funds.

By the same token, consumers are increasingly choosing farm-to-table and wholesome products. The means to take advantage of these opportunities are agri-environmental agreements, in which the managing bodies of protected areas and Natura 2000 sites should play a key pro-active role in bringing farmers together and defining shared, large-scale projects that can result in improvements in water quality and in the conservation status of species, habitats, and ecosystem services.

The best way to solve the problems that have emerged lies undoubtedly in the implementation of the Guidelines' Measures, through increased coordination between the measures of the RDPs and those for the implementation of the PAN, as per the findings of the Conference in Florence.

(<http://www.reterurale.it/pan/firenze2017>).



**Wetlands are areas for naturalistic tourism (eg birdwatching) and environmental education and are among the areas with the highest biological diversity. In the image the Bolgheri marsh (SACs/SPZ IT5160004).** Photo by E. Calvario.

## Update on the designation of the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

As of today (December 2017) 1,685 SACs have been designated in 15 regions and two autonomous provinces, as detailed in the table below.

Regione/Provincia autonoma	Data designazione	n. siti	Superfici a terra		Superfici a mare	
			Sup./ha	%	Sup./ha	%
Basilicata	16/09/2013	20	64.567	6,41	5.894	1,00
	11/01/2017	33				
	22/11/2017	1				
Bolzano A.P.	22/11/2016	35	149.931	20,27	/	/
	15/05/2017	5				
Calabria	12/04/2016	25	57.494	3,78	15.142	0,86
	27/06/2017	128				
Friuli Venezia Giulia	21/10/2013	56	129.173	16,43	3003	3,61
Latium	06/12/2016	142	122.371	7,10	30.311	2,68
	02/08/2017	27				
	11/10/2017	11				
Liguria	24/06/2014	14	138.067	25,49	9.133	1,67
	13/01/2016	38				
	07/04/2017	74				
Lombardy	30/04/2014	46	224.200	9,04	/	/
	02/12/2015	1				
	15/07/2016	138				
	14/06/2017	8				
Marche	06/05/2015	1	104.692	11,14	996	0,26
	12/04/2016	29				
	12/04/2016	2				
	05/12/2016	1				
	05/12/2016	43				
Molise	16/03/2017	60	52.755	11,83	/	/
Piedmont	27/07/2016	27	248.728	9,80	/	/
	03/02/2017	57				
	26/05/2017	23				
	21/11/2017	15				
Apulia	10/07/2015	21	34.298	1,76	6848	0,45
Sardinia	07/04/2017	56	181.976	7,55	33.217	1,48
Sicily	21/12/2015	118	379.375	14,69	4.056	0,11
	31/03/2017	5				
	31/03/2017	15				
	31/03/2017	33				
	07/12/2017	32				
Trento A.P.	28/03/2014	123	154.314	24,86	/	/
	24/05/2016	3				
	15/07/2016	3				
	21/11/2016	3				
	07/07/2017	3				
Tuscany	24/05/2016	89	305.887	13,31	70.532	4,32
	22/12/2016	45				
Umbria	07/08/2014	95	121.332	14,33	/	/
	18/05/2016	1				
	03/02/2017	1				
Valle d'Aosta	07/02/2013	27	34.607	10,61	/	/
<b>Totale</b>		<b>1.733</b>	<b>2.503.768</b>	<b>8,29</b>	<b>179.132</b>	<b>1,16</b>

### The European Commission re-launches the "Prioritized Action Framework" (PAF) tool.

During a recent meeting of the Commission Expert Group on the Habitat and Birds Directive held on 7 November 2017, the European Commission's Environment DG, as part of its work on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, decided together with the Member States to re-launch the use of the "Prioritized Action Framework" (PAF) tool.

The Commission is currently carrying out a spending review – a systematic analysis of the programmes currently in the EU budget – as the basis for a preliminary discussion on the future of post-2020 funds. The formal debate on the next Multiannual Financial Framework should begin with the European Council of December 2017; the Commission's proposal on the modalities and fields of application for the next funding period is expected in 2018, to be followed by legislative proposals for the individual funds. The Environment DG deems it opportune to begin working immediately on updating the PAF format, in order to be ready once the new programmes are being put together.

The updating of the PAF format is in line with the goals of the recent Action Plan adopted by the European Commission on 27 April 2017. [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/efe/themes/nature-and-biodiversity/new-eu-action-plan-nature-people-and-economy\\_it](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/efe/themes/nature-and-biodiversity/new-eu-action-plan-nature-people-and-economy_it)

Action 8 of the Plan already highlights the need to update PAFs for the next financial framework, in part in order to address the conclusions and specific recommendations of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) in its special report on the implementation of the Natura 2000 network of February 2017.

<https://www.eca.europa.eu/it/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=40768>

In order to adapt the PAF format, the Commission is taking into consideration the experience acquired during the 2014-2020 budget; an audit highlighted certain problems in integrating PAF measures within the Programmes.

The new PAF format should be completed by early 2018, so that the rest of the year can be used to collect the data needed by the Member States and regions to draft the new PAFs and begin the consultation process, so that they may be presented to the Commission during the course of 2019.

### Forests

On 27 September 2017, Brussels hosted a meeting on: "Implementing Natura 2000 in forests: lessons learned and looking ahead".

This is a particularly significant topic in light of the fact that the Natura 2000 Network covers about 18% of the land area of Europe, and about 50% of this total comprises forests.

The issues discussed included:

- The status of biodiversity in European forests
- The implementation of the Natura 2000 Network in forests and available knowledge on its effects on biodiversity and forest management
- Focus on the most relevant policy conclusions that can be drawn for the future management of the Natura 2000 Network
- Presentation of the results of a European by interdisciplinary scientific study carried out by a team of 20 scientists under the aegis of the 20 European Forest Institute (EFI) "Natura 2000 and Forests: Assessing the State of Implementation and Effectiveness"

The study lays out a rather complex and structured situation, and on the basis of in-depth analyses it provides a series of policy, administrative, and operational "recommendations" for the European forestry sector as a way to solve the problems that have emerged.

[http://www.efi.int/files/attachments/publications/wsctu7\\_2017.pdf](http://www.efi.int/files/attachments/publications/wsctu7_2017.pdf)

### A date has been set for the bilateral meeting with the European Commission for verifying progress in the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directive and of the Natura 2000 Network in Italy

On 12-13 February 2018 a bilateral meeting will be held with the European Commission (DG Environment) to identify the main obstacles preventing the Birds and Habitats Directive from being implemented and to find concrete solutions to remove such obstacles. The meeting will also be an opportunity for identifying and sharing key actions to improve the implementation of the Directives which will be transposed into a roadmap with milestones and results expected. The initiative is part of Action 5 – "Action Plan for nature, people and the economy" - adopted in April 2017 by the European Commission as a strategic response to the problems highlighted by the Fitness check of the Birds and Habitats Directive. The aim of the meeting is to hold an open discussion on the processes under way in our Country, but above all to examine the criticalities and specific problems Italy faces - at both national and local levels – when it comes to fully implementing the provisions of the Directives. The meeting, which envisages a first session expressly dedicated to a consultation with the stakeholders and a second session with the Regions and Ministries affected by the Nature Directives, is structured to be practical and operational and geared to working out solutions jointly with the European Commission and at defining a timetable for actions as we move ahead.

### Meeting of the Joint Committee for the National Biodiversity Strategy

The meeting of the Joint Committee for the National Biodiversity Strategy was held on 28 December 2017 during which the meeting the **Third Strategy Report** was approved. The Report will be presented at the State-Regions Conference and will soon be available on: <http://www.minambiente.it/pagina/documenti-e-atti>

## NATURA 2000 Italia informa

### EDITORIAL TEAM:

Maria Carmela Giarratano, Laura Pettiti

### CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE:

Enrico Calvario, Mattia Bertocchi, Susanna D'Antoni, Gabriele De Filippo,

Francesca Pani, Gianluca Salogni, Tommaso Sitzia.

**THIS NEWSLETTER IS AVAILABLE IN ITALIAN AND IN ENGLISH.**

and in the website of the Ministry of Environment and Territorial Protection at:

<http://www.minambiente.it/home>

[\\_it/menu.html?mp=/menu/menu\\_attivita/&m=Rete\\_Natura\\_2000.html|Documenti\\_di\\_riferimento.html](#)

Reproduction is authorized, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.

**GRAPHIC DESIGN:** Sagg, Roma

**PRINTING:** Dicembre 2017