



European
Commission

Nature and Biodiversity Newsletter

Number 51 | February 2022



NATURA 2000

ISSN 2443-7727



Protecting 30% of the EU for Nature and People

Environment

Natura 2000
nature and biodiversity
newsletter
February 2022

CONTENTS

- 3–7**
Protecting 30% of the EU
for Nature
- 8–9**
Natura 2000 barometer
- 10–13**
The new EU Forest Strategy
- 14–16**
Natura News



Virginijus Sinkevičius, on the left, and Vera Coelho, Senior Director for Advocacy in Europe at Oceana, during the handover of the petition “Stop destroying our oceans”.

Editorial

At the start of this key year for nature, let us have a quick stocktaking of where we are and what we have achieved in the last year. I am pleased to report that we have progressed with many of the essential building blocks of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. By the end of last year we had completed almost a quarter of the over 100 actions envisaged in the Strategy.

In March 2021, the Commission adopted an EU Action Plan on Organic Farming, to help steer Member States' efforts towards the target of having 25% of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030. In July, we published the EU Forest Strategy to improve the quantity and quality of EU forests (see article), followed by the EU Soil Strategy in November, which proposed concrete measures to achieve healthy soils by 2050.

Meeting the ambitious targets for nature conservation and restoration under the Biodiversity Strategy could be challenging. To help Member States and stakeholders in this task, we produced various guidance documents: on identifying and designating additional areas to reach the 30% protected areas target (see article), on improving the conservation status of habitats and species of EU importance and on dismantling barriers along all Europe's rivers in order to reach at least 25,000 km of free flowing rivers in the EU by 2030.

We have also actively engaged the public with the launch of our 3 billion additional trees pledge and MapMyTree counter. The response has been tremendous. By the end of 2021, already 1 million additional trees have been planted across the EU. We also launched a new biodiversity governance framework with online tools for tracking progress in the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and a call for participation in the EU Biodiversity Platform – a new body that will govern the implementation of the Strategy.

Now it is Member States' turn to take these actions forward. We have set ourselves an ambitious agenda to 2030, and are determined to finally turn the corner on biodiversity loss. This will require all hands on deck, on all levels. We, at the Commission, will be there to guide and support every step of the way.

The year 2022 will be just as busy with our much awaited proposal for a Nature Restoration Law due to be published in Spring and a new global biodiversity accord under the Convention for Biological Diversity to be adopted by world leaders later in the year. We will tell you all about them in the next issue of the Newsletter, which will be dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Habitats Directive and the Natura 2000 Network.

Virginijus Sinkevičius
European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries



© Alex Mustard/naturepl.com



© Juan Carlos Muñoz/naturepl.com



© Alamy



© Bernard Castel/naturepl.com

Cover: Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*) male feeding on berries, Oulu, Finland.

© Markus Varesvuo/naturepl.com



The Pyreneen mountains Aragon, Spain. Only 3% of the EU's land is currently strictly protected.

Protecting 30% of the EU for Nature

“The Biodiversity Strategy commits Member States to protecting at least 30% of the EU's land area and 30% of its seas for nature by 2030.”

In May 2020, the European Commission adopted a new EU Biodiversity Strategy setting out a comprehensive package of actions and commitments to redouble Europe's efforts to protect and restore biodiversity by 2030.

The Strategy aims to consolidate efforts and ensure the full implementation of existing EU legislation, whilst filling any remaining policy gaps. It also sets out an enhanced governance framework to mobilise all sectors of society at local, regional, national and European level and so enable a truly transformative change.

The first pillar of the Biodiversity Strategy deals with the protection of nature in the EU. It recognises that, thanks to the Natura 2000 network, Europe already has a strong legal framework to protect its most valuable, rare and

threatened species and habitats across 27 countries.

However, as recent studies have demonstrated, this, in itself, is not enough to safeguard Europe's biodiversity. The existing network of protected areas needs to be further expanded, reconnected and effectively managed so that it

becomes a truly coherent Trans-European Nature Network.

The Biodiversity Strategy therefore commits Member States to protecting at least 30% of the EU's land area and 30% of its seas for nature by 2030. At least one third of this (10% of land and 10% of sea) should be strictly protected. All

Pillar I: Protecting Nature in the EU

Key commitments by 2030

1. Legally protect a minimum of 30% of the EU's land area and 30% of the EU's sea area and integrate ecological corridors, as part of a true Trans-European Nature Network.
2. Strictly protect at least a third of the EU's protected areas, including all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests.
3. Effectively manage all protected areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures, and monitoring them appropriately.

protected areas should also have clearly defined conservation objectives and measures and be effectively managed and monitored to avoid that they become mere 'paper parks' with no real impact on the ground.

As the targets are voluntary it is up to each country to do its fair share and honour their political commitments. If however, by 2024, Member States have not made sufficient progress in designating protected areas, the EU will investigate whether stronger actions, including EU legislation, are needed.

Distance to target

Currently, the Natura 2000 network covers 18% of the EU's land and 8% of its seas. There are however large differences between Member States and between biogeographical regions.

According to the EEA's inventory of protected areas (CDDA), an additional 8% of land and 3% of sea has been protected nationally. Member States will therefore need to collectively designate a further 4% of their land and 19% of their seas in order to reach the 30% EU target.

As for strictly protected areas, the data is very limited but if the IUCN Protected Area management categories Ia, Ib, and II are used as a proxy, it can be estimated that only around 3% of the land and 1% of the sea in the EU is strictly protected.

So, while the first target should be fairly easy to achieve, the strict protection target may be much more challenging and will require major efforts on the part of all countries, both on land and at sea.

Commission guidance

The responsibility for the identification, designation and management of protected areas lies with the Member States. The Commission's role is therefore essentially one of guidance and facilitation, starting with the

preparation of guidelines on the criteria to be used by Member States in identifying and designating further protected areas to meet the EU level target.

The guidance also includes a definition of strict protection as well as recommendations for ensuring the overall coherence and connectivity of the trans-European network.

During the course of 2020 and 2021, several meetings were held with Member States and stakeholders to reach a common understanding on the target and the criteria to be used for designating protected areas. This led to the publication of a Commission Staff Working Paper in January 2022.

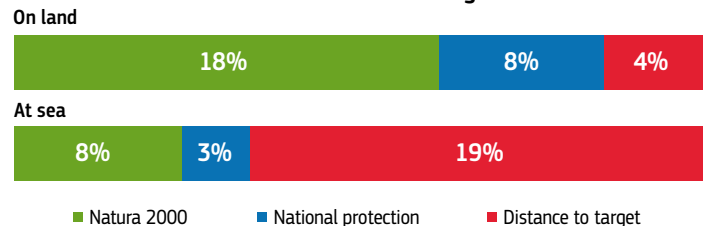
The first question examined concerns the breakdown of the EU level target. The ideal situation would be for every Member State to protect 30% of its land for nature. However, recognising that there are significant differences in both the quality and quantity of biodiversity in different countries, it was deemed more appropriate to apply the 30% target to each of the biogeographical and marine regions instead.

Regarding the ecological criteria to be used, the guidance specifies that nationally protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (known as OECMs) must meet a minimum set of criteria to be counted towards the 30% target.

Unlike Natura 2000 sites, some areas are protected at the national level for reasons other than nature conservation and do not necessarily have a mechanism in place for ensuring the areas are effectively conserved and managed. All existing protected areas should therefore be screened first to check whether they meet these minimum criteria.

As for identifying new protected areas, the guidance recalls the significant amount of work that has already been done

30% Protected area target



to identify areas of importance for biodiversity in Europe. This includes, for instance, BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and IUCN's Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) as well as the European and National Red lists of species and habitats, all of which provide a good scientific basis to guide the selection of additional areas for protection. Similar guidelines exist for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) under the various regional seas conventions.

Annex III of the Habitats Directive also sets out criteria for identifying special areas of conservation that can be used for habitat types and species not covered by the Directive.

It is worth noting however that there is a broad agreement among conservation scientists that the Natura 2000 network's effectiveness, in its present form, is limited by the fact that it often includes areas that are too small, too disconnected from one another and not adequately managed to be effective in

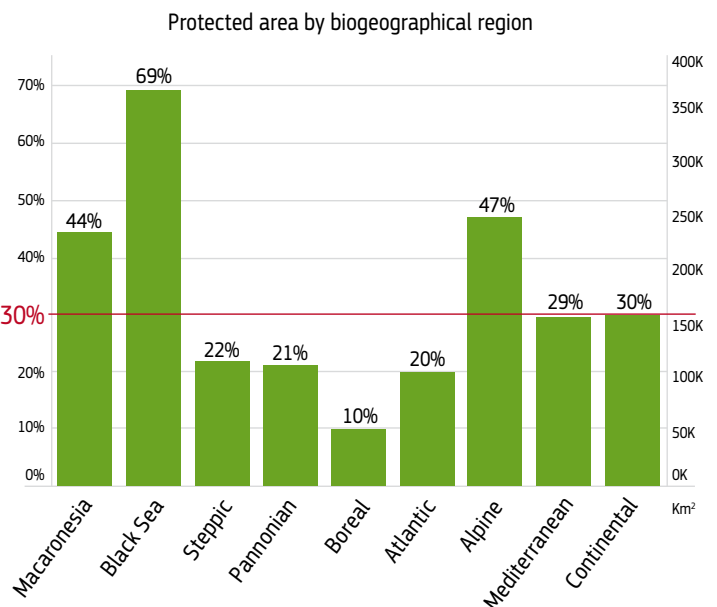
terms of nature conservation. Providing protection for more areas that are small and disconnected will therefore not be enough to reach the ambition of the strategy according to the Commission's guidance.

Types of protected areas

Clearly, the Natura 2000 Network will remain the core of the Trans European Nature Network. The first step is therefore to designate further Natura 2000 sites in order to complete the Network. This is especially important in the offshore marine environment where significant gaps remain.

As regards areas to be protected under national schemes, there is clear merit in considering further designations for species and habitats covered by EU nature legislation, even if these will not subsequently be included in the Natura 2000 Network. Such designations could, for instance, include areas that are contiguous to

Protected areas cover 25.8% of the EU land area (1 068 600 km²)



existing Natura 2000 sites and that can increase the size of the area under protection or help reconnect neighbouring protected areas.

Member States should also examine the need to protect habitats and species not covered by EU legislation, especially those identified in European or national Red Lists. As mentioned above, the existing IBA and KBA listings can also be used to identify further high biodiversity areas that deserve protection at national level.

Regarding the marine environment, it is recognised that the number of marine habitat types and species listed in the Habitats Directive is very limited. So, other marine protected areas will need to be designated in order to cover a much larger proportion of Europe's rich marine biodiversity and meet the 30% target at sea.

In this context, the marine species and habitats listed in Annex I of the Technical Measures Regulation under the Common Fisheries Policy could be prioritised as this will also significantly contribute to achieving the legal requirements

of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Finally, consideration should be given to the links between biodiversity protection and climate change. Priority could be given, for instance, to protecting ecosystems that contribute to mitigating or adapting to climate change (e.g. peatlands, coastal wetlands, seagrass meadows.), or that are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and need to be made more resilient.

Management effectiveness

The designation of protected areas can only contribute to the overall goal of the strategy, to put biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030, if these areas are adequately and effectively managed and are not allowed to deteriorate.

The Biodiversity Strategy specifies that all protected areas must have clearly identified conservation objectives and measures. According to the Commission guidance conservation objectives must be based on sound science and must specifically address

Priorities for protection

- Areas needed to complete the Natura 2000 network
- Areas that increase the coherence of the network and connectivity of Natura 2000 sites
- Areas that protect species or habitats considered threatened or vulnerable and in need of protection at the national level
- Areas contributing to mitigating or adapting to climate change

the ecological requirements of each area. They should also be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) and regularly monitored to check their effectiveness.

Additionally, Member States should put in place the necessary governance systems and allocate sufficient resources to ensure that all protected areas, whether in Natura 2000 or under national protection schemes, are adequately managed and monitored.

Strict protection

The second part of the target concerns the need to strictly protect 10% of the EU for nature. As the Biodiversity

Strategy explains, strict protection should be applied to areas of very high biodiversity value, such as all remaining primary and old-growth forests. The strategy also highlights the need to strictly protect significant areas of other carbon-rich ecosystems, such as peatlands, grasslands, wetlands, mangroves and seagrass meadows.

The Commission guidance defines strictly protected areas as: *“fully and legally protected areas designated to conserve and/or restore the integrity of biodiversity-rich natural areas with their underlying ecological structure and supporting natural environmental processes.*

What are OECMS?

The Biodiversity Strategy calls on the Commission's guidance to indicate how other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) can contribute to the targets. According to the Convention on Biological Diversity an OECM is defined as “a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values”. OECMs may therefore include areas that only indirectly promote the conservation of biodiversity.

The Commission guidance recommends that OECMs be counted towards the EU target if:

- the area is covered by a national or international legal or administrative act or a contractual arrangement achieving long-term conservation outcomes
- conservation objectives and measures are in place; and
- the area will be effectively managed and monitored for biodiversity.



All remaining primary and old growth forests should be strictly protected.

What is legal protection?

Although this is not defined in the Biodiversity Strategy, according to the guidance the term “legal protection” is understood as meaning either formal legal designation, an administrative act or contractual means. The guidance also states that temporary formal or informal mechanisms do not effectively contribute to reaching the ambition of the strategy. There must be a long-term commitment to protect specific areas of land and sea.

The 30% improvement target – stepping up efforts for protected species and habitats

The Biodiversity Strategy also calls on Member States to raise the level of implementation of existing legislation, within clear deadlines – notably as regards the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, the Water Framework Directive, Floods Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

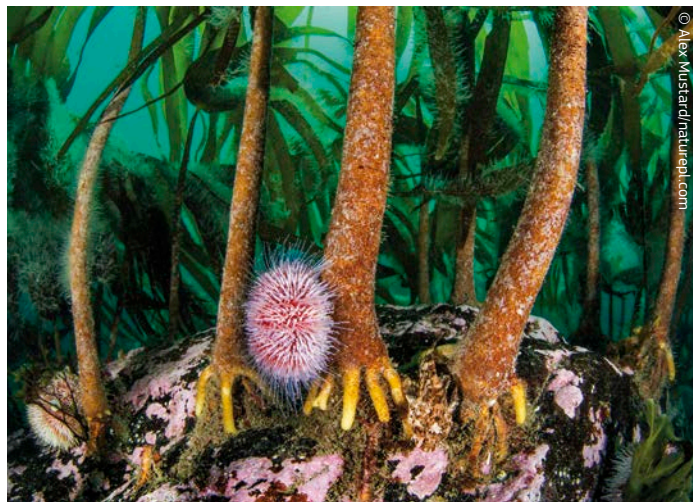
In this context, the strategy calls on Member States to ensure that, by 2030, there is no further deterioration in conservation trends and status of habitats and species protected by the EU Nature Directives. In addition, Member States must ensure that at least 30% of species and habitats, not currently in a favourable status, reach that category or show a strong positive trend by 2030.

In contrast to the protected areas target, the so-called 30% improvement target needs to be met by each Member State individually. National pledges under this target will therefore need to list all species and habitats for which Member States intends to achieve a strong positive trend by 2030, together with a description of the measures that need to be put in place to achieve the desired restoration outcome.

The process for achieving this target is the same as the one used for the 30% protected areas target: following the publication of the relevant Commission Guidance in June 2021 and the organisation of introductory seminars in December 2021, Member States have now until the end of 2022 to submit their national pledges.

Thereafter, the Member States’ pledges will be reviewed in the same biogeographical seminars to be organised by the Commission during the first half of 2023, to ensure that their ambition is sufficient.

Commission Guidance on the 30% improvement target available on: <https://bit.ly/3mZwonM>



Reaching the biodiversity 30% protection target will be especially challenging for the marine environment.

Natural processes are therefore left essentially undisturbed from human pressures and threats to the area's overall ecological structure and functioning, independently of whether those pressures and threats are located inside or outside the strictly protected area”.

The condition that natural processes should be left essentially undisturbed by human pressures and threats means that many strictly protected areas will be non-intervention areas, where only limited and well-controlled activities that either do not interfere with natural processes or enhance them will be allowed.

Such activities may include scientific research, natural disaster prevention (e.g. wildfires), invasive alien species control, non-intrusive

activities and installations, non-intrusive and strictly controlled recreational activities, when such activities are compatible with the conservation objectives of the areas on the basis of a case by case assessment.

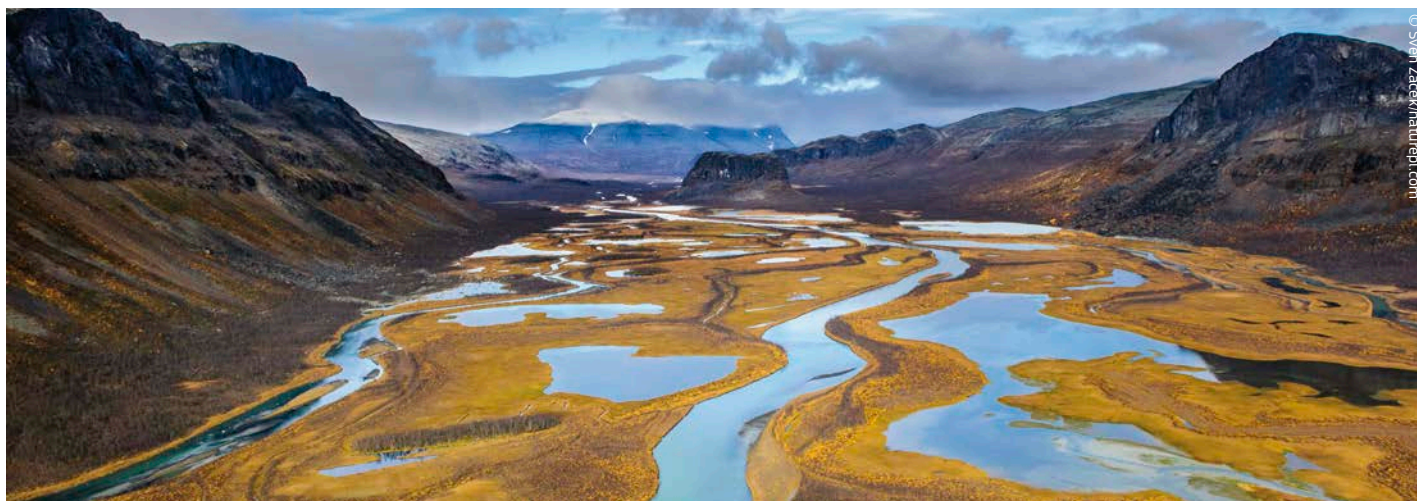
But, strictly protected areas can also concern areas in which active management sustains or enhances natural processes, such as semi-natural grasslands that require regular mowing or grazing to maintain their high biodiversity value.

Activities authorised in strictly protected areas should also include those that are necessary for the restoration of the natural values of the areas in question.

The areas under strict protection must be functionally meaningful. For instance, the areas should be large enough, in themselves or in association



Member States must ensure that at least 30% of species not currently in a favourable conservation status, reach that category or show a strong positive trend by 2030.



© Sven Zacek/naturepl.com

The Rapa River Delta, Rapadalen Sarek National Park, Sweden. Few wilderness areas remain in the EU where natural processes are allowed to run their course.

with buffer zones, for key natural processes to take place essentially undisturbed. This is especially important for areas that can be restored naturally by stopping or limiting existing pressures from human activities.

Next steps

Now that the guidelines are in place, Member States can start to work on identifying the areas. They have until the end of 2022 to submit their pledges to the Commission.

For each area or group of areas, they will be asked to explain the criteria used for their identification, the scientific evidence supporting their selection and the mechanism that will be put in place to ensure their adequate management and monitoring. Member States should also

explain how their 'pledges' will contribute to reaching the 30% EU target.

In order to kick off this so-called 'pledge and review' process, the Commission organised a first series of introductory seminars – one for the marine and another for the terrestrial environment – in December. The purpose was to explain both the guidelines and the process to a much wider audience and to allow for a first exchange of experiences and ideas on how to identify and prioritise the selection of new protected areas for the EU level target.

Then, once the Member States' pledges have been submitted by the end of 2022, the Commission will organise a series of biogeographical seminars in early 2023 to review them at the level of each

biogeographical region in order to check whether the proposed areas are ecologically coherent and collectively meet the 30%/10% target.

The Commission will ensure that the biogeographical seminars are conducted in an open and transparent manner so that all those who have a role to play in the process, be they Member State authorities, stakeholders, non-governmental organisations, scientists or site managers, are given an opportunity to be involved from the outset.

On the basis of the conclusions of the biogeographical seminars, Member States may need to revise their pledges. At the same time they need to work on protecting the areas thus identified with a view to ensuring

that they are adequately managed and monitored by 2030 at the latest.

Finally, as stated before, if by the end of 2024, the Commission considers that there is insufficient progress in meeting the EU level target it will examine whether stronger actions, including EU legislation, is needed. But in the first instance all efforts will be placed on achieving the EU level target voluntarily and in light of the political commitments taken by all Member States.

Commission guidance on protected areas target is available on:

<https://bit.ly/340oILB>

Further information on the pledge and review process is available on the EEA website <https://biodiversity.europa.eu/protected-areas>

Protected areas “pledge and review” time line

End 2021	Introductory seminars for the marine and terrestrial environments.
End 2022	Member States submit their pledges to the Commission.
1 st semester 2023	The Commission organises a series of biogeographical seminars to review the pledges and identify any potential gaps that should be addressed.
2 nd semester 2023	Evaluation of progress towards reaching the 30%/10% EU level targets.
2024	The Commission will check if progress in designating areas is sufficient or whether stronger actions, including EU legislation, are needed.
2025–2030	Member States designate the protected areas and ensure their effective management and monitoring.

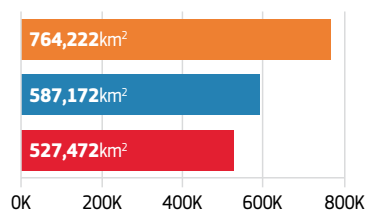
natura 2000

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 **December 2020**.

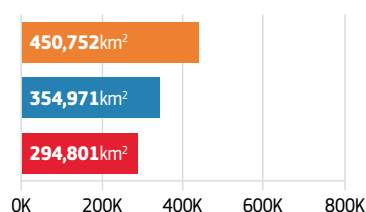
The Natura 2000 network is composed of sites under the Habitats Directive (pSCI, SCIs or SACs – labelled 'SCIs' in the barometer) and sites under the Birds Directive (SPAs). The figures relating to the total area of Natura 2000 sites (i.e. SPAs + SCIs) have been obtained through GIS analysis. This avoids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

Natura 2000 in EU-27

Terrestrial area



Marine area



■ Natura 2000
■ SCI
■ SPA

Member States	Natura 2000 network (terrestrial and marine)		TERRESTRIAL			
	Total N° Natura 2000 Sites	Total area Natura 2000 km²	SCI	SPA	Natura 2000 network	
			SCI area (km²)	SPA area (km²)	Natura area (km²)	% land area covered
AUSTRIA	352	12895	9378	10334	12895	15%
BELGIUM	310	5211	3284	3189	3894	13%
BULGARIA	341	41554	33629	25609	38728	35%
CYPRUS	63	10145	959	1544	1680	30%
CZECH REPUBLIC	1154	11149	7952	7035	11149	14%
GERMANY	5200	80831	33550	40263	55228	15%
DENMARK	350	22647	3178	2605	3594	8%
ESTONIA	567	14861	7806	6203	8106	18%
SPAIN	1857	222487	118282	102202	138083	27%
FINLAND	1875	50640	42200	24545	42498	13%
FRANCE	1755	203718	48893	44039	71030	13%
GREECE	446	58778	21912	27761	35982	27%
CROATIA	783	25954	16036	17050	20716	37%
HUNGARY	525	19949	14442	13747	19949	21%
IRELAND	604	19481	7162	4311	9225	13%
ITALY	2636	79074	43007	40326	57354	19%
LITHUANIA	557	9748	6461	5529	8185	13%
LUXEMBOURG	66	702	416	418	702	27%
LATVIA	333	11833	7421	6606	7446	12%
MALTA	55	4184	41	16	42	13%
NETHERLANDS	197	20585	3118	4771	5495	15%
POLAND	999	68457	34266	48428	61220	20%
PORTUGAL	167	61402	15661	9196	18968	21%
ROMANIA	606	60577	40310	37118	54214	23%
SWEDEN	4099	75796	55023	26455	55534	12%
SLOVENIA	355	7682	6634	5066	7672	38%
SLOVAKIA	683	14633	6151	13105	14633	30%
EU – 27	26935	1214974	587172	527472	764222	17.46%

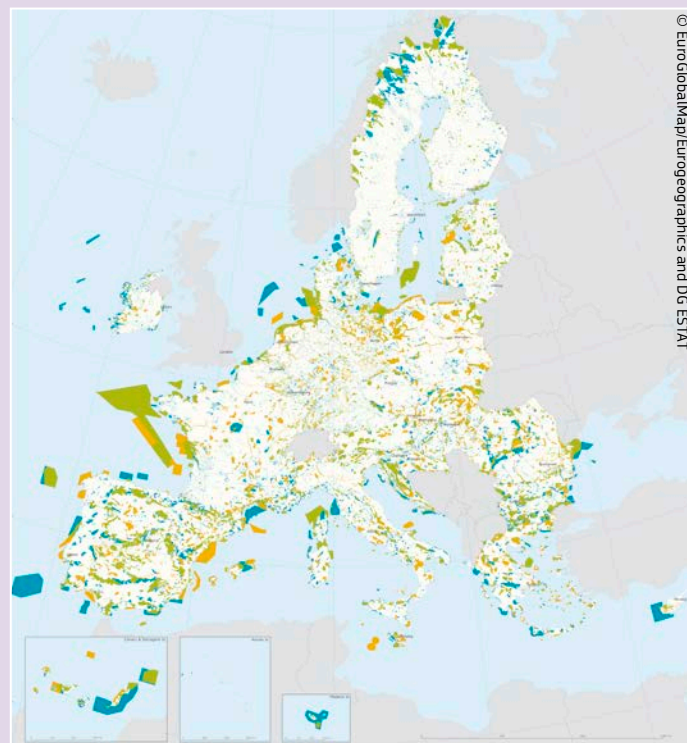
The United Kingdom withdrew from the European Union as of 1 February 2020.

barometer

	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
	1178	316	1317	BE
	2482	550	2827	BG
	8464	110	8464	CY
	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	CZ
	20938	19738	25603	DE
	16492	12184	19053	DK
	3883	6480	6754	EE
	54895	52071	84405	ES
	7700	7142	8142	FI
	106306	119645	132688	FR
	17528	10764	22798	GR
	4919	1112	5238	HR
	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	HU
	9782	1660	10256	IE
	↗↗ 14335	↗↗ 13674	↗↗ 21720	IT
	958	1056	1563	LT
	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	LU
	2664	4280	4398	LV
	2283	3221	4142	MT
	12081	8627	15090	NL
	4339	7224	7237	PL
	37377	8749	42434	PT
	6188	1630	6362	RO
	20175	14448	20243	SE
	4	9	10	SI
	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	SK
	354971	294801	450752	EU

- ↗** Small increase in 2019
- ↗↗** Moderate increase in 2019
- ↗↗↗** Substantial increase in 2019

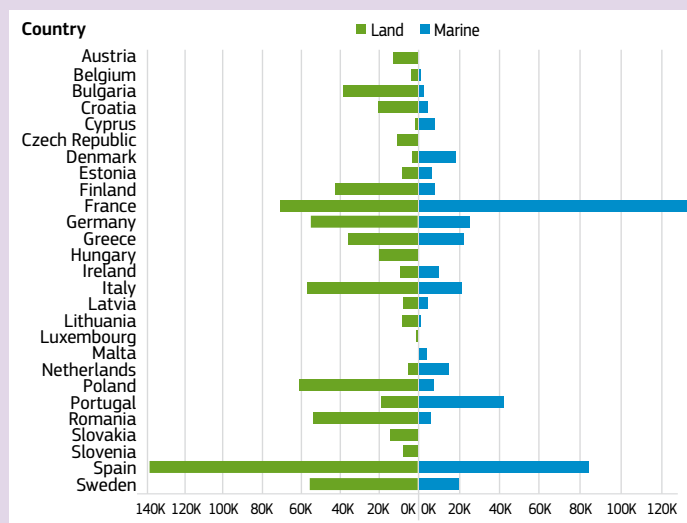
The Natura 2000 network – status December 2020



Natura 2000 – European Union

- Sites – or parts of sites –belonging to both Directives
- Birds Directive sites (SPA)
- Habitats Directive sites (pSCI, SCI, SAC)

Natura 2000 land and marine area





© Juan Carlos Wundt/istock.com

Native tree afforestation, Miera Valley, Valles Pasiegos, Cantabria, Spain.

The new EU Forest Strategy

“Only 3% of the EU’s forested land are still truly natural, such areas are vital biodiversity reservoirs”

In July 2021, the European Commission adopted a new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 which sets out a vision for increasing both the quantity and quality of forests in the EU while strengthening their protection, restoration and resilience. The Strategy also promotes a multifunctional approach to forests where the EU’s biodiversity and climate dimension work synergistically with a forest-based bioeconomy.

As one of the flagship initiatives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and European Green Deal, the strategy is part of the package of measures proposed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 and achieve climate neutrality in the EU by 2050.

Forests and other wooded areas cover 43.5% of the EU’s land area and are of vital importance for Europe’s

economy, culture and people’s wellbeing. They provide a wealth of ecosystem services and are an essential ally in the fight against climate change, acting as carbon sinks and offering protection against the devastating effects of extreme weather events. In addition, these highly complex habitats host a significant proportion of Europe’s biodiversity.

For the last two decades, the total forest area in the EU has grown thanks to natural processes, afforestation and active restoration, but this has not stemmed the rate of total tree cover loss or the further decline of forest ecosystems. More than half of the 81 forest habitats protected under the Habitats Directive, for instance, currently have an unfavourable conservation status. Alone, they make up a quarter of all forested areas in the EU.

Global warming has also induced changes in forest ecosystems, and large forest areas in the EU have been affected in the last few years by unprecedented bark beetle outbreaks, severe droughts, and new wildfire patterns.

One of the key objectives of the new EU Forest Strategy is therefore to promote more biodiversity and climate-friendly forest management, afforestation and restoration practices that will strengthen forest resilience and help them adapt to the changing climate.

The other main objective is to promote a strong and sustainable forest-based bioeconomy that is compatible with the EU’s climate targets and biodiversity objectives.

These objectives will be supported by a better monitoring of the state of Europe’s forests, stronger links with the research



© Alamy

Siberian flying squirrel (*Pteromys volans*) eating leaves, Finland.



Vast swathes of forests were lost in Greece in Summer 2021 during the extreme heat wave.



The fire salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*) a typical woodland species found in healthy deciduous forests across the EU.

and innovation agenda and a more inclusive and coherent EU forest governance framework, all of which is in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

Protecting and restoring EU's forests

The strategy reaffirms the need to strictly protect the last remaining primary and old-growth forests in the EU, as foreseen under the EU Biodiversity Strategy. While only 3% of the EU's forested land fall in this category, such areas are vital biodiversity reservoirs. They also store significant amounts of carbon.

Additionally, the strategy sets out a series of actions to promote more climate and biodiversity friendly forest management practices to diversify Europe's forests and improve their resilience, both at

the level of individual forests and on a wider landscape scale. This could, for instance, involve management practices that encourage uneven-aged and continuous-cover forestry, with sufficient amounts of deadwood, and the inclusion of protected habitat patches or set aside areas in production forests.

The aim is to encourage a shift away from unsustainable practices, such as clear felling or the planting of fast growing short-lived crops, which should only be used in duly justified cases, and instead move towards establishing a more resilient forest resource that is genetically and functionally diverse and better adapted to its natural environment.

While sustainable forest management is already embraced by a number of forest owners and managers,

the Strategy aims to render such practices more common place and widespread across Europe, thereby strengthening the multifunctional role of forests while at the same time maximising their contribution to the EU's agreed climate and biodiversity objectives.

In this context, the Commission is currently developing guidelines on 'closer to nature forestry' in collaboration with Member State authorities and stakeholders. Once adopted, and depending on the interest shown, the Commission will set up a voluntary certification scheme so that the most biodiversity friendly forest practices can apply an EU quality label.

The Forest Strategy also accords particular attention to the need to extend Europe's forest coverage through active and sustainable re- and

afforestation schemes and tree planting initiatives. In this regard, the Commission together with the Member States will develop guidelines on biodiversity friendly reforestation and afforestation.

This should link up with the Commission's forthcoming proposal for legally binding nature restoration targets under a new EU Nature Restoration Law.

In addition, the Strategy provides a roadmap for implementing the pledge made by Member States under the EU Biodiversity Strategy to plant at least 3 billion additional trees by 2030 in full respect of ecological principles.

Boosting a sustainable forest-based bioeconomy

Sustainable raw wood and non-wood materials and products are key to the EU's transition to a climate-neutral economy.

The three pillars of the EU Forest Strategy

Protect and restore forests	A sustainable forest-based bioeconomy	Supporting and enabling measures
Protect the EU's last remaining primary and old growth forests	Promote sustainable forest bioeconomy and especially long lived wood products	Improve monitoring of the state of Europe's forests and the EU-wide integrated forest monitoring framework
Promote more climate and biodiversity friendly forest management practices including closer-to-nature forestry	Ensure sustainable use of wood based resources for bioenergy	Assist Member States in developing national or regional Strategic Plans for their forests
Re- and afforest biodiverse forests, including the planting of 3 billion additional trees by 2030	Promote a non-wood forest-based bioeconomy, including ecotourism	Create a more inclusive and coherent EU forest governance framework
Provide financial incentives for forest owners and managers to improve the quality and quantity of forests in the EU	Develop skills and empower people to transition to a sustainable forest-based bioeconomy	Promote strong research and innovation agenda to improve knowledge of forests

Three billion additional trees by 2030

Under the EU Biodiversity Strategy, Member States have pledged to plant at least 3 billion additional trees by 2030 as part of Europe's efforts to fight climate change and biodiversity loss. The initiative will also help raise public awareness and encourage all sectors of society, including the general public, to join in and do their part.

To get the process going, the Commission adopted a roadmap in July 2021, which sets out the criteria to be respected when planting trees as part of the initiative. For instance, only trees that benefit biodiversity and the climate, and that are additional to the 'business as usual' scenario, will be counted. The overall goal is to plant the right tree in the right place for the right purpose. This should be done in full respect of ecological principles so that the trees can grow healthily and reach full maturity.

The Commission will also track progress, provide technical support and develop a visual identity to publicise the pledge. This will include a labelling scheme to give recognition to those who participate. A new monitoring tool – MapMyTree – has already been launched to enable all organisations to join the pledge, map their planted trees and check progress towards the EU target.

Full details on https://ec.europa.eu/environment/3-billion-trees_en



© Rosalind Hodinott 2020/VISION/naturepl.com

The Forest Strategy therefore proposes a set of actions to foster a strong forest-based bioeconomy, ensuring thriving rural areas and promoting the multifunctionality of forests. In this regard, it aims at promoting the sustainable use of wood and encourage a non-wood forest-based economy.

The construction sector has an important role to play here, for

instance by substituting carbon intensive and fossil-based products with long-lived wood-based materials. The aim is to help turn the construction sector from a source of greenhouse gas emissions into a carbon sink.

Also, as part of the review of the construction products Regulation, the Commission will establish a standard, robust and transparent methodology

The Pro silva initiative

Pro Silva is a European federation of foresters that promotes sustainable forest management based on natural processes. It regularly organises regional workshops to exchange information and experiences on different close to nature forestry practices. In addition, it has set up hundreds of demonstration forests to showcase different techniques for conserving, regenerating or improving existing forests at different stages of stand development and across a wide range of stand types.

<https://www.prosilva.org/close-to-nature-forestry/exemplary-forests/>

to quantify the climate benefits of wood construction products and other building materials. This should help stimulate the demand for sustainably harvested long-lived wood products in all relevant downstream industries.

Short-lived wood-based products still have a role to play, especially in substituting their fossil-based counterparts. However, as the Strategy explains, only wood that is unsuitable for long-lived materials and products should be used.

Rather than increasing wood harvests from forests, priority should be given to better using, reusing and recycling all wood-based products, in line with the EU's new Circular Economy Action Plan and the 'cascading principle'. This will help to maintain wood-based products longer in the economy and multiply their potential uses.

In line with the 2018 Renewable Energy Directive, the Forest Strategy recognises the need to further strengthen the sustainability safeguards of biomass-based energy, while wood currently supplies 60% of EU's renewable energy use. Bioenergy should continue to play a major role for increasing the share of renewable sources in the energy mix of Member States, although such biomass should be produced sustainably and used in line with the cascading principle. For instance,

the use of whole trees for energy production should be minimized.

For its part, the Commission will continue to analyse the impact of the national support schemes on biomass supply and demand, its impacts on biodiversity and carbon sinks, and possible market distortions, and will assess the possibility for further limitations regarding support schemes to forest biomass.

Lastly, the strategy underlines the importance of promoting non wood-based bioeconomy, including recreation and ecotourism, as a means of diversifying revenues in rural areas and creating co-benefits for climate and biodiversity. In this context, the Commission will promote the elaboration of national and regional programmes on the sustainable production of non-wood forest products, particularly in the relation with tourism and nature protection.

Financial incentives for forest owners

The Forest Strategy acknowledges that its ambitions can only be met if European forest owners and managers are fully engaged in the process and motivated to take action. Private forest owners and managers, especially those with small holdings, will need drivers and financial incentives to help them transition towards more biodiversity and climate friendly

forest management practices.

The Strategy encourages Member States to make better use of the funds available under the CAP and other EU funds in order to support biodiversity friendly re- and afforestation investments, and cover any costs and income foregone.

It also urges Member States to set up payment schemes to reward forest owners and managers for the many ecosystem services their forests provide society, in addition to

wood production. The estimated value of harvested non-wood products in Europe is €19.5 billion per year, with significant growth potential but, until now, such benefits have almost never been recognised or rewarded.

The Commission will provide advice and technical guidance on the development of payment schemes for ecosystem services. It will also promote its new carbon farming initiative to help land managers, including forest managers and owners

to adopt a new green business model that rewards climate- and environment-friendly practices, based on the climate benefits they provide.

Several other flanking measures are also proposed, for instance, to help forest managers and owners learn new skills and techniques that allow them to adapt their forestry practices, or to monitor the health of Europe's forests and develop a stronger forest-science partnership. Subject

to an impact assessment, the Commission will present a legislative proposal for a Forest Observation, Reporting and Data Collection framework. Through this, monitoring of EU forests will be improved, and Member States will be asked to draw up national or regional Strategic Plans to develop an overall vision for their forests and forest sector over the next decades.

For more information on The EU forest Strategy for 2030: <https://bit.ly/31uqKCu>



© Lorc Podewil/naturepl.com

New Governance framework for the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 called for the setting up of a new EU biodiversity governance framework to ensure that the EU delivers on its biodiversity commitments. The aim is to constantly improve the knowledge and evidence base for biodiversity policy, increase accountability for implementation, ensure transparent and effective progress monitoring and review, and engage stakeholders across the board in the efforts to deliver the EU biodiversity targets over the coming years.

A core component of the new framework is an updated and

improved structure of Commission expert groups, under the coordination of the EU Biodiversity Platform (EUBP). In December, the Commission announced a call for stakeholders to join the new EU Biodiversity Platform.

At the same time, it launched two new online tools to track progress in implementing the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Hosted by the EU Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity, an online actions tracker provides up-to-date information on the state of implementation of more than 100 actions of the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

A targets dashboard completes the picture by showing progress towards the quantified biodiversity targets identified in the Strategy, both at the EU level as well as in the Member States. The dashboard is in its prototype phase, starting with a set of seven indicators that will be further developed during 2022.

- Actions tracker: <https://bit.ly/3pXGWwr>
- Targets dashboard: <https://bit.ly/3pY8Ykr>
- EU Biodiversity Platform: <https://bit.ly/3GbJzIS>

natura news

● NEWS ● PUBLICATIONS ● EVENTS



© Doug Perrine/naturepl.com

Striped dolphins (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) Azores, Atlantic.

Conference on 30 years of Natura 2000

To mark the 30th anniversary of the Natura 2000 network, the French Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the European Commission are co-organising a high-level conference on 24th and 25th February 2022 in Strasbourg. The event offers an opportunity to take stock of the achievements of the Natura 2000 network and to consider its implementation in view of the targets in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and in particular the EU Nature Restoration Plan.

Participants will discuss how action to halt biodiversity loss

can be strengthened through the implementation of measures to improve the conservation status of species and habitats (both within and outside the Natura 2000 network), restore ecosystems and reduce pressures linked to human activities, extend the protected areas network, take action against climate change and mobilise adequate financing.

<https://bit.ly/3qkOv9W>

Guiding the strict protection of species

In October 2021, the Commission adopted an updated guidance document on the strict protection provisions of the Habitats Directive, following two rounds of consultation with

Member State authorities and stakeholders.

The guide examines the requirements of Articles 12, 13 and 16 in detail, summarising all EU Court of Justice rulings regarding their legal interpretation. A series of good practice examples are also highlighted to illustrate how conflicts between strictly protected species and human activities have been successfully addressed in different parts of the EU, especially in relation to large carnivores.

Following the adoption of the guide, the European Commissioners for Environment and Agriculture issued a joint letter to all respective Member State Ministers urging them to use the guidance to devise effective and pragmatic ways of applying the strict protection provisions to the species protected under the Habitats Directive. The letter also highlights the Commission's ongoing initiatives and funding opportunities for promoting the co-existence of large carnivores and humans.

Guidance document, brochure and video on:
<https://bit.ly/3njdWGY>

Derogations from strict protection requirements

Article 16 of the Habitats Directive and Article 9 of the Birds Directive provide for the possibility to derogate from the strict protection provisions of the Directives under certain specific circumstances, provided the derogation is fully justified and all the legal conditions are met.

Every two years – or every year in the case of the Birds Directive – Member States must report back to the European Commission on the derogations issued for a compliance check. The contents of the Member States derogation reports are now available in an on-line tool. Putting everything online not only makes the process more efficient and transparent, but allows for a more systematic analysis of the type of derogations issued and the species most commonly covered.

Online dashboards:
<https://bit.ly/3Ff6y5u>

Huntable bird species under the Birds Directive

Article 7(4) of the Birds Directive requires Member States to ensure that species listed in Annex II are not hunted during the rearing season or during the various stages of reproduction. In the case of migratory species, hunting should be prohibited during their period of reproduction or during their return to their rearing grounds.

In 1994, the European Court of Justice concluded that complete protection of huntable species must be guaranteed during these periods. The Commission has since conducted

Common hamster (*Cricetus cricetus*).



© Wild Wonders of Europe/Woah/naturepl.com



© Otava Opemans

Greater White-fronted goose (*Anser albifrons*).

regular reviews of best available information on the period of pre-nuptial migration and reproduction of the huntable species to assist Member States in deciding when to prohibit hunting. The latest update was published in November 2021.

<https://bit.ly/3K2u7Cf>

Methodological guide on the requirements of Article 6

In September 2021, the Commission published an updated methodological guide on the assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites under Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive.

Designed to complement the general guidance on Article 6, the document offers step-by-step advice for each stage of the assessment, supported by checklists, matrices and illustrations as well as practical examples and case studies. The guide also examines the issue of strategic planning and the assessment procedure for plans in particular, also in relation to other environmental assessment procedures.

<https://bit.ly/3ngBbl2>

New EU Soil Strategy

It is estimated that around 60 to 70% of soils in the EU are not healthy. Every year about 1 billion tons of soil is washed away by erosion, causing an estimated loss of agricultural production in the EU of €1.25 billion per year.

To address this major but often overlooked problem, the Commission adopted a new EU Soil Strategy in November 2021 which sets out an overall vision, accompanied by a comprehensive programme of measures, for the protection, restoration and sustainable use of soils. The ambition is to increase soil carbon in agricultural land, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, and ensure that by 2050, all soil ecosystems are in a healthy condition.

The Strategy also calls for the same level of protection for soils as for the marine environment and air in the EU. To achieve this, the Commission will propose a new Soil Health Law by 2023, following an impact assessment



© Nick Garbutt/naturepi.com

Apollo butterfly (*Parnassius apollo*), North Tyrol, Austria.

and broad consultation of stakeholders and Member States.

<https://bit.ly/3qkiheX>

8th European Action Programme

In October 2021, the Commission published its eighth European Action Programme, re-affirming its commitment to environmental and climate action until 2030. The 8th EAP sets out a coherent programme of measures across the EU for implementing the European Green Deal and accelerating Europe's transition to a climate-neutral, resource-efficient and regenerative economy.

Focussing on six priority objectives, the programme also calls for the active engagement of all stakeholders at all levels

of governance, to ensure that EU climate and environment laws are effectively implemented.

<https://bit.ly/3ff4kbb>

New LIFE projects

In November 2021, the Commission approved an investment package of more than €134 million for 39 new LIFE projects targeting nature and biodiversity actions. Examples include projects to save the Apollo butterfly in Poland, Czechia and Austria, promote recovery of the Saker falcon in Bulgaria, restore wetlands in Latvia and Lithuania, and connect nature through green infrastructure in Denmark.

A number of projects targeting climate change mitigation have also been adopted and

Sunrise over Klein Schietveld, Brasschaat, Belgium.



© Bernard Castelle/naturepi.com

will help conserve species and habitats protected under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. For example, while restoring the carbon sink function of degraded peatlands across five countries (Belgium, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Poland) the LIFE MULTI PEAT project will also contribute to nature conservation by raising groundwater levels. In addition the project will aim to develop replicable techniques for halting further significant emissions from degraded peatlands as well as create a peatland policy toolkit and a web portal for policymakers, climate change activists, nature experts, and the public.

Finally, the new call for standard action LIFE projects closed in November 2021. In total, 165 applications were received for nature and biodiversity from almost all EU countries, representing a total investment of €945 MEUR.

<https://bit.ly/3GoiVgP>

Natura 2000 award

40 applications were submitted for this year's prestigious Natura 2000 award. This is less than in the previous round, possibly due to COVID restrictions. Nevertheless, they showcase the breadth and diversity of Natura 2000 sites and the protected habitats and their species. The most popular categories were

once again 'conservation on land' and 'communication'.

The applications are currently being assessed with a view to selecting the finalists by March 2022 and announcing the winners at a High Level Award Ceremony in Brussels in May 2022. There will also be an opportunity for the public to vote again for their favourite project.

<https://bit.ly/35mw0cW>



The Natura 2000 logo

In June 2021, the Commission adopted a Decision on the use of the Natura 2000 logo, which sets the conditions under which Member States can receive a free licence to use the logo on goods and services in their territory. The contribution of such goods and services to the achievement of the site's conservation objectives is of key importance. A first agreement on the use of the logo was signed with the Minister for the Ecological Transition of Spain in December 2021.

Through this initiative, the Commission wishes to give greater recognition to the

benefits that Natura 2000 can bring to local economies and help build new partnerships between site managers, landowners and users, businesses at the local level.

<https://bit.ly/311L02K>

Ecosystems accounting in the EU

Despite the crucial role of ecosystems for our economy and society, there is yet no standardised system for measuring their quantity, condition and the services they provide. To close this gap, Eurostat in cooperation with other Commission services in partnership with and the European Environment Agency, have launched the EU INCA project to help develop an integrated system of natural capital and ecosystem services accounting for the EU.

In June 2021, the project published a report summarising key results to date. It also provides practical examples of how ecosystem services accounts can be used and applied to existing policies. Meanwhile the Commission's Joint Research Centre has also

developed a new methodology to unravel how ecosystem services flow from nature to our economy.

<https://bit.ly/3GpjpDv>
<https://bit.ly/3nmsUMa>

Report on the implementation of the Invasive Alien Species Regulation

In October 2021, the Commission published a first report on the application of the Invasive Alien Species Regulation.

The report reveals that steady progress has been made across the EU to tackle this ever-growing problem.

In particular, Member States have improved their capacity to prevent and manage alien species on the Union list and have increased awareness of the problem in their respective countries.

However, many challenges remain, especially due to the projected increase in global trade and travel, which together with climate change, will increase the risk of the spread of invasive alien species.

<https://bit.ly/3qiiPNE>

HERE IS HOW TO RECEIVE YOUR NEWSLETTER BY POST:

Subscribe @ <https://bit.ly/3x3WIWp>. The newsletter is available in English, French, Italian, German, Polish and Spanish.

The Natura 2000 Newsletter is produced by DG Environment, European Commission. Author: Kerstin Sundseth Ecosystems LTD, Brussels. Commission Editor: Sofia Pachini, DG Environment. Design: www.naturebureau.co.uk

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022. © European Union, 2022

Reuse is authorised provided the source is acknowledged. The reuse policy of European Commission documents is regulated by Decision 2011/833/EU (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39). For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the EU copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

The newsletter does not necessarily reflect the official view of the European Commission.

Photos: Cover © Markus Varesvuo/naturepl.com; p. 2 © European Union; p. 3 © Angelo Gandolfi/naturepl.com; p. 5 © Andres M. Dominguez/naturepl.com; p. 6 © Alex Mustard/naturepl.com, © Oriol Alamy/naturepl.com; p. 7 © Sven Zacek/naturepl.com; p. 10 © Juan Carlos Munoz/naturepl.com, © Alamy; p. 11 © Constantinos Petrinis/naturepl.com, © Alamy; p. 12 © Ross Hoddinott/2020VISION/naturepl.com; p. 13 © Loic Poidevin/naturepl.com; p. 14 © Doug Perrine/naturepl.com, © Wild Wonders of Europe/Wothe/naturepl.com; p. 15 © Otars Opermanis, © Nick Garbutt/naturepl.com, © Bernard Castelein/naturepl.com

