



Croatian knot in
the European net



STATE INSTITUTE FOR
NATURE PROTECTION



Project funded by the European Union

NATURA 2000 *in Croatia*



NATURA 2000 in Croatia

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PHARE PROJECT: Institutional Building and Implementation of NATURA 2000 in Croatia



Project funded by the European Union



Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The State Institute for Nature Protection has been assigned to coordinate the development of the NATURA 2000 network in Croatia. This Institute is the central Croatian institution for expert work in nature protection, which amongst others, undertakes a systematic and co-ordinated collation and processing of data that sets the foundations for Croatia's nature protection and management activities.

With the support of the European Union LIFE III project we started in 2003 to identify areas in Croatia that are potential NATURA 2000 sites according to the scientific criteria of the European legislation. For several years now our experts and scientific community as well as NGOs have been engaged in extensive research work to collect data needed for the proper evaluation of potential NATURA 2000 sites.

This year we start a process to bring NATURA 2000 to life through dialogue and public consultation. This is a process. We consider our role very much as the one of a catalyst. In this respect, we are helping to organise stakeholder dialogue on the various levels, involving scientists, representatives of other sectors and administrative bodies on national, regional and local level, NGOs and the general public. We are also developing management plans in two potential NATURA 2000 sites and preparing a lot of awareness raising material that is designed to help target groups and all people who are interested to better understand NATURA 2000. These activities are supported through the European Union's PHARE programme.

NATURA 2000 is a network of nature conservation areas. Yes! But NATURA 2000 is also developing into a potentially useful tool for rural development, that applies to ecotourism, ecologically sustainable businesses, or preserving traditional species and centuries-old practices, which have an important cultural dimension too.

Croatia will become partner in a strong European network that does not just help to preserve Europe's and Croatia's unique nature, but that also gives new perspectives for remote areas.

For this network to be a success we need the support of many colleagues from various Ministries, from the counties and the municipalities as well as many partners from the private sector. We aim to develop the NATURA 2000 network in Croatia in an open and transparent way and, most importantly, in a spirit of partnership, trust and cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Davorin Marković
Director of the State Institute
for Nature Protection



Croatia's natural riches



A diverse landscape....



Lonjsko polje - Continental region (SINP)

Croatia sits on the dividing line between no less than four different biogeographical regions which is why it is so incredibly rich in nature and wildlife.

In the far north, the relentlessly flat **Pannonian** region offers sweeping views over the fertile plains of Slavonia with their extensive grasslands and internationally important wetlands, like Kopacki Rit. Towards the middle of the country, the landscape becomes more **Continental** in nature and is characterised by rolling hills, flower-rich meadows, meandering rivers and large forested areas.

Close to the coast, the dramatic **Dinaric Alps** suddenly emerge from the lowlands, separating the sea from the rest of the country. Because of its porous limestone and dolomite origins, this mountain range exhibits many typical karst features: jagged white peaks that glisten in the sunlight, rocky scree slopes, mysterious sinkholes and thousands of underground caves. They also harbour some of the most extensive areas of uninterrupted beech and fir forests in the country.

On the other side of the mountains, the terrain descends abruptly down to a long narrow coastline. From here one can look out onto the thousand or more islands scattered amidst the clear blue waters of the Adriatic. The landscape here is now typically **Mediterranean** in character with aromatic scrublands, majestic umbrella pines, a myriad hidden coves and tranquil bays.

Thanks to these strongly contrasting climatic, geological and topographic conditions, Croatia harbours an exceptional range of different habitats considering its size, each with its own complex mix of typical plants and animals. It is no wonder that Croatia is one of the richest countries in Europe in terms of biodiversity.



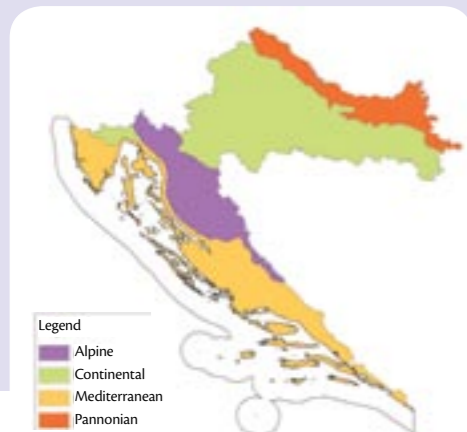
Podravski peski - Pannonian region (SINP)



Kornati - Mediterranean region (V. Jakupović Gricko)



Dinara - Alpine region (SINP)



Biogeographical regions in Croatia

...harbouring an abundant wildlife

This diversity of habitats has resulted in a wonderfully rich and varied wildlife. Even today, new species are being discovered every year. The number of **plant species** is especially high, putting Croatia amongst the top three countries in Europe for plant diversity. Many of the species exist here and nowhere else in the world, like the beautiful Biokovo bell-flower.

Croatia also harbours significant populations of **rare mammals** that are highly threatened in other parts of Europe. The vast mountainous beech and fir forests, for instance, harbour healthy populations of all three large carnivores – bear, wolf and lynx - while the many underground caves and karst systems are home to practically all European cave-dwelling bat species.

Almost half of all **birds** in Europe (over 230 species) breed in Croatia, and many more stop over during their annual migration. The large floodplains, marshes and fishponds along the Drava and Sava Rivers provide ideal foraging grounds for rare waterfowl, such as the ferruginous duck and endangered raptors like the majestic white-tailed eagle. The extensive natural forests, on the other hand, offer excellent conditions for woodpeckers, owls, black stocks as well as a whole range of other woodland animals and plants.

Reptiles and amphibians are also well represented. The caves provide a safe haven for the rare olm, sometimes known as the 'human fish', in view of its pallid skin colour. It is in fact the largest troglodytic amphibian in the world. Croatia also holds no less than 38 species of reptiles, including 9 that are endemic to the region like the Mosor lizard which can sometimes be seen basking on a sunny rock in Dinaric mountains.

As for the marine environment, this is one of the richest and cleanest in the Mediterranean. Over 65% of all known **fish species** in the Mediterranean occur here, alongside other wonderful sea creatures – red corals, sea fans and colourful sponges - that live hidden inside the many sea caves or amongst the extensive underwater meadows, known as Posidonia beds.



Lynx (B. Krstinić)



Eleonora's falcon (D. Ristow)



Yellow-bellied toad (D. Jelić)

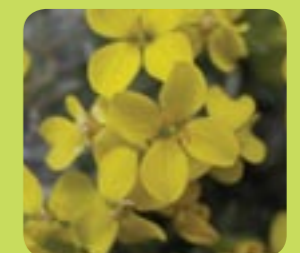


Red Gorgonian (Grupa Sredozemna medvedjica)

Croatia's endemic plants

Croatia has an exceptionally high rate of plant endemism. One of the reasons is that Croatia was left relatively untouched by the last Ice Age which was responsible for wiping out much of Europe's wildlife some 10-15,000 years ago. Many of the plants in places like the Velebit or Biokovo mountains are 'tertiary relicts'. That means they have been growing here, uninterrupted for millions of years.

Another reason is that the soil is generally very poor and stony, especially in the limestone mountains and on the islands. As a result, the more vigorous plants are unable to establish themselves in such harsh conditions, leaving the ground free for a wide range of other more delicate and specialised plants to grow, like the Velebit degenia pictured here.



Velebit degenia (S. Bogdanović)

NATURA 2000 in Europe...

...and Croatia

Saving Europe's biodiversity

In 2001, the European Union (EU) set itself the ambitious target of halting the loss of biodiversity in Europe by 2010. Two strong pieces of European legislation are the cornerstones of the EU's policy response to this commitment - the **Birds Directive** and the **Habitats Directive**. Together, they represent the most ambitious initiative ever undertaken to conserve valuable habitats and species across all EU Member States (currently 27 countries).

Thanks to these two Directives, countries are able to coordinate their conservation efforts, irrespective of political or administrative borders. The whole process is science driven, legally enforceable and based on an approach to management that takes account of people's interests and concerns.

The NATURA 2000 Network

At the heart of the two Directives is the creation of a Europe-wide ecological network of nature conservation sites – **the NATURA 2000 Network**. This network is designed to conserve over a thousand rare, threatened and endemic species of wild animals and plants and some 230 natural and semi-natural habitats listed in the annexes of the two EU Directives.

Around 25,000 sites have been included in the NATURA 2000 Network so far making this **the largest network of nature conservation areas anywhere in the world**.

The EU Habitats Directive

The Habitats Directive was adopted in 1992. This introduces similar measures to the Birds Directive but extends its coverage to a further 1000 species (plants, mammals, invertebrates etc...) and for the first time also protects certain types of natural and semi-natural habitats in their own right. These are habitats that are characteristic or unique to Europe such as flower-rich mountain hay meadows, virgin beech forest or underwater reefs.

The EU Birds Directive

The Birds Directive was adopted in 1979 and aims to protect all wild birds and their most important habitats across their entire natural range within the EU. The Directive puts an end to certain practices, such as the keeping or sale of native wild birds, and introduces a legal mechanism for regulating other activities, such as hunting, to ensure that they are sustainable. It also requires all EU Member States to preserve the most important sites as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for over 190 threatened species and all migratory birds, paying particular attention to wetlands of international importance.



White storks (I.D. Grlica)

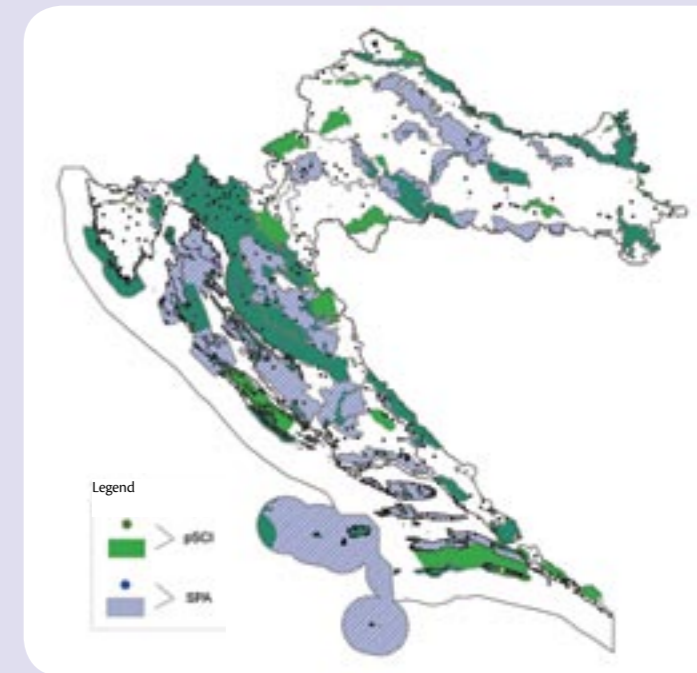
Selecting NATURA 2000 sites in Croatia

At the time of its accession to the EU, Croatia will need to implement the Birds and Habitats Directives on its territory. Already, many of the provisions of these two EU Directives have been transposed into the Nature Protection Act (Official gazette N° 70/05). Like other EU countries, Croatia will also have to propose sites for the NATURA 2000 Network for over 250 species and 70 habitat types that occur in Croatia and that are considered to be of EU importance, such as the Eurasian lynx, griffon vulture, the marsh fritillary butterfly or Adriatic lizard orchid.

In anticipation of this, the State Institute for Nature Protection (SINP) has coordinated a detailed inventory of the distribution of these species and habitats in Croatia. From this extensive baseline information, SINP has identified around 1000 sites that should be proposed for the EU NATURA 2000 Network. The selection is based on standard scientific criteria that apply to all EU countries.

These possible sites have been put out to public consultation. This consultation process has two roles: on the one hand to inform all those potentially concerned or interested in NATURA 2000 what it is and how it will work in practice. On the other hand, to give people an opportunity to comment on the selection of sites – for instance, if they have extra information about the location of a particular species or habitat in a specific site.

Once the public consultation exercise is finished, a final revised list of possible NATURA 2000 sites will be sent for final government approval before being submitted to the European Commission in Brussels.



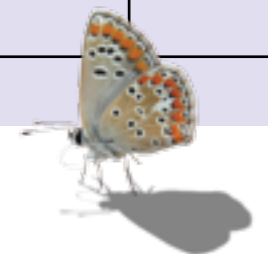
Map of possible NATURA 2000 sites in Croatia

NATURA 2000: what's in a name?

Sites under the Habitats Directive are called proposed Sites of Community Importance (pSCIs) whilst those classified under the Birds Directive are called Special Protection Areas (SPAs). But both SPAs and pSCIs are more commonly referred to simply as NATURA 2000 sites as they are all part of the EU NATURA 2000 Network.

NATURA 2000 in Croatia - statistics

| | Terrestrial Area / km ² | N° of sites | % Terrestrial | Marine Area/km ² | % Marine |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| SPA | 22101,5 | 38 | 39,05 | 10097,2 | 32,50 |
| pSCI | 14529,1 | 1099 | 25,67 | 4360,8 | 14,04 |
| NATURA (taking overlapping into consideration) | 25373 | 1137 | 44,83 | 12107,5 | 38,97 |



Managing NATURA 2000...

...in partnership with people

Activities within NATURA 2000 sites

The Habitats and Birds Directives, although adopted at different times, are made up of a similar set of measures designed to safeguard Europe's most valuable plants, animals and habitats. On the one hand, they protect species in their own right. Thus, the deliberate capture, killing or collection of certain wild plants and animals is strictly prohibited unless for specific well justified reasons, such as public health concerns. Activities, such as hunting and fishing, are also regulated to ensure that they remain sustainable.

On the other, the Directives also protect key areas for these species and habitat types as NATURA 2000 sites. These could be for instance, important breeding, feeding or resting places for rare birds or areas that still harbour rare habitats like flower-rich meadows or natural forests.

In every NATURA 2000 site management must be done in a way that ensures the continued long-term survival of the species and habitat types for which they are designated. This means that within NATURA 2000 sites:

- Damaging activities are avoided that could significantly disturb the species and/or deteriorate the habitats for which the site has been selected
- Positive measures are taken, where necessary, to maintain and restore these habitats and species to a 'favourable conservation status' in their natural range

How this is achieved will depend on the specifics of each site.

Some sites may be very small, just a few hectares (eg a wet meadow for the large blue butterfly), others may be huge and already protected as a National Park like the North Velebit Mountain, others still may be underground (bat caves) or far out at sea (underwater reefs).

But the majority are likely to form an integral part of our countryside and will still be used by people for farming, forestry, fishing, recreation. Indeed many sites in NATURA 2000 are valuable precisely because of the way they have been managed up to now. In such cases it will be important to ensure that these sorts of activities can continue in the future.

Sheep herding (SINP)



What IS true...

- Many existing land use practices will continue as before because they are already compatible with the conservation of the habitats and species present;
- Where the land uses negatively affect the species and habitats present, adjustments can often be made without jeopardizing productivity;
- Management activities that favour nature conservation are eligible for receiving additional financial support through EU funds;
- Hunting, fishing, tourism and other recreational activities will continue provided that they are managed in a sustainable manner and do not adversely affect the rare species and habitats present or prevent their recovery.

What is NOT true...

- All economic activities will be limited or stopped;
- Hunting activities are forbidden;
- Any new infrastructure is forbidden;
- Everyday activities will have to undergo a nature impact assessment;
- Inclusion in NATURA 2000 site affects land ownership ;
- Properties automatically lose value as a consequence of NATURA 2000 designation.

People and nature – not nature without people

People often associate nature conservation with strict nature reserves where human activities are systematically excluded. NATURA 2000 adopts a different approach – it recognises that man is an integral part of nature and the two work best in partnership with one another.

In this way NATURA 2000 supports the principle of sustainable development. Its aim is not to stop economic activities altogether but rather to set the parameters by which these can take place whilst safeguarding its biodiversity.

This is best achieved by sitting down with those who live and work in a NATURA 2000 site to agree together on the best ways to conserve the species and habitats present whilst respecting the local socio-economic context. In most cases only minor adjustments will be needed, which are best decided on a case by case basis.

The Habitats Directive recommends developing management plans for NATURA 2000 sites precisely to help establish a dialogue between all interested parties and agree on pragmatic management solutions.

Although not obligatory, management plans are useful tools because:

- they record the conservation needs of the habitats and species present so that it is clear to all what is being conserved and why;
- they analyse the socio-economic and cultural context of the area and the interactions between different land-uses and the species and habitats present;
- they provide an open forum for debate and help build a consensus on the long term management of the site;
- they help find practical management solutions that are sustainable and fully integrated into other land uses.

Working with local inhabitants to develop management plans for NATURA 2000 sites

Two NATURA 2000 management plans are currently being prepared with the help of EU funding: one at Vransko Lake and Jasen and the other for large carnivores in Gorski Kotar. Both plans are being drawn up with the help and advice of local inhabitants and stakeholder groups.

This is done in various ways:

- through one-to-one discussions with local land owners and interest groups,
- placing draft plans out to public consultation, and
- most importantly, hosting a series of workshops where everyone is able to give their views and opinions on the draft plans and on the management options proposed.

See www.natura2000.hr for details



Agriculture (SINP)



Fishing (B. Krstinić)



Stakeholder dialogue - a key to success (SINP)

NATURA 2000:

What does it mean in practice?

Good practice examples...



Posidonia beds (J. Harmeln/UNEP)



Shepherd with puppy (Arcturos)



Lesser Kestrel (N. Lecoq)



Sheep dog (Arcturos)

All over Europe, examples already exist of how NATURA 2000 works in practice. In most cases only minor adjustments will be required to ensure that existing land uses are compatible with the conservation of the species and habitats present, for instance mowing fields a few weeks later to allow ground nesting birds, like the corncrake, to fledge; or avoiding disturbing animals at certain times of the year when they are breeding, feeding or hibernating.

There will be times however where the changes may be more substantial. In such cases it is essential that those who live and work in NATURA 2000 sites are closely involved in decisions over their long-term management. It is not just the conservation authorities who are concerned: private landowners, government authorities, industries, local communities, scientists and concerned citizens all have an important role to play in making NATURA 2000 a success.

The following are a few examples of how NATURA 2000 sites are being managed in different economic sectors across Europe.

1° Managing conflicts between people and large carnivores in NATURA 2000

Fearing for their livelihood, many farmers in Greece are intolerant of wolves and bears in their region and occasionally shoot the animals illegally. This remains the single largest threat to both species in Greece and accounts for the loss of 25% of all wolf deaths every year. An EU funded project was launched to get to the root of the problem by analysing past incidents within a number of NATURA 2000 sites and holding one-to-one discussions with the farmers concerned. As a result, the project was able to lobby for a significant improvement in the national compensation schemes for livestock loss.

However, all agreed that the most effective solution would be to prevent any damage in the first place. Different measures were tried out with farmers. They included erecting electric fences around crops and beehives, providing alternative sources of food such as wild fruit trees planted in abandoned orchards, and supplying the farmers with indigenous sheepdogs to protect the flocks. All three measures proved to be effective deterrents and

very popular with local farmers. As a result, the Ministry of Agriculture decided to include these measures in the Rural Development Plan for Greece (2000–2006) as of 2003 which meant that farmers could receive extra financial support for implementing these protective measures on their land. A drop in wolf and bear deaths in the project areas has already been noticed.

2° Developing management plans for forest in Finland

Central Finland is at the heart of the country's timber industry. Here most of the forest is in private hands and any restriction on its use due to NATURA 2000 designation is unlikely to be well received. The Regional Environment Board decided that the best way to persuade private foresters to accept NATURA 2000 was to offer them the option of having a management plan drawn up for their forest. This would assess the forest's economic potential over the next 10–20 years and clarify what could be done from a conservation perspective. Such a practical tool not only helped the owner manage his resource more efficiently and profitably but also helped to dissipate the myth that NATURA 2000 meant taking all the forest out of production. Here was proof to the contrary.



Sustainable forestry (P. Kulmala)

...across European Union

3° Maintaining extensive cereal production in the steppes of Portugal

On the vast steppic plains of Castro Verde in southern Portugal the traditional farming system is based on non irrigated extensive cereal production, laid fallow every 2–3 years. The resulting semi-natural steppic habitats are of immense nature conservation value, particularly for birds. However, increasing competition from intensive cereal production has forced many farmers to abandon their land in search of jobs elsewhere, with serious consequences for both the local economy and the bird populations. With the inclusion of Castro Verde in NATURA 2000, conservation groups and farmers decided to join forces and lobby the government for an agri-environmental support scheme that would enable farmers to continue to manage their land as before. The scheme has proven to be very popular, over 350 km² of steppic farmland is now being managed extensively again and the birds are returning in large numbers.



Imperial eagle (B. Castelein, BBCWILD)



Power cables (REE)

4° Electricity companies work to help save endangered birds of prey

The Aragon region produces much of Spain's electricity. Unfortunately, the extensive network of power lines and cables are a major cause of mortality for highly threatened birds such as the imperial eagle. Many end up electrocuted after colliding with the high voltage lines. To address this problem, the regional government is working closely with electricity companies to adjust over 350 km of powerlines in NATURA 2000 sites so that they are rendered safe for birds. Since the start of this cooperation, there has been a dramatic decline in the death toll of birds. Some have even taken to nesting on the high electricity towers. The electricity companies have agreed to run all new cables underground from now on.

NATURA 2000: A chance...

...for sustainable development



Workshop in nature (SINP)

New opportunities

The European Union is committed to promoting sustainable development. This principle is now reflected in all of its policies and funding instruments like the 'Structural Funds' for regional development or the EU's Common Agricultural Policy which has been the main driving force behind much of Europe's agriculture in the last 50 years.

The EU Common Agricultural Policy, for instance, has recognised the important role of farmers, foresters and other land managers in managing and safeguarding the countryside. Not only are EU farm payments now decoupled from production and dependent upon farmers respecting certain minimum standards for the environment and for animal welfare, but they also provide additional payments to land managers who carry out positive conservation measures within a NATURA 2000 site.

So, whilst NATURA 2000 does impose some obligations on the sites concerned, it is matched by strong European policy and financial support. This in turn can also create a whole series of new opportunities for sustainable rural development, for instance in the field of wildlife friendly farming or eco-tourism.

Because of their stunning locations and diverse wildlife, NATURA 2000 can also act as a magnet for the ever increasing number of people who like to enjoy nature and explore the great outdoors. In contrast to mass tourism operators, these eco-tourism activities are traditionally run by small local businesses. As a result, the revenues generated help to support the local economy and increase the value of protecting nature. What is more, nature-based tourism is less likely to damage the environment and local wildlife provided certain safeguards are introduced.

Thus, the sheer scale of NATURA 2000 - currently it covers a fifth of the EU territory, an area larger than the size of France - makes it a powerful ally in helping to maintain the economic viability and social fabric of many rural areas. As such it can bring new opportunities for economic diversification and inward investment to those areas most in need of support during this difficult transition period towards a more market based economy.



Great Bustard in Lower Austria

In Lower Austria more than 300 farmers are today working together with local and regional experts to protect the great bustard which is breeding and living on their arable land. Farmers have agreed to adapt their way of farming the land to accommodate the needs of the great bustard. As this entails additional work effort on their part, each farmer receives extra financial support from the Agri Environmental Scheme of Austria. The farmers developed together with the authority their "own" great bustard friendly crop rotation, specific green covers in the winter and management activities together with hunters. Information events were organized, leaflets carried out and education started, all supported and financed by Rural Development. This raises the awareness of all these groups and supports the acceptance of the necessary measures for the protection of the great bustard. The result of these activities is an increase in population numbers of the great bustard for which especially the farmers are very proud of.



Great bustard (R. Raab)

Conservation supports local farming in Denmark

The Varde river valley was once a complex patchwork of salt meadows of high biodiversity value. Over time these were systematically drained to make way for intensive agriculture but when the market for intensively produced grass pellets collapsed the local Farmer's Union had to look for alternative sources of income. They found that the area would be ideally suited to extensive grazing and mowing, which could receive financial support under agri-environmental schemes, if only the meadows could be re-wetted. Enter the conservation authorities who took on the work of restoring the meadows to their original natural state. Over 250 farmers signed up for agrienvironment schemes worth €1 million a year. Their future is now more secure and the wet meadows are once again managed with nature in mind.



Varde river valley (K. Sundseth)



El Hierro (www.flickr.com)

The Canary islands: a magnet for eco-tourists

Over 11 million tourists visit the Canaries every year. Although most come for the sunshine, there has been a steady rise in nature based tourism away from the busy coastline. As people are becoming more discerning in their choice of holiday destination, an increasing number are looking for quality based holiday experiences away from the coast. And in the Canaries there is plenty to see, apart from offering dramatic landscapes, the islands are also a world biodiversity hotspot for plants and the seas that surround them are teeming with dolphins, sea turtles and other colourful marine creatures.

Over 30% of the Canaries has been designated as NATURA 2000 as a result of this rich biodiversity. This international recognition has done a lot to boost local eco-tourism businesses further. It has also created some interesting partnerships where tourism revenues are helping to further the work of conserving rare animals such as the Hierro Giant Lizard (Europe's largest Lizard at 70cm). Little wonder that this gentle giant is now the mascot for this island and its football team.

Dealing with...

...large scale developments

Assessing new developments within NATURA 2000

Sometimes new development plans and projects are proposed that might have an impact on sites within the NATURA 2000 Network. These could, for instance, involve the construction of a new road, a tourism complex or the opening of a new quarry site. It could also involve major changes in current land uses within and around a NATURA 2000 site — such as the planting of a commercial forest plot or the conversion of a rough grassland to arable land.

None of these activities are prohibited de facto within NATURA 2000. Instead, they are put through the following screening process in order to determine whether the plan or project can be permitted to go ahead or not.

- **Step 1:** The first stage is to determine whether the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the NATURA 2000 values of the site. If it is concluded that the effect is not likely to be significant then the project can be approved straight away, even though it will take place in a NATURA 2000 site.
- **Step 2:** If on the other hand the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the site then the proponent is asked to redraft the project to remove the likelihood of these effects or to consider alternative options which would not have a negative impact on the site. This could, for instance, mean changing the route of a proposed road scheme so that it goes outside the NATURA 2000.
- **Step 3:** If no alternatives exist but the project or plan is considered to be indispensable— i.e. it is of overriding public interest, then it can still go ahead provided adequate compensation measures are taken to ensure that the overall integrity of the NATURA 2000 network is maintained—for instance, the designation of an equivalent area elsewhere for the species or habitat types affected, or the restoration of potentially equally valuable areas close by.

There is an additional safeguard for plans or projects that are likely to affect a site hosting priority habitats or species—i.e. those that are especially endangered or vulnerable. In these cases the developer must demonstrate that the project is necessary for human health or public safety reasons, or it will provide benefits of primary importance for the environment.

Decisions relating to steps 1 to 3 are made by the national authorities in the Member State concerned. The European Commission – whose duty it is to check that the EU laws are implemented correctly - only interferes in these decisions if there is an official complaint against the decision taken by the Member State by one of its citizens or if the development proposal is likely to affect priority species or habitat types.

In the case of the latter, the European Commission can deliver an opinion that overrides step 2 if the Member State presents compelling arguments regarding its overriding public interest, accompanied by adequate compensation scheme. It must nevertheless be informed of all compensation measures proposed for any plans or projects that are approved under step 3 so that it can check that the coherence of the NATURA 2000 network as a whole is not affected.



Drawing up management plans (SINP)

...large scale developments

Careful road planning saves money and nature in Austria

There is an increasing body of examples showing how this procedure has been used effectively to promote sustainable development. They are based on an integrated approach to development planning where all factors are taken into consideration very early on in the planning stage, and not as an after-thought.

In Austria, the company responsible for planning, constructing and maintaining the country's motorways, ASFINAG (Autobahnen und Schnellstraßen Finanzierungs-AG), has learned through experience that working with nature conservationists right from the beginning pays off in the long-run.

In the past, the lack of consultation and environmental planning on a number of Austrian road schemes proved to be a costly mistake. Legal complaints by environmental organizations and local communities, including complaints submitted by NGOs to the European Commission regarding infringement of EU conservation legislation, managed to stop or delay certain projects. Even where the projects eventually went forward, the delays usually caused financial disadvantages. The process for planning motorways is long and costly, taking up to 10 years. Planning problems and legal disputes at the end of the process can throw a project off by years - with expensive implications.

Today, ASFINAG's approach to project planning and development is very much based on public participation and integrated planning and can be held up as a positive example for others to follow. Indeed, the company has become an important force for the implementation of EU nature conservation legislation in the country.

In preparing its infrastructure projects, the company now focuses on three key elements;

- gathering quality information regarding possible impacts on the environment as well as on participating communities and other stakeholders in a genuine process of consultation that aims to address all concerns and identify best options
- involving conservation and other experts whose sectors are likely to be affected by the proposed scheme (eg town planners, water authorities, tourism boards) at the very early conceptual stages, before lines are drawn on a map. This way 'win-win' situations can be created whereby a route is selected that causes the least damage to the environment
- Ensuring that once the proposed scheme is drafted, it is put out to public consultation in a transparent and easily understandable way

It is true that this approach does cost more time and money in the short term, but it avoids much bigger costs over the long-term as projects can move forward as planned.



Brown bear (D. Huber)



Green bridge (D. Huber)

In 2001, the European Union (EU) set itself the ambitious target of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010. The EU 'Habitats' and 'Birds' Directives are the cornerstones of the EU's policy response to this commitment. Together, these two EU laws set the same high standard for nature conservation across all EU Member States (currently 27 countries). At the heart of the two Directives is the creation of a Europe-wide ecological network of nature conservation areas – the NATURA 2000 Network - designed to safeguard rare species and habitat types. It is the largest network of nature conservation areas anywhere in the world.

Like every country in the EU, upon accession, Croatia will need to identify areas as NATURA 2000 sites for inclusion in the European Network. Around 1000 possible sites have been identified for inclusion in NATURA 2000. They would help to save the ca 250 species and ca 70 habitat types in these two EU Directives that occur in Croatia. As Croatia is one of the richest countries in Europe in terms of biodiversity, its contribution to NATURA 2000 and biodiversity conservation in the EU in general is vital.

This overview brochure is part of a series of brochures on NATURA 2000. The others look at NATURA 2000 in the context of specific socio-economic sectors like forestry, farming and water management. For more details go to

www.natura2000.hr