



natura

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EDITORIAL

The EP's Environment Committee Chairman, Ken Collins, underlines the importance of Natura 2000 in promoting biodiversity



PRESERVING BIODIVERSITY is of vital importance in the quest for sustainability. After all, we cannot replace extinct species of flora or fauna, and the disappearance of even small numbers of species can be catastrophic for entire ecosystems. From the standpoint of agriculture and medicine, biodiversity acts as the essential guarantor of the necessary gene pool; from the economic perspective, maintaining biodiversity means we preserve our stock of raw materials, thereby conserving the basis of future economic activity.

The Natura 2000 project, which will ensure the protection of special conservation sites and rare species, is a laudable initiative which must be properly implemented and funded to allow the creation of a coherent EU ecological network. This network must in turn guide the development of sustainable land and resource

management policy.

The EU has a very clear role to play in ensuring biodiversity is preserved, and, in the shape of the Birds and Habitats Directives, enjoys a sound legal framework within which to act. Biodiversity is a global issue, which member states are

fortunate to be able to tackle through a well-developed common legal and political structure. Via the EU, member states can address the risks to biodiversity in a useful, coordinated fashion. This is important because biodiversity preservation calls for a new approach to policy making, involving a partnership of tiers of government from international (UNCED) to local (Agenda 21). We need to ensure the creation of a dynamic, ongoing partnership which also alters policy design, reflecting the central importance of biodiversity in the march towards sustainability.

Taking such steps is dependent on integrating environment and other policies, which of course means fostering horizontal as well as vertical partnerships. For this reason, Natura 2000 is an even more important project, since it involves cooperation between environment, agriculture and regional policy makers. It is a practical example of the progress the EU has made in this regard, a process which was reinforced in the new Amsterdam Treaty.

The European Parliament will continue to be active in its policing of EU biodiversity legislation. My committee will act to ensure that the right of the citizen to an environment which is both safe and diverse is itself preserved. The UNGASS negotiations, following Rio, have shown that international action on biodiversity has some way still to go, it is vital that via Natura 2000 and other instruments the EU continues to play a leading role in the global promotion of a progressive, sustainable biodiversity policy.

KEN COLLINS MEP, Chairman, European Parliament Committee on the Environment, Consumer Protection and Public Health



The NATURA 2000 Newsletter is produced by the Nature Conservation Unit of the Environment Directorate General (DG XI.D.2) of the European Commission. It provides regular updates on the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives and the establishment of the NATURA 2000 Network.

Implementing the Habitats Directive in Marine and Coastal Areas



Oyster trestles off the Wash and North Norfolk Coast: proposed SAC.
Photo: English Nature

The particular challenge of implementing the Habitats Directive in marine and coastal areas was the subject of a European seminar held in Morecambe, England on 22 to 24 June 1997. Organised by the Institute for European Environmental Policy, London, the event was supported by various organisations, including DG XI of the European Commission and the UK's Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, and several non-governmental organisations. The meeting was

attended by a group of some 100 invited delegates.

The principal aim of the seminar was to provide a forum for exchanging experience and information with a view to progressing implementation of the Directive in the marine and coastal environment. Morecambe Bay, situated in the north east of England, was chosen as the seminar location in order to illustrate the many potentially conflicting issues arising in one pSAC (proposed under Article 4 of the Directive) – also part of a LIFE Nature project – see box). The Bay is characterised by vast intertidal areas consisting of sand and mud flats, and provides habitats for internationally important numbers of birds; it is also an important location for fishing, industry, shipping, and tourism and recreation.

A field trip organised for the first day of the seminar gave participants an opportunity to experience at first hand the approach being adopted by the UK to reconcile the many interests and activities arising within the pSAC. Discussions during the seminar covered a wide range of interrelated subjects, commencing with an outline of the state of implementation generally and in the UK specifically. Key scientific issues were the subject of several plenary papers. Delegates agreed that site identification and selection was a scientific exercise, although subsequent discussion

SUMMARY OF GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE HABITATS DIRECTIVE IN MARINE AND COASTAL AREAS

Site identification and management

Site identification and selection should be followed by the development of management strategies for sites.

- best available data on the location, extent and distribution of habitats and species is needed to enable the establishment of boundaries;
- researching and understanding processes, and the dynamics of the marine environment will enable assessment of site dynamics and sensitivity to human impacts, and future management needs;
- site-specific conservation objectives should be established, followed by an agreement on management measures;
- strategies for achieving conservation objectives should include the use of indicators, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms to review measures.

Integrated approach

An integrated approach is often central to the successful management of coastal and marine sites.

- conflicts should be managed and resolved through local cooperation, though resolution through more formal regulation may be required;
- stakeholders are to be involved early on in the management plan process, and presented with clear proposals;
- management frameworks should embrace the range of relevant interests, ensure practical application of management plans and be adaptable;
- advantage should be taken of existing initiatives.

Supporting measures

A range of supporting policy tools may be useful in establishing the required forms of management and may include the following:

- funding for site identification, designation, management, and developing skills. The possibility of using the Structural Funds should be explored;
- practicable monitoring and enforcement arrangements which are clearly tied to the decision-making process. Technological advances and self-regulation by users may play an important role;
- information and awareness to foster understanding, compliance and support for management measures;
- cooperating with and learning from other projects, including the EU Demonstration Programme on the Integrated Management of Coastal Zones.

highlighted the different approaches being adopted in practice by the Member States. More detailed discussion was encouraged within separate workshops.

The importance of involving various sectors in managing marine and coastal sites was a recurring theme of the meeting and some of the specific issues relating to the fisheries, ports, and tourism sectors were outlined from both industry and nature conservation perspectives. These were then placed within a wider context of institutional issues and supporting mechanisms.

Although the main focus of the seminar was on the identification and management of marine and coastal sites forming part of the Natura 2000 network, it was recognised that the Directive demands additional protection for species listed in Annex IV and V. This is particularly necessary for ensuring favourable conservation status of aquatic species which range over wide areas.

A clear overall message to come from the seminar was that the Habitats Directive is indeed a very important measure for promoting marine and coastal nature conservation. However, implementation in the marine and coastal environment lags behind that on terrestrial sites, and needs to be taken forward by the Member States. With this in mind, discussion during the last part of the meeting focused on the production of a set of guidelines for effective implementation in the marine and coastal environment. These were intended to reflect deliberations at the seminar. They have no legal status; nor are they intended to be universally applicable as conditions vary greatly in Europe and the character of the marine environment requires flexibility in management. A shortened version of the guidelines is produced here.

A full copy of the guidelines will be produced in the proceedings for the seminar, to be published later in 1997. For further details contact Clare Coffey, IEEP (fax +44 171 799 2244)

Managing marine sites requires the involvement of all sectors, including fisheries. Photo: English Nature



THE UK EXPERIENCE: MANAGEMENT SCHEMES FOR MARINE SACS CO-FINANCED BY LIFE (NATURE)

The UK has a vast coastline along which a rich diversity of habitats and species of European importance can be found. It is also the focus of considerable human activity be it industry, transport, fishing, or recreation. Because of this complex situation, the UK established new legislation covering the marine environment to meet the terms of the Habitats Directive.

In order to facilitate implementation of these regulations a large innovative 4 year programme of actions was initiated in 1996 with co-financing from LIFE Nature. It involves a consortium of public and private organisations, led by English Nature – a government nature conservation agency. The project will culminate in the establishment of demonstration management schemes for 12 marine sites around the UK – but in the process will also test, and improve on, the current best practice in a whole range of areas from scientific research to the development of different management approaches.

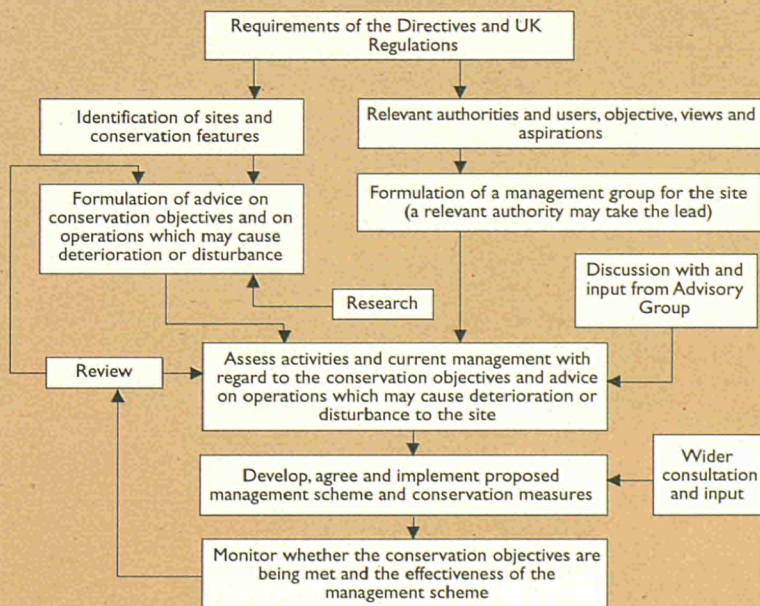
Central to the success of each management scheme will be the process by which it is achieved – with the emphasis firmly on partnerships with the relevant authorities and interest groups on the sites. Thus, while the nature conservation agencies deal with setting conservation objectives for the sites, gathering research material and working out what activities could damage or disturb the key features, a special management group (set up individually for each site) will tackle the wide ranging issues affecting the way in which the site is used.

The management group brings in interests other than nature conservation, and provides the basis for assessing how current uses of a site may affect conservation interests. This consultation process, backed by the best available scientific information, will lead to the development of an agreed management scheme. The scheme will then be monitored to check that nature conservation objectives are being met, and adjusted accordingly through periodic review.

The experiences gained from this project should not only pave the way for the conservation of other marine SACs in the UK but should also help inform similar processes in other Member States.

For more details on the project and copies of 'NATURA 2000. European marine sites: an introduction to management' contact John Torlesse, English Nature (fax +44 1733 555948).

A model process for developing a marine management scheme in the UK

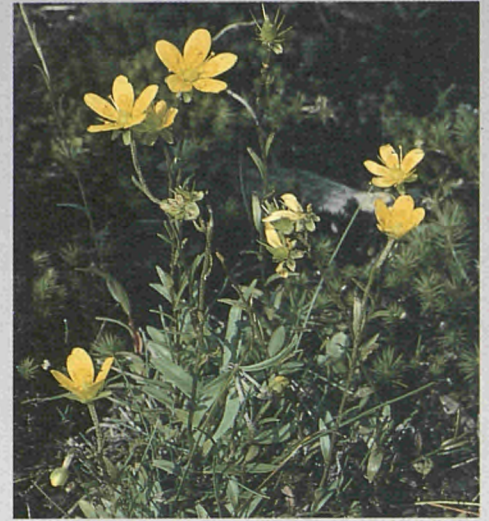


ON SITE

LIFE along the Dugeon river valley: an example of effective environmental integration



Restoration work in one of the richest areas of the valley, around the lake of Bouverans.
Photo: Geneviève Magnon



Marsh saxifrage *Saxifraga hirculus*. Photo: Bob Gibbons/Natural Image

An exceptional natural environment ...

The Dugeon river starts its life in the high Jura mountains. From there it flows along 36 kms before reaching its final destination in the plains of the Doubs. After a brief passage through an enclosed valley, the river opens out onto a vast depression created during the last ice age.

Extending over 8000 ha this area has a particularly high natural heritage due largely to favourable climatic conditions and a wide variety of geological deposits. Woods, dry grasslands, wet meadows, marshes, bogs and lakes all intertwine to form a rich tapestry of different habitats. Amongst the most notable are active raised bogs and bog woodlands, both priority habitat types under the Habitats Directive. The wet meadows harbour the marsh saxifrage *Saxifraga hirculus* and numerous

The Dugeon river starts life in the high mountain chains of the French Jura.



orchid species on Annex II of the Directive. Wildlife is also well represented, with over 40 species of dragonfly and nine species of amphibians.

Thanks to its strategic location along a migration route, the ornithological interest of the valley is also exceptional. Close to 220 bird species have been observed here – that is, almost half of Europe's total avifauna. 28 of these are on Annex I of the Birds Directive. Amongst the most representative are populations of the corncrake *Crex crex*, red kite, *Milvus milvus* and the black kite, *Milvus migrans*. There have also been the occasional sightings of the lynx, *Lynx lynx* and the capercaillie, *Tetrao urugallus*.

... maintained by man

The first signs of human colonisation, found in the bogs, date back to 1000 BC. Since then man has played a central role in maintaining and managing the natural habitats in the valley through various forms of pastoralism such as extensive grazing and hay cutting.

However, after the 1950s, the expansion of human activities in the area disrupted the valley's functional equilibrium which, in turn, threatened to destroy its rich natural heritage. At that time, priority was given to improving agricultural output over 2000 ha and to limiting the river's flooding capabilities. An ambitious and expensive programme was launched to alter the course of the Dugeon river and to drain the surrounding wetlands. By the early '70s, the river had been shortened by 30% and transformed into a rigid canal. Yet despite all this only 200 ha was actually gained for agriculture.

What is more, the whole valley began to dry up, exacerbated by a deepening of the riverbed. Other activities such as the planting of spruce, creation of artificial stretches of water for hunting

and fishing, embankments and illegal dumping took their toll too. Moreover, the 14 communes within the valley were insufficiently equipped to deal with the wastewater treatment and runoffs from livestock manure which were polluting the water. Increased use of pesticides made matters even worse. All this led to an impoverishment and loss of the valley's biodiversity.

Facing the facts ...

For 30 years, everyone used the valley to their own ends with little regard for the future. It was only when the valley was threatened further by potential gravel extraction that its inhabitants (approx 15,000) began to realise the exceptional nature of their environment. Since then, matters have progressed rapidly to try to redress the balance. The syndicate in charge of draining wetlands was replaced by an intercommunal syndicate, the 'Plateau de Frasné', which brought together all 14 communes within the valley.

An integrated overall action programme for the valley ...

A global action programme was thus initiated in order to conserve what remained of the biological richness of the Dugeon basin.

The first step came in 1991 when they obtained financial support under LIFE (Nature). The project, which has now just finished, aimed to restore and maintain the most important areas for the habitats and species. Nearly 1500 ha of wetlands were bought, or leased under strict management, by the communes, syndicate and an NGO. Restoration work was undertaken on 150 ha of bogs. The river was re-laid, in sections, along its original bed in order to re-wet the valley bottom and re-establish its piscicultural wealth for which it was once famous. The Syndicate also purchased specialised equipment to help manage the wetlands and re-introduced grazing with rustic horses (Haflinger) in the most neglected areas. At the same time, there was much dialogue between the organisations and inhabitants. Memories of the older folk on how 'things used to be' helped considerably. A moving exhibition travelled around the whole valley and every household was sent a regular newsletter updating them on progress with the project.

It was recognised however that this programme alone would not be enough to meet the desired objectives. That is why, stimulated by the success of this project, other operations were initiated:

- a programme was set up, in 1993, to carry out environmentally friendly agricultural practices under the Community's Agri-environment regulation (1700 ha contractualised)
- a programme was initiated in 1995 to improve the standards in the livestock buildings so that they could adsorb the agricultural pollutants under the Community's improvement of agricultural production structures regulation. This concerned all exploitations with more than 25 livestock units;

- a programme to restore the Dugeon river started in 1995 to re-lay the river along its natural bed. The first phase of the programme was undertaken under LIFE but now these initiatives will be continued until the year 2000 with other financial sources;
- finally, a programme for cleaning up domestic waste water within the valley has just been launched under the Structural Funds. It will lead to the opening of a purification plant in 1999 to which 9 communes will be attached.

... for a better quality of life and natural environment

It is still too early to establish irrefutably that all these actions have been successful for nature. But everything that could be done has been done. And already an increase of 1m in the groundwater level has been observed in several areas. At certain times the Dugeon river has also overflowed, nourishing once again the surrounding meadows.

All in all 'operation Dugeon' could be considered exemplary for a number of reasons. First, there is a tremendous groundswell of local support for conserving their natural environment. Then, there is the political will to protect the valley's nature which united different communes and political forces around a single cause. Added to this is the fact that different financial and legal instruments have been used in a coherent and complimentary fashion to optimise results. Finally, dialogue between all parties will shortly pave the way for the designation of the valley as a Special Protection Area under the Birds Directive. Thus, the inhabitants, who were for a time separated from their valley and river, have once again become – in the spirit of Natura 2000 – its custodian.

For further information on the project:

- Ms Geneviève MAGNON
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Marie de Frasné
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Raised bog at Bonnevaux, one of the priority habitat types present in the valley. Photo: Michel Perrinet



NATURA BAROMETER

(Situation as of 15/9/97 on the basis of information transmitted officially by the Member States)

Member State	Birds Directive SPA Classification					Habitats Directive SAC designation (stage I)				
	Number of SPAs	Total area (km ²)	Area Maps	Information	Progress	Number of sites proposed	Total area (km ²)	Site maps	Natura 2000 forms	National list
<i>België/Belgique</i>	36	4,313				102	903			
<i>Danmark</i>	111	9,601				175	± 11,000		0	
<i>Deutschland</i>	502	8,598				80	1,176			↑
<i>Ellas</i>	52	4,965			↑	245	26,590			↑
<i>España</i>	150	25,208				174	8,015			↑
<i>France</i>	105	7,360				0	0	0	0	0
<i>Ireland</i>	106	2,054				207	5,530	0	0	↑
<i>Italia</i>	108	4,530				± 2,262	± 46,074			
<i>Luxembourg</i>	6	14				0	0	0	0	0
<i>Nederland</i>	28	3,442				27	2,820			
<i>Österreich</i>	46	6,984			↑	78	± 4,916			
<i>Portugal</i>	36	3,323				65	11,940			↑
<i>Suomi</i>	15	967	0	0		415	25,599			
<i>Sverige</i>	225	22,177		0		1,038	42,517		0	
<i>United Kingdom</i>	155	5,641			↑	255	13,322			
EUR 15	1,681	109,177				5,123	200,402			

Note on SPAs: Some Member States, especially Denmark and the Netherlands, have designated significant parts of their coastal waters (= non land area). Certain SPAs in Germany have been classified for nature conservation values other than their importance for birds. Information on Austria is provisional.

- Keys:
- no or insignificant classification
 - list insignificant or not transmitted
 - no transmission
 - classification notably insufficient
 - partial but insufficient national list
 - incomplete information or partial transmission
 - classification incomplete
 - substantial national list but information still incomplete
 - complete for all transmitted sites
 - classification complete
 - complete national list according to Member State, information transmitted is coherent
 - computerised and coherent
- ↑ significant progress being made since last Natura barometer

For further information contact: Micheal O'Briain, DG XI.D.2 for SPA classification and Olivier Diana, DG XI.D.2 for SAC designation.

The Natura Barometer: commentary on progress

Over the course of the last months, the most significant progress has been realised by the following:

- the United Kingdom is pursuing its programme of regular designation by adding 21 new SPAs since the start of the current year;
- Greece has designated 23 new sites under the Birds Directive and proposed more than 7,000 km² under the Habitats Directive;
- Spain has proposed its national list for the alpine region;
- Ireland and Portugal have proposed their first national lists corresponding to 8% and 12% respectively of their national territory.



Natura 2000 – progress in Macaronesia

At the second seminar on Macaronesia, held on the 15–16th July in the Azores, progress was made on the establishment of a list of sites of Community importance to be integrated into the Natura 2000 Network for this biogeographical region. Involving three archipelagos (the Canaries, Madeira and the Azores) and two Member States (Spain and Portugal), this little region represents a mere 0.3% of the territory of the Union but contains a high biodiversity and a particularly large number of endemics.

The participants (European Topic Centre for Nature Conservation, national and regional authorities, independent scientific experts and NGO representatives) made substantial progress on the list. Spain and Portugal proposed new sites to cover those habitats and species for which there was insufficient representation in the initial list of sites.

The draft Community list for this region should contain over 200 sites and will be ready by the end of this year. The timetable foreseen in the Habitats Directive should therefore be respected as far as Macaronesia is concerned with the final list of sites being adopted by the Commission before June 1998.

EU expert seminar on 'Agriculture and Natura 2000'

At the initiative of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, an EU expert seminar was held in June on 'Agriculture and Natura 2000' with DGXI support. This brought together around 100 representatives from 20 European countries, including members of both the Habitats Committee and the STAR Committee (set up to oversee the Habitats Directive and the Agri-environment regulation respectively). The seminar focused on four principal themes: (1) the application of agri-environment measures to agriculture land within NATURA 2000, (2) perspectives for Central and Eastern Europe, (3) Managing Agricultural land with high natural value within a broader nature conservation perspective and (4) approaches to improving the natural value of agricultural land.

Whilst recognising that the agri-environment Regulation could make a significant contribution to the Natura 2000 network if it were targeted more specifically at these sites, participants were reminded of the need to consider these issues in a wider context of CAP reforms and global market liberalisation. Particular attention was also drawn to the need to maintain extensive farming practices in marginal lands. *Conference proceedings are available from Garry Post, Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries (fax +31 70 379 3613.)*

LIFE Projects funded in 1997

60 nature projects, totalling 42.5 million ECU, were agreed for funding under the 1997 budget. A new consolidated report is now available from DGXI briefly describing each of the projects in its original language and in English and French. The short introduction explains this year's selection process and type of projects funded. *Copies available from I. Venti DG XI.D.2*

LifeNature 97



LIFE 1998 project application round

The budget available for LIFE Nature in 1998 is likely to be around 49 million ECU. Applications should be with the national competent authorities before the end of the year. Exact dates are given in the new application brochure which provides guidance on submitting a proposal and incorporates the forms to be used. This is now available from the competent national authorities or on INTERNET (<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg11/env-proj/env/life.htm>).



The monk seal becomes Madeira's emblem

The efforts undertaken by the Natural Park of Madeira, with LIFE co-financing, over the years to ameliorate the conservation state of the monk seal in the Desertas islands has led to an increase in population. Demonstrating the political support for this initiative, the Authorities in Madeira have just integrated the monk seal in their coat of arms, illustrating the Island's pride in having this flagship species.

Netherlands Court suspends Dutch gas exploration

In an interim ruling of 28th April, the court in Leeuwarden decided that declarations allowing for experimental gas drilling in the Waddenzee had to be suspended awaiting a final judgement, partly because they infringed the Habitats Directive. The drilling activities were planned to take place in the immediate vicinity of a Special Protection Area (SPA). The Court applied Article 6 of the Habitats Directive in their analysis of the decisions by the authorities. It found that the environmental impact assessment carried out for the project was incomplete and could not justify the conclusion that the project was unlikely to have a significant effect on the site. Furthermore, cumulative effects of successive drilling were not taken into account and there appeared to be important gaps in the knowledge of the ecology of the North Sea coast and the Waddenzee. Because of these lacunae this court was unable to determine whether there were imperative reasons of over-riding public interest to justify carrying out the project.

Authorisation repealed for construction of a motorway in a brown bear area in Greece

Following an appeal lodged by two Greek NGOs, the Greek Council of State, by its ruling of 2 July, repealed the approval of environmental terms granted by the Greek authorities for the construction of a section of the Via Egnatia motorway affecting an important brown bear conservation area in Central Northern Greece. The arguments brought forward by the NGOs were sustained by the Council of State which ruled that the proposed road could not disturb the habitat of the brown bear. The Court also threw out other alternative construction methods proposed and called instead for an alternative tracing which will circumvent the conservation area thereby preventing any disturbance to the species and its habitat.

Removal of the great cormorant from Annex I of the Birds Directive

Following a recovery of its population, the great cormorant sub-species, *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* is now considered to have a favourable conservation status in Europe. The Commission has decided to remove it from Annex I of the Birds Directive. This decision has been taken after approval by the Member States. All populations of the great cormorant will continue to benefit from the general protection regime afforded by the Birds Directive, and also from its specific provisions concerning migratory species. In addition, an international management plan is under preparation within the framework of the Bonn Convention on migratory species which will, amongst other things, address the interactions between the great cormorant and fisheries.

NGOs' involvement in Natura 2000

Regrouping the principal European NGOs active in the field of nature conservation, the European Habitats Forum is an observer at the Scientific Working Groups of the Habitats Directive and, as such, is associated with the Natura 2000 Network. The bulletin *Spotlight on Natura 2000* (in English), published by WWF-Europe with the support of the European Commission, put forwards the NGOs' point of view on the establishment of the Network. **Contact:** Marta Ballesteros, WWF - Brussels (fax +32 2 743 8819).

E mail address

This – and previous issues – of the newsletter are now available on INTERNET (<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg11/news/natura/index.htm>)

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