

More action is needed to save Europe's biodiversity



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The EU and its Member States need to urgently take much firmer action to have any chance of coming close to the objective of halting the loss of biodiversity in 2010. This is the key message from the EU's **Biodiversity Action Plan mid-term report**, issued in December 2008. This has provided the most ambitious assessment so far of the state of biodiversity in the EU – a comprehensive 'health check' of Europe's natural environment.

Despite some encouraging news, especially on the development of the Natura 2000 network, the report finds that many species are still under threat, and biodiversity and ecosystems are not getting the attention they need across other policy areas. The mid-term report sets out the priorities for action.

In 2006, the European Commission's Biodiversity Action Plan identified ten priority objectives associated with the 2010 target, and some 150 concrete steps for reaching them. The mid-term report is part of the commitment to monitor progress at regular intervals.



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Mid-term report findings on status and trends

• EU and biodiversity

Some 50% of species and up to 80% of habitats protected in the EU are threatened or vulnerable. Over 40% of European bird species are in the same predicament. These figures reflect the decline that has been taking place for decades.



But the news is not all bad. The decline of farmland birds is stabilising, and populations of some large mammals are recovering. The EU's Birds and Habitats Directives have played a major role in arresting decline, and the Natura 2000 network has grown to cover more than 25,000 conservation sites.

• EU and global biodiversity

In 2002, at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, governments around the world promised to significantly reduce biodiversity loss by 2010.

Yet progress has been poor, and globally, biodiversity loss is reaching a crisis point. Expanding demand for agricultural land for food, crops and animal grazing has put more pressure on natural habitats. Forests, wetlands and coral reefs are under threat. Tropical forests are disappearing at a rate of some 13 million hectares per year. And rising demand for food and biofuels has added new challenges. If we continue as we are doing, we will lose a further 11% of the natural world by 2050.

The mid-term report sets a series of challenges and priorities

• **EU policies and laws** provide a strong foundation for progress, but they **must be effectively implemented**. And there are some gaps yet to be filled: for example, to protect soils and to combat 'invasive species' which compete with native European flora and fauna. The Commission has presented options towards an EU Strategy to tackle these invasive species.

• The EC Treaty (Article 6) says **environmental protection must be "integrated" into all EU policies** and activities. But this is not happening as it should. Conservation must

be higher on the agenda in policy areas such as agriculture, transport, regional development and many more.

"This continuing loss of biodiversity is critical. We have set an ambitious target for 2010, we know what needs to be done and we have the tools to achieve this. I therefore call on all Member States to redouble their efforts to sustain the variety of life, and the health of the ecosystems that underpin our prosperity and well-being."

European Environment Commissioner
Stavros Dimas.

- **Natura 2000 needs to be extended and finalised**, with its offshore marine network put fully in place. The next step is to ensure the sites are restored and effectively managed, with standards and objectives for conservation.
- Many fish stocks are still short of safe biological limits. This means **overall fishing has to be reduced** to sustainable levels within the framework of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).
- The EU and Member States **need to build stronger partnerships with businesses**, especially in sectors such as tourism and agriculture. Communication campaigns should raise public awareness of biodiversity.



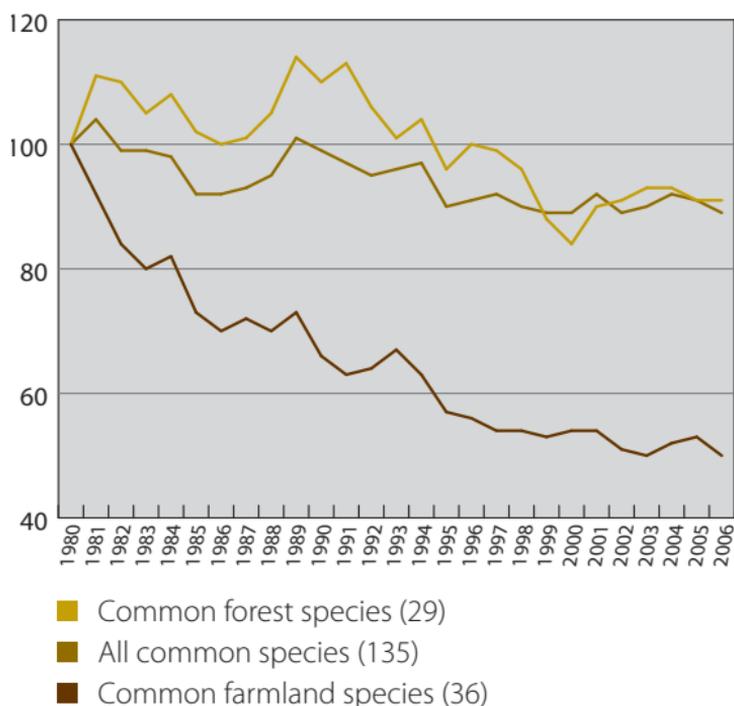
- Member States **need to be able to measure the impact of Structural Fund spending on biodiversity**, with monitoring to ensure that resources are being used effectively to protect nature.
- At the global level, well-designed **policies to preserve rainforests**, which are home to half of all land-based species, **must be implemented**. The EU has called on the international community to cut deforestation by 50% by 2020 and to phase it out by 2030. Europe can also help by tying development aid and trade policies more closely to the conservation of biodiversity.
- Making biodiversity conservation a priority will also help in the fight against climate change, and policy-makers should be more aware of the connection. There **needs to be wider recognition of the critical role ecosystems play** in strengthening resilience to environmental stress. The Commission has presented a white paper on adapting to climate change.
- Expanding the knowledge base: policy-makers **need more solid, science-based information** in order to make the right decisions at all levels, from global to local. For example, what impact does Europeans' consumption of commodities, such as meat and soybeans, have on global biodiversity loss? What is the relationship between biodiversity and poverty, especially in developing countries? How do we put a financial value on biodiversity? The ongoing study *The economics of ecosystems and biodiversity* (TEEB) estimates the potential annual cost of biodiversity loss to be 7% of global GDP.



What is at stake from now until 2010?

Biodiversity is vital to sustaining human life and economic and social development. Financial crises are cyclical, but the extinction of living things is forever, and it must be stopped. The EU may be currently off-target to halt biodiversity loss by 2010, but it is not too late to put this right provided that we all make a significant additional effort to tackle the challenges and implement the priorities.

Common birds in Europe, population index (1980 = 100)



Data source: EBCC/RSPB/BirdLife/Statistics Netherlands

This indicator is one of the 26 SEBI Biodiversity indicators:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/knowledge/eu2010_indicators/index_en.htm



More information:

European Commission EU Biodiversity Action Plan Report 2008 portal and country profiles

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/bap_2008.htm

European Environment Agency

<http://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/europe-is-losing-biodiversity-2013-even-in-protected-areas>

