

Conservation of wild birds. Codification

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In accordance with the requirements of the [Habitats Directive](#) and the [Birds Directive](#), the Commission presents a report on the status of and trends for habitat types and species covered by these Directives for the 2007-2012 period. To recall, The Birds and the Habitats Directives are the main legislative instruments for ensuring conservation and the sustainable use of nature in the EU, particularly through the Natura 2000 network of areas of high biodiversity value. The directives are key elements of the [EU Biodiversity Strategy](#), Target 1 of which has the following goals:

- 100% more habitat assessments (34%) and 50% more species assessments (25,5%) under the Habitats Directive in a favourable or improved conservation status; and
- 50% more species assessments (78%) under the Birds Directive with a secure or improved status.

The report describes the key results for the 2007-12 reporting period, and represents an unprecedented level of collaboration between the Member States and European institutions. It contains information on the status of about **450 wild bird species, 231 habitat types and more than 1200 other species of Community interest**. It notes that, while this is only one component of the extent of biodiversity in the EU, it is a very important sample, reflecting the threats and pressures facing biodiversity across the Member States.

The report also notes that this is the second conservation status assessment under the Habitats Directive, enabling the first comparative EU level assessment to be made. There has been a similar reporting exercise under the Birds Directive, enabling a comprehensive status and trends assessment of all species covered by EU nature legislation to be made for the first time.

Findings

All birds species: the report states that the status 52% of all the wild bird species assessed is secure (as in 2004). About 15% are near threatened, declining or depleted and another 17% of the species are threatened. The short-term population trends of the bird species indicate that only 4% are non-secure but increasing, while 6% are non-secure and stable, and further 20% are non-secure and decreasing. The report gives instances of where some bird species appear to be benefiting from targeted conservation measures aimed at adapting land-use practices, especially in Natura 2000 sites.

Species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive: about 23% of EU-level species assessments indicate a favourable status, while 60% are unfavourable, of which 18% are unfavourable-bad. In relation to status trends the 60% of assessments recorded as unfavourable are composed of 4% that are improving, 20% that are stable, 22% that are deteriorating and 14% without a known trend.

Many of the bad status/deteriorating trends are found in species associated with **aquatic environments such as rivers, lakes and wetlands**. This corresponds with the finding that freshwater habitats mostly have an unfavourable-inadequate conservation status. They are being threatened by **human-induced changes to hydrologic functioning**, loss of connectivity, canalisation, removal of sediment, and eutrophication and pollution.

Habitats: the conservation status of and trends for habitats are **worse than for species**. This is probably due to a more established tradition of conservation action for species, and the less complex nature and

shorter response time for species to recover. Across the EU, 16% of habitat assessments are favourable, while **more than three quarters are unfavourable**, of which 30% are unfavourable-bad. No additional habitats achieved favourable conservation status.

In relation to status trends, the 77% assessed as unfavourable are composed of 4% that show improvement, 33% that are stable, 30% that indicate further deteriorations and 10% with an unknown trend. **Grasslands and wetlands** have the highest proportion of habitats with an unfavourable-bad and deteriorating status. This is also supported by the findings on pressures and threats, which have highlighted that these systems are particularly affected by agriculture and hydrological changes.

Overall trend: the overall trend for habitats appears to be broadly similar to the one for species. Those that are already favourable/secure remain stable or are improving further. A small proportion of unfavourable/non-secure assessments is improving, but a **larger proportion of those previously determined as unfavourable continues to deteriorate**. Unless there is a significant improvement in trends it will not be possible to achieve target 1 in the Biodiversity Strategy by 2020.

Conclusions: much stronger conservation efforts are needed to achieve the EU 2020 Biodiversity Target 1. Significant pressures and **threats from changes in agricultural practices** and continuing changes in hydrological conditions, as well as **over-exploitation and pollution of the marine environment**, need to be tackled to reverse these trends.

The effective management and restoration of the **Natura 2000** areas is central to achieving the objectives of the directives. Despite progress in establishing the network, insufficient progress has been made in introducing conservation objectives and measures that fully respond to the needs of the protected habitats and species. **Only 50% of sites were reported as having comprehensive management plans by end 2012**. EU funding instruments, which provide opportunities to support the management and restoration of Natura 2000, were not sufficiently used.

The conservation status of species and habitats can be improved through targeted action, as has been demonstrated, for example, by the LIFE Nature programme and by tailored agri-environmental actions co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

The Commission is working with Member States and stakeholders at EU biogeographic level to promote the exchange of experience and good practice on management and restoration.

Such improvements will continue to reap significant economic benefits from the extensive ecosystem services provided by the Natura 2000 Network. Benefits, estimated at between

EUR 200-300 billion for terrestrial sites alone, include carbon storage, mitigation of natural hazards, water purification, health and tourism. These should continue to encourage further investment in the network.