LIFE III

focus

LIFE-Nature: communicating with stakeholders and the general public

Best practice examples for Natura 2000

European Commission

European Commission
Environment Directorate General

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Foreword

by the European Landowners Association

European Landowners' Organisation

LIFE's objectives are to encourage proper communication on Natura 2000 and to develop solutions in the field. LIFE-Nature, even if everyone has not understood its needs since its early origins, becomes a clear tool not only for going into the heart of Natura 2000's issue operating at the level of the individual sites but also for bringing together landowners, land users and stakeholders, inviting them to find sustainable, balanced and consensual solutions for their specific management problems.

After already ten years of existence, LIFE is entering into a more intensive phase, paving the way of the preparation of management plans for Natura 2000 sites, looking for broad partnership and inputs from the different landowners and users.

This principle of collaboration is enshrined in the Habitats Directive, requiring that conservation measures take account of the economic, social and cultural requirements as well as the regional and local characteristics of the area.

Natura 2000 affects part of a living landscape, much of Europe's natural diversity has been developed through the centuries by human beings.

As there is a clear fear from the users' side that Natura 2000 could affect their livelihoods and restrict their activities, they should be able to find in the examples provided by LIFE-Nature an answer to their anxiety as the projects have to pave the way for National or Regional Governments providing them good examples and inviting them not to be burdensome over regulating.

The manner in which Natura 2000 will be implemented is very important – the involvement of the owner of private land is crucial. LIFE shows that contracts are preferable to constraints. There seems to be a myth that private economic land use practices have in principle a negative impact on nature. However this is quite often the contrary as conservation is highly dependent on the continued active management of the sites and implementing LIFE has demonstrated how much can be learned from the practical experience.

One of LIFE's achievements is to show that cooperation leads to new opportunities for rural areas and that at the end of the day, when actors are really concerned by nature, as most of the landowners are (it's their valuable asset), there is no objection to applying solutions favourable for biodiversity, if this was not already the case.

Because LIFE-Nature is designed to help to establish the network and demonstrate how it may function in practice, it is indeed open to everyone. It is regrettable that private actors haven't made sufficient use of it in the past as LIFE-Nature really may help to resolve existing issues on Natura 2000 (for well-known reasons).

Its bottom-up approach is a key factor in determining sustainable solutions to be found at site level in close agreement with landowners and users. This reduces conflicts and helps to develop a shared vision for the long-term management of sites and to identify opportunities and promote measures to help put these into practice for the benefit of all. Another advantage is to promote partnership giving the different socio-economic partners an opportunity to build up a sense of trust and mutual understanding.

Finally, LIFE giving life to Natura 2000 by providing model examples, invites Member States and Regions to apply the Natura 2000 regulation cautiously: whilst a level of regulation is neces-

sary to ensure that basic standards are met, there should be reluctance to introduce burdensome regulation prohibiting all activities in the Natura 2000 areas.

By its examples, LIFE demonstrates clearly that overall prohibitions are not the purpose of the Network. On the contrary, there is a great need for flexibility in order not only to maintain but also to enhance nature conservation and its biodiversity. Doing so, LIFE gains trust and confidence in favour of the initiative as rural actors feel that they are invited to make a real contribution and not just being "heard out".

To engage private landowners on conservation activities and recognize the fact that they are contributing to nature conservation is bridging a gap between various stakeholders and public authorities. In doing so, it is indicating the direction that must be pursued.

A good example of this evolution is the Natura Networking Initiative involving in a consortium of organisation Eurosite, Europarc and the European Landowners' Organization.

LIFE-Nature preparing management plans for Natura 2000 sites, developing best practices experiences, coordinating actions for endangered species across the EU, involving all the actors of rural society, and opening a window for Natura 2000 is a crucial tool for fulfilling the target of Göteborg: halting the decline of biodiversity.

LIFE is already by itself quite an achievement. Addressing itself to a broader public of stakeholders and encouraging landowners and land users to play their role, to share their achievements for nature conservation and to involve themselves in the development of more than just model examples allows us to say that LIFE paves the way for a broad socio-economic and environmental consensus.

This publication puts into evidence the need to communicate LIFE's projects and their good examples in order to take part usefully and actively to the demands of Natura 2000.

It is our belief that the future of Europe's countryside is dependent on the individual management decisions of its millions of actors and private landowners. Their future depends on innovation, value creation and enhancement of biodiversity. This booklet shows us how LIFE is a tool for bridging the gaps and building cooperation between public authorities, NGO's, private owners and economic actors.

Therefore, we warmly welcome this publication.

Thierry de l'Escaille

Purpose of this report

For the past ten years the European Commission's LIFE-Nature fund has been assisting in the establishment of the Natura 2000 Network, – a European network of sites designed to protect Europe's rich and diverse natural heritage.

Around €558 million has been spent so far on co-financing practical conservation projects in over 1800 sites across Europe, representing 10% of the network.

Through this comes a wealth of practical experiences and knowledge on implementing Natura 2000 which can be of use to others involved in conservation management and, indeed, in land use policies generally.

In this report we focus specifically on LIFE-Nature's experiences of communicating with different stakeholder groups and the general public in order to gain acceptance and support for Natura 2000.

Considering that the Natura 2000 Network is set to cover almost a fifth of the European territory and touch the lives of many sectors of society, the need for communication cannot be stressed enough. It is fundamental to the success of Natura 2000.

Unfortunately, to date, so much attention has been focused on selecting sites for the Network that few have had the chance to explain what Natura 2000 means in practice for the people concerned. The result is that some stakeholder groups feel alienated from the process and – in the absence of an open forum for dialogue – fear the worst.

Yet their concerns are likely to be largely unfounded. There is no doubt that people will continue to live and work in Natura 2000 sites and most will require only minor adjustments to current land use practices to ensure they are compatible with the species and habitats present.

What is more, the scale of Natura 2000 is such that in some cases it can become a powerful ally for rural areas across Europe, providing opportunities for increased inward investment and economic diversification through positive management.

The general public, too, stands to gain thanks to the fact that Natura 2000 can provide them with greater opportunities for enjoying and discovering 'their' rich and diverse nature.

Thus, in contrast to the more classic nature reserves of the past – Natura 2000 is essentially about 'people in nature' rather than 'nature without people'. Everyone should therefore feel a sense of shared ownership and responsibility towards this important pan-European initiative.

For this to happen however there has to be good communication at all levels. People need to be fully informed about the aims of Natura 2000 and actively involved in decisions over the future management of the sites. Not only will this help to dispel unfounded fears and mis-perceptions but it should also help to incite interest and active collaboration from different sectors of society.

The LIFE-Nature projects have demonstrated time and again that the level of acceptance and interest in Natura 2000 increases in direct proportion to the level of time and effort spent on communication. And, as always with LIFE, it is on the basis of such practical experiences that solutions are found which can then be applied elsewhere.

The purpose of this report is threefold:

> **The first objective** is to provide an overview of the key issues relating to communicating on Natura 2000. This is presented in section one which looks at current perceptions of Natura 2000, the type of communication activities funded under LIFE-Nature and the reasons why communication is so important.

> **The second objective** is to provide a series of practical LIFE-Nature examples of successful communication techniques used by LIFE projects to communicate with different interest groups (part 2).

> **The final objective** is to offer some basic guidelines and practical advice on how to communicate effectively on Natura 2000 with different audiences, based on the LIFE experiences. This is presented in chapter 3 of the report (page 16–26).

The overall ambition of the report is to inspire each and everyone, LIFE-Nature projects included, to communicate better and more effectively about Natura 2000 in order to raise the profile and level of understanding of this important network.

Only then can the discussions about the future management of Natura 2000 move into the realm of an informed debate and away from the instinctively negative perceptions that currently prevail. Once this is done, a wealth of new opportunities should open up for all sectors of society to derive some benefit from Natura 2000 through greater cooperation, new partnerships and increased access.

As for nature, Natura 2000 offers a unique opportunity to conserve Europe's diverse and rare habitats and species across their natural range, irrespective of national or political boundaries. Such an opportunity cannot be missed if man and nature are to cohabit in harmony and if development is to progress in a sustainable manner that safeguards our rich natural heritage.

PART ONE
ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Natura 2000 Network

The Natura 2000 Network is expected to cover almost a fifth of the EU territory. It is the most ambitious undertaking yet to safeguard Europe's rare and threatened habitats and species. The sheer scale of the Network means that it must remain an integral part of a living landscape in which people are at the heart of the process rather than on the periphery.

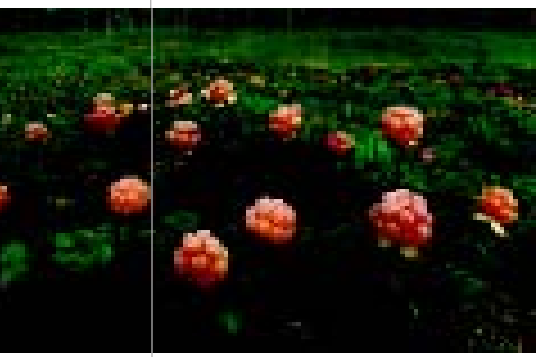


Photo © Jurma Luhta

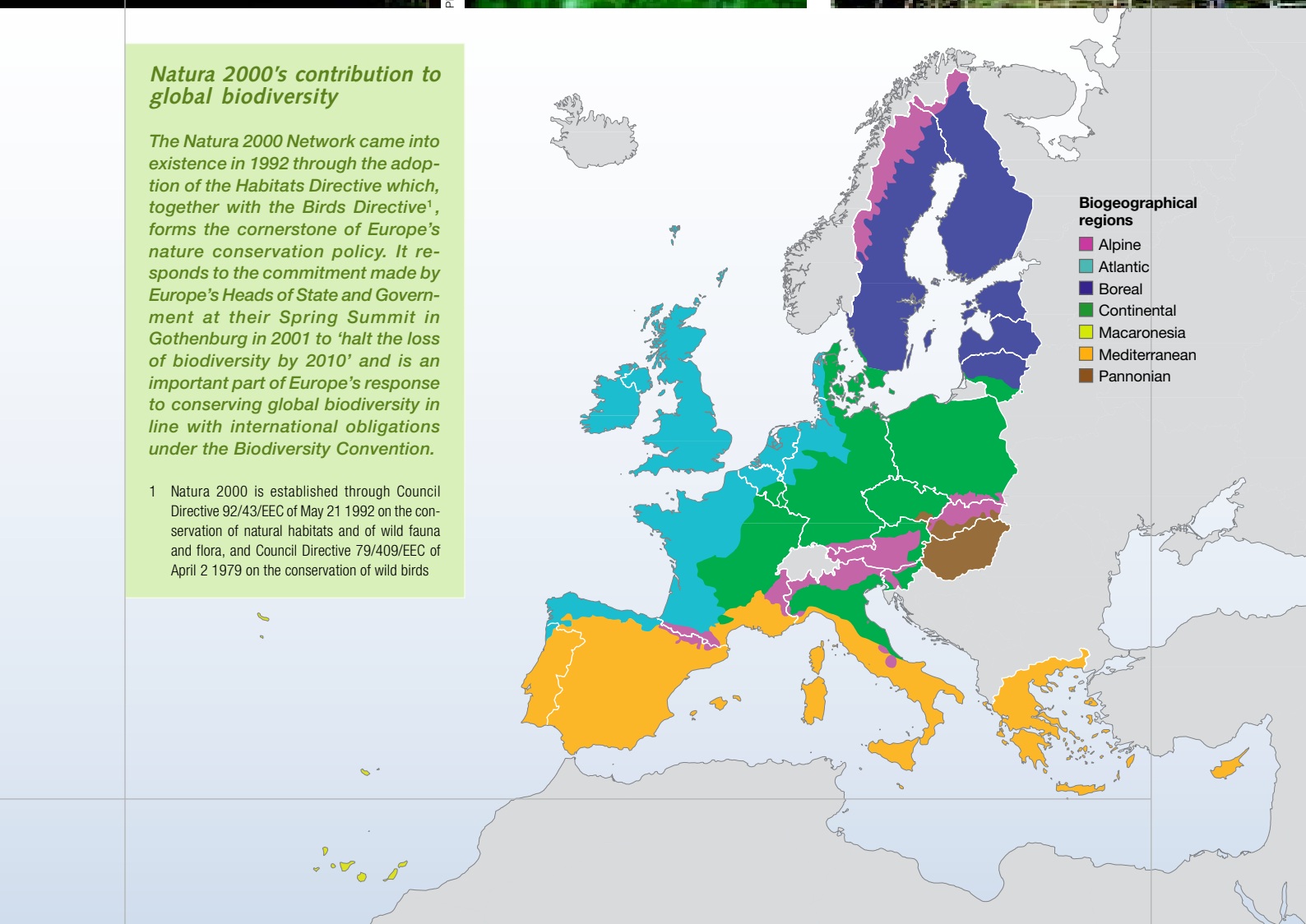
Photo © Zsolt Kalotás

Photo © Arcturos

Natura 2000's contribution to global biodiversity

The Natura 2000 Network came into existence in 1992 through the adoption of the Habitats Directive which, together with the Birds Directive[1], forms the cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy. It responds to the commitment made by Europe's Heads of State and Government at their Spring Summit in Gothenburg in 2001 to 'halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010' and is an important part of Europe's response to conserving global biodiversity in line with international obligations under the Biodiversity Convention.

1 Natura 2000 is established through Council Directive 92/43/EEC of May 21 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, and Council Directive 79/409/EEC of April 2 1979 on the conservation of wild birds



Natura 2000 – putting people at the heart of the process

Natura 2000 has to be one of most ambitious initiatives ever launched to protect Europe's rich and diverse natural heritage. Responding to the growing concern of Europeans over the rapid loss of their wildlife, it sets out to create an extensive network of protected areas across the European Union to conserve its rare species and habitats.

So far, some 18,000 sites have been proposed for the Natura 2000 Network, covering almost a fifth of the European territory – an area equivalent to the size of Germany and Italy put together.

With the recent enlargement of the EU, this coverage is likely to extend even further. Not only do the new Member States have a rich biodiversity of their own, but they also harbour species and habitats that have almost disappeared from the rest of Europe.

It is this European dimension that sets Natura 2000 apart from previous efforts to conserve nature in Europe. For the first time, all 25 Member States are working together towards the same goal and within the same strong legislative framework (i.e. the Habitats and Birds Directives) to protect and manage vulnerable species and habitats across their natural range, irrespective of national or political boundaries. As such, the network should add up to substantially more than the sum of its parts.

The other distinguishing feature of Natura 2000 is that it puts people at the heart of the process rather than on its periphery. This principle of collaboration is enshrined in the Habitats Directive, which requires that conservation measures 'take account of the economic, social and cultural requirements and the regional and local characteristics of the area'.

It also follows the principle of good governance which advocates greater participation and openness in shaping and delivering EU policies.

This breaks with the more traditional top-down approach of classic nature reserves, where people were tolerated rather than integrated. Natura 2000 is in fact more about saying 'take note – this is our common heritage' rather than 'keep out – this is for wildlife not people'.

Such an approach has many advantages, both for nature conservation and for people living and working in rural areas. By actively associating different stake-holders in the management and implementation of Natura 2000 sites, many vulnerable semi-natural habitats and species which are dependent upon positive management will be maintained. By the same token, the sheer scale of Natura 2000 should make it a powerful ally in maintaining the economic viability and social fabric of many rural areas.

This can bring new opportunities for economic diversification and inward investment, for instance through the EU's Regional policy and Rural Development Programme. Recent discussions over the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the new financial perspectives for the Community Budget post-2006, for instance, attach increasing importance to this potential synergy between nature conservation and the maintenance of dynamic rural areas.

All of this, however, requires a concerted effort in communication, as much at the local level as at the European level and across all sectors and interest groups.

Europe: a living landscape

Semi-natural habitats are often as important in biodiversity terms as natural habitats. They characterise much of Europe's landscape but it is only when comparing different regions of Europe that one begins to appreciate their sheer scale and diversity. The Spanish dehesas, Irish machairs, Austrian mountain hay meadows or Hungarian steppes, for instance, are all unique to their regions. Intensively managed cornfields and enriched grasslands on the other hand look pretty much the same wherever they are in Europe. Unfortunately, the latter is increasingly common place, and is often established at the expense of the traditional semi natural landscapes.

Shepherding in the moors and heath of west Münster.

Photo © Christoph Aschemeier

Current perceptions of Natura 2000

Up to now most efforts relating to Natura 2000 have concentrated on selecting sites for the Network. The scale of this work was unprecedented. Many countries had to launch nationwide surveys and biological inventories which mobilised much of the scientific community and monopolised most of the national conservation authorities' time.

This selection process is now finally reaching an end. Community lists of Natura 2000 sites have so far been adopted for 2 of the 6 biogeographical regions and the remainder is due by the end of 2004, together with the additional contributions from the ten new Member States.

With so much attention focused on choosing sites for Natura 2000, few countries had the time to initiate a proactive awareness raising campaign to explain what Natura 2000 actually means in practice for those involved. Many conservation authorities also felt that it might be premature to start up a dialogue until the Network was complete.

This lack of early communication has however created a number of problems. It has, for instance, alienated certain stakeholder groups and, sometimes, created a general air of suspicion or even resentment towards Natura 2000. In France, Finland and parts of Germany major campaigns were launched against Natura 2000 during the 1990s in response to fears that Natura 2000 would affect their livelihoods and restrict their activities.

The trouble is that, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary or opportunities for dialogue, the concern that Natura 2000 'prevents development' will continue to prevail – spurred on by a vocal minority and a few high profile cases in the European press.

In reality though, these concerns are likely to be largely unfounded.

Stakeholder attitudes towards Natura 2000 in the Baltic States

A recent opinion poll in the Baltic States on the knowledge and attitude of key stakeholder groups (farmers, foresters, fishermen, local administrations and NGOs) towards Natura 2000 concludes that 'in general, it can be seen that the acceptance of Natura 2000 grows along with the level of detailed and factual knowledge people have about it. Not enough information leads to a very negative and suspicious attitude as it creates an instinctive rather than an objective reaction'.

Management of coastal meadows in Estonia

Photo © Voldemar Rannap

How do Czech land owners perceive Natura 2000?

In a recent opinion poll undertaken in the Czech Republic by the Regional Environmental Centre, landowners were asked to identify what they saw as the most problematic issues arising from creating a network of protected areas under Natura 2000 in the Czech Republic.

These were the findings:

- *34% were concerned that Natura 2000 would mean restricting and regulating activities, how would their activities be safeguarded?*
- *20% considered that it would be difficult to harmonise the interests of nature with actual management and the land owners needs, how will agreements be reached with all landowners, what if someone doesn't agree?*
- *20% considered that finance was the key issue. Without this it would not be possible to preserve or protect nature*
- *9% were concerned about who would be in charge of supervising the network, what kind of sanctions will be imposed, how can corruption be avoided*
- *9% were worried about outsiders not respecting the conditions – e.g. illegal dumping, trespassing, co-operation with other neighbouring land owners so as not to feel isolated by being in Natura 2000*
- *8% were concerned about the level of bureaucracy involved, too many rules and regulations, authorities disinclined to be of service.*

Photo © UK limestone pavements LIFE project

www.natura2000.cz

People will continue to earn a living from farming, forestry, fishing, hunting etc… in Natura 2000 sites and most will only need to make minor adjustments to current land-use practices to ensure they are compatible with the needs of the species and habitats present. They also ignore the potential added value of Natura 2000 in terms of recreation, quality of life, tourism and natural products etc….

With the benefit of hindsight, both Member States and the European Commission recognise that more might have been done early on to pre-empt the negative reactions to Natura 2000.

That is why, in May 2002, all 25 EU countries signed the El Teide Declaration to emphasise their commitment in promoting greater awareness and understanding of Natura 2000 and involving stake-holders in decisions over the long term management of the sites.

This Declaration came at a crucial turning point in the history of Natura 2000 as efforts began to shift away from designation towards that of implementation and management.

In this respect, LIFE-Nature projects can play an important role in demonstrating how communication between different sectors of society can work in practice and how this can lead to tangible results for the long term management of Natura 2000 sites, based on cooperation and mutual understanding.

Having operated so far on over 10% of the sites included in the Natura 2000 Network, these projects provide a useful test bed for gauging people's reactions to Natura 2000 and offer a wealth of practical examples across Europe of cooperation with different stakeholder groups and the general public under a wide range of socio-economic circumstances.

Their overwhelming conclusion is that effective dialogue does almost invariably increase the level of acceptance and support for Natura 2000. The aim of this report is to explore how this was achieved and to pass on such best practice experiences to others involved in managing and implementing Natura 2000.

Wallonia's publicity campaign for Natura 2000

As in many countries, Natura 2000 was initially poorly understood by Belgian stakeholders and was largely unknown to the general public. The Wallonian Government decided therefore to launch a high profile media campaign on Natura 2000. Full-page spreads appeared in main-stream newspapers, publicity spots were made on national radio and TV and high profile events and open days were organised to encourage people to visit their local Natura 2000 sites.

So far the campaign looks to be achieving is objectives very effectively. Not only has Natura 2000 become a familiar term in many Wallonian households but it has also incited active interest in finding out more about 'their' nature. Stake-holders too have become more open to dialogue and discussion over the future management of these sites.

The way in which the campaign has been implemented has been central to its success. The messages used were positive, inclusive, under-standable to all and focused on building trust and confidence. They also gave Natura 2000 an easily recognisable identity in the form of a cartoon character – Mr Natura 2000 – who appeared on all the publicity materials and at events.

http://natura2000.wallonie.be

Overview of communication activities in LIFE-Nature projects

One of the most effective ways of showing people what Natura 2000 means in practice and winning their support is to present them with practical real-life examples of Natura 2000 in action.

Photo © Eero Vapa

LIFE-Nature projects have operated on over 10% of the sites in the Natura 2000 Network, under a wide range of circumstances and socio-economic conditions. They therefore provide an invaluable source of examples of communicating with different sectors of society on Natura 2000.

The overwhelming conclusion from the 700 projects funded so far is that attitudes can, and really do, change once a concerted effort is made to explain Natura 2000 to local interest groups and involve them in decisions about the subsequent management of the sites.

This is not to say the process is without difficulties, or doesn't suffer from the occasional impasse, but the level of success generally increases in proportion to the time and effort spent in planning their communication work.

The advantage of LIFE-Nature is that it adopts a bottom up approach. Projects are able to operate at the level of the individual sites themselves which puts the beneficiaries – be they public authorities, NGOs or stakeholder groups – in direct contact with the people that are most likely to be affected by Natura 2000.

It also provides them with the necessary resources to initiate discussions on the future management of the sites and to suggest improvements in existing legislative practices and instruments.

As such, LIFE-Nature opens a 'window' onto Natura 2000 and offers a wealth of successful experiences on raising awareness and engaging stakeholders.

LIFE-Nature: good governance in practice

Adopted at the same time as the Habitats Directive in 1992, the LIFE-Nature component of the LIFE programme is designed to help fund the conservation of habitat types and species listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives, particularly in Natura 2000 areas.

The intention is not to pay for the implementation of the Natura 2000 Network wholesale (this would require much more money) but to help establish the network and demonstrate how it can function in practice.

Thus, in many respects LIFE-Nature follows the principles of good governance, by encouraging greater participation and openness in shaping and delivering EU policies.

Particular importance is attached to engaging local stakeholders in the different project activities, for instance, by encouraging partnerships between them within the framework of the project.

LIFE-Nature projects also bridge the gap between European policy making and local implementation by establishing a direct link between the Commission, the Member States and the local actors.

Through LIFE-Nature, the Commission becomes more than a simple co-financier. It takes on the role of a partner in its own right, helping to implement Natura 2000 across the EU.

Ten key strengths of LIFE-Nature projects

1. *Adopts a bottom-up approach to Natura 2000*
2. *Functions at the level of the individual sites*
3. *Provides a framework for working in partnership with other interest groups*
4. *Mobilises interest in Natura 2000 at local level*
5. *Develops sustainable solutions for the long-term management of sites*
6. *Demonstrates how these solutions can be put into practice in cooperation with local interest groups*
7. *Pump primes the use of other long term funds such as Rural Development Programme and agri-environment schemes*
8. *Develops best practice experience on conservation management practices*
9. *Promotes an exchange of experiences and networking between projects*
10. *Brings a sense of pride to an area that has received EU funds for their nature.*

Stakeholder workshop on responsible hunting.

Working in partnership

Photo © Spanish Cetacean Society, SEC

LIFE-Nature is open to everyone – from national, regional and local authorities, NGOs, stakeholders and interest groups, to other public bodies and even private enterprises.

The majority of the beneficiaries however tend to be either public authorities who have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that Natura 2000 is implemented (72%) and conservation NGOs who have much of the practical know-how and expertise (27%) on species and habitat management.

This diversity has enabled projects to develop different approaches both in terms of the scale of the projects and of the type of activities undertaken. Several have, for instance, adopted a strategic approach by working on a whole suite of sites (sometimes across an entire country).

The scale of these projects provides a number of advantages. They tend to receive a high media profile, which makes it easier to mobilise interest and cooperation with other interest groups. They also often involve many partners, which is useful in sharing experiences and developing management models and best practice techniques that can be applied on a large scale.

The majority of LIFE-Nature projects, however, still operate on one or two sites.

They are usually run by regional or local conservation authorities who have the advantage of being already familiar with, and involved in, the day-to-day land-use activities of the area in question. They also know the socio-economic and cultural context of the project: who the main interest groups are and what their attitudes towards nature conservation tend to be.

This bottom up approach is a key factor in determining the success of many LIFE-Nature projects since it ensures that sustainable solutions are found at the level of the individual sites and in close agreement with the local actors.

Another major strength of LIFE-Nature is that it provides a structured framework in which public and private stakeholder groups can learn to work together.

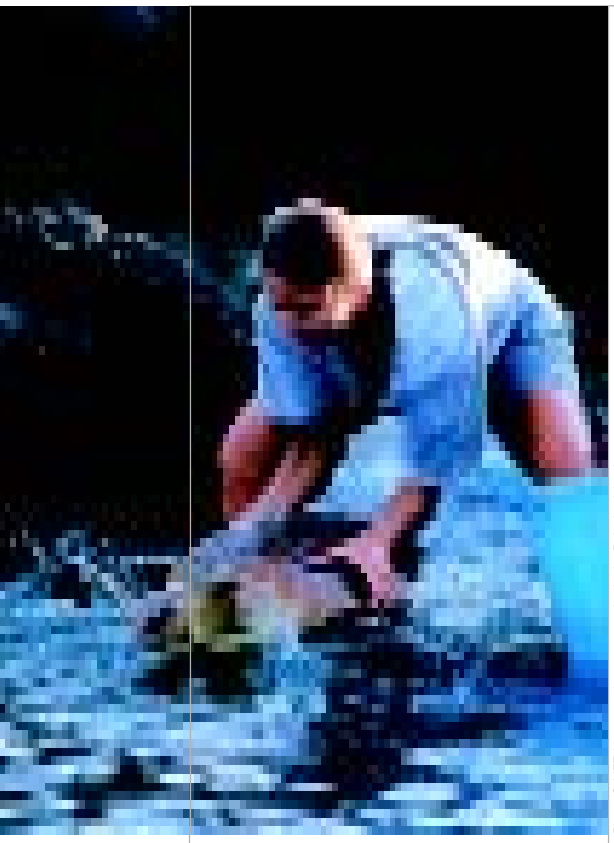
Since the start of LIFE III in the year 2000 over two thirds of the 256 projects funded so far have been run by partnerships. The average number of partners is 2 to 3 per project depending on the type of management issues involved and their location (whether in an area of significant human land uses and land owners or with very few socio-economic interests). Some may have more than 10 partners.

Thus, within these LIFE projects, the different socio-economic partners have an opportunity to build up a sense of trust by sharing their experiences and expertise and develop a mutual understanding of each others interests and concerns.

This not only helps to develop a shared vision for the long-term management of the site but also provides a means of identifying additional opportunities to put these into practice.

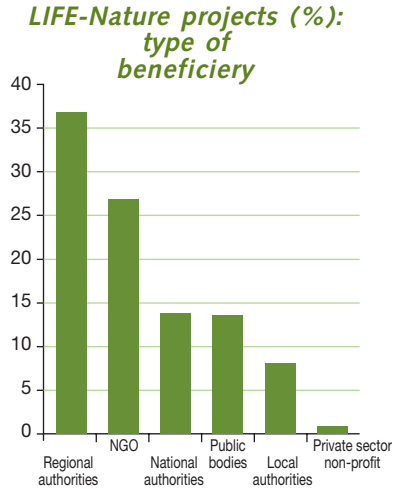
The success of this last aspect is evident from the significant number of projects that maintain and expand their partnerships long after the LIFE funding stops and who go on to apply, as a partnership, for other more long term funding sources such as the Rural Development Programme.

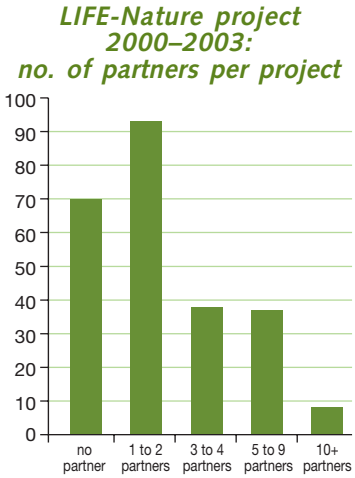
When asked, most beneficiaries consider this partnership approach to be one of the key strengths of LIFE-Nature funding. Sometimes, merely the fact of bringing partners together to write a LIFE application is in itself motivation enough to start a constructive dialogue over the future of the Natura 2000 sites.

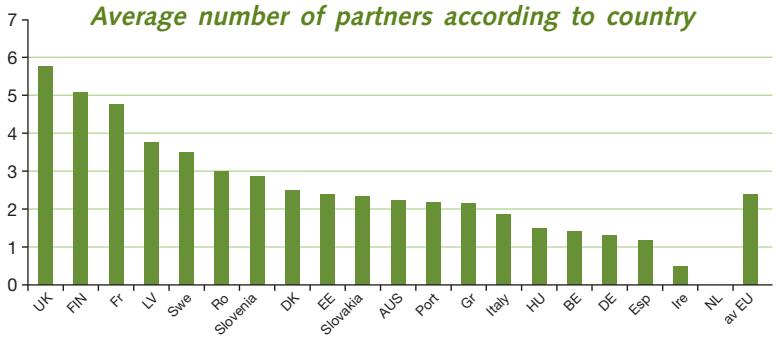


LIFE-Nature project on sea tutles in the Pelagian islands.

Photo © LIFE-Nature project on sea tutles in the Pelagian islands







LIFE-Nature helps to de-block the impasse on Natura 2000 in France

In the mid 1990s, the French Government froze the implementation of Natura 2000 in response to strong opposition from many stakeholder groups. The latter felt alienated from the process and resentful of the fact that they had not been consulted over the choice of sites, many of which were in private ownership. Initially, there seemed to be no way out of this impasse. But then the government decided to carry out a LIFE-Nature project on 36 different sites across different regions to develop a modus operandi for involving local interest groups in discussions over the future management of Natura 2000 sites in their areas.

The project developed a planning system that uses independent facilitators to develop management plans which are then discussed by local steering groups. These groups are specifically set up to involve local stakeholders and landowners in the decision making process. The steering groups have been very successful and have since become the focal point for developing legally binding Natura 2000 contracts with stakeholders which are usually funded through the French Rural Development Programme.

Thanks largely to this project, the debate on Natura 2000 in France was re-launched and dialogue re-established amongst the different interest groups.

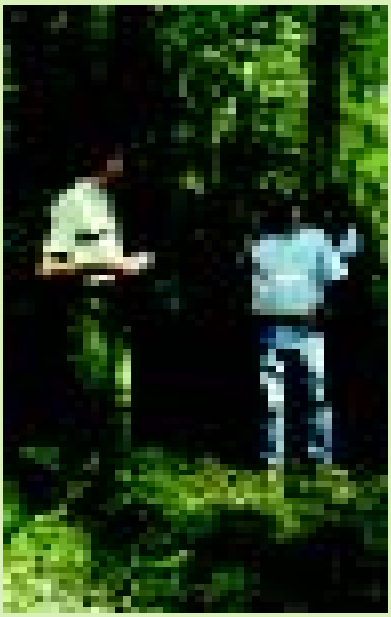


Photo © Florent Favier

Communication activities funded under LIFE-Nature

Most LIFE-Nature projects undertake a whole suite of different activities in order to achieve their goal. Almost all of these have some some communication function.

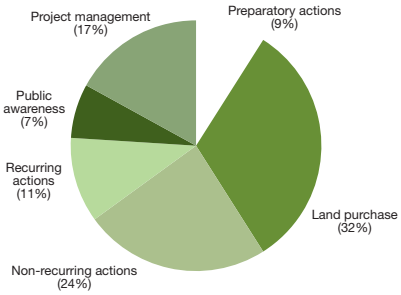
Preparatory actions, for instance, can involve initial contacts and dialogue with stakeholder groups or studies of their socio-economic activities and attitudes towards Natura 2000. This in turn helps to determine the most appropriate management actions to take.

They also involve the development of management plans in close consultation with different interest groups. Experience has shown that management plans are an invaluable tool for securing the long-term conservation of Natura 2000 sites, be they large or small. This is because they provide a framework in which to engage all interest groups in discussions over the practicalities of Natura 2000 and so help to develop a consensus on the long-term management options for the sites.

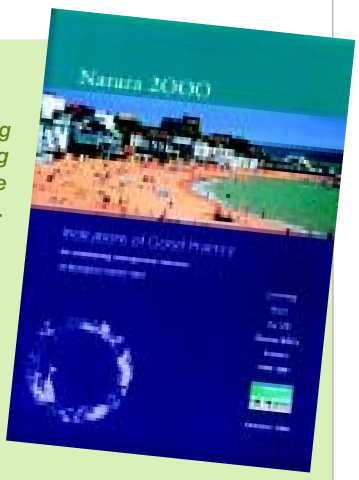
The on site conservation actions also usually involve establishing agreements and contracts with farmers, foresters, hunters etc.... to help manage the Natura 2000 sites and to set up high profile demonstration plots to illustrate how this can be done.

The fact that each project has a dedicated management team also provides them with a human face and a visible focal point. Local project managers, in particular, find that they spend a considerable amount of time talking to others and promoting the project's goals and aspirations, be it through formal steering committees or just by chatting to people they happen to meet.

LIFE-Nature projects: average budget allocation



Management plans – an important communication tool



Gaining trust and confidence is fundamental to the success of any initiative involving decisions over people's private lands and livelihoods. In the case of Natura 2000, winning people's trust is only possible if a genuine interest is shown in their views and if these views are also taken into account in decisions over the future conservation of the site. People must feel that they are making a real contribution and not just being 'heard out'.

One of the most effective ways of achieving this is through the preparation of Natura 2000 management plans. This has proven to be very popular in LIFE-Nature projects. Over 60% have produced such plans and begun to implement them before the end of the project, usually with the help of the different stakeholder groups. This has led to some useful good practices on how to organise public participation and initiate stakeholder dialogue (e.g. the Marine SACs project in UK: http://www.ukmarinesac.org.uk)

The key advantages of these plans are that they:

- *gather all the necessary conservation information on the site in one place for all to see;*
- *clarify the existing land uses and their interrelation with nature conservation;*
- *provide an open forum for debate;*
- *lead to a consensus view on how the long term management should be done;*
- *create a sense of shared ownership for the final product amongst all participating groups.*

In many respects the management planning process is as important as the final end product. Issues can be discussed in greater detail than would be possible through more classic public consultation processes. In addition they provide a means for different participants to learn from each other and appreciate the other person's views.

However it is important to remember that once the momentum is underway, it must be maintained. There is nothing more counter productive than stimulating a lot of support and interest in developing a management plan and a shared vision of how the site should be managed, only to find that there are no resources to implement it afterwards.

By the same token, it may sometimes be hard to keep stakeholders interested in the management planning process after the first flurry of meetings. Particular efforts will be needed to keep the process going and to stimulate interest and active collaboration on the part of the stakeholders.

Awareness raising activities

There is also a specific category of actions (E) in LIFE-Nature projects dedicated to awareness raising and dialogue. This is used by every project and accounts for approximately 7% of the overall budget.

The type of activities carried out under this category is very broad indeed and ranges from the conventional (production of leaflets) to the more experimental (theatre productions, innovative partnerships…).

Essentially, they have four main goals:

> To raise awareness of the natural values of the area and the conservation issues at stake;

> To mobilise interest amongst different sectors of society and engage them in the project's activities so as to encourage their long term involvement in managing Natura 2000 sites;

> To provide greater access to, and possibilities for enjoyment of natural areas whilst protecting fragile habitats and species;

> To disseminate and exchange experiences on best practice management techniques with other projects and conservation bodies.

Certain communication activities have become compulsory under LIFE III (2000–2004). This is to ensure that their experiences and achievements are widely disseminated. All projects are thus required to produce a dedicated website and, at the end of the project, a layman's report summarising their achievements. They must also acknowledge LIFE support on all material produced and help promote greater awareness of the Natura 2000 network (see following chapter).

The second part of this report gives some examples of how these different actions have been used successfully in raising awareness and engaging different interest groups in managing Natura 2000 sites.

High media coverage for LIFE-Nature projects

LIFE Nature projects in general have been particularly effective at gaining media interest for their activities. It is estimated that on average every project generates between 20 and 50 press articles during its lifetime. Quite a number though manage to generate hundreds of articles, particularly amongst the more complex and large scale projects.

Most of this press is local as Natura 2000 stories are rarely picked up in the national newspapers (unless they concern high profile conflicts) but the local press is probably a more effective way of getting the messages across since it is adapted to the local circumstances surrounding the individual sites. This is not to say that all articles are favourable, but at least they raise the profile of the issues and encourage further debate and involvement.

It is estimated that 12,000–15,000 newspaper articles, radio and TV interviews have been produced so far as a direct result of LIFE-Nature. This is far more than could ever have been generated by a coordinated publicity campaign at EU.*

Good practice recommendations in communicating on Natura 2000

This chapter looks at why it is important to communicate on Natura 2000 and offers some practical tips on how to do this effectively with different interest groups – be they stakeholders, public authorities or the general public.

Photo © Benninger Reid LIFE project

Communication covers everything from running high profile advertising campaigns and producing information material to hosting round table discussions and building partnerships, or simply talking to different interest groups.

It requires a certain amount of imagination, enthusiasm and creative thinking, as well as an organised and open approach towards others. However, this does not make it the sole preserve of communication specialists. Anyone involved in Natura 2000 can and, should, be involved in communication work.

Communication can in fact be relatively straightforward and very satisfying, providing certain basic principles are followed.

In this concluding chapter of part one of the report, we consider briefly some of these principles and offer some practical tips on how to put them into practice:

> Why do we want to communicate
> who do we want to communicate with
> what messages do we want to pass on
> how do we want to achieve this
> what pitfalls should we watch out for
> how do we know if we have succeeded.

These good practices are largely derived from the different experiences of LIFE-Nature projects which are presented in part two.

The aim is to illustrate the range of techniques that have been used successfully by LIFE in winning support for Natura 2000 locally and so inspire others involved in Natura 2000 to communicate more frequently and effectively on this important European initiative.

Why is it important to communicate on Natura 2000?

Photo © Catherine Keena

There are many good reasons for communicating on Natura 2000:

> **Natura 2000 is a direct response to public concerns** over the rapid loss of nature in Europe and people should be informed of what is being done to meet their concerns. According to a recent Eurobarometer survey, over a third of Europeans are worried about species extinction and loss of natural areas. Often though they will know more about wildlife in Africa than the nature that exists on their own doorstep. Thus, Natura 2000 also opens up opportunities for the public to discover and enjoy Europe's own wealth of natural heritage.

> **Yet, Natura 2000 remains largely unknown to the vast majority of Europeans**: Those who have heard of it tend to think it is simply another layer of protection or 'red tape' on top of existing national and international initiatives (nature reserves, Ramsar sites, National Parks…). They are not aware of the issues that make Natura 2000 different from previous conservation initiatives in Europe and that it is about 'people and nature' and not 'nature without people'.

> **Natura 2000 is a European initiative** – for the first time all 25 countries are working together to conserve nature using the same strong legislative framework. There is an important learning process in cooperating at a European level and many advantages in administrations, NGOs, stakeholders and site managers sharing their experiences and know-how.

Not only does it avoid 'reinventing the wheel' but it also creates a more coherent and effective approach towards the management of this Network. LIFE-Nature projects, in particular, are ideally placed to help achieve this exchange of experience.

> **Much of Natura 2000 will be on private land** and will be used for economic purposes. It is clear, therefore, that the owners and users must be informed and involved in discussions over the future management of their land (they are also often best placed to do this work). That way the different land-uses can be made compatible with each other and sustainable development can be allowed to continue whilst respecting the areas' natural values.

By the same token there also needs to be some recognition that public influence over private land for nature conservation purposes is as legitimate an undertaking as other over-riding public interests (e.g. landscape and visual impacts, infrastructure development, cultural heritage, health and safety …).

Ten good reasons to communicate on Natura 2000

1. *The vast majority of Europeans have still not heard of Natura 2000*
2. *It is a European initiative requiring exchange of experiences and networking*
3. *It involves mainly private land*
4. *It is currently shrouded in misconceptions*
5. *It can help create new opportunities and partnerships for rural areas*
6. *It leads to joined-up thinking at policy level*
7. *It informs the public of the governments' response to their concerns*
8. *It Increases people's possibilities to enjoy their natural heritage*
9. *It brings the discussion on Natura 2000 into the realm of an informed debate*
10. *It encourages everyone to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for Natura 2000*

> **Many myths and misconceptions have built up around Natura 2000** which need to be corrected. For instance, there seems to be a general view that economic land-use practices have, in principle, a negative impact on nature. Often it is just the contrary, conservation is highly dependent on the continued active management of sites and much can be learned from the stakeholders' own practical experiences in this respect.

People should also be aware that Natura 2000 does not systematically imply restrictions. Where change is required, the aim is to work with the stakeholders concerned so that the areas are managed sensitively, while at the same time introducing a degree of protection that recognises the social and economic uses of the site;

> **Greater communication and cooperation can lead to new opportunities for rural areas**. The rural economy in Europe has seen many changes over the last 50 years. An increasing number of rural areas are showing signs of economic struggle, especially those that practice extensive land uses in so-called marginal areas. This in turn has had serious social consequences, such as rural depopulation, which risks spreading to the new Member States.

Recent reforms of the CAP and Rural Development Programme (RDP) aim to address this problem by de-coupling farm payments from production and by introducing additional measures to diversify the economy and encourage greater inward investment. Natura 2000 is ideally placed in this respect. It is a European policy in its own right covering an extensive part the territory, often in exactly those marginal rural areas.

As such, Natura 2000 can become a powerful ally in attracting inward investments to help maintain existing land use practices or encourage new ones (e.g. tourism). Indeed several RDP measures are now specifically geared to Natura 2000 in recognition of its important role in maintaining rural diversity.

> **Communication leads to joined-up thinking at policy level**. In most Natura 2000 areas, various public bodies and governmental departments have an influence on the way the different land-uses within that area are practiced. Consequently, their actions can directly impact on Natura 2000 and influence the way a site is managed. It is vital therefore that these different public authorities are made fully aware of Natura 2000 so that it can be taken into account in their daily work.

> And finally, communication is the only way to **bring the discussions over Natura 2000 into the realm of an informed debate** and away from some of the more instinctively negative reactions that are often seen today which are caused by misunderstanding and lack of information. Establishing a dialogue between different interest groups and conservationists can help root out unfounded fears about the impact of Natura 2000.

This will not only pave the way for a more constructive discussion on the future management of these sites but also help identify those areas where Natura 2000 really does present a problem for those involved. Efforts can then be focused specifically on these difficult areas in order to find a way forward without bringing the whole Network into question again.

So the conclusion is clear: communication is essential if the Natura 2000 network is to succeed and everyone needs to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for conserving our rich natural heritage. Ultimately, we are all its stakeholders in this important task – whether conservationists, government officials, land owners and users or individual members of the public.

Volunteers, lowland Limestone Pavements, UK.

Photo © LIFE project LIFE996094

Photo © Archiv der Abteilung Umweltschutz, Amt der Tiroler Landesregierung

Who should we be communicating with?

Photo © Archiv der Abteilung Umweltschutz, Amt der Tiroler Landesregierung

Having identified that it is not only necessary but also beneficial to communicate on Natura 2000, the next question is who should we be communicating with? Experience has shown that there are essentially four distinct target groups for communicating on Natura 2000. The approach taken will be different for each (as section 2 of the report illustrates further):

> ***Stakeholders***
Stakeholders incorporate a range of different sectors of society, from those directly affected by Natura 2000, such as private landowners and land users to those that may be indirectly affected or implicated such as tourism providers, recreational groups or other private businesses. They also include people who could have an influence on the process, for instance key opinion leaders or local politicians.

> ***Public authorities***
Public authorities include all administrations whose policies and activities could have an impact on Natura 2000, whether positive or negative. This can be at local or regional level or at national level. The list is surprisingly long and includes, amongst others, authorities responsible for planning, water management, farming, forestry, tourism and fisheries, as well as other environmental departments dealing with EIAs or pollution and even, on occasion, administrations responsible for employment, justice and enterprise.

> ***The general public***
The general public is an equally diverse group. It can mean local communities living in and around Natura 2000 sites or those from further afield who come to enjoy 'nature' (through recreational pursuits, relaxation, tourism etc…). It also includes individuals who care about their natural environment and the loss of biodiversity and who want to make an active contribution through volunteer work.

> ***Conservation NGOs and other Civil Society groups***
NGOs have a wealth of scientific expertise and practical know-how as regards species and habitat management. They are particularly good at raising awareness and interest on conservation issues. Their large membership also makes them a powerful lobbying force and generates an important body of volunteers who want to help out and be the 'eyes and ears' of society, reporting problems where they see them.

Other civil society groups can also find useful areas of mutual benefit with nature conservation – schools, local youth clubs, heritage groups etc….

It may not be necessary to communicate with all of these different interest groups with the same level of effort. A lot will depend on the circumstances surrounding each individual site. It is useful therefore to determine who should be the primary target for communication and who should be a secondary target in order that limited resources are used where they are most required

A word should also be said about ***the media*** as they have a significant impact on people's attitudes and perceptions. Communicating with the media is an indirect way of reaching the different target audiences but is essential for winning (or losing!) support for Natura 2000 issues and should always be borne in mind when planning communication activities.

Photo © Lee Valley Regional Park Authority

Benefits of communicating with different target groups

Stakeholders	> *Develops an understanding of each others' interests* > *Encourages the sharing of experiences in managing the natural values under threat* > *Builds trust and confidence* > *Encourages a consensus approach to management* > *Creates a sense of pride and 'ownership' for the site* > *Creates new socio-economic opportunities and partnerships* > *Ensures continuity*
Policy developers and government bodies	> *Leads to better integration of N2000 into other policies* > *Encourages a more coordinated approach to land-use policies within the region* > *Highlights areas of mutual interest and helps to plan strategically*
General public	> *Addresses concerns over the loss of wildlife and nature* > *Raises the level of awareness of Europe's diverse natural heritage and the need to conserve it* > *Provides additional opportunities for learning, discovery, relaxation, recreation, health ….* > *Encourages responsible behaviour* > *Gives individuals a chance to get involved and make a contribution*
NGOs and other civil society groups	> *Hold much of the scientific and management expertise on nature* > *Campaign for and help raise the profile of Natura 2000* > *Raise funds for nature conservation* > *Implement conservation actions on the ground* > *Act as the 'eyes and ears' of society* > *Mobilises people through their membership*

Photo © Rädle

Key messages on Natura 2000

Photo © Plantlife

Limestone pavement, the Burren, Ireland

Developing strong messages is a fundamental part of any communication process and it is therefore worth spending some time in devising these, especially when dealing with something as complex as Natura 2000.

The importance of this cannot be over-emphasised, the best communication strategy in the world will be ineffective if it doesn't have a clear message or if the message is too confused or complicated.

Much can be learnt from commercial branding operations for popular consumer products (without of course having to adopt the same highly sophisticated techniques they use!). Their approach is to devise simple, easily understandable messages or slogans that people can relate to in their everyday lives.

Once these have been developed they are repeated over and over again until the 'brand' becomes a household name.

Natura 2000 is a classic example of a policy requiring simple but strong messages. The procedures and conditions for designation and management are so complex that one can quickly get lost in details. This, of course, also makes it much harder to explain to others.

Recognising this, the Commission and Member States are currently working on developing a set of key messages for Natura 2000, with the help of a Communication working group made up of Member States' public relations officers, communication specialists and NGOs. Their objective is to find a series of unifying themes that can be used in all countries to promote a common understanding and 'branding' of Natura 2000 across Europe.

To contribute to the debate the most popular themes used by LIFE-Nature projects have been examined to see which messages are most often used and appear to be particularly successful.

This revealed three main axes (see table):

> **The Nature angle**: Natura 2000 safeguards the most important rare habitats and species in Europe

> **The people angle:** Natura 2000 is 'your' nature. It allows sustainable development to proceed whilst protecting biodiversity

> **The European angle**: Natura 2000 sites exist in 25 countries, together they form part of a coordinated European Network of sensitively managed areas to protect species and habitats across their natural range and irrespective of political or national boundaries.

Key messages should be:

> ***Positive***
> ***Simple to understand for all***
> ***Memorable***
> ***Accurate***
> ***Realistic***

How these messages are then used and put across is, of course, up to the regional or local authorities, NGOs, projects and interest groups to decide. They are afterall the one who can ensure the messages are personalised, adapted and placed in the right local context, instead of being seen as coming from 'Brussels' (the sites are important in European context but it is still 'their local nature').

Further details of this and other communication initiatives, including the Commission's own communication strategy for Natura 2000 can be found in annex I and on the Commission's nature website http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm.

Photo © New Forest LIFE Partnership

Photo © David Kjaer

What is so special about Natura 2000?

The people angle –NATURA 2000 IS YOUR NATURE

- *Natura 2000 is a response to people's increasing concerns over the loss of biodiversity*
- *Natura 2000 helps to improve the quality of life for all and provides greater opportunities for recreation, relaxation, enjoyment and discovery in nature*
- *Many sites are valuable for nature because they have been managed extensively by people for centuries and are part of their culture*
- *People will continue to live and work in Natura 2000 sites: people need nature, nature needs people*
- *Natura 2000 is about working in partnership with local stakeholders to conserve nature in a living landscape*
- *Natura 2000 promotes sustainable development whilst protecting biodiversity*
- *Natura 2000 can provide new opportunities for rural areas in Europe*

The European angle – A 25 COUNTRY EUROPEAN NETWORK

- *25 countries are working together to form a European Network of sites to save Europe's rich and diverse natural heritage*
- *Natura 2000 sites exist in every country of the EU*
- *Every site is an important part of the European network*
- *The Natura 2000 Network covers almost a fifth of Europe's territory*
- *Thanks to a European Network species and habitats can be conserved across their natural range, irrespective of national boundaries*

The nature angle – SAVING NATURE

- *Natura 2000 conserves Europe's rich and diverse natural heritage, much of which has been formed by centuries of human activities*
- *Natura 2000 safeguards the most important and rare habitats and species in Europe, whilst promoting wider biodiversity*
- *Natura 2000 aims to bring endangered species back from the brink of extinction*
- *Natura 2000 provides areas for wildlife and man to cohabit in harmony*
- *Natura 2000 is part of Europe's response to saving global biodiversity*

Photo © Iñigo Fajardo

Photo © LIFE project LIFE96094

Photo © Veikko Vasama

Developing a communication strategy

Having identified why, with whom and what one wants to communicate, the next stage is to start planning how to put this into practice. As part two of this report illustrates there are a wide range of techniques that can be used but, in order to ensure they are effective and make the best use of limited resources, it is necessary to organise and plan the work carefully.

This is best done by developing a communication strategy. One should not be put off by the word 'strategy'. It does not automatically mean hiring communication experts or developing highly sophisticated marketing tools. Anyone can draw up and implement a strategy, even if they have never been involved in communication activities beforehand.

A strategy is simply a means of planning and organising one's activities to get the maximum benefit out of limited resources. It is essentially based on common sense and helps avoid dissipating one's efforts.

A strategy also provides an important reference point for determining whether the communication activities are having the desired effects. Is the strategy achieving its objectives or does it need to be fine tuned.

There are essentially five basic parts of any communication strategy (see box):

1. **Carry out a detailed analysis** of the Natura 2000 site to know who your primary stakeholders are, what their concerns/activities are and their general knowledge/interest in nature

2. **Set clear objectives** of what you want to achieve and identify your key messages and targets

3. **Devise an action plan** – how will you communicate, with whom, when, where, using which methods

4. **Allocate sufficient resources** – calculate what resources are needed when and ensure that these are made available

5. **Identify indicators of success** to enable you to review the achievements of the strategy at regular intervals and fine tune as necessary.

Photo © Christoph Rückriem

Local TV interview during Münster SPA LIFE project.

Basic ingredients of a communication strategy

Analysis
- *What are the main issues for nature conservation*
- *What land use activities are practised in and around the Natura 2000 sites*
- *How are they likely to be affected by Natura 2000 designation*
- *What other socio-economic issues need to be taken into account*
- *What other activities or land-use policies, laws, should be considered*
- *Who are the primary stakeholders, who else should be targeted*
- *What is their level of knowledge about nature and Natura 2000*
- *What are their attitudes to nature conservation and Natura 2000*
- *What actions have already been taken, were they successful, If not why not?*

Objectives
- *Make Natura 2000 known to all interest groups and the general public*
- *Explain what Natura 2000 means in practice*
- *Reassure the different audiences*
- *Encourage participation*

Action plan
- *What techniques are considered best for each of the target audiences*
- *How should they be done, when and where*
- *Who will do them,*
- *what resources are required*
- *Who will coordinate the work*
- *How will the momentum be maintained*

Funding
- *What are the estimated costs of implementing the action plan*
- *Has enough money and resources been earmarked in the annual budget*

Review
- *what are the success indicators for determining if the strategy has worked*
- *how will these be assessed, by whom and when: opinion polls, interviews, surveys, observations.*
- *how will the information be used to refine and adjust the strategy.*

What techniques to use?

Photo © UK LIFE project on limestone pavements

People remember:
> *10% of what they hear*
> *30% of what they read*
> *50% of what they see*
> *90% of what they do*

Source: Provoke, Relate, Reveal, Scottish Natural Heritage

The range of techniques that can be used for communicating on nature conservation is immense but essentially they fall into two main categories:
> one-way flow of information from you to your audience
> two-way flow of information between you and your audience.

These can in turn be delivered **directly** (e.g. through brochures, bilateral meetings etc) or **indirectly** (via the media, a third party or an intermediary such as a school or association)

Every method has advantages and disadvantages. These need to be taken into account when choosing which communication technique to use (see table opposite).

The **one-way flow of communication** is the most common form – e.g. leaflets, brochures, websites, information panels, videos, posters…. Its main advantage is that it is relatively cheap and easy to do and can theoretically reach a lot of people in one go.

It does however have considerable disadvantages too. The most obvious is that the information goes only one way. There is no assurance that people will actually read the material they are given and if they do, whether this will motivate them to show an interest.

This is all the more relevant in today's society where people are generally overloaded with information. If these methods are used they should be carefully planned and specifically adapted to respond to people's interests. Otherwise the material might simply be discarded unread.

The other option is to consider using a **two-way flow of communication such as** public information meetings, working groups, one-to-one discussions with individuals or organising field visits.

The main advantage is that it creates a personal contact between two parties and so helps build up mutual trust and understanding. For Natura 2000, this type of dialogue is essential for developing a consensus view on how the areas should be protected and managed.

The main disadvantage is that it takes a good deal of time, energy and resources as well as a certain amount of diplomacy and skill in communicating with others. If done properly however in the spirit of open dialogue, the success rate is often very high and well worth the effort.

Table: examples of different communication tools used in LIFE-Nature projects

Method	Advantage	Disadvantage
One way communication		
Printed – Letters – Brochures, leaflets – Reports, books – Magazines, newsletters – cartoons – postcards/calendars – t shirts – educational material	– Uses familiar techniques that are simple to manage – Requires less time and money – Reaches a wide audience both locally and further afield – Draws attention to a problem people may not know exists – Keeps people informed	– Needs to be effectively distributed – Is often not read – Can send confused messages that are not understood in the way they are intended – Is often not enough to motivate people to take action – Effects are short lived
Information technology – Website – CD Roms, DVD	– Avoids printing costs – Responds to an increasing IT-orientated society, especially amongst the young	– Not everyone is 'wired up' or computer literate yet, especially amongst the older generation
Visual – Information panels – Displays and exhibitions – Multimedia programs – Plays, theatre – Films – Videos – Photos	– Provides a permanent form of communication – If made entertaining and enjoyable can be memorable – Stimulates all the senses (sight, hearing, smell, feel) – Makes it easier to explain a complex story	– Becoming ubiquitous, people are starting to ignore them – Can contain too much information which is off–putting – More expensive to produce and requires specialised skills – Information or technology can become outdated
Two way communication		
Stakeholder orientated – One to one discussions, phone calls – Meetings, round tables, public hearings, workshops, – Management forum – Steering committee – Field visits **General public orientated** – guided tours – Work camps – Open days, festivals, events **Longer term** – Education for school children – Training programmes	– Establishes a personal rapport – Encourages mutual understanding – Develops a knowledge base – Ensures the messages are understood in the way they are intended – Builds up trust and confidence – Leads to longer lasting solutions – Motivates people better to get actively involved – provides opportunities for socialising	– Is more time consuming and costly, no guarantee of success – Needs to be sustained to maintain the momentum – Can lead to a negative backlash if not handled properly – Reaches only a small audience at a time – Needs a lot of organisation and planning – Requires inter-personal skills – Does not reach an audience further afield
Indirect communication		
Media oriented – newspaper articles – radio/TV interviews – press releases – advertising	– Reaches a large audience instantly both locally and further afield – Stimulates curiosity amongst groups not normally interested in nature – uses the most popular communication medium – builds a rapport with the press increasing further media interest	– Issues have to remain simple, not possible to go into details – No control over contents of articles or TV spots – can also be very negative – Could generate polarised views – Not targeted at specific groups
Other – launch events – involvement of third parties (e.g. a representative of hunting or agricultural associations) – intermediaries or mediators	– Attracts high profile and influential people – Can have a significant multiplier effect – Wins trust more rapidly – people talking the same language – Offers a neutral party for conflict resolution	– Costly and time-consuming – Usually only possible where there are benefits for both parties – Mediation requires specialised skills

Difficulties in communicating about nature

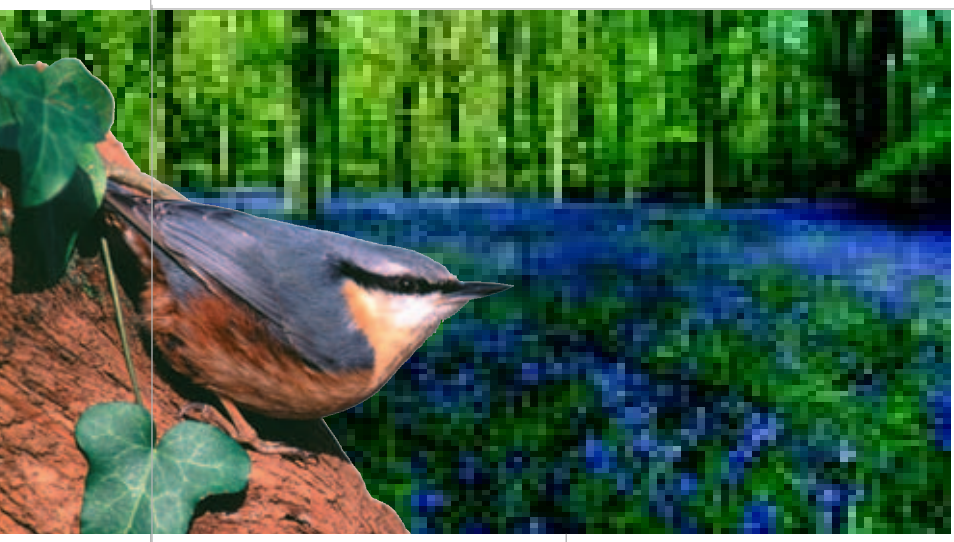


Photo © Jim Asher

Photo © LIFE-Nature project on sea turtles, Italy

When developing a communication strategy it is also worth considering some of the common problems and mistakes you may come across when communicating about nature in order that you can avoid these:

> ***A language full of technical terms and jargon***
Nature conservation is not an easy subject to communicate on. Part of the problem undoubtedly lies in the kind of language we use: biodiversity conservation, endemic species, threatened habitat types, favourable conservation status, Natura 2000, SACs, SCIs, SPAs etc …. These are all terms that people have difficulty relating to in their everyday lives and that will immediately put many off. The only message this kind of scientific jargon transmits is that nature conservation is an elitist subject only accessible to specialists. It also promotes an 'us and them' culture. The fact that Natura 2000 concerns our collective natural heritage is therefore completely lost.

> ***Describing nature in a way that people cannot relate to***
The way in which conservation issues are described is often very dry, impersonal and consequently uninteresting to the average person. In a bid to be scientifically accurate, many forget to focus on the emotional and enjoyable aspects of nature: a sense of wonder, curiosity, relaxation, pleasure, tranquillity. Yet, it is these aspects that people remember most. The key is to keep the messages simple and interesting and to relate them to things that people can identify with in their daily lives (as large as 10 football pitches, as small as a €1 cent, these birds behave just like people at a ball…).

> ***A focus on rare and endangered species***
There is usually a strong emphasis on protecting rare and endangered species. The advantage is that certain charismatic species like the brown bear or sea turtle have immediate appeal and can act as flagships for nature conservation generally. The disadvantage is that an emphasis on rare species, be they high profile species like bears or, more often, obscure species that nobody has heard of, tends to de-personalises nature, especially at the local level. Many people will simply never see such animals or plants. A way needs to be found to get the dual message across that Natura 2000 is about 'your nature' which is special in a European context. The network does after all cover almost a fifth of the EU and most people can find a Natura 2000 site close to them. It is also about conserving rare habitats and species in core areas. The large number of sites involved testifies to the fact that Europe has a particularly rich and diverse natural heritage, unfortunately under increasing threat.

> ***All doom and gloom***
Another problem with communicating on nature conservation is that it is often full of 'doom and gloom' and alarmist messages. In general, people are likely to find these concerns more palatable if they are accompanied by potential solutions. Also, there are still significant gaps in our scientific knowledge of species and habitats. Therefore the information needs to be presented carefully as the best available and not as unquestionable scientific facts. It is a very long struggle back to credibility if the concerns are overstated, or if the solutions advocated don't succeed.

> ***Not seeing the other person's perspective***
Conservationists will also often talk about their own needs and concerns when communicating without much apparent thought or consideration for others who might be implicated. Sometimes, the audience will simply ignore the information produced, but more often than not it will cause irritation and alienate them even further. It helps therefore to put oneself in the shoes of the other person and to try and see the issues from their perspective first.

Another option is to find an appropriate intermediary or third party. Many farmers for instance are more open to the views of their farmer's representative or union. It may therefore be more effective to dialogue with that representative and reach a common understanding with them. They can then be encouraged to communicate about Natura 2000 with their membership – not only is the debate likely to be more effective since the partners are talking the same language but it also has a significant multiplier effect.

> ***Fear of compromise***
Conservationists often fear that if they enter into dialogue with others, they will be forced to make compromises. Sometimes this may well be the case but not entering into a discussion with others could have far worse consequences – like no solutions at all. It has been demonstrated time and again, that acceptance and support for conservation increases significantly the more people know about the issues and concerns.

This is not to say that people will always cooperate, there will inevitably be cases where views remain polarised and entrenched. However, at least those consulted will no longer be able to hide behind the contention that the conservationists have not 'explained things'. This helps separate out the real concerns from the more emotive ones in which people simply don't care or don't want to change their habits. Once such views are exposed for what they are, they will be much harder to defend in the face of public opinion.

> ***Wrong choice of communication tool:*** finally, people often think communication is just about producing a nice brochure or a couple of leaflets and posters. Or worse they organise meetings and then only put their own views across without providing an opportunity for dialogue with its audience. This on its own achieves nothing, just a deluded sense of having made an effort to communicate!

Tips for communicating on nature

> *Identify your audience*
> *Target your message*
> *Keep it simple and relate it to issues people can identify with*
> *Use different techniques*
> *Drive home the message*

Common communication problems and how to solve them

Problem	***Solution***
> *too much jargon*	*Use language that everyone can understand and keep the information simple. Don't try to explain everything.*
> *describing nature in a way that people cannot relate to*	*Make the information interesting and try to associate it with things that people identify with in their daily lives by using analogies and comparisons. Bring out the sense of wonder of nature. Use a bit of humour.*
> *Strong focus on rare and obscure species*	*Protecting rare species and plants may be the focus but it is in a wider biodiversity context. Link the fact that habitats harbouring rare species also harbour many other natural features that are more familiar to people. Their nature is also an important part of Europe's diverse and rich natural heritage.*
> *Too much doom and gloom*	*Don't overdo it and be sure to present also the potential solutions to these problems. Try to bring out the positive elements.*
> *Not seeing the other person's perspective*	*Put yourself in the other person's shoes and find out beforehand what their main concerns are as well as their level of interest and knowledge in conservation issues.*
> *Wrong choice of communication tool*	*Plan your communication work carefully bearing in mind whom you want to communicate with and what you want them to understand or do. Keep repeating the messages using a variety of communication methods until you have succeeded.*
> *Fear of compromise*	*Ignore this fear! – you will have much greater chances of reaching a mutually agreeable solution through communicating than by not communicating.*

Practical tips for LIFE-Nature projects on promoting Natura 2000

Photo © Emilio Laguna

The previous guidance on communication has been largely derived from practical experiences through LIFE–Nature projects. The variety of communication techniques used by these projects to generate interest in their activities is truly vast and ranges from the most classic to the more innovative and experimental. Some of these are highlighted in part two of this report and will hopefully provide valuable food for thought for others.

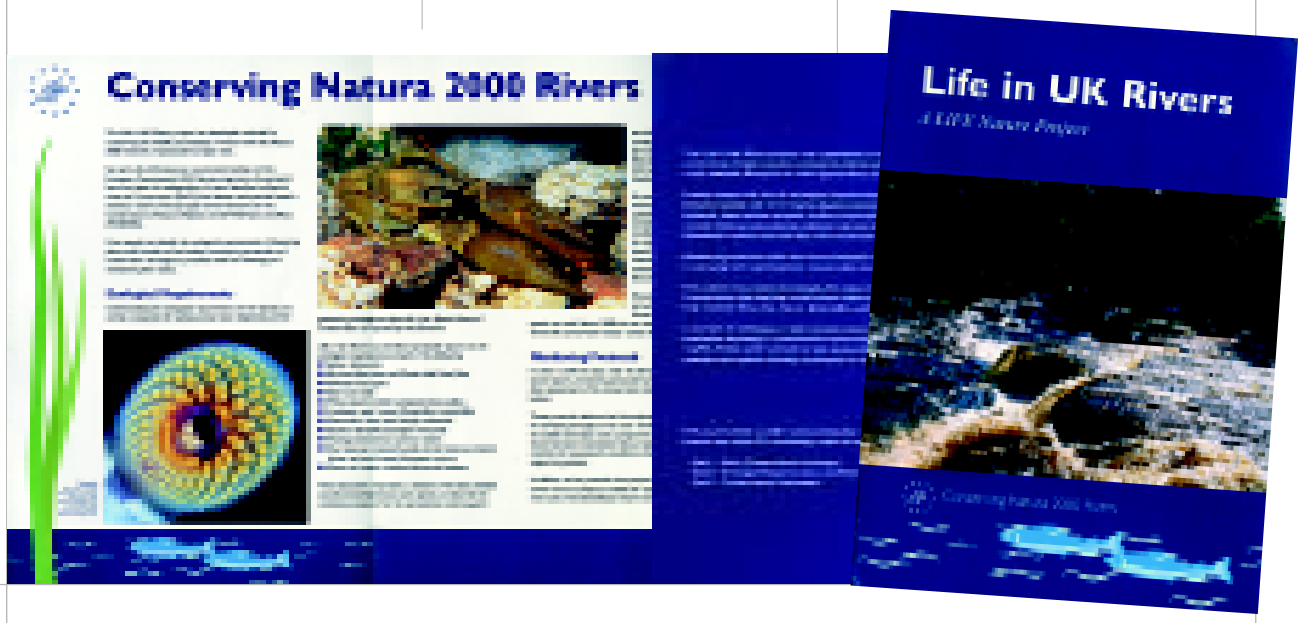
Whilst the communication successes of the LIFE-Nature projects are clear, it has to be said that they have not, on the whole, been so successful or active in promoting Natura 2000 as such. Yet, this is why the projects received LIFE money in the first place.

Moreover, with 10% of the sites in the Natura 2000 Network targeted by LIFE, the collective potential for these projects to raise the profile and present a positive image of Natura 2000 is very significant indeed.

In effect, LIFE projects should consider themselves as Natura 2000 'ambassadors'. The more they are able increase the visibility and acceptance of Natura 2000 locally, the greater the chances are of this being taken up and adopted elsewhere.

That is why it has now become obligatory for all LIFE III projects to make reference to Natura 2000, as well as LIFE, in their publicity and awareness raising material. In fact all on-going LIFE-Nature projects are strongly encouraged to do so now.

The question then arises: how best to do this? There is no 'standard' or model to use and much will depend on the kind of communication tools being applied. Nevertheless, there are certain basic factors that should be used by all projects in order to create a common understanding and 'branding' of Natura 2000. These can then be developed further or adapted as appropriate.



The following lists some of the essential elements to be included in any awareness raising material prepared under LIFE projects.

The first is the systematic use of the **Natura 2000 logo**: the more this logo is used the more familiar it will become to people. It is in fact a form of branding which helps create an identity for Natura 2000. It should therefore be included, together with the LIFE logo, in all awareness raising material produced under the project and on any other public documents, such as survey reports, management plans, posters, even the project's letter headed paper if possible etc….

The second is a **short description of what the logo stands for**. Although the Natura 2000 logo is a good visual tool, on its own it will initially mean nothing to people unless there is also an explanation of what it represents.

This explanation can be expanded or restricted depending on the type of communication medium used. For instance, if it is to be placed on an information panel or back of a document, space will be limited and the text will need to be as succinct as possible. Here the purpose is merely to explain what the logo stands for and to give the briefest of explanations of what Natura 2000 is (see box).

Even with information panels though, it is possible to elaborate further on Natura 2000. Several projects have created panels, or sections within panels, specifically for this purpose. Their experience has been that people are indeed interested in finding out more about what is happening around Europe on nature and how 'their' site fits in to this wider strategy.

Another useful tool for describing the Natura 2000 Network is a stylized **map of the EU.** This helps to visualize the European nature of the Network and taps into people's natural curiosity for mapped information.

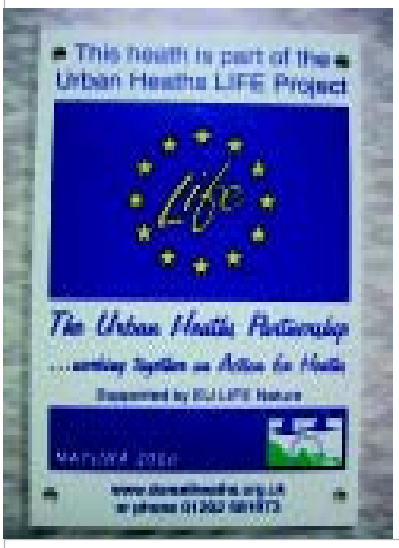
When it comes to the more lengthy printed material such as brochures, books and leaflets, a more detailed explanation is needed on Natura 2000.

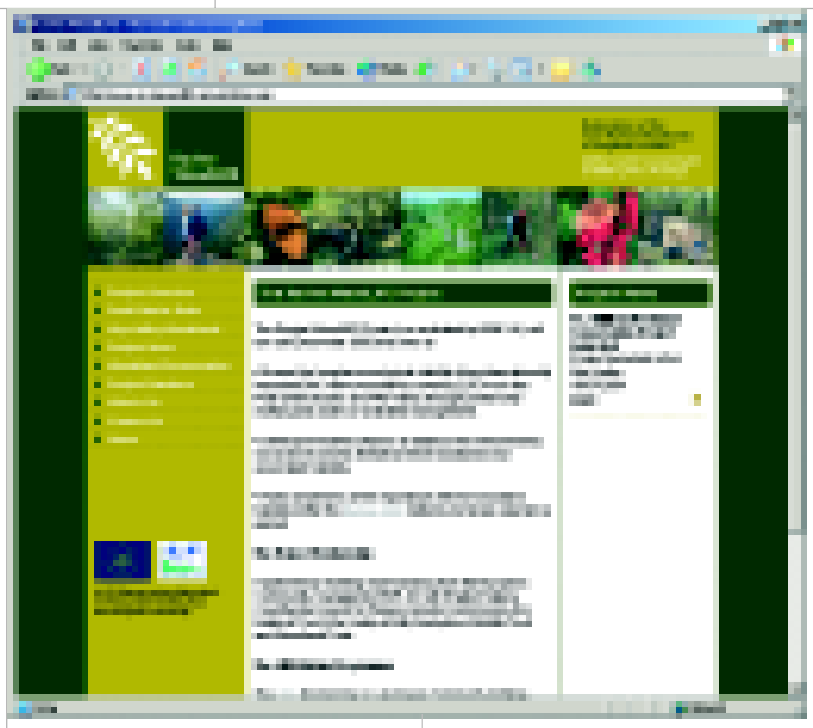
For those produced under LIFE projects, the text should explain further why the site is protected as a Natura 2000 site, what this means in practice and how people are implicated in this designation (e.g. in terms of integrating conservation concerns in other land-uses, ensuring development initiatives safeguard endangered species and habitats, providing recreational opportunities that are sensitive to the natural value of the area). The link with LIFE funding should also be clearly made: i.e. that Natura 2000 designation is the reason why the project receives EU funding.

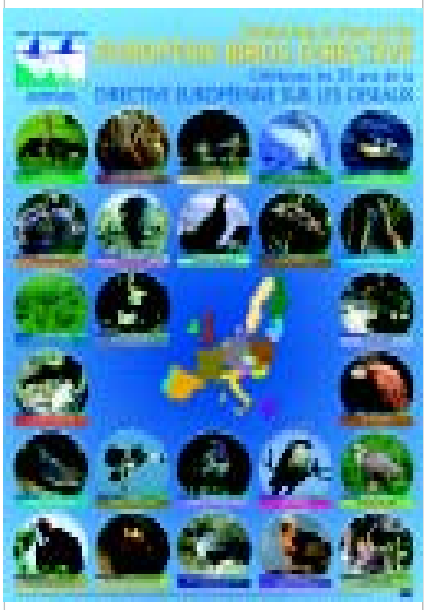
NATURA 2000

Suggested text to accompany the Natura 2000 logo:

'Natura 2000 – Europe's nature for you. This site is part of the European Natura 2000 Network. It has been designated because it hosts some of Europe's most threatened species and habitats. All 25 countries of the EU are working together through the Natura 2000 network to safeguard Europe's rich and diverse natural heritage for the benefit of all'.







For **project websites** (which are now obligatory under LIFE III) these descriptions can be taken one step further. Space is theoretically unlimited on a www but if it is badly presented it will not be used. Thus, it is often useful to start with a short description and then add further layers of information to allow people to explore in greater detail if they wish. Links can also be established to other www sites such as the ones hosted by national or regional authorities which provide fuller details of Natura 2000 and often extensive data bases on the individual sites.

These are just some of the basic elements recommended to be used by LIFE projects to increase the profile of Natura 2000 in their work. The guidelines in the previous pages of this chapter should provide additional ideas and tips in this respect.

Projects are also advised to look at what has been national level to promote Natura 2000. Just like the forthcoming brochures on Natura 2000 to be produced by the European Commission there is a wealth of material available which can be used or adapted by the projects for their own needs (see Annex I).

PART TWO
LIFE-NATURE PROJECT EXAMPLES

Communicating with stakeholders

This chapter illustrates the range of communication techniques used by LIFE-Nature projects to raise awareness amongst stakeholder groups and engage them in the management of Natura 2000 sites.

Seminar on bears for local people in Dardha village, Southern Albania.

Photo © Arcturos

Stakeholders include a wide range of different sectors of society from private landowners, to farmers, foresters, hunters, fishermen and others who depend on their land for their livelihood. They also include tourism operators and recreational groups or development organizations who are implicated in rural land use activities and policies.

Communication with different land owners and users can be either direct or indirect, for instance, through their representatives, elected members or influential third parties. Whatever the method used though it is essential that they are given an opportunity to have a say and influence the way the Natura 2000 sites are managed in the long run.

The key to success when communicating with stakeholders is therefore to ensure that they are correctly informed about the purpose of Natura 2000 designation and its practical implications and, to associate them with decisions over the subsequent management of these areas.

This can only be achieved if there is mutual trust and understanding between the different parties involved.

The following case studies illustrate how this has been achieved in a variety of circumstances and with different stakeholder groups.

LIFE in action **case one**

Analysing landowners concerns of bears in Greece

The context

Many farmers are intolerant of bears on their land, and sometimes shoot them illegally to protect their territory. This is in fact the single largest threat to this species in Greece. The NGO, Arcturos, decided to launch a LIFE-Nature project to get to the root of this problem.

The activities

The organisation began by conducting a detailed analysis of past incidents within 18 Natura 2000 sites in Central and Northern Greece. This was followed up by one-to-one discussions with all farmers, beekeepers, shepherds and hunters living in and around the Natura 2000 sites. The aim was to hear their views on the problem of bears and to use this information to identify possible solutions. This resulted in the introduction of preventive measures designed to stop bears damaging private property (fencing, guard dogs ...).

To ensure the results remained durable, the project went on to hire 68 seasonal wardens to maintain close contact with the different interest groups and land users over the whole project period (several years). They paid regular visits to those living in and around the Natura 2000 sites and soon became familiar faces locally. They carried out regular checks to see if the owners were satisfied with the protection measures and to help them with any maintenance work. Additionally, volunteer groups from Athens and Thessaloniki were occasionally brought in over the weekend to help the farmers with their activities.

The result

The local stakeholders were highly appreciative of the obvious interest shown by the project in their livelihoods and views. By helping them in their daily activities a feeling of solidarity emerged, re-enforced by the regular presence of volunteer groups from the large towns. It also created a shared sense of responsibility for the bears' survival. The bears became the property of all rather than the property of none.

By the end of the project, attitudes towards the bears had begun to change and the number of shootings had decreased. Arcturos also lobbied successfully for a change in the state compensation system to gain better support for livestock loss and the introduction of additional incentives for preventive measures under the Greek Rural Development Plan.

Photo © Jurma Luhta

Photo © Arcturos

Keywords: ***one-to-one dialogue, seasonal wardens, volunteers***

Seasonal wardens meet regularly with local land owners (left).

Photo © Arcturos

LIFE in action case two

Sharing scientific information on cetaceans in Spanish waters

Photo © Spanish Cetacean Society, SEC

The context

Relatively little is known about the ecology and management needs of many marine species. Yet, it is difficult to convince people to take the conservation concerns seriously without this information.

In 2002, the Spanish Cetacean Society (SEC) began a LIFE-Nature project to survey cetaceans and sea turtles along the southern coast of Spain, in order to be able to find a consensus view on their management with the different interest groups concerned.

The activities

The project first carried out a survey to identify all stakeholder groups in the region whose livelihood depended on the sea in order to develop a communication strategy specifically targeted at these different groups. The aim was to raise their awareness of marine conservation issues and inform them of the latest scientific developments.

Three old sailing vessels were kitted out with information material on the marine environment and survey equipment. The boats travelled the length of the Andalucian coast, stopping at selected ports and bays along the way to deliver a well-publicised programme of events, talks, monitoring activities and excursions.

This journey is repeated at regular intervals to maintain their interest and update them on the latest scientific findings.

The results

This targeted awareness raising work has been important in creating a constructive and informed climate for the more formal round-table discussions on the development of conservation orientated management plans in key marine Natura 2000 areas.

Thanks to the success of the information campaign and the popularity of the boats, the discussions are proceeding in a spirit of cooperation in spite of the fact that the conservationists haven't yet a complete picture of marine ecology and conservation requirements.

By sharing the results of the scientific surveys as soon as they are known, all interested parties felt a sense of 'finding out' together. Thus, the stakeholders can see that the NGO hasn't a hidden agenda and is prepared to do serious scientific work before advocating measures that may affect their livelihoods. The fact that these groups are associated and well informed from the outset re-enforces the sense of collaboration and shared ownership of the process.

Keywords: ***identification of stakeholders, travelling exhibitions, early dialogue***

LIFE project activities aimed at involving local fishermen.

Photo © Spanish Cetacean Society, SEC

LIFE in action **case three**

A room with a view: raising the profile of the Natterjack toad in Estonia

The context

Convincing local people to support the conservation of less charismatic species such as amphibians is not an easy task. But sometimes this can be achieved by exploring the associations these species have with their surroundings.

This is how a LIFE-Nature project in Estonia managed to convince the local inhabitants of a small island in the Baltic sea to assist in their efforts to restore the original habitats of the natterjack toad.

The activities

The project manager visited each household on the island to introduce the project and, during the course of the conversation, asked the inhabitants to describe what it used to be like on the island before the reed beds took over the coastline (reeds are a legacy of the intensive cooperative farms during Russian times). People enthusiastically recounted how beautiful the island was back then. They could see all the way down to the shoreline and out at sea.

At this point the project manager explained that this could happen again if they cooperated with the project. This was because the toads depend on the very same low lying coastal meadows that open up the landscape and create the beautiful views.

The result

From then on, restoring the toads' meadows became more meaningful for the inlanders as they could associate this with something tangible and relevant to them. Soon people began to cut the tall reeds and mow the meadows outside their windows too! With the view came the long forgotten sound of the natterjack toad.

Keywords: ***finding something people can relate to***

Photo © Voldemar Rannap

Photo © Voldemar Rannap

Photo © Voldemar Rannap

Restoring coastal meadows for Bufo calamita *on Manilaid Island, Estonia.*

Perceptions and attitudes towards Natura 2000

Identifying people's attitudes and perceptions towards nature conservation will help in determining the most effective means of raising their interest and awareness.

The four basic questions to ask are:

> do they know anything about Natura 2000 or the habitats/ species involved?
> do they understand what this involves and why it is considered important?
> What are their main fears, are they justified or based on lack of information?
> And what are their attitudes toward nature and Natura 2000?

As regards Natura 2000, do people view this with:

> hostility – conservation and Natura 2000 are seen as a clear threat to their livelihood
> fear and suspicion – concerned that it could result in restrictions or interference in local activities
> benign indifference – not concerned one way or another (often the most common reaction)
> approval – generally content with the designation
> accolade – proud that the site has been recognised internationally

Different perceptions may exist at each site in varying degrees. Determining where the majority lies and how strong the more extreme views are will be useful in selecting the most appropriate form of communication.

It is surprising how often people actually have no idea about the natural values that exist on their land. They will retort that 'nature is all around them' and ask what is special about this particular place. Yet, with a bit of effort, many become genuinely interested. This is an important first step in initiating a constructive dialogue. After all, one cannot expect people to want to talk about solutions if they cannot see the problem in the first place.

For those that are already hostile or suspicious of Natura 2000, it is important to consider their concerns and address these directly wherever possible. If not, views can become polarised making further discussions more, rather than less, difficult.

Photo © Rambower Moor LIFE project

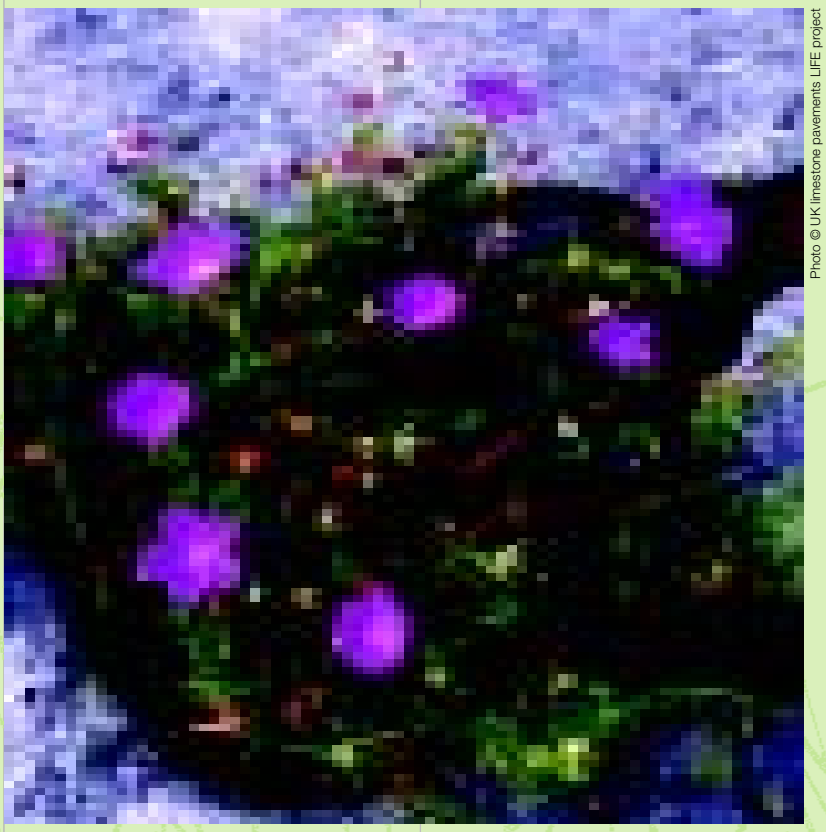


Photo © UK limestone pavements LIFE project

LIFE in action **case four**

Bogs: what do people really think about them?

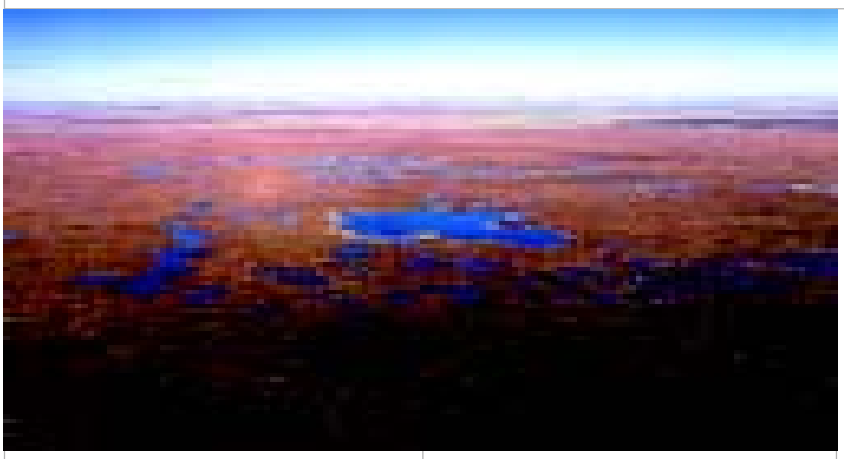


Photo © Richard Lindsay

The context

The northern tip of Scotland is covered in a single large expanse of blanket bog (over 400,000 ha). In the 1980s, a new government policy was launched to encourage commercial conifer plantations on the peatlands and within a short space of time over 67,000 ha of blanket bog had been planted over, resulting in large-scale drainage and destruction.

This sparked off a bitter and high profile conflict between nature conservationists and foresters which ran for years. The local community was trapped in the middle, they saw the forests as a potential source of much needed local jobs even if they had their reservations about whether trees would actually grow here.

Eventually the number of new plantations petered out but the problem on the planted bogs remained.

The activities

In 1996, the RSPB, one of the NGOs at the centre of the original conflict, put forward a LIFE-Nature project to purchase a plot of land at the heart of the afforested area so that it could restore the site to active bogland again. Realising that this would be a delicate issue, they decided first to carry out an attitude survey of different local interest groups to assess their views and perceptions.

Crofters, farmers, foresters, local businesses, elected representatives, estate owners and land managers as well as local recreational clubs and members of the general public were all interviewed.

The survey revealed that the level of knowledge about the bogs was low but that local people did appreciate them for their unique scenery and generally favoured traditional extensive land uses. However most interviewees viewed nature conservation as a threat and were very wary of NGOs who they felt were unsympathetic to their views and would impose further restrictions on their legitimate use of the peatlands.

Armed with this information, RSPB and its partners organised a concerted campaign to inform the local target groups about the natural values of blanket bogs and of their international importance. This was done using a variety of communication tools (postcards and information packs for every house hold, field trips, excursions, meetings, school outings).

In addition, they contracted local companies to fell the trees on the newly acquired land which injected over a €1,300,000 into the local economy and joined forces with the local tourist board to promote the area as a nature tourism destination.

The results

The attitudes and awareness survey helped the RSPB to better orientate the project's communication work from the outset to address any misconceptions or past hostilities. It also provided a baseline against which to measure their success.

The survey was repeated in 2002 and it concluded that local interest groups had become more knowledgeable about the peatlands. It also confirmed that most people had accepted that nature conservation was a legitimate land use in its own right and believed that RSPB was now working on their side to find economic solutions such as green tourism for the area.

Keywords: ***attitudes survey, attractive awareness raising material, green tourism***

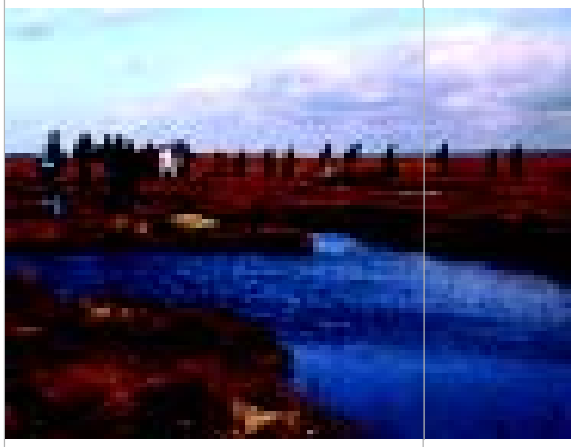


Photo © RSPB blanket bogs LIFE project

LIFE in action case five

Wolves: are they welcome and, if so, under what conditions?

Photo © Florent Favier

The context

After 60 years of absence, the wolf is making a modest come-back in France. It is estimated that there are now 24–26 individuals living in the French Alps, essentially around the region of Mercantour. Their gradual spread has however been met with alarm, particularly amongst agri-pastoral farmers who fear for their sheep. Yet, an analysis of the damage caused by the wolves is relatively minimal (180 attacks per year – 0.5% loss) and few people have actually seen them.

In order to know how best to tackle this fear and prevent an increase in illegal killings, the Ministry of Environment in France ordered a survey to be done of people's perceptions of the wolf as part of an on-going LIFE-nature project on the conservation of this rare species.

The activities

Surveys were conducted of around 1000 residents and in depth interviews held with 23 different interest groups. This revealed a curious and sometimes conflicting mix of views and perceptions. Most people were convinced that wolves had been deliberately introduced and completely over-estimated the population (100s or more). They also feared walking alone in the mountains despite very few reports of sightings.

However, the majority was also opposed to hunting them. Instead they want to see humans and wolves co-habiting. In particular they were keen that farmers get paid compensation for any losses and given help in installing livestock protection measures (such as guard dogs).

The results

With this information, the project developed a communication strategy aimed at dispelling the myths about wolf introductions and population sizes as well as demonstrating what was being done to help agri-pastoral farmers.

One of the most effective tools used was a night-time video in which the wolf tries but fails to attack a flock of sheep. The guard dogs (which had been given to the farmers by the project) swiftly and ably chased it away. This not only appealed to people's natural curiosity over these elusive animals but also convinced them (and the farmers) that the prevention measures are really working.

Keywords: *perceptions survey, videos, communication strategy*

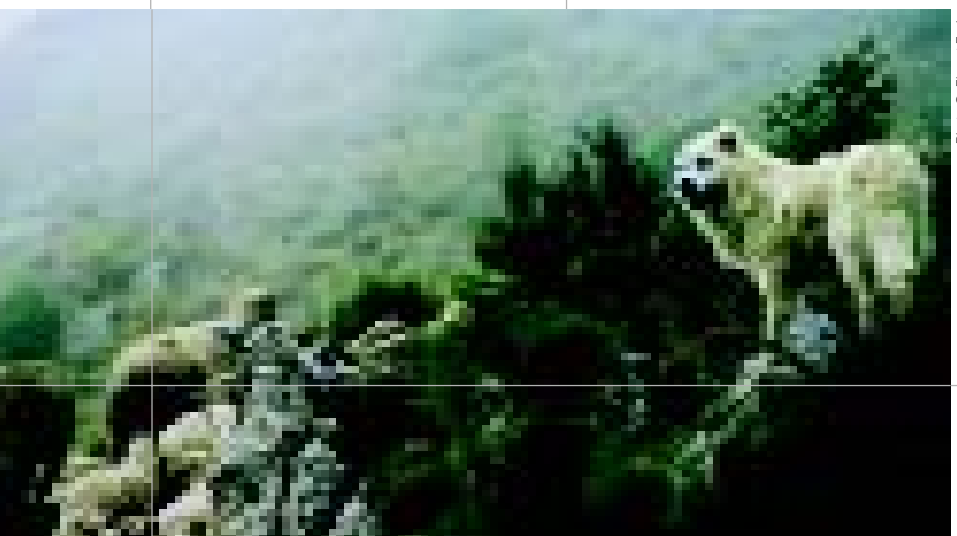


Photo © Florent Favier

Photo © Florent Favier

LIFE in action **case six**

Developing a sense of pride around Natura 2000

Photo © Prackendorf Moos LIFE project

Photo © Prackendorf Moos LIFE project

The context

The Prackendorfer Moos in North Eastern Bavaria was once amongst the largest and best preserved raised bog systems in Germany. With time however much of the peat was extracted for local fuel consumption and damaged by other land uses. For the last 50 years it has served little economic function and, on the surface, looks rather unappealing. Yet, even in its degraded state it is still an important wildlife sanctuary capable of regeneration.

A LIFE-Nature project was funded in order to restore the bog's natural hydrology but, despite its lack of economic interest, the project still met with local resistance. People could not understand why so much effort and money was being put into this 'wasteland' and were irritated that the higher water levels would make local access more inconvenient.

The activities

The project decided to tackle this issue head on. Realising that the local community had only ever seen the bog in its degraded state, it set out to show them what it used to look like. They enlisted the support of local authors, researchers, and the mayor to help piece together the area's local history and past relations with the bog.

The findings were written up in a very attractive book, with first hand accounts from the older members of the village on what life used to be like here at the beginning of the 20th century as well as old fairy tales about the bog. Other sections of the book concentrated on illustrating the different plants and animals that make up the bog and explaining why it is considered precious in a European context, being part of a European network of sites called Natura 2000.

The result

This was the first time a book had been produced on the local history of the area and because every villager received a free copy it soon became the local talking point. Local guided walks organised by the LIFE project became increasingly popular.

Attitudes towards the project soon began to change. Land owners who had previously been reluctant to sell their share in the bog were now willing to do so and local farmers agreed to help reduce the flow of nutrients. It was not long before Prackendorf Moos became the envy of neighbouring villages and ended up on the local tourist trail.

Photo © Prackendorf Moos LIFE project

Keywords: *Illustrated book, identifying local history*

Gaining trust and confidence

Photo © SBVA

Discussion with hunters in France.

Gaining trust and confidence is fundamental to the success of any initiative involving decisions over people's lands and livelihoods. In the case of Natura 2000, winning people's trust is only possible if a genuine interest is shown in their views and if these views are also taken into account in decisions over the future conservation of the site.

People must feel that they are making a real contribution and not just being 'heard out'.

One of the most effective ways of achieving this is through the preparation of **Natura 2000 management plans**. This has proven to be very popular in LIFE-Nature projects. Over 60% have produced such plans and begun to implement them before the end of the project, often with the help of the different stakeholder groups.

The key advantages of these plans are that they:

> record all the necessary conservation information on the site its objectives, threats, uses, ecological interests, etc… for all to see;
> clarify the existing land uses and their interrelation with nature conservation;
> provide an open forum for debate;
> lead to a consensus view on how the long term management should be done;
> create a sense of shared ownership amongst all participating groups for the final product.

Often the level of conflict between the conservation needs and the other land uses is not nearly as important as people first imagine. The management planning process provides an ideal opportunity to clarify many of the mis-perceptions that often prevail.

The real challenge then comes in persuading other interest groups to become actively involved in improving the conservation condition of the species and habitats in question. Finding areas of mutual interest and building a sense of shared ownership are crucial to this process.

However it is important to remember that once the momentum is underway, it must be maintained. There is nothing more counter productive than stimulating a lot of support and interest in developing a management plan and a shared vision of how the site should be managed, only to find that there are no resources to implement it afterwards.

This problem can be addressed in part by engaging the private land owners and users in practical on-site conservation work. Not only does this help to demonstrate what the management practices actually involve but it also gives the different groups an opportunity to learn to work together which can in turn help to open up further prospects for mutual benefit through cooperation.

There are many different ways of engaging private owners. Some are down to simply establishing a rapport with the owners through regular dialogue. Others involve finding an area of common ground or mutual benefit to build on, or, alternatively, identifying ways of giving stakeholders public recognition for their contribution to conserving our natural heritage.

LIFE in action **case seven**

Offering something in return: Natura 2000 in Finland's private forests

Photo © Jurma Luhta

Photo © LIFE project Pohjois Savo

Photo © LIFE project Boreal Groves

The context

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 forestry use due to Natura 2000 designation is unlikely to be well received. So, in a change from normal practice, the Regional Environment Board decided not to impose restrictions at the outset on Natura forests but instead to require landowners to seek prior approval before exploiting their forests.

To test how this could work in practice, the Environment Centre joined forces with the Forest Centre through a LIFE-Nature project to trial the process out on ten Natura 2000 sites.

The activities

The project offered private owners the option to have forest management plans drawn up for their forest, which would take into account the natural values of the area. With this they would know immediately what they could or could not do in their forest and were given advance approval for these works should they wish to carry them out at a later stage.

The project officer began by taking each owner around his site to show him the natural features of interest and to discuss the conservation implications with him. Although a time consuming and labour intensive exercise, this did much to win the owner's trust, many were indeed relieved to learn that Natura 2000 did not mean taking all the forest out of production.

The project officer also used forestry experts to analyse the forest's composition and timber value in order to determine the plot's economic potential over the next 10–20 years. All of this was written up in a detailed management plan for each plot.

The results

By the end of the project, private landowners became increasingly supportive of the project's approach to forest conservation. Many more, even outside the Natura 2000 areas, came to ask for management plans on their land.

What was the key to success? Firstly, the one-to-one dialogue help build up trust between the forester and the project officer and dispel many of the commonly held misperceptions about Natura 2000. Secondly, it gave the foresters something in return, an approved management plan which would help them to manage their own forestry resource efficiently and profitably. Few would have invested in such a plan otherwise.

Keywords: *dual purpose management plan, one-to-one dialogue*

LIFE in action case eight

Using demonstration plots to influence farming practices in Ireland

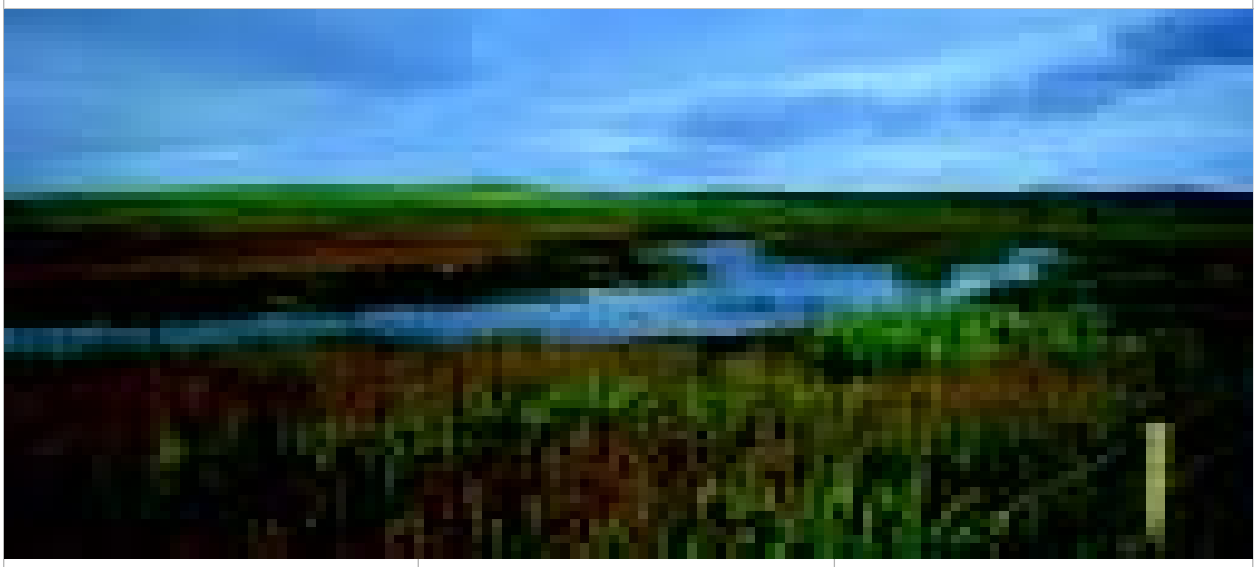


Photo © John Houston

The context

Many grassland areas along the West Coast of Ireland are of high conservation value, particularly for birds. But because they are mostly split up into small farm holdings, they provide only a low economic return. Farmers must therefore seek additional financial support to maintain their extensive farming practices. The most accessible are the agri-environment schemes, however these are not usually compatible with the needs of many of the rare farmland birds.

To address this concern, the NGO, BirdLife Ireland, launched a LIFE-Nature project to demonstrate how farming practices can be made more conservation friendly.

The activities

A Natura 2000 area known as Termoncarragh was chosen as the demonstration site. Contact was made with all farmers in the area to persuade them to test different techniques on their land in exchange for an annual management fee. Initially, the level of interest was very low but the project persisted and eventually, with the help of its partner, Teagasc, the agricultural authority responsible for agri-environment in Ireland, it succeeded in signing up 87% of the farmers.

This made it possible for the project to demonstrate these adapted farming techniques to a wider audience. It organised regular field visits to Termoncarragh for farmers in neighbouring regions (around 200 so far) so that they could see for themselves what was involved and could talk to the farmers concerned. The project also organised regular outdoor training courses for personnel from farming authorities and associations.

The result

This demonstration area is now well known across Ireland as a model in conservation friendly farming. Thanks to its high profile and the success of the demonstration training days, decision-makers are now considering including conservation orientated measures in the new Agri-environment schemes as of 2006.

Keywords: *demonstration plots, field visits, training workshops*

Photo © Catherine Keena

LIFE in action **case nine**

Conserving lynx on private estates in Andalucia

Photo © Junta de Andalucia

Photo © Junta de Andalucia

The context

Andalucia is one of the last refuges for the Iberian lynx. It is estimated that there are around 300 individuals scattered in and around 25 Natura 2000 sites. Their survival remains precarious due to a combination of factors, including scarcity of prey (rabbits), habitat fragmentation and accidental or illegal killing.

Most of the lynx are found on private land in large estates (over 1,000 ha each) devoted to hunting and cattle raising. Because of the scale of these estates, the lynx is not seen as an immediate threat. But the general lack of awareness over its conservation needs means that many of the problems the lynx face are not addressed.

Thus, any communication strategy should focus on enlisting people's support and active involvement in positive management measures.

The activities

With this in mind, the regional authority launched an ambitious LIFE-Nature project in partnership with the hunters association. Its first objective was to initiate a large-scale awareness raising campaign aimed at the private estate owners as well as local schools, interest groups, and the general public to help raise the profile of the lynx in the region.

The second objective was to negotiate management agreements with the private estates to reduce hunting and to improve the habitat conditions for the lynx (e.g. shelters, supplementary feeding stations, ecological corridors).

The results

Thanks to these actions, the local communities are now well aware of the lynx's presence in their region, and increasingly proud of the fact that they harbour one of the last remaining populations of this elusive yet attractive species in Spain. This is borne out by the fact that, within the first two years, already 80 agreements were signed with private estates covering over 1,287 km².

To maintain the momentum, the project has also initiated an annual award for owners who make the greatest effort to manage their estate for the benefit of the lynx. The winner not only gets a prize (a sculpture of a lynx) but also significant public recognition e.g. through media attention.

The project's awareness raising campaign has also had Europe-wide recognition. It received a Eurosite communication award for the quality of the material produced and for its effectiveness in raising awareness for the lynx as well as for Natura 2000.

Keywords: *a conservation prize, high profile publicity campaign, partnerships*

Photo © Junta de Andalucia

LIFE in action case ten

Regulating whale-watching activities in the Azores

The context

Situated almost in the middle of the Altantic, the deep waters of the Azores are well known for their abundance of whales and dolphins. In recent years, several whale-watching operators have sprung up, encouraged by the general growth in tourism to the islands.

In order to ensure that their activities are compatible with the marine mammals and the provisions of Natura 2000, a LIFE-Nature project on coastal and marine Natura 2000 sites in the Azores set out to develop a code of conduct for all whale watching operations.

Photo © Frederico Cardigos

The activities

Using experiences gathered from other countries, the project conducted its own survey of cetacean behaviour during the whale-watching tours. Its findings were presented to the regional Tourism authority who in turn organised a series of public consultation meetings with the tour operators to discuss the results. The meetings were constructive and a consensus was quickly reached. The new regulations became law in 2003.

The results

Why did it all proceed so smoothly? For two reasons; the tour operators were formally consulted on a draft piece of legislation that could affect their livelihood before it became law, which gave them an opportunity to influence the process.

Secondly, they also got something in return from their involvement. Under the new law a special four-day training course became compulsory for all operators. This covered everything from training on marine conservation issues and cetaceans, emergency first aid at sea, to promoting tours and ensuring customer satisfaction etc. Not only did it ex-clude unscrupulous operators from setting up business overnight but it also gave the existing operators valuable training on how to improve their own businesses.

The LIFE-Nature project played a key role here too as it was responsible for preparing the comprehensive training manual for the course participants.

The project's high profile publicity campaign also generated a lot of useful information material which the operators could use for its customers and attracted new clients to the now booming whale watching business.

Keywords: *mutual benefits, comprehensive training manual*

A wealth of highly attractive information material was produced for this marine project in the Azores.

LIFE in action **case eleven**

Creating an open dialogue in the Black Forest, Germany

The context

Capercaillie requires a complex mosaic of forest habitats to survive. Unfortunately there are very few such forests left in Germany that still maintain this mosaic structure. The Black Forest offers one of the last refuges for this species which is why it became the target of a LIFE-Nature project aiming to find ways of reconciling the interests of foresters and recreation groups with those of the capercaillie.

At 1,493 m, the 80 km state owned forest on Feldberg is a popular year round destination for over two million walkers and skiers. Forestry is no longer practiced and this is bad news for the species. Without management the forest has become too uniform and no longer provides a combination of open patches and forests of varying ages and structures.

The activities

To address this problem, the project inventoried and mapped the forest structure, the species' presence and the dense network of walking and skiing tracks throughout the area. It concluded that only 30–40% of the forest needed to be in optimal condition for the species at any one time and that this could be adjusted from year to year.

Armed with this information the beneficiary, the regional forestry institute, took contact with each stakeholder group in turn to see what solutions could be found to manage the forest appropriately.

Forest management was tackled first. Foresters, hunters and other interested individuals were taken on field trips to the capercaillie hot spots to discuss the species conservation needs on site. Thereafter, a rolling plan of habitat restoration was implemented by the foresters themselves with constant support and back-up of the project.

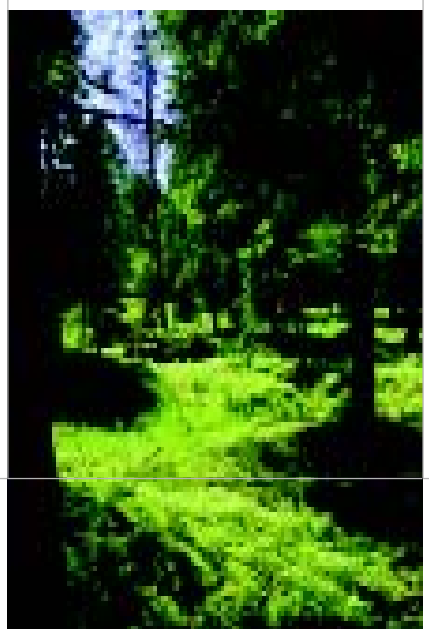
The same approach was taken with the tourism sector. Instead of imposing restrictions on hiking/skiing paths unilaterally, meetings were held with stakeholders to agree on alternative routes so that if one trail was taken out of use, it would be replaced by an improved trail elsewhere.

The result

This dynamic forest management approach was greatly appreciated by the foresters and the local municipalities. These groups later supported a proposal to expand the Natura 2000 area to incorporate the whole of the Capercaillie metapopulation.

Its success can be put down to the open and constructive approach adopted towards the different interest groups and the project's ability to demonstrate the species complex management needs in an understandable way.

Keywords: ***open dialogue, one-to-one discussions***



Building lasting partnerships

Photo © New Forest LIFE Partnership

A partnership is a powerful tool for developing long lasting solutions and ensuring that Natura 2000 becomes an integral part of the local land use policies and practices, rather than something distinct or isolated.

Its advantage is that it provides a structured framework in which different public and private stakeholder groups can learn to work together and coordinate their activities.

As a result, the different socio-economic partners – be they public bodies, farmers associations, water authorities, conservation NGOs, or private landowners – have an opportunity to discuss different views on nature conservation issues and to learn about what others are thinking and doing.

It also provides a forum in which the long-term management of the Natura 2000 sites can be negotiated and agreed upon.

The subsequent implementation of these plans can also be better coordinated through a partnership as they are able to benefit from using the different expertise and competences of each partner to maximum advantage.

LIFE in action **case twelve**

A shared vision for the New Forest, UK

Photo © New Forest LIFE Partnership

The context

The 'New Forest' is in fact a very old forest dating back to the 11th century, containing a mosaic of different habitats. Covering 300 km², it is a remarkable bio-diversity 'hot spot' situated in a heavily populated part of southern England.

Around 20 million people visit the New Forest every year, most live locally and use the area for recreation. They have become very attached to 'their forest' and are reluctant to see it change. Apart from tourism, the area is also used for a whole range of other economic activities, including forestry and farming.

With such a complicated mix of land-uses, interest groups and administrative boundaries it came as no surprise to learn that most planning activities were undertaken in piecemeal fashion. Foresters looked after their forests, verderers after their ponies, local authorities after visitor access and conservationists after the biodiversity.

The activities

However, with the designation of the New Forest as a Natura 2000 site the situation had to change. The local authority responsible took the lead in developing a coordinated management strategy for the whole area which would take all land-uses into account whilst placing conservation at the heart of the process.

It set up an wide-ranging partnership of 10 public bodies, NGOs, interest groups and stakeholders and applied to LIFE-Nature for funding. The aim was to develop one single all-encompassing conservation plan that all parties could sign up to and feel ownership of, and then to start putting this into practice.

The results

Despite its complexity, the project was a success. The partnership proved to be a powerful and effective framework for cooperation and made the best use of each partner's skills and expertise.

Thanks to its coordinated communication strategy, it was also able to 'speak with one voice' which helped further win the support of the general public and local residents for restoration work that would otherwise have been very contentious and unpopular. People were appreciative of the partnership's sustained efforts at public consultation and awareness raising and few are left in any doubt nowadays about the conservation importance of the New Forest.

As for the partnership itself? It continues to operate to this day, long after the end of the project.

Keywords: ***partnerships, best use of skills, coordinated communication strategy***

Photo © New Forest LIFE Partnership

Photo © New Forest LIFE Partnership

Communicating with other public bodies

In the rural environment, many authorities have an influence on the way the land is managed and used. Communicating with these authorities helps to ensure that their activities are compatible with Natura 2000 and fully integrated at the policy level.

Photo © K Sundseth

Various public bodies and governmental departments have an influence on the way different land-uses are carried out within a particular region. Consequently, their policies often directly impact on Natura 2000 sites.

It is vital that these authorities are informed about Natura 2000 and its practical implications. This will not only ensure that conservation issues are taken into account in their day-to-day activities but also contributes to a more holistic, efficient and co-ordinated planning approach for the region as a whole, in which Natura 2000 is fully integrated.

Communicating with other public bodies should theoretically be relatively straightforward since Natura 2000 is a government policy enshrined in strong legislation. In practice, however, the situation may be more complex. Conflicting bylaws and procedures, lack of knowledge, maps and limited human resources are just some of the problems encountered.

The communication efforts need therefore to focus first on raising awareness of Natura 2000 be it through inter-service meetings and/or targeted information dissemination.

Then it will be easier to identify how the different government policies impact on Natura 2000 and whether this involves mutual benefits or possible conflicts. In either case, it should be possible, having established a dialogue and learnt of each other's policies, to find sustainable and coherent solutions on both a practical and policy level.

Some authorities may in fact be best placed to do the conservation work themselves, because they have the right skills and the necessary influence over private land-users, or because they own the land themselves.

The range of public bodies that should be informed about Natura 2000 is very broad. It includes the obvious authorities responsible for planning, water, farming, forestry, fisheries, ports and tourism as well as the less evident ones such as those responsible for justice, health or employment.

Many LIFE-Nature projects have for instance cooperated with unemployment offices to give the long-term unemployed an opportunity to learn a new skill in nature conservation management.

Because Natura 2000 permeates across so many policy sectors, it pays to look beyond the obvious government departments to find additional avenues for cooperation and integration.

LIFE in action **case thirteen**

Joining forces with agricultural authorities in Austria

The context

The Lafnitz is one of the few naturally meandering rivers left in Austria. However its condition is rapidly declining due to the fact that most of the habitats along its banks have been converted to intensive farmland. Very few patches of the original alluvial river floodplain habitats are left. Those that have survived are of limited conservation value and serve little ecological function since they are now isolated from one another.

For nature conservation, the task was clear: stop further intensification along the river and roll back what was already there to beyond the river's natural corridor. That way, a continuum of alluvial floodplain habitats could be re-established and its ecological functions restored.

But how to achieve this? Buying the land would only work if they bought all of it, a highly unlikely scenario considering the large number of landowners and plots involved. The LIFE-Nature project, run by the local conservation authority, decided instead to try a different tack.

Photo © BBL Hartberg

The activities

The beneficiary contacted the local agri-structural authority to discuss the possibility of using a rural land consolidation scheme instead to redistribute the land along the river.

This was originally designed to improve farm efficiency by pooling scattered parcels of farmland together in a given area and then redistributing it as larger more coherent farming blocks of equal economic value. Good news for farmers, but not always for nature conservation – that is until now.

The local agri-structural authority was sympathetic to the idea. So was the water authority who saw in this an opportunity to avoid expensive banking works along the river to prevent erosion and flooding. With all the elements in place, now all the project had to do was buy some land in order to have something to swap.

The result

Although the LIFE project had conceived the idea, it was the agri-structural authority who ran the rural land consolidation procedure. Because the authority was well known among farmers and considered an objective and neutral party, the redistribution scheme was accepted without opposition.

This was made easier by the fact that most farmers owned long narrow strips of land perpendicular to the river. Therefore, to create the riverine corridor, each one only had to give up a small parcel in exchange for a more manageable area elsewhere.

By the end of the project, continuous corridors had been created along 50 km of the Lafnitz river. This would have been unthinkable had it not been for the cooperation and involvement of other government departments and the fact that other legislative tools could be used. In the end all parties were able to benefit from this cross-sectoral approach.

Keywords: ***identifying useful non-nature related legislation***

LIFE in action case fourteen

Integrating Natura 2000 into territorial land-use plans

Photo © K. Sundseth

The context

The Latvian coastline used to be USSR's frontier onto Europe. Access was strictly controlled and most of it remained out of bounds to Latvians for decades. Perversely, this was good news for the coastal habitats and species which thrived in these undisturbed conditions.

Since independence, Latvia's beautiful coastline has once again become a magnet for weekenders and holiday-makers. There is therefore a real risk that these recent activities will damage to the coastal habitats and species unless key natural areas are identified and protected as soon as possible.

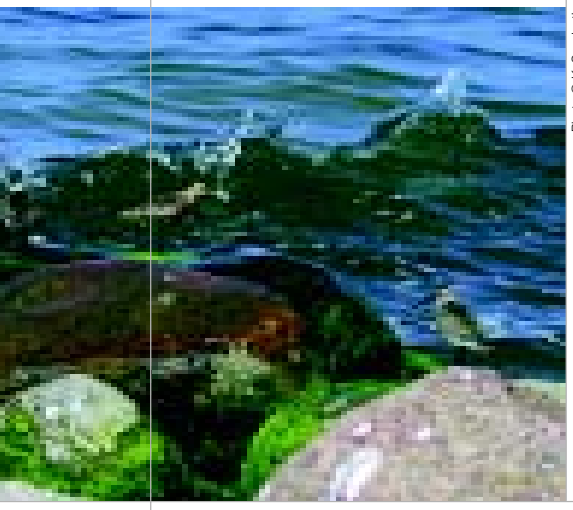


Photo © K. Sundseth

The activities

The University of Latvia has the skills and equipment to do the necessary scientific surveys and maps, but wanted to work from the outset with the relevant municipalities along the coast in order to ensure that its survey results could be integrated into the local land-use plans. It therefore set up a partnership with 13 municipalities and the Ministry of Environment and applied for LIFE funding. This would enable each partner to complete its share of the work under the common umbrella of the project.

Thus, the University inventoried the whole coastline and provided the other partners with the latest surveys and maps for their areas of responsibility. It also organised training sessions for municipality staff on coastal conservation management issues and on the preparation of functional zoning maps.

The Ministry of Environment, for its part selected the sites to be included in Natura 2000 on the basis of the survey work and provided additional training on the provisions of European and national nature legislation.

As for the municipalities themselves, they appointed local project co-ordinators to prepare the territorial land use plans and were responsible for conducting the public consultations.

The results

Thanks to this cooperation and the regular meetings between scientists, government officials and the local project coordinators from the municipalities, a coherent approach to coastal zone management soon began to emerge in which Natura 2000 is fully integrated. Public consultation on the territorial plans also progressed smoothly thanks to the combination of local consultation backed up by national policies and technical expertise.

Much of this is down to the fact that the different partners are not only sharing information on a regular basis but are also using the respective skills and administrative responsibilities of each to translate this information into policy.

Keywords: *project steering committees, local coordinators, training*

LIFE in action **case fifteen**

Joining forces to manage the river Ain, France

Photo © SBVA

The context

The lower reaches of the river Ain in France harbour some of the most intact riverine habitats in Europe and are consequently of high conservation value. However, activities upstream (such as the construction of barrages, gravel extraction etc…) have begun to take their toll on the area. The river is gradually loosing its natural flow and many of the tributaries are drying up. This is not only bad for nature but also bad for local tourism and farmers who depend on the river's water supply.

The activities

In a bid to redress this problem, the regional conservation body in the Rhone-Alpe province joined forces with a 'Syndicat' or union of local municipalities to restore the river's natural dynamics in accordance with an agreed management strategy for this part of the river.

The Syndicat represents altogether 40 riverine municipalities of which 21 are in Natura 2000, and so is an ideal partner for gaining general public acceptance over such a large and complex multiuse area. It lacked however the necessary technical expertise and so was interested in turn in the cooperation of the regional conservation body who not only had technical know-how but also the experience in applying for European funds, such as LIFE-Nature.

The project decided to start with a high profile media event to draw attention to the fact that the newly formed partnership would generate practical and tangible solutions. It decided to clear 24 km of river banks of rubbish. Every commune was enrolled in advertising this event and recruiting volunteers. Invitations were also sent to 27,000 households in the area. The turn out was substantial with over 600 people coming to help clear up over 12 tons of rubbish.

This was an ideal opportunity to promote the LIFE project objectives widely and to advertise the new partnership between municipalities and conservation authorities aimed at conserving 'their river' for the benefit of all. Due to the large media presence, the information was reported on extensively in the local newspapers and it was not long before everyone became familiar with the project.

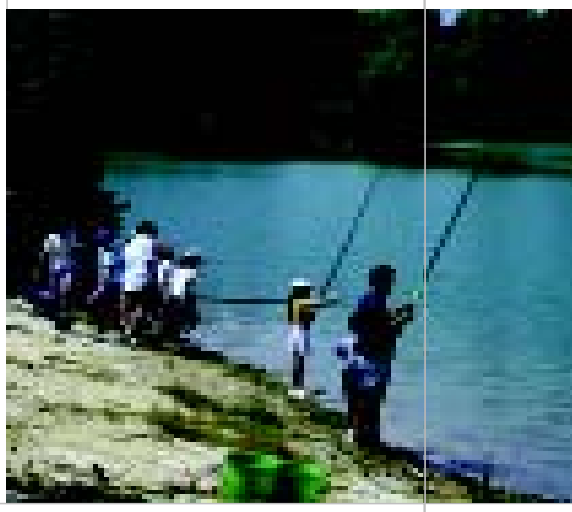
The Syndicat too was delighted by the fact that their river had been recognised by 'Europe' and that a framework had been created in which they could coordinate the different land use policies.

The results

The scene is now set for a constructive dialogue over the management and use of this stretch of the river. The conservation beneficiary is currently undertaking the necessary detailed ecological and hydrological investigations in order to put a first set of the possible management options on the table for discussion. It will then be up to the municipalities, through their union, to consult the different interest groups and find practical solutions that will satisfy all parties.

Keywords: ***identifying mutual benefits, using high profile events***

Photo © N Goussef



Communicating with the general public

The key to communicating with the general public is to find ways to make nature conservation and Natura 2000 directly relevant to their everyday lives. This can be achieved using a wide variety of techniques which allow people to discover 'their nature' and derive pleasure from it.

Photo © Pelagian Islands LIFE-Nature project on sea turtles

The term 'general public' covers an incredible variety of people from all walks of life, with varying interests in nature conservation.

An increasing number are concerned about the loss of nature and want to see natural areas and wildlife conserved. The majority, however, are more interested in the scenic landscapes and in using natural areas for recreation and tourism. They may not be aware or interested in their biodiversity values per se.

This is an important distinction with the stakeholder groups who, by definition, are directly concerned by legislative initiatives such as Natura 2000 – whether they want to be or not.

For the general public the key to success is to find ways of making nature conservation and Natura 2000 directly relevant to them.

One way to do this is to provide people with greater opportunities to enjoy 'their' nature. People visit natural areas for a number of reasons, often unrelated to nature conservation, such as recreation, tourism, discovery, health, education or simply relaxing in a beautiful natural setting. This experience could however become more meaningful if they are also able to learn a bit about the area they are visiting.

Once this has been achieved, nature conservation become more personal and relevant to those who have enjoyed the experience. This in turn often encourages people to take a more active interest and involvement in the future of an area they know well, especially if it is under threat.

Such an approach tends to be much more effective than the more commonly used passive channels of communication, such as leaflets and brochures. This is especially true when the areas lack charismatic flagship species. Raising interest in an obscure plant that few have seen is much more challenging if the focus is on that species rather on the natural environment in which it is situated.

Raising the level of awareness and understanding of conservation issues also encourages a more responsible behaviour towards the natural environment and can even motivate people to take an active part in conservation work, either by volunteering to help out at a local nature reserve or by being the eyes and ears of society and reporting illegal activities.

The media plays a particularly important role in this respect through their newpapers, TV and radio channels. Not only do they have a significant multiplier effect in terms of the audiences they can reach but journalists also excel in presenting the issues in an entertaining, relevant and often personalised way, as storylines. Although some of the detail may be lost, there can be no doubt that the media is one of the most effective ways of capturing people's interest.

LIFE in action **case sixteen**

Gaining media attention for sea turtles in Italy

Photo © Spanish Cetacean Society, SEC

Photo © Pelagian islands LIFE-Nature project on sea turtles

The context

Until recently few people, Italians or otherwise, would be able to tell you where the tiny islands of Lampedusa and Linosa, are situated. Even fewer appreciated the fact that these little gems hosted the only remaining nesting sites for sea turtles in Italy. The Sicilian Province of Agrigento decided it was time to do something about this and set about placing both the islands and the species firmly on the map once and for all.

The activities

It believed the most effective way to do this would be to enlist the support of the Italian media. So, in June 2001, it flew 2 representatives of the national TV and printed press to the islands off the coast of Sicily to show them what they were doing to protect sea turtles in Italy via the newly approved LIFE-Nature project.

The local tour operator, tourism office and airline 'Airone' who operates charter flights directly to the islands were all enlisted to help plan the itinerary so that the journalists would be able to see as much as possible of the islands and extract the maximum information and photo opportunities in the limited time they had.

The results

The journalists were indeed impressed. For many months after the visit, regular articles appeared in all the national newspapers and several TV spots were shown on the main TV channels telling the story of the sea turtle, the project and the islands. The publicity was so wide spread that today most Italians know exactly where Lampedusa and Linosa are and immediately associate them with sea turtles. Another positive spin-off has been the increase in eco-tourism to the islands.

Photo © Pelagian islands LIFE-Nature project on sea turtles

LIFE in action case seventeen

Raising the profile of bats amongst an international public

The context

One of the last remaining strongholds for bats in Europe is located in the border region between Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany and France. Yet, here too, many of their hibernating places – caves, cellars, quarries, bunkers, old tunnels – are being destroyed or disturbed by a multitude of different human uses. Added to this is the general public's widespread dislike and fear of these animals.

In a bid to change people's perceptions and behaviour, a small conservation NGO launched, as part of a LIFE-Nature project, an international publicity campaign on the species amongst local inhabitants and land users in all four countries.

The activities

This involved, amongst others, a travelling bat exhibition (visited by 200,000 people), several attractive brochures, two high quality videos as well as over 150 public meetings in different local villages. The aim of the latter was not only to raise awareness over the problems affecting bats locally and so encourage responsible behaviour but also to enlist their support in reporting incidents of dead or injured bats.

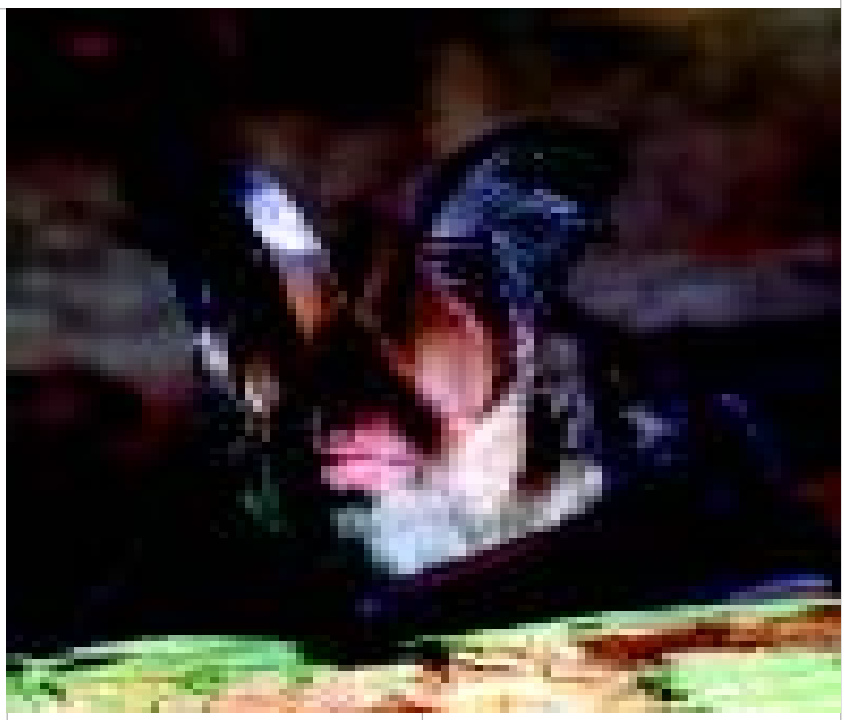


Photo © BBOWT

Through this work the project succeeded in generating a lot of media attention, with regular articles in newspapers and on TV. This in turn helped it to reach an even wider audience and to re-enforce the key messages about bats.

The results

Several results point to the success of the awareness raising campaign.

> the level of vandalism in, and destruction or disturbance of hibernating places has been substantially reduced,

> the general public have begun sending in regular bat reports and sightings which has enabled the NGO to prevent further damage and prosecute illegal activities,

> other authorities and user groups are now more receptive to taking bat conservation into consideration in their activities,

> the conservation work is also still on-going, long after the end of the LIFE project.

Keywords: *intensive publicity campaign, single species focus, responsible behaviour*

LIFE in action **case eighteen**

Hiring a public relations officer in Federsee, Germany

Photo © Federsee LIFE project

Photo © Federsee LIFE project

The context

The Federsee is the largest mire in South-west Germany. However over the years, its conservation value has steadily deteriorated through the combined effects of agricultural intensification, water drainage and increasing tourism pressure (over 150,000 people visit the area every year).

A LIFE-Nature project was launched to restore the hydrology of the mires and reorientate existing land uses to make them more compatible with nature conservation.

The activities

With so many different interest groups implicated, the beneficiary was concerned that there would be a lot of resistance to their restoration work. It decided therefore to hire a professional public relations officer to keep the project in the public eye throughout its duration.

The PR officer used a whole range of communication techniques to achieve this high profile, ranging from regular meetings with stakeholders, nature excursions for locals and tourists (ca 300 tours a year involving over 8000 people), high profile events, attractive brochures and interpretative material on site…

The officer also paid particular attention to establishing good relations with the local media. She knew that for items to be picked up in the press, they needed not only to be 'newsworthy' but also presented in a way that could be quickly assimilated by journalists and reporters.

The results

The use of a dedicated communication professional turned out to be a great success. The project appeared almost weekly in the news (around 150 articles in local and national newspapers a year, over 500 in total!) and on the radio (ca 25 interviews) which, together with the other communication activities, created a groundswell of goodwill and constructive dialogue.

As a result, the restoration work went very smoothly with little local resistance, which is highly unusual in Germany for projects of this kind. Recognising this, many other LIFE projects began organising study tours to Federsee to learn how to plan their own communication activities.

Keywords: ***hiring a Public relations expert***

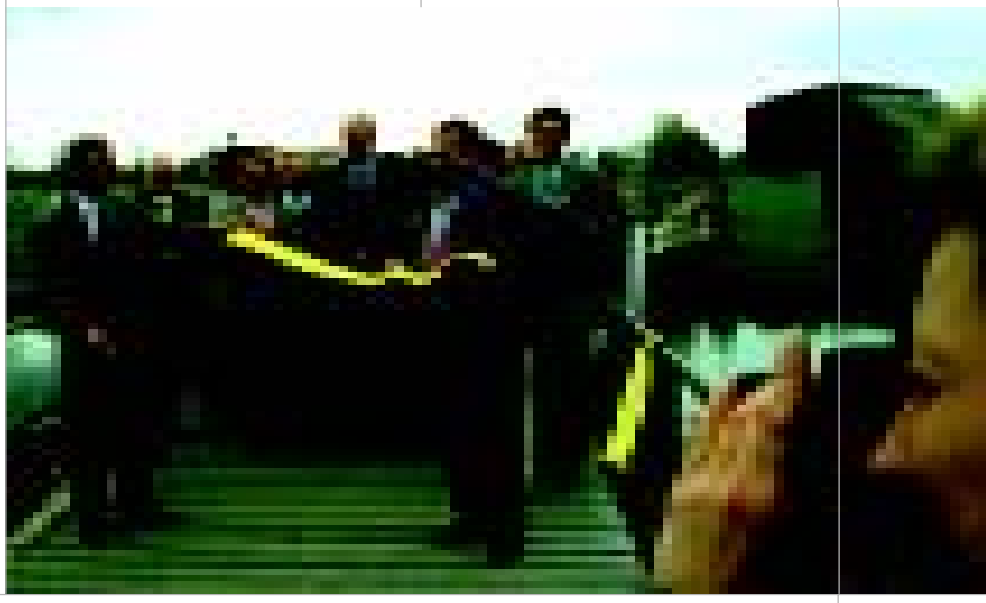


Photo © Federsee LIFE project

Producing awareness raising material

Awareness raising material such as brochures and leaflets are the most commonly used form of communication for both the general public and stakeholders. Almost every LIFE-Nature project has produced a leaflet about their site and their activities.

Leaflets are easy to do and can reach a wide audience both locally and further afield at a relatively modest cost. In this respect they are particularly useful at drawing people's initial attention to a problem or issue.

There are however a number of disadvantages which are worth bearing in mind. The main one being that the information goes only one way. In today's environment of information overload, there is no way of being sure that the person receiving the leaflet will actually read it, and if they do whether they will be influenced by its contents.

One way around this problem is to explore different ways of presenting and packaging the information. This can for instance be incorporated into other magazines or publications that already have a good circulation and a faithful readership (eg on tourism, farming, or the local 'weekly').

Alternatively, it could be turned into something useful for the target audience such as a calendar, postcards, guides on nature walks (or even on t-shirts which are in fact walking posters).

It is also worth exploring the electronic media as more and more people are connected to the internet and have CD/DVD players. The advantage of this form of information is that it can be presented in a wide variety of ways. A digital book, for instance, can include video material, interactive Q and As, storylines etc… which are usually much more interactive and enjoyable than a classic brochure. Once developed, they are also relatively cheap to reproduce and particularly effective with the younger generation.

Videos are sometimes also effective, especially if they are able to reveal another angle to the site or species that would not normally be available to the general public, for instance stories about people's lives and how they interact with their environment, or close ups of rare and elusive animals.

LIFE in action **case nineteen**

Read about the golden eagle as you fly to Ireland

The context

A LIFE-Nature project was launched in 2001 to reintroduce the golden eagle to Ireland. The species had become extinct several decades previously due to a combination of persecution and lack of food but now the conditions were again ripe for the species to make a come back in the Killarney National Park in County Mayo.

The activities

Recognising that the presence of this species might provide additional 'pulling power' for local eco-tourism businesses and in a bid to announce the project to as wide an audience as possible, the beneficiary contacted the national airline Aer Lingus to see if they would be interested in including an article about the golden eagle in its in flight magazine. Because of the high quality photos and newsworthiness of this recent reintroduction programme, the airline was happy to oblige.

The result

For several months the Air Lingus in flight magazine carried an 8 page spread about the species, its conservation needs and the efforts of the project. Thanks to this the LIFE project was able to reach an extensive audience that might otherwise never have read about such issues.

Using calendars to get the message across in Austria

Many LIFE projects also found annual calendars to be a very popular form of information material. Not only does this give people something they can use but it also provides a means of passing on different messages (one a month!) about the project and the site.

The Austrian LIFE-Project on the Odere Drau river produced just such a calendar. This showed wonderful close-ups of the river's wildlife, attractive landscapes, and pictures of people using and enjoying the river. Every month another story was told about the river and why it is useful to conserve it.

It was not long before many households had put these attractive calendars up on their walls.

Making nature discovery enjoyable

Photo © G Bievet

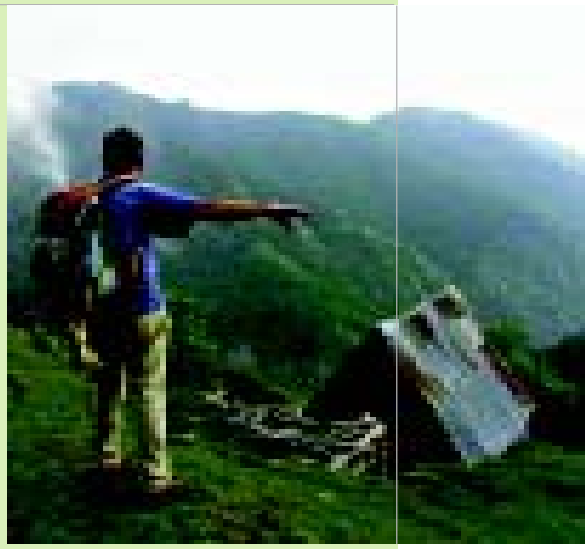


Photo © Florent Favier

There are several ways to make nature enjoyable and interesting to the general public. Events, for instance, are an ideal means of reaching a larger audience, as they can be geared to the whole family.

On many Natura 2000 sites, guided walks and open days are common practice and are usually very popular. People tend to be curious about the history and interests of a site nearby, and enjoy having an opportunity to walk safely through a wild area that they might not otherwise know existed or dared to venture into.

Photo © Lee Valley Regional Park Authority

Alternatively, people may want to explore an area on their own. Their experience can be enhanced by providing them with good access and visitor amenities, such as nature trails, interpretation panels and visitor centres. At the same time these can ensure that the environment people come to enjoy is preserved.

Developing good trails and interpretive material however requires a lot of planning and forethought. Much has been written about how to maximise the impact of the material on the people concerned whilst still providing them with an enjoyable and stimulating experience.

Unfortunately, many site managers tend to ignore this wealth of experience. As a result they sometimes create dull information boards that one feels one *ought* to read them rather than one *wants* to read. In a bid to pass on as much information as possible, the authors end up creating interpretive signs that are very wordy, abstract and too technical.

The visitor might read one or two but few will read them all. Not only is this a lost opportunity but it may also affect the visitors enjoyment of nature – it's a bit like being back at school.

The same goes for exhibitions in visitor centres – with the wealth of mutlimedia and IT facilities nowadays there are many ways of producing exhibits which stimulate all the senses, (sight, touch, smell, sense, hearing) and provide interest and entertainment for all the family. These exhibitions also have the advantage of being able to introduce and explain a complex story.

Often the best way is to put oneself in the shoes of the visitor and their families. If this was about a different subject would you be interested?

Finally, a word should be said about the increasing interest in members of the public wanting to volunteer for nature conservation activities in their spare time. More and more people are keen to make a personal contribution to conserving nature and learn more about this subject, or simply want to be able to work outdoors and meet other like-minded people.

Whatever the motivation, it is well worth tapping into this precious resource, not only does provide an extra pair of hands but it also helps to re-enforce the public's increasing interest in nature conservation issues.

LIFE in action **case twenty**

Theatre performances at Rambower Moor, eastern Germany

The context

Rambower moor is a biologically rich mire situated in one of the more isolated and economically depressed parts of eastern Germany. A LIFE-Nature project was adopted in 1998 to restore the area and bring the valuable grasslands under the right kind of management. Establishing communication with local inhabitants, such as farmers and fishermen, was straightforward – they could be counted on to help.

However, the project also wanted to reach out to the inhabitants who lived nearby. If they appreciated the value of the mire, they could help generate a more positive local attitude to the otherwise 'unexciting' area and so help reduce problems like disturbance and dumping of rubbish.

The beneficiary used the opportunity of a local summer festival in the village of Boberow, one of the settlements along the rim of the moor, to present the project to a wider local audience. Reasoning that a stand with technical documents would not attract many people, the project manager tried a different tack.

She offered 'dragonfly-cocktails', 'peat-soup' and other bizarre culinary treats and had a colleague dress up as a 'Moor-Witch' and tell ghost stories to the youngsters. She also contributed to organising a small theatre performance on an open air stage overlooking the moor. This auditorium was surrounded by prominent LIFE information stands which became the focal point for people before and after the performance.

The annual cultural event has gone from strength to strength, it is regularly reported on in the press and has begun to attract the interests of professional theatre groups, such as the Rostock theatre company who see this as an opportunity for students to practice their acting skills in front of a live audience.

Although hard to measure directly, the approach seems to have paid off. There was little local opposition to the restoration work and Rambower moor is now 'on the map' both for its nature interest and for its annual theatre performances. People living in the area are now proud that this desolate looking moor has become the focus of so much attention.

Photo © Rambower Moor LIFE project

LIFE in action case twenty-one

Imperial eagles: the new stars of a topical radio series in Hungary

Photo © Ivan Demeter:

New imperial eagle chicks, Boros and Bochkor.

Photo © Ivan Demeter:

The context

Hungary is one of Europe's last strongholds for the rare Imperial eagle, yet, as elsewhere, its survival is increasingly threatened by a wide range of conflicting activities such as the construction of new power lines and rapidly changing land uses.

A New LIFE project was funded in 2002 to address these concerns in a strategic fashion across Hungary. One of the project's objectives was to raise the overall level of awareness and interest for this impressive bird amongst the general public and specific interest groups.

The activities

The beneficiary organized a series of workshops, leaflets, open days etc…. to help draw attention to the plight of the Imperial Eagle. All were successful but somewhat short lived. Something was needed to keep the birds in the public eye on a more permanent and regular basis. This drove the project team to the idea of asking for the support of two famous radio broadcasters.

Boros Lajos and Bochkor Gabor run a popular programme called 'Bumerang' on the national radio every week day morning in which they discuss different topical events and news items in a humorous and non-political fashion. Their stories are interspersed by music and regular feedback from the audience via text messages and phone-ins. So popular is their show that an estimated 5–10% of Hungarians tune in every day (over 1 million people).

The broadcasters were asked if they would be willing to do a regular spot on two new imperial eagle chicks which had been named after them as they flew from their nests into the Hungarian landscape. The DJs were happy to oblige and created regular anecdotal stories around the birds' latest sightings, sometimes based on 'double attendres' with their extra curricular activities. Members of the audience were also encouraged to send in SMS's if they had spotted the birds in their area. (yes, Bochkor was last seen coming out of a wine cellar in Tokaj!)

The results

The plight of these two individual chicks not only captured people's imagination but also opened up additional opportunities to air some of the more serious issues about Imperial eagle conservation in Hungary on the radio.

Since the stories began the beneficiary has also noticed a remarkable difference in people's attitudes towards their work. Now when they go out into the field, people come up to them and ask how Boros and Bochkor are getting on. This was in strong contrast to the originally hostile, or at best cool, reception the project used to get when visiting different stakeholders.

LIFE in action **case twenty-two**

The guided walks and events around the elusive Bittern in the UK

Photo © Phil Vines

Photo © Lee Valley Regional Park Authority

The context

In 2002, a consortium of NGOs and public authorities set out to conduct a strategic LIFE-Nature project to bring the bittern back from the brink of extinction in the UK. Focussing on 19 sites across England, it aims to recreate a network of suitable reedbed habitats to allow the existing minute population (just 43 territorial males) to expand.

One of the main problems the project faces in communicating the work to the public is that bitterns are shy and elusive, and sometimes live in unattractive reedbeds near abandoned industrial sites and run down urban areas. One of the project sites, Lee valley for instance, is located on the outskirts of London and made up of a former gravel pit, three tertiary treatment lagoons and a once derelict and polluted floodplain. Little surprise therefore that people are not immediately attracted to these areas.

The activites

The project set out to raise the profile of the Lee Valley reedbeds by promising to reveal a rare European bird in a setting perhaps not normally associated with rare wildlife. It did this by organising a series of events, such as guided walks, open days, and an annual Birdwatching Fair. The events were heavily advertised both locally and nationally and received good media coverage, there was even an item on BBC national lunchtime news.

The events turned out to be extremely popular. The rare and elusive bittern, with its loud booming sounds and international reputation had captured people's imagination and drew them to Lee Valley. Many came out of simple curiosity 'what could be so good about these derelict areas that people are are willing to spend so much money here'?

The results

So far, over 8000 people have participated in the regular guided walks, weekend open days and the annual Birdwatching Fair. One of the highlights is of course the very high success rates in seeing a rare bittern in the wild from the watchpoint at the end of one of the trails. Many people go away pleasantly surprised by their day out and eager to see this internationally important bird return to their local area.

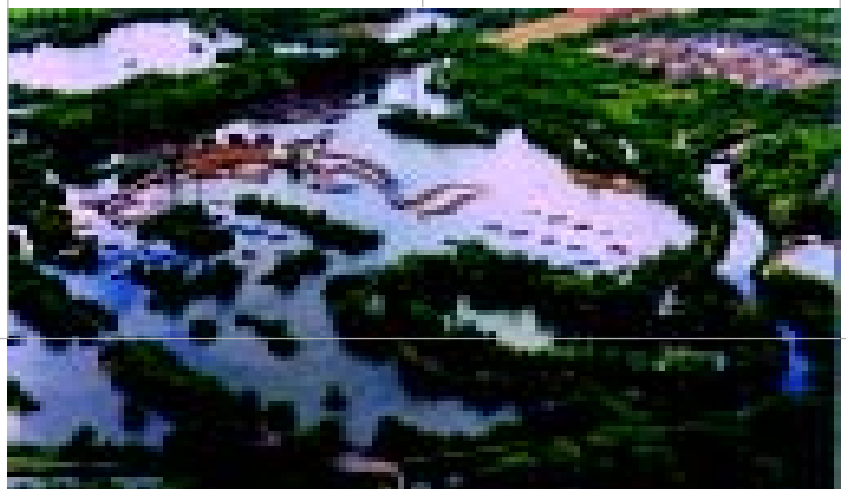


Photo © Lee Valley Regional Park Authority

LIFE in action case twenty-three

Turning a nature trail in Lapland into an enjoyable journey of discovery

Photo © K Sundseth

Photo © K Sundseth

The context

The area of Yllas in northern Finland, lies beyond the Arctic circle. It is one of the few true wilderness areas left in Europe, covering vast expanses of forests, mires and fens of outstanding natural beauty. This majestic scenery attracts many walkers, cross-country skiers and others who go to enjoy the 'great outdoors'.

Much of the area in Yllas has recently been declared a Natura 2000 site (over 300 km²). In order to ensure that the increasing number of visitors remains compatible with the area's fragile habitats, a LIFE-Nature project set out to develop a tourism management strategy for the area. This included the design of a series of nature trails that would channel visitors away from the more sensitive areas whilst still providing them with an enjoyable experience.

The activities

The project put a lot of thought and effort into developing trails and interpretation panels that would be interesting, stimulating and enjoyable for the reader. They based their choice on the results of a preliminary visitor survey which recorded people's main interests and level of understanding on nature issues.

By the end of the project, 7 trails of differing length (47 km in total) had been developed. Each was given a particular theme – e.g. predators trail, Enchanter's trail, the Cloudberry path, the starry way…. Interactive panels were placed along the way, sometimes carved into a tree or hidden under a box to encourage people to actively search for the information. In between the panels were other forms of interpretation such as animal footprints crossing the board walk or an animal olympics where people could compare the abilities with those of other animals.

The results

The trails were so popular that they made headline news. Feedback from visitors showed that they were unreservedly positive about the trails and the interpretive material produced. Many were even quoted as saying that this had made their holiday more memorable and enjoyable. It was not long before the local tourism entrepreneurs started asking the project for courses on nature conservation issues in order to satisfy their clients increasing interest in this area and its nature values.

Photo © Keijo Taskinen, Arctic Idea

LIFE in action **case twenty-four**

Using the multimedia to explain the plight of the brown bear in the Italian Alps

The context

A lot of skill goes into creating an interesting exhibit in a visitor centre. People have been experimenting with different techniques for years to find the best ways of providing an enjoyable learning experience for all the family. The exhibits in the Bear museum of the Adamello Brenta National Park in Northern Italy have put many of these experiences to good use.

The activities

Located in a restored 14th century manor house, the exhibits tell the story of the bear in the Italian Alps. Six different themed rooms have been equipped with a gamut of interactive equipment and gadgets to arouse curiosity and stimulate all the senses.

One can follow the tracks of a bear through a simulated forest whilst listening to the tales of a lumberjack, visit its den and experience what it would be like to live here, learn about the myths and legends surrounding this impressive animal and watch a puppet show of four peoples' encounter with a bear. In each room there are also ample opportunities via quizzes and multimedia programmes, to test one's knowledge about the bear and to learn more about what is being done across Europe to save this species.

Through a new LIFE-Nature project on the reintroduction of the brown bear into Italy a new exhibit has recently been created. With only three bears left in the Italian Alps, the project set out to import a further 11 bears from Slovenia and reintroduce them to the park.

The exhibit tells the story of how the reintroduction was done. It includes a video game giving people an opportunity to learn how to radio-track bears and identify their whereabouts. It also introduces the visitors to each of the bears in turn through individual videos and stories. People can then follow the progress of their chosen bear on the internet once they have left the park. Today's headline news: Gaspar had lost its radio collar and Bel was spotted down by the lake.

The results

It is difficult to judge the success of these interpretation facilities but regular visitor surveys have confirmed that people are generally satisfied with their visit to the centre (in fact a significant number are now just coming to the centre without visiting the National park).

The conservation message also seems to be getting through: when one of the reintroduced bears was killed, it made headline news in all the national newspapers, something that would have been unheard of a few years ago.

Release of Gaspar.

Photo © Parco Naturale Adamello Brenta

LIFE in action case twenty-five

Volunteers help to save sea turtles on the island of Crete

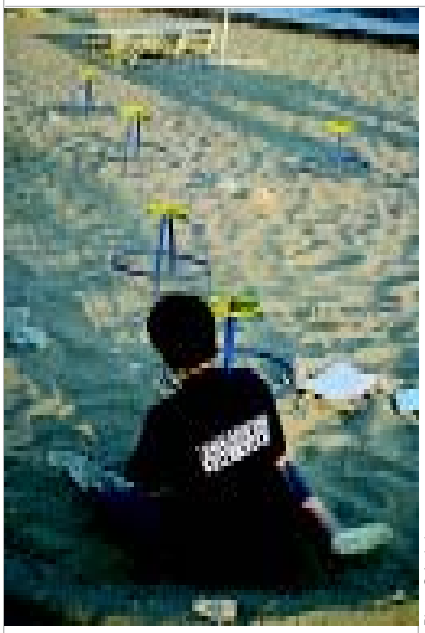


Photo © Archelon

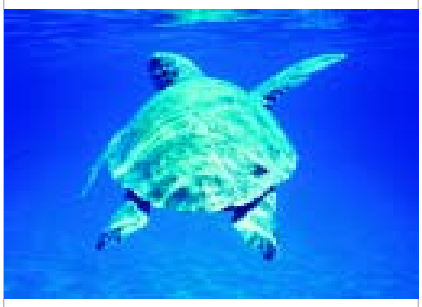


Photo © Archelon

The context

For centuries, the loggerhead turtle has been returning to nest on the island of Crete and, despite intensive tourism development, the beaches in the north of the island are still amongst the most important nesting sites for the turtle in the Mediterranean.

However with over 40 km of coastline and several hundreds of thousands of tourists every year, the task of protecting these nests from damage is daunting.

The activities

The NGO quickly came to the idea of using volunteers to help them out. They advertised in across the EU and received an overwhelming response. Before long, over 200 volunteers had signed up. Many people were indeed willing to spend their summer patrol-ling beaches and helping with turtle conservation work in exchange for food and lodging at subsidised rates.

This massive human resource was put to effective use on the beaches both in protecting new nest sites and in engaging with local inhabitants and tourists alike to raise awareness of the turtles on Crete's beaches and to explain what people can do to help.

The multi lingual volunteers also manned the information kiosks in main towns and gave regular presentations and slide shows in the evenings at hotels along beach. On average around 600 presentations were given each season reaching an audience of over a quarter of a million tourists (10% of all tourists to the island).

The results

The regular presence of volunteers every summer on Crete's northern beaches has not only done a lot to reduce the number of damaged nests but has also helped raise the overall level of awareness amongst tourists and businesses alike. And of course when they return home countries they take their messages and experiences with them, thereby spreading the information even further afield.

Helping out at the local Natura 2000 site

Photo © RNOB

Volunteers can be equally important closer to home for instance on a local nature reserve. In southern Belgium, a LIFE Nature project, run by the NGO RNOB, enlisted the support of local volunteers to help restore the alkaline fens of the region. It organised 51 'management days' to encourage people to come and help out in their local Natura 2000 site. Special events were also organised for schools, scouts groups and the local village.

These work camps proved to be very popular, some 470 people turned out during the course of the project to lend a hand. Some became so committed to the sites that they set up their own permanent volunteer group to ensure the longer term management of the areas. All are now also very familiar with Natura 2000 and are able to explain this important new initiative to others they may meet.

Educational activities

Photo © Junta de Andalucía

Finally in this chapter, a word must be said about involving school children in nature conservation, be it through classic educational channels such as schools or through youth groups and organisations.

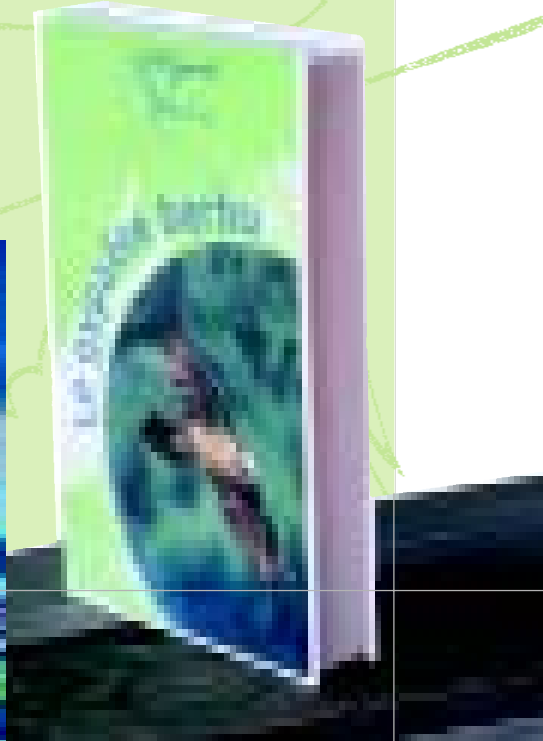
The impact of this communication work may be hard to measure but it has long been recognised as a fundamental part of any awareness raising policy.

There are several ways to go about bringing nature issues to the attention of children. The most classic is to involve the local schools and teachers in this. Many LIFE-Nature projects have helped organise outings for local schools to show them around the site. Some have gone on to produce educational material for different age groups on nature for use in lessons.

Alternatively the local nature reserve may provide a useful backdrop for other educational topics like health, safety, recreation, geography etc…

Another interesting option is to team up with local youth organisations to organise special events around the site or to reach the children through the parents e.g. by organising events that are child friendly. Often if the kids are happy, so are their parents.

Many LIFE projects have used games to explain the ecology and conservation of rare species – such as the Iberian lynx (above) and the bearded vulture (below).



LIFE in action case twenty-six

Producing a video on activities around Lake Constance

Photo © Amt der Landeshauptstadt Bregenz

The context

As its name implies the rare Lake Constance forget-me-not exists only on the shores of this important lake at the foothills of the Alps. A LIFE-Nature project has begun to restore the eroding banks along the shore line but for the plant to be able to re-estalish itself here permanently efforts are also needed to address the increasing problem of reacreational activities along the lake.

Photo © Amt der Landeshauptstadt Bregenz

As the beaches are heavily used in the summer, especially by young people, for barbecues, campfires and parties, it decided to enlist the support of local school children and youth groups to help get the conservation messages across and encourage responsible behaviour.

Photo © Amt der Landeshauptstadt Bregenz

The activities

The beneficiary contacted the Bregenz city youth department to see if they would be interested in producing a video about the conflict between recreation and conservation in the project area. Here they found six teenagers who volunteered to help produce the video after school.

The project manager gave the girls an introduction to the problem and a number of conflict situations were play-acted to 'get a feel' for both sides' attitudes and motivations. Next was a site visit to scout for good shooting locations (the girls were amazed how many people they spotted breaking the bye-laws). A series of trial interviews and camera shoots were also done to help perfect the girls' camera and interview techniques.

Now they were ready to start filming for real. The first proper shoot began with interviews of the conservation authorities and the site warden. Next came days of filming anglers and beach parties – the girls soon discovered that although there were plenty of people on the beach, it wasn't hard finding someone who agreed to have themselves and their opinions recorded on film. Within a month the girls had gathered enough material to start editing, choosing the film music and recording the voice-overs.

The results

The final film was shown at the Aquarama 2003 lake festival where it was seen by thousands of people. Such was its success that the project decided to show it at the local schools and youth clubs, to generate discussion on the conservation issues raised. The video was also shown at a day-long event organised by the regional government dedicated to the theme 'young people making a mark'. This gave the girls an opportunity to present their work to a 300 strong audience, including many mayors and the President of the regional government.

Encouraged by this initially positive result, the project went on to enlist the support of pupils at the Bregenz high school to help design and develop the software for the project's website. This too had positive spin-offs. In Spring 2003 the two pupils responsible entered the LIFE homepage in an Austria-wide competition for schools and won third prize.

LIFE in action **case twenty-seven**

Dorset heaths

The context

One of the biggest problems facing the urban heaths in Dorset, southern England, is that they are regularly set on fire by young arsonists. This is not only destructive for the fragile heaths but also puts a considerable strain on the police and fire brigade's limited resources (last year a heathland fire cost €300,000 to put out).

As in any big city there are inevitably problems with delinquency, drugs and petty crime and the police are constantly having to explore new ways of tackling crime prevention amongst the young.

The activities

Recognising that much of the answer lay in how children and young teenagers perceive the heaths, a LIFE-Nature project run by a consortium of different interest groups, including the fire brigade and the police force, set out to elaborate an education programme for school children based on two new UK government initiatives: one on citizenship and the other on healthy schools.

In the case of the first, the idea is to use people's irresponsible attitudes to the Dorset heaths to help school children develop an understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens. In the case of the healthy schools initiative, the heaths provide an ideal environment in which to encourage healthy outdoor pursuits for children.

The project started out by giving talks to 23 schools (6,000 pupils) in the vicinity of the heaths. This is done as a good cop, bad cop routine where the project education officer explained all the benefits to be had from the heaths and the wildlife police officer explained what happens when juveniles are caught damaging the heaths and how prison sentences can affect their future prospects in their adult live.

The project is now developing a series of educational packs to be integrated into the school curriculum. These are currently being tested out on teachers before being produced on a larger scale. Altogether 40 different lesson plans will be developed together with handouts, diagrams, pictures, videos and an educational game called the 'fire fighter'

Photo © Claire Dinsdale

The results

Education is a long term process and it is unlikely that the impact of the project can be measured immediately, although there are already some positive signs. For instance since the project started the number of reported fires has already gone down by 54%! The 'good cop, bad cop' routine is clearly having an effect.

Photo © Claire Dinsdale

Photo © Peter Creed

LIFE in action case twenty-eight

Targeting younger children

Many projects also target younger children in their information campaign. The LIFE-Nature project on the Balearics shearwater, for instance, produced a CD ROM with an interactive multimedia programme for young school children on the island of Formentura to learn about the habitats of this rare bird on their island. They can listen to stories about the bird, watch videos, answer a quiz and play games.

One of the games is about Miquelet, a young shearwater, who needs to get from the sea to his nest without falling foul of any of the dangers that lay in his path. The CD Rom, and a 16 page comic about the bird, were distributed to all 18 schools on the island and has proven to be very successful in raising awareness for the shearwater amongst children and adults alike.

On the other side of Europe, in the Austria, WWF dedicated one of the issues of its youth magazine, Panda Club, to its LIFE project on the protection of wetlands in the Waldviertel area. This was distributed to all primary schools in the district.

The way the information was presented is particularly interesting. The ecology of the Waldviertel is explained using a kind of treasure hunt with clues and questions throughout the magazine. This was followed up by a real outdoor treasure hunt on wetlands in which 100 children participated.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 The Commission's activities on communicating on Natura 2000

The Commission has organised a number of communication activities to raise the profile of Natura 2000 across Europe. The most important ones are listed below. It is well worth spending a bit of time to look at these and to order copies of brochures etc as they could provide useful material on Natura 2000 that can be readily used or adapted for your own communi-cation activities.

> GREEN DAYS: Natura 2000 … nature for you!

For the last couple of years, the Commission has run a 'Green Days' initiative to promote events in and around Natura 2000 sites across Europe. Every year, site managers (LIFE projects included) are encouraged to organise simultaneous events at their local Natura 2000 site in order to give people living close to these areas an opportunity to learn about and enjoy 'their nature'.

Last year some 400 events were held in 15 countries attracting over 22,000 people. Activities include guided walks, exhibitions, workshops, open days etc. The Commission has enlisted the support of the organisation Eurosite to help coordinate the future Green day events which will now run throughout the year.

Eurosite has created an online dynamic calendar in which all Green day activities can be recorded. From this it is possible to promote events across Europe and search for activities in particular regions. Event organisers receive a Green Days toolkit, containing leaflets, posters, hats, stickers etc… about Natura 2000.

Details on www.eurosite-nature.org

> The Natura Networking Initiative: local partnerships in action

A second initiative has just been launched called the Natura Networking Initiative. This is designed to promote good practice in the management of Natura 2000 sites, and to raise public and stakeholder awareness of Natura 2000. The Natura Network Initiative (NNi) will cover the 25 EU Member States and includes the above Natura 2000 Green Days project.

The NNi aims to identify and promote examples of good practice in site management and encourage the formation of Local Area Partnerships. Where they already exist, it aims to provide additional resources to assist their development/promotion (see box).

The Initiative has been contracted out to a consortium of organisations involving Eurosite, Europarc and the European Landowners Association. Full details can be found on www.eurosite-nature.org

NNi agreements

The following is description of the 7 agreements to be established for the NNi. The agreements are voluntary and ranked in order of (anticipated) commitment and difficulty, easiest to achieve to most difficult.

1. *Submitting basic information about the site to the Natura 2000 Agreements Page.*
2. *Organising at least one Green day event per year.*
3. *Promoting the Natura Network Initiative (NNi) at the local level.*
4. *Committing to a site twinning.*
5. *Networking at the national/European level.*
6. *Involving local stakeholders in the management planning process – creating a local area partnership.*
7. *Agreeing to become an NNi ambassador.*

> Brochures and other information material on Natura 2000

The Commission is producing its own series of brochures on Natura 2000 which can be directly down-loaded from the website or ordered as paper copies from the address given below. These include:

- A general brochure on Natura 2000 as a European Network (16 pages)
- A more detailed brochure aimed at stakeholders giving information on the different European policies and funds that are relevant (24 pages)
- A brochure on the Natura 2000 sites in each of the six biogeographical regions (8 pages each)
- A selection of posters on Natura 2000 illustrating various different themes

> The Natura 2000 Newsletter

Finally, the Commission produces a Natura 2000 newsletter twice a year in five languages to review certain topical themes in greater detail and provide regular updates on the latest happenings in Europe that concern Natura 2000. In addition, there is a regular update of the Natura Barometer showing the progress made by Member States in designating sites for the network.

The newsletter is published in five lanuages free of charge and can be downloaded or ordered from the nature website.

For a full update on these current initiatives consult the European Commission nature website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm

ANNEX 2 Reference list of LIFE-Nature projects featured as case studies in this report

identity card

Name LIFE ("L'Instrument Financier pour l'Environnement" / The financing instrument for the environment)

Type of intervention Co-financing of actions in favour of the environment in the European Union and candidate accession countries.

LIFE is made up of three branches: **"LIFE-Nature", "LIFE-Environment" and "LIFE – Third countries".**

Objectives

> with a view to sustainable development in the European Union, contribute to the drawing up, implementation and up-dating of Community environment policy and legislation;
> explore new solutions to environmental problems on a Community scale.

Projects Any natural or legal person, provided that the projects:

> match the priorities laid down at Community level and contribute to the objectives listed;
> are submitted by technically and financially reliable participants;
> can be technically carried out and offer a good cost-benefit ratio.

Types of project

> LIFE-Nature projects are **nature conservation projects** which contribute to the protection of species and maintaining or restoring of natural habitats according to the "Birds" and "Habitats" Directives.
> LIFE-Environment projects are **demonstration projects** which contribute to the development of innovative and integrated techniques and methods, and to the further development of Community environment policy. The projects concern at least one of the following 5 themes:
  - integrate environmental and sustainable development considerations into land use development and planning;
  - promote the sustainable management of ground- and surface water;
  - minimise the environmental impact of economic activities;
  - promote the prevention, reuse, recovery and recycling of waste of all kinds and ensure the sound management of waste flows;
  - reduce the environmental impact of products.
> LIFE – Third countries projects are **technical assistance projects** which:
  - benefit the Community, through their contribution to the implementation of regional and international policies and agreements;
  - promote sustainable development at international, national or regional level;
  - bring solutions to serious environmental problems in the areas concerned.

Implementation The Member States or third countries send the Commission the proposals of projects to be co-financed. The Commission sets the date for sending the proposals annually and reaches a decision on these. It monitors the financing and follow-up of the implementation of the LIFE actions. Accompanying measures enable the projects to be monitored on the ground and, in the case of LIFE-Nature, to encourage certain forms of cooperation between similar projects ("Co-op" measure).

Period covered (LIFE III) 2000 to 2004.

Funds from the Community approximately €638 million of which €300 million to LIFE-Nature, €300 million to LIFE-Environment and €38 million to LIFE-Third countries.

Contact

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LIFE Unit – BU-9 02/1 – B-1049 Brussels – Fax: +32 2 296 95 56
Internet: http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/home.htm

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