



## 4<sup>th</sup> Natura 2000 Seminar for the Mediterranean Region



### Seminar Report

17 – 19 April 2024  
Larnaca, Cyprus

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**In cooperation with:**

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**Event:** All presentations from the seminar and other information and relevant documents can be found at: <https://biogeoprocess.net/mediterranean-region/>

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Context of the Natura 2000 seminar for the Mediterranean region

The Natura 2000 biogeographical process was launched in 2011 by the European Commission. Its objective is to promote information exchange, networking, and cooperation on Natura 2000-related issues amongst Member States (MS) and stakeholders at the biogeographical region level. The process involves regular seminars in each biogeographical region (or group of regions) to discuss key conservation challenges and agree on a roadmap for cooperative action in the region(s) for the following years.

MS in each biogeographical region often face similar challenges in managing Natura 2000 sites, habitats, and species. Therefore, the Natura 2000 seminars are intended to stimulate transnational exchanges and promote coherent management of Natura 2000 at the biogeographical region level.

The Mediterranean biogeographical region is the second largest EU biogeographical region, accounting for 20.6% of the EU land area. From west to east, it concerns eight MS: Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Croatia, Malta, Greece, and Cyprus.

The fourth Mediterranean Biogeographical seminar was hosted by the Department of the Environment of Cyprus in Larnaca, Cyprus, from 17 to 19 April 2024. In total, 93 participants attended the seminar including representatives from all Mediterranean MS except Portugal, experts from five additional MS, representatives of the European Commission, and members of the BGP supporting team.

The field visit was organised by the Department of the Environment of Cyprus together with LIFE-IP Physis.

### 1.2. Seminar Themes

A background document for the seminar was produced and circulated to participants before the event to outline discussion topics and the seminar agenda. The programme (Annex I) focused on four main themes:

- Theme 1: Strictly protected areas in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030
- Theme 2: Site-specific conservation objectives
- Theme 3: Defining Favourable Conservation Status/Favourable Reference Values
- Theme 4: Effective management of Natura 2000 sites

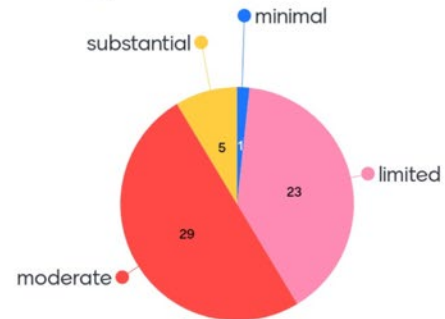
Themes 1 and 2, as well as themes 3 and 4, were scheduled as parallel sessions. Reports on the outcomes of these sessions were presented in plenary during the last day.

The Spanish government also hosted a session on the Working group: Pilot action plan for a habitat type of community interest ([Embryonic Shifting Dunes 2110](#)).



Mentimeter

How would you rate the current progress of nature conservation efforts in the Mediterranean biogeographical region?



Mentimeter poll 1: Seminar participants' perception about the progress in conservation in the Mediterranean region. The most rated answers were Moderate (50%) and Limited (39%).

## 2. Opening and plenary sessions



*Pictures 1: Opening session at the Radison blue.*

The seminar was opened by **Mrs. Elena Stylianopoulou, Director of the Department of the Environment of Cyprus**, who welcomed the participants. The Mediterranean region is recognized as an important global biodiversity hotspot. Cyprus has many endemic species – and has designated 69 Natura 2000 sites. Her department has been developing and managing the Natura 2000 network. Climate change will have huge impacts on EU biodiversity, particularly in the Mediterranean region, meaning action is essential.

**Mr. Humberto-Delgado Rosa, Director of Natural Capital at the European Commission's Directorate General for Environment**, welcomed participants in a video message and thanked the hosts. He stressed the importance of Biogeographical Seminars in addressing the current European challenges in nature and biodiversity conservation, particularly in reversing the decline of biodiversity. To this end, he highlighted the importance of attaining the targets set in the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, specifically the protection and site-specific conservation objectives and the need to ensure restoration by fully implementing the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. He highlighted the challenges faced by the MS whilst submitting their pledges, and praised Cyprus, Spain, and France for having already submitted pledges. The EU Biodiversity Strategy is in line with the global biodiversity targets of the CBD, adopted by the governments of 195 countries, known as the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity.

**Mr. Andrea Vettori, Head of Unit D3, DG Environment**, highlighted the importance of the Biogeographical Process to discuss the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives and the Biodiversity Strategy with MS and stakeholders. The EEA recently published a climate risk assessment

that shows the climate change impact on EU biodiversity. We need resilient ecosystems to cope with climate change.

A vital pillar of the Biodiversity Strategy is the Nature Restoration Law, which (at the time of writing) was waiting to be approved by the European Council. DG Environment trusts the commitment of Belgium's EU presidency to support adopting the law before 30 June 2024. Two related important laws are being prepared, the Directive on Soil Monitoring and Resilience and a Regulation on a Forest Monitoring Framework, that will provide additional support to protect and restore biodiversity in the EU. LIFE has been and will continue to be essential for implementing the EU biodiversity policies.

Pictures 2,3,4,5: From top to down and left to right: Opening of the seminar by Elena Stylianopoulou, Humberto-Delgado Rosa,



Andrea Vettori, and Frank Vassen.

**Mr. Frank Vassen, DG Environment**, presented the pledge and review process status under the Biodiversity Strategy. To date, seven MS have submitted pledges, three of which are in the Mediterranean Region: Cyprus, Spain, and France. He highlighted the importance of the available data from MS on the current state of the species and habitats protected under the Habitat and Birds Directive and the pressures they face. Given the often fragmented location of designated Natura 2000 sites, we need to increase the areas and restore connections to ensure a coherent network. In particular, fish species have a bad conservation status (U2), as well as grassland, freshwater and dune habitats. If the targets of the Biodiversity Strategy should be achieved in time for 2030, MS should take action now to ensure the protection and restoration of EU biodiversity.

**Mr. Eugenio Dupre** presented the topics and achievements from the previous Mediterranean seminar. Due to COVID, the seminar took place online from the 4th to the 7th of May and was hosted by the Calabria Region and the Sila National Park in Italy. 137 registered participants from 11 countries attended, in addition to 11 people from the supporting team. The seminar was centred around four themes:

- Defining and coordinating a Natura 2000 restoration agenda in the Mediterranean region.
- Defining conservation objectives at site level and monitoring impact of measures.
- Addressing land abandonment in the Mediterranean region.
- Building capacity for Natura 2000 management.

At the Knowledge Market, 34 projects presented their work in the Mediterranean region. All documentation on this and previous Seminars is available at [biogeoprocess.net](https://biogeoprocess.net)

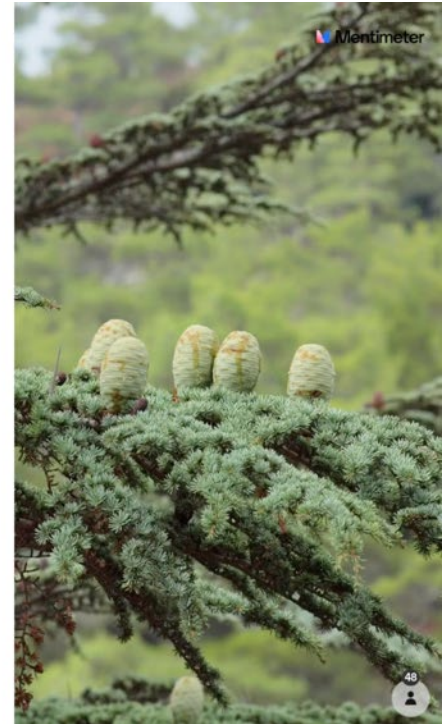
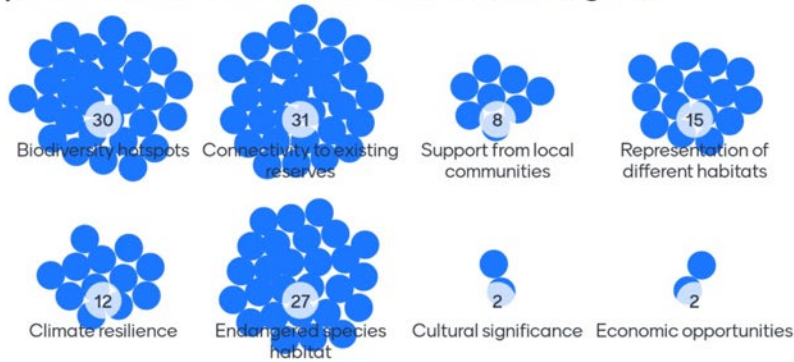
The LIFE Programme in the Mediterranean region and its contribution to Natura 2000 was presented by **Mrs. Georgia Valaoras**, ELMEN. Mediterranean MS - particularly Spain and Italy - have been very successful in accessing LIFE funding. Over the years, projects have become bigger. The LIFE program has assisted in buying land to ensure biodiversity, such as nesting beaches of sea turtles, and has improved species populations (e.g., Yelkouan shearwater, Lesser kestrel, Bearded vulture) and enabled their protection through dedicated action plans. Several projects focused on the control of invasive alien species such as lionfish. In addition, all LIFE projects work on environmental education and involve local communities to ensure high stakeholder involvement.



Pictures 6,7: From left to right: Eugenio Dupre and Georgia Valaoras.

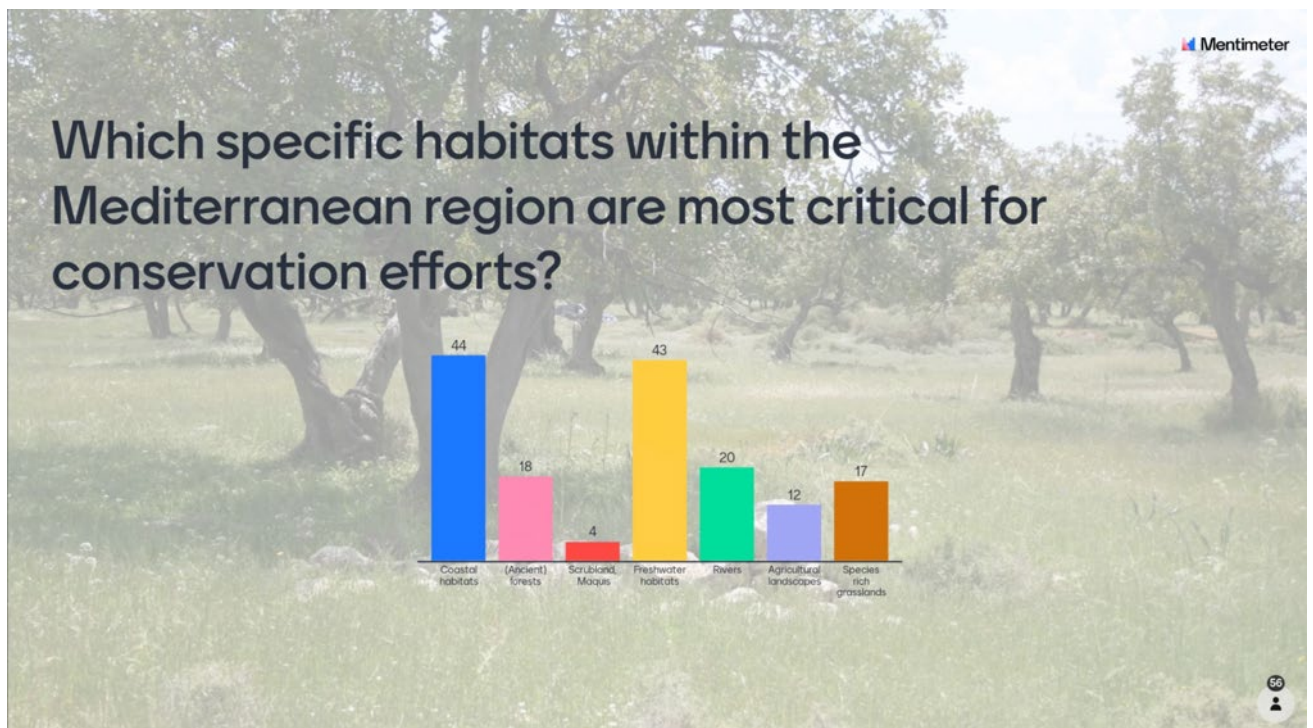


### Which are key factors when designating new protected areas in the Mediterranean region?



Mentimeter poll: Seminar participants' perception about the key factors for designating new protected areas. Most rated were connectivity towards existing reserves (24,4%), biodiversity hotspots (23,6%), endangered species habitat (21,2%), and representation of different habitats (11,8%).

### Which specific habitats within the Mediterranean region are most critical for conservation efforts?

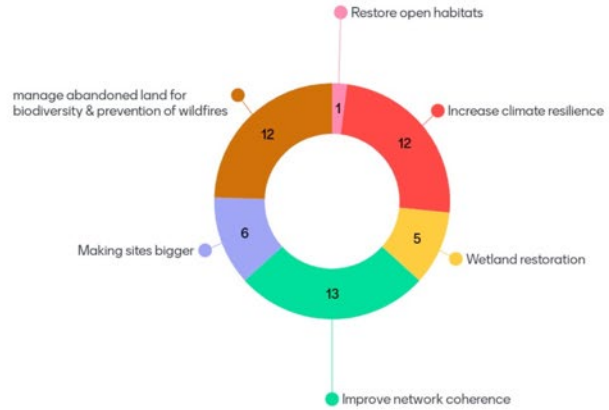


Mentimeter poll: Seminar participants' perception about the habitats most critical for conservation. Most rated were Coastal habitats (27,8%), Freshwater habitats (27,2%), Rivers (12,6%), Ancient forests (11,4%), and Species rich grasslands (10,7%).



Mentimeter

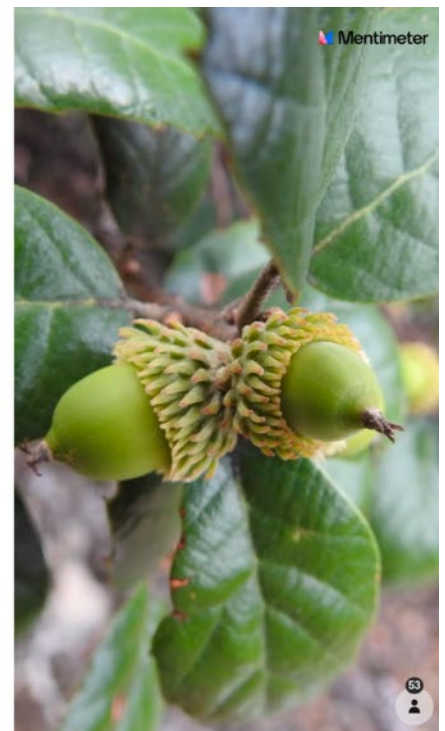
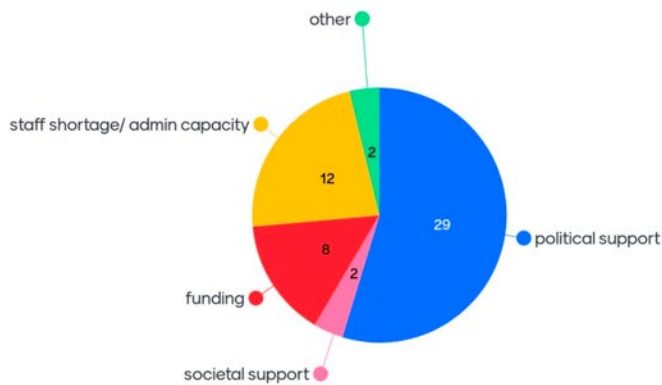
## What is most urgent for restoring degraded habitats?



49

Mentimeter poll: Seminar participants' perception about restoring degraded habitats. Most rated were Improvement of network coherence (26,5%), Manage abandoned land for biodiversity and the prevention of wildfires (24,4%), and Increase climate resilience (24,4%).

## What is the main bottleneck for increasing the ambitions for the pledges?



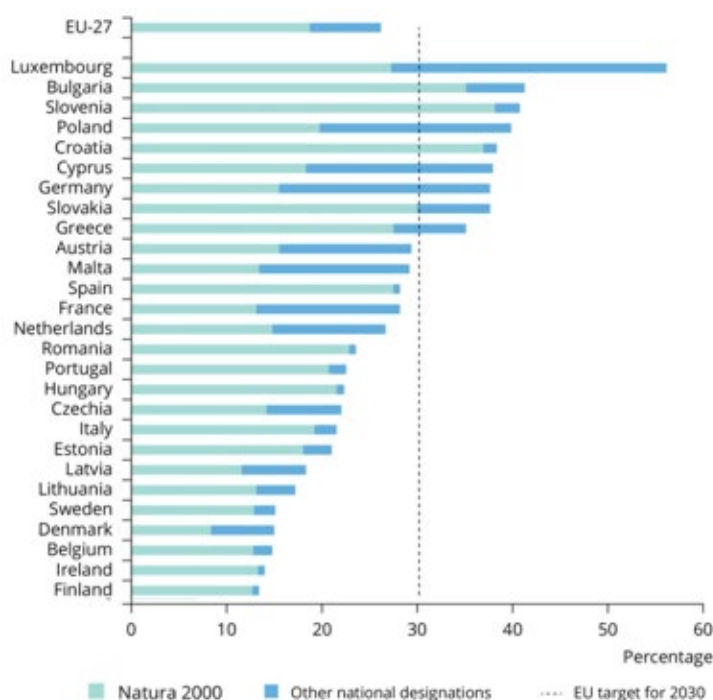
Mentimeter

53

Mentimeter poll: Seminar participants' about the bottlenecks to increase the ambitions for the pledges. Most rated were the lack of political support (55%), shortage of staff funding/admin. capacity (22,6%), and funding (15%).

### 3. Protected area target

Mrs. Mette Lund (EEA) presented [the data on protected](#) areas coverage per Member State, including Natura 2000 sites as well as nationally designated areas. Based on the EEA analyses the Mediterranean Biogeographic Region is close to achieving the 30% target. The Natura 2000 network covers most of the protected areas and often overlaps with the national protection categories, but in some MS, a wide variety of national protection categories predominate. A [Pledges dashboard](#) has been developed by the EEA, which will be updated regularly.



A graph of the percentage cover of protected areas for each MS made up of Natura 2000 (light blue) and other national designations (dark blue).

Mr. Piero Visconti and Mr. Jeremy Dertien, [NaturaConnect](#) project, presented a method aimed to find the best additional protected areas to reach the 30% target, using a set of core rules that serve as a quick guide to prioritize areas. They presented three strategies to achieve the objective. They also incorporated climate change into the models for mapping future protected areas (e.g., modelling bioclimatic refuge areas). They concluded by presenting a case study on the connectivity of French protected areas with neighbouring countries.

Mr. Constantin de Pontbriand, presented how France, in line with the EU strategy, developed a [National Strategy of Protected Areas 2030 \(NSPA\)](#), to reach the 30% protected area target with 10% strict protection status. France does not have the status of ‘strict protection’; instead, a concept of “strong protection” is used. The NSPA defines this level of protection as “areas in which the pressures of anthropogenic activities likely to compromise the conservation of ecological issues are absent, avoided, eliminated, or mostly limited”. Currently, 28.1% of the terrestrial surface is protected, and only 1.5% is strongly protected. This is based on land protection, or an adapted regulation associated

with effective control of the activities concerned. For its operational implementation, the NSPA relies on a three-year action plan at the national and regional levels, which diagnoses the current situation of the network of protected areas and proposes its extension, including the designation of highly protected areas. To date, France has yet to officially recognize any OECMs, but work has been initiated for their recognition.

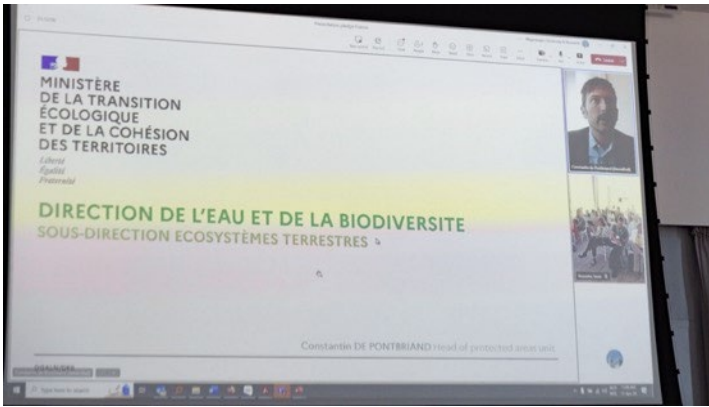


*Pictures 8, 9, 10: From left to right: Mette Lund with Despo Zavrou (Chair) and Theo van der Sluis. Piero Visconti with Despo Zavrou and Jeremy Dertien.*

**Mr. Eugenio Dupre and Mrs. Susanna d’Antoni** reported on the progress of Italy in producing pledges to date. Italy has not submitted pledges yet, but a territorial evaluation process is underway with the regional administrations on the areas to be included as protected and strictly protected areas. At present, the total protected area in Italy is 21.6% (CCDA<sup>1</sup>, N2000 and Ramsar sites), or 23.3% in the Mediterranean region. New areas have been identified towards the 30% target to be included in the national list of protected areas, and it is foreseen to reach 22.3% (24.3% in the Mediterranean region), with 149 new protected areas totalling some 120,000 ha. For the 10% target of strictly protected areas, national law 394/1991 definition incorporates strict protection criteria, it is expected to reach 11.5% of the territory (12.9% in the Mediterranean region). OECMs are still under discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> CDDA, EEA Common Database on Designated Areas



Pictures 11, 12: From left to right: Constantin de Pontbriand and Susanna d'Antoni

### Discussions on the protected area target

The groups discussed the following questions:

*How can we ensure that national pledges for protected areas will be implemented?*

To ensure that pledges are being implemented it is essential that long-term funding is available, according to the group. Furthermore, the pledge preparation should be planned bottom up: from regional level and authorities up to the national level and authorities.

*How to identify the best areas to improve the coherence and connectivity of the protected areas network?*

Connectivity planning must not only consider the positive but also the adverse effects of corridors, e.g. in human-wildlife interactions, the spread of alien species, and other unpredictable adverse effects. It will be challenging to bring the theory into practice and to arrive from national broad scale plans to regional implementation.

*How to identify the best areas for strict protection? Which areas to strictly protect?*

Key criteria for identification of strictly protected areas might be:

- Vulnerability and irreplaceability of habitats and species.
- Areas where ecological processes and ecosystem integrity dominate.
- Areas rich in ecosystem services.
- Areas supportive for connectivity.
- Remote areas (but not only remote areas, no exclusive criterion)

*Constraints and barriers to consider*

- Economic and social interests.
- Land ownership.

*What kind of management should be expected in strict protection areas?*

- It should be noted that ecological integrity and processes are not the same as wilderness and naturalness. Sometimes ecological integrity and ecosystem processes are supported by

human uses, whereas wilderness is related to minimum human presence and reduction of human intervention in the system.

- Active management implies biodiversity conservation as the goal of an action, which leads to two positions:
  - (Purists) Activities are only acceptable when their purpose is strictly for conservation.
  - (Practical) If the result of an existing activity has a positive effect on biodiversity conservation, then it could justify its maintenance regardless of the purpose of the activity.

*What are OECMs, and how can they become important for the pledges?*

- Several MS are hesitating to propose OECMS to reach the target as they are uncertain whether they would qualify.
- On the other hand, investing time and energy in OECMs is difficult as resources, even for the protection of Natura 2000 areas, are limited.
- However, OECMs can be beneficial if they are implemented by other sectors. This may generate additional funding for biodiversity protection.

Finally, it is important to highlight that a common challenge to all subgroups was that central concepts must be clear for all MS; they cannot be a matter of interpretation.

## 4. Conservation improvement targets

### Highlights of the presentations

**Mrs. Irene Bouwma, WENR/BGP**, presented the preliminary analysis of the submitted pledges. So far pledges have been received from Sweden, Luxembourg, Germany, Denmark, Spain, and Cyprus. The assessment of the commitments submitted by Spain and Cyprus concluded that they are very comprehensive and ambitious.

**Mrs. Eva Pitta, Department of the Environment, Cyprus** presented the Cypriot pledge to improve the conservation status. Focus is to improve the status of 30% of species and habitats in unfavourable/unsecured status, and not to deteriorate conservation trends further. In relation to the Habitats Directive, eight habitats, and seven species have been selected for the conservation status improvement, and for the non-deterioration, six habitats and no species have been included (no species show a decreasing trend, although 15 have an unknown trend). From the Bird's Directive, 11 nesting species have been included, and 12 for non-deterioration. Conservation actions are being planned for all of them.

**Mr. Rafael Hidalgo and Mr. Francisco Guil**, presented the Spanish approach for developing pledges for the 30% targets of improving the conservation status of species and habitats. This work required close coordination with 17 regional authorities, encompassing 4 different biogeographic regions, each including a high number of status assessments for protected species and habitats. Of these species and habitats, 181 habitat types, 415 Habitats Directive species and 56 bird species were assessed as U1 or U2. Spain followed different methodologies for prioritization depending on whether they were considering habitats, flora, fauna, or birds. This led to the selection of 51 habitats, 138 Habitat Directive species, and 17 bird species, totalling 206 features for which conservation or restoration measures need to be stepped up.

### Conclusions of the discussions in the breakout groups on the status improvement target

The different groups discussed the following questions:

*What are the barriers to preparing and submitting national pledges (technical/political), and how can they be overcome?*

- Pledges must be realistic, and to achieve that it is necessary not only to establish objectives and measures but also to know with certainty their financial and socioeconomic viability.
- Lack of knowledge of the status and distribution of species/habitats.

*How can we ensure that national pledges for status improvement will be implemented?*

- Funding is essential to guarantee the implementation of the pledges.
- The involvement of stakeholders in the process can be crucial.
- The existence of management plans for SACs will contribute to their implementation.



Pictures 13, 14, 15: From left to right: Irene Bouwma, Eva Pitta, Rafael Hidalgo, Francisco Guil, Despo Zavrou, Theo van der Sluis.

*What is required to scale up conservation and restoration efforts for species and habitats?*

- Whether or not all the needed information is available, action is needed now. We must accept the lack of perfection.
- Break down large targets to smaller sub-targets, milestones, from year to year.
- Often there is experience and knowledge available in projects in the LIFE programme, which can help identifying effective restoration and conservation measures
- Funding remains important to implement measures.
- Communication is important. In particular, using the same language among participants

*For which species/habitats is deterioration considered to be unavoidable? Why?*

- Habitats/species on the edge of their distribution area are likely to go extinct due to climate change and shifting habitat ranges.
- Extinction as a result of factors /pressures out of control (e.g. climate change).
- Species that are severely impacted by invasive alien species.
- Lack of knowledge of rare species/habitats (time is often limited to acquiring knowledge (an example was given from Cyprus of a very rare insect species living in tree holes).
- Species with small populations are vulnerable towards metapopulation factors (infertility, stochastic events, diseases).



## 5. Seminar Themes

### 5.1. Theme 1: Pledges and strict protection

**Chair:** Yannis Kazoglou | **Facilitators:** Carlos Sunyer

#### Objectives of the thematic session

Theme 1 focussed on the conditions under which areas that are subject to “limited and well controlled activities” or to “active management” can count as strictly protected areas. The specific objective of this thematic session was therefore to discuss and reach a common understanding on:

- What are the requirements for an activity to be counted as “limited and well-controlled” in line with the definition of strict protection in the Commission staff working document?
- How is the concept of “undisturbed natural processes” to be understood in the case of species, habitats or sites that require an active management?
- What are the conditions under which active management can be considered compatible with the definition of strict protection in the Commission staff working document?

#### Highlights of the presentations

**Mrs. Jutta Behr** from NaturaConnect, presented different policy definitions on strict protection in the USA, from IUCN, and the EU Staff Working Document. For the Mediterranean region of the model, NaturaConnect developed two scenarios: the optimal, uncompromised focus on species and habitats, and a constrained scenario, minimizing costs and only upgrading existing protected areas. They concluded that the former is the best, both for habitats and species.

**Mrs. Vasiliki Kati** presented the roadless initiative. Roads fragment landscapes and trigger human colonization and degradation of biodiversity and ecosystem functions. The remaining large and ecologically important tracts of roadless areas sustain key refugia for biodiversity and provide relevant ecosystem services. This initiative proposes that these areas be given priority for protection.

Experiences in Spain with strictly protected areas were discussed by **Mr. Jorge Bonacho**. The Spanish network of national parks aims to protect the best representation of Spanish ecosystems. It comprises 16 areas, accounting for 0.76% of the territory, with an IUCN category II level of protection (meaning all activities incompatible with conservation are prohibited, including hunting and fishing). In turn, the parks are zoned, including strict protection zones. In addition to the national parks, nature reserves also contain strictly protected areas in Spain.

#### Conclusions of the discussions in the breakout groups

The different groups discussed the following questions:

*Which active management measures are compatible with the definition of strict protection?*

- Hunting for ungulate control
- Eradication of Invasive Alien Species
- ‘Do nothing’ option
- Habitat restoration
- Extensive grazing/ controlling overgrazing

- Water management
- Measures leading to carbon sequestration

*What is a limited and well-controlled activity which can be undertaken in strictly protected areas?*

- Hiking (possibly with some limits on the number of people to avoid disturbance) – Ecotourism
- Low-intensity grazing and specific agricultural practices (e.g., in favour of farmland birds / relevant to CAP measures/eco-schemes)
- Habitat management and restoration (including forestry practices for forest bat species)
- Prescribed burning
- Control of certain species (non-commercial hunting)
- Control of Invasive Alien Species.

However, if too many of these activities are permitted in a certain area, it probably should not be considered for strict protection. Criteria for strict protection could rather focus on areas that do not require active management.

In some countries it is very difficult to eliminate all activities in protected areas, so it might be difficult to reach the 10% target, unless the concept of strict protection is relaxed.

A question that arose was whether natural wildfires should be left without intervention in strictly protected areas? There was no conclusive answer from the group on this issue.

Core areas of National Parks may be good candidates for strictly protected areas. The Roadless Areas processes and criteria and those of the NaturaConnect project could be used to identify sites to be included in the “strict protection” category, considering each Member State’s special characteristics. There was some discussion whether the idea of Strategy 2030 is to let the areas evolve naturally to a positive state, or whether management is necessary. Management is possible to improve biodiversity.

*How to manage strictly protected areas for management-dependent species and habitats?*

- Management will depend on the species/habitats you want to protect.
- Management can facilitate natural processes.
- Shall we differentiate for the level of intervention in the 10% to be included in the strictly protected areas?



*Pictures 16, 19: Discussions in some break-out groups*

## 5.2. Theme 2: Site specific conservation objectives and measures

**Chair:** Frank Vassen | **Facilitator:** Theo van der Sluis.

### Objectives of the thematic session

The objective of this thematic session was to discuss and reach a common understanding on:

- What kind of information and what level of detail is required for site-specific conservation objectives to ensure that they can usefully contribute to setting conservation measures at site level?
- What level of ambition is needed for site-specific conservation objectives to ensure that they enable the natural habitats and the species' habitats concerned to be maintained or restored at a favourable conservation status?

### Highlights of the presentations

**Mr. Olivier Argagnon** described the French approach towards setting conservation objectives. France has 1761 Natura 2000 sites, including 13% of the metropolitan terrestrial territory. There is a steering committee with a local facilitator for each site, with a participatory approach among all stakeholders to define objectives and measures. The administrative regions are responsible for supporting the facilitators and financing site management actions.

The document of objectives (DOCOB) is the central pillar. These are prepared by the steering committees (Comite de Pilotage, COPIL) and take into account habitat conservation manuals (Cahier d'Habitats). The DOCOB not only considers the ecological issues of the site but also the socioeconomic, giving rise to biodiversity conservation and local development objectives, which are implemented through specific agreements (chartes) and good practices guides. Different [studies](#) have demonstrated that the Natura 2000 network has a positive effect on biodiversity by curving the decline rather than reversing the situation.

**Mrs. Francesca Pani** presented the [methodological guide for the identification of conservation objectives and measures](#) in the Natura 2000 network which was developed in Italy. The current challenges are the finalization of the forms for the 2000 Italian SACs and acquiring sound scientific data for all sites. The Ministry of Environment has created a specific national fund to support the regions in this task.

### Conclusions of the discussions

Questions were proposed to be discussed in smaller groups. However, the participants proposed to change the approach and ask questions to the European Commission. A Mentimeter questionnaire was used to collect the questions from the 39 participants. The leading question was: *What important questions regarding site-specific conservation objectives would you like to discuss with the Commission (and expert institutions)?*

The audience submitted the questions and suggestions to the Commission, which are presented (with answers) in **Annex 4**.

Frank Vassen from the European Commission addressed some of the questions in person and stated that more detailed answers would be provided at a later stage. Given the interest from the audience and the large number of requests for further clarifications, a dedicated follow-up event on site-specific conservation objectives could be considered.

### 5.3. Theme 3: Defining Favourable Conservation Status/Favourable Reference Values

**Chair:** Ioannis Tsiripides | **Facilitator:** Theo van der Sluis

This thematic group discussed existing approaches and best practices for setting Favourable Reference Values (FRVs) for habitats and species in the Mediterranean MS. It specifically aimed for an in-depth discussion on the following questions:

- What aspects (data availability, guidance, resource limitations, legal obligation, operational, etc.) should be considered when setting FRVs?
- What are the main obstacles to setting FRVs, and what solutions have been found to overcome them?
- How is the setting of FRVs embedded in other related processes at the country level, such as the reporting work under Article 17 Habitats Directive/ Article 12 Birds Directive, the setting of site-specific conservation objectives for Nature 2000 sites, site-level management planning, etc?

#### Highlights of the presentations

**Mrs. Greta Borg** from the European Commission presented online. Assessing the conservation status is an assessment of the distance to a favourable situation. A definition of this “favourable condition” is therefore required so that an effective assessment can be made. This definition is provided in Article 1 of the Habitats Directive, which is implemented at the biogeographical and national levels. A working group of MS experts was set up, which produced [a guide during the period 2013-2018](#). However, for various reasons, this guidance is not always used. As a result, a review of how the MS establishes the FRVs is underway, which will lead to a revision of the guidance in cooperation with the MS.

**Mr. Antonio Camacho**, reviewed the Spanish approach of setting FRVs and presented a procedure for assessing conservation status. He also focused on the underlying concepts, especially those of Favourable Reference Range (FRR), Favourable Reference Area (FRA), and Current Value (CV). There is still much to be agreed upon between MS and experts regarding FRVs since their definition is not well documented. Collecting all relevant information on the subject is important to understand the ecological and historical context. FRV can be either reference-based (i.e., based on historical distribution) or model-based. The most critical factor is the required area to ensure a favourable status. Camacho presented examples of both approaches from across Europe.

## Conclusions of the discussions in the breakout groups

The groups addressed the following questions:

*What are the main obstacles to setting favourable reference values, and what solutions have been found to overcome these obstacles?*

Main issues raised:

- Lack of distribution data on species or habitats (historical or present)
- Absence of appropriate planning procedures
- Lack of funding
- No good understanding of favourable reference values
- Difficulty to measure/estimate certain parameters of favourable reference values

Solutions / best practices / suggestions:

- Make more use of citizen science
- Focus on the habitat of species
- Ensure sufficient funding.
- Sharing examples, e.g. at seminars.
- Hands on training.

*What scientific criteria have been used in your country for setting favourable reference values?*

Main issues raised:

- Need for testing of methodologies and funding
- Lack of (historical) data hampers the development of favourable reference values.

Solutions / best practices / suggestions:

- Use different approaches (e.g. distribution models, expert judgment).
- Use remote sensing to define ranges
- Using “operators” instead of certain variables.

*Have other than scientific aspects been considered when setting favourable reference values?*

Main issues raised:

- A problem is the data availability
- Data should not only be collected for Natura 2000, but also for e.g. management purposes.

Solutions / best practices / suggestions:

- Initiate data collection projects .
- Target areas and surrogates with gaps of knowledge.
- Consider current land-uses.



*Pictures 18, 19: Different moments of the breaking groups. In the right Ioannis Tsiripides and Louise O'Connor.*

## 5.4. Theme 4: Effective management of Natura 2000 sites

**Chair:** Irene Bouwma | **Facilitator:** Irene Bouwma

### Objectives of the thematic session

A comprehensive EU system to regularly assess and report on the management effectiveness of Natura 2000 sites is under development. This session therefore focusses on improving management effectiveness on the ground. The specific objective of this session was to discuss and provide recommendations on how to ensure a broader application of management practices with proven effectiveness:

- What are the key ingredients for effective site management?
- What is the experience so far in the MS measuring the effectiveness of the Natura 2000 site management?
- Who should be responsible for measuring the sites' management effectiveness? At what interval and for what purpose?

### Highlights of the presentations

**Mrs. Iva Obretenova** presented a project commissioned by the European Commission, SUBMON and three other partners. A methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of the management of Natura 2000 sites is being developed. This tool will contribute to achieving protected area targets.

**Mr. Daniel Springer** presented how Croatia is using the [METT](#) management effectiveness tracking tool to assess the effectiveness of their management plans. This is the most widely used tool in protected areas globally. They also use a management tool to prepare basic management documents.

**Mr. Michael Hosek** presented the [IUCN Green List Initiative](#), which is a global programme of certification aiming to achieve and promote effective, equitable, and successful protected and conserved areas. This will be achieved through highlighting best practices, and providing a benchmark for progress towards effective and equitable management.

### Conclusions of the discussions in the breakout groups

The following questions were addressed:

*What is your national experience in terms of measuring the effectiveness of the Natura 2000 site management?*

- Only a few MS have a (partial) system to assess the management of Natura 2000 sites, and some do not even have management plans for all sites.
- Bottlenecks for assessing effective management:
  - Lack of human resources and capacity (monitoring/management) and often lack of finance
  - Scale issue: some MS do have many sites (how to assess them all?)
  - The responsibility often lies with different bodies responsible for nature conservation at the regional or national level and different ministries (forestry, fisheries, etc.)
  - Lack of knowledge on effective management

- No access to the required information.

*Who should be responsible for assessing the sites' management effectiveness? At what interval and for what purpose?*

- The most suggested option was a self-assessment by a third party.
- The assessment should be multi-scaled (site -> region-> national)
- The assessment should be recurring every 5 to 12 years – depending on the time frame of the management plans.

## 6. Working group on shifting dunes

**Mrs. María Regodón** from TRAGSATEC presented background information and explained the Working Group within the context of Biogeographical Process. The primary objectives of the group are twofold: first, to reach agreement on habitat interpretation, and second, to harmonize procedures and methodologies for evaluating and conserving habitat types. There is a particular emphasis on the importance of learning throughout the process, rather than solely focusing on the outcome. The criteria which led to the selection of Embryonic shifting dunes habitat (H2110) for the pilot plan were explained. The working group comprises individuals from all eight Mediterranean region MS, including scientific and technical coordinators and staff. Meetings are held every six weeks, and the final document is expected to be completed in the coming months.

**Mrs. Irene Delgado**, from the University of Cádiz, presented some of the main topics discussed during the meetings, such as the common definition and components of the embryo-dune for the Mediterranean region. She also discussed the dynamic behaviour and particularities of this habitat type, highlighting information gaps and difficulties encountered during the process.

**Mr. Jaime Galán**, from TRAGSATEC, elaborated on the main contents of the action plan draft, which is divided into a diagnostic phase and a phase for establishing conservation objectives and actions. A framework-for-action table has been developed to address the main conservation objectives, categorized into four topics: conservation & restoration, knowledge improvement, assessment and monitoring of conservation status, and dissemination and awareness raising.

### Conclusions of the discussions in the breakout groups

The different groups discussed the following questions:

*How can we proceed with this work and address the identified needs, particularly improving scientific knowledge at a local scale (e.g., FRV, Occupied area, CS assessment methodologies)?*

At a biogeographical level, projects like this one are crucial for harmonizing procedures and leading to a more coherent Art. 17 report. It was proposed that this exercise be implemented and followed by an evaluation of the outcomes, with results being disseminated along with the lessons learned. Funding is crucial for continuation of this work and addressing the identified needs. Sources such as LIFE, Horizon Europe, and involvement of the IUCN with a focus on a "whole-MED" approach, were discussed.

*How can we replicate this experience in other habitats of interest for the Mediterranean region? Would it be more effective to work with groups of habitats rather than individual habitat types?*

Sharing knowledge, information, and experiences was highlighted as paramount. FRVs should be addressed at a biogeographical level, and a database for sharing information should be established. General and specific guidance should be provided to assist MS in evaluating the conservation status of habitat types and in addressing conservation and restoration efforts in a harmonized manner. There was agreement that working with habitat groups would not make sense, except perhaps in the case of dunes, where the entire dune system should be addressed together in a common action plan.



## 7. Knowledge Market

The knowledge market was opened by **Mrs. Marilena Papastavrou, National Coordinator of LIFE, Department of the Environment of Cyprus**. She welcomed all participants representing at least 14 nature conservation projects in the Mediterranean region. Annex 2 gives an overview of the LIFE and other projects present at the Knowledge Marketplace. The Knowledge Marketplace allowed for informal interactions between participants and the project representatives.

**Mrs. Iva Obretonova, DG-ENV** presented the communication about the Natura 2000 network and highlighted Natura 2000 day, on 21 May 2024. This year, the European Commission will organise a [Bioblitz](#) in Natura 2000 sites. This is a citizen science event in which any participants use an app to report on the species they detect in a specific Natura 2000 site. The Bioblitz can be organised any day between 18 and 26 May. She also informed on the [Natura 2000 award](#).



Pictures 20, 21: From left to right: Marilena Papastavrou and Iva Obretonova,



Picture 22: Opening of the knowledge market

## 8. Field Excursion

The field excursion was to Cape Grevo (Kavo Gkreko), an SPA and SAC (code: CY3000002, CY3000005) which includes the National Forest Park of Kavo Gkreko, a rocky coastal peninsula. The site is dominated by scrubby arborescent vegetation, such as *Juniperus*, *Phoenicia* (5210), and *Zyziphus* (5220\*), and other scrub typical of coastal thermo-Mediterranean coastal areas (5420). Mediterranean temporary ponds (3170\*) were also seen within the National Forest Park. The area is also an SPA, mainly because of its importance for bird migration.

The excursion was financed by [LIFE IP Physys](#) (LIFE10 IPE/CY/000006). Physys aims to make the Natura 2000 network more effective, functional, and sustainable. It aims to achieve a favourable conservation status for habitats and species, particularly those included in the Habitats and Birds Directives.

During its 10-year duration, various conservation and restoration activities have been carried out in the area, such as the removal of invasive species (*Acacia saligna* and *Eucalyptus* sp), habitat restoration following the dismantling of an antenna station, and restoration of temporary ponds (part of LIFE Physys).

At the visitor centre we were welcomed by Mr. Constantinos Kounnamas, Scientific Coordinator of the Project, and we were shown a documentary film about the site. The participants then walked a trail along the coast, observing various coastal habitats.

Afterwards, a second site was visited with a lighthouse. This site was a former military site which had been recently acquired and is now the site of a LIFE project which is working on the protection of specific plant species.



Picture 23: Reception at the Cape Greco visitor's centre.



Picture 24: Coastal view in Cape Greko

## 9. Concluding plenary session and following steps

**Mr. Andrea Vettori and Mr. Frank Vassen** from DG ENV concluded the seminar by encouraging participants to take advantage of the discussions and to intensify the collaboration between authorities and nature experts of the MS in order to achieve the objectives of the EU biodiversity strategy by 2030 at a biogeographic level. They take note of the difficulties encountered in the biogeographic process and committed to address them within the Commission. They thanked the participants, speakers and organizing team and, in particular, the authorities of Cyprus for their support in organizing the seminar and the field visit to the Kavo Greco National Park.

On behalf of the authorities, Mrs. **Elena Stylianopoulou, Director of the Department of Environment of Cyprus**, concluded by encouraging participants to continue working on the biogeographic process, recognising its relevance and interest not only for achieving the objectives of the biodiversity strategy, but for the future of the Natura 2000 network in the Mediterranean. She emphasized the significance of sharing international experiences through exchange programs throughout the region to come to more fruitful cooperation. She thanked the Commission and all participants for their contributions and active participation.



### Which strategy is crucial for enhancing the conservation outcome of Natura 2000?



Mentimeter poll 2: Essential steps to improve conservation: Increasing administrative capacity (45%), increasing funding (23,5%), strengthening cross-border cooperation (11,7%).

## 10. Additional information: development of the roadmap

The roadmap should remind practitioners of the key issues and actions discussed at the biogeographical seminar and stimulate new joint actions. The roadmap will identify possible lead organisations and set a timeline for actions. A lead has been identified in most cases, or the European Commission will propose a lead.

During the seminar, attendees were asked through Mentimeter on the issues that should be incorporated into the roadmap, and 52 suggestions were received. The results of the Mentimeter poll and breakout groups were used and arranged as follows:

### Guidance

There is a demand for more guidance in order to meet the objectives and address challenges discussed during the seminar. In fact, it was most proposed by respondents (36.5% of the suggestions) with the following topics as its objective:

- Definition of strict protection
  - Natural evolution and management
  - Which controlled activities could be undertaken?
- Site-specific conservation objectives
  - Setting objectives
  - Links to the obligation of the appropriate assessment of the plans and projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites (Art. 6.3)
- Favourable reference values
- Restoration priorities for habitats and species at the biogeographical level.

### Information Exchange

Some 25% of the survey responses requested more information on the topics covered in the seminar and to this end, they propose:

- Create a common virtual place to share documents, reports, data, good practices, and experiences
- Share information on issues in common with other biogeographic regions
- Networking events on the seminar's topics
- Organisation of regional events to coordinate activities at the supranational levelHave more regular information exchanges with the European Commission

### Harmonization

There is also a demand for harmonization of definitions, criteria, and methodologies (7.7% of respondents Mentimeter). In particular, for harmonizing processes and methods at the biogeographic level, such as habitat interpretation, favourable reference values, conservation objectives, and species conservation objectives. The work promoted by Spain in this direction has culminated in the elaboration of an action plan on shifting dunes. During the last meeting of this working group participants committed themselves to promote a common project for its implementation. The results of this experience will be relevant to the process of harmonisation.

### **Potential topics for networking events**

In addition to the topics discussed at the seminar, the following have also been proposed for future networking events:

- Managing land abandonment for biodiversity
- Greening the CAP
- Incorporation of assessment of the ecological integrity in the monitoring procedures and in the definition of favourable reference values
- Defining indicator species to assess site management and habitat quality
- Communication with stakeholdersSetting limits on tourist activities

### **Other issues**

- Communication to attract private funding
- Funding of research on species/habitats with unknown status
- Promote the participation of regional authorities
- Involve administrative/political staff in the discussions with scientists

## Annex 1: Mediterranean Seminar Programme

Wednesday 17th April 2024

Plenary session (Chair: Despo Zavrou)	
Time	Session, topics and speakers
8:00-9:00	<b>Registration of participants</b>
9:00-9:30	<b>Official welcome &amp; introduction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elena Stylianopoulou, Director of Department of Environment, Cyprus</li> <li>Humberto Delgado-Rosa – Director for Natural Capital (DG-ENV) (video recording)</li> </ul>
9:30-11:00	<b>Opening address</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EU policy context - Andrea Vettori (DG-ENV)</li> <li>The Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process and pledge process – Frank Vassen (DG-ENV)</li> <li>Presentation previous host, Regione Calabria (It) – Eugenio Dupre</li> <li>LIFE Programme and updates. Georgia Valaoras (ELMEN)</li> </ul>
11:00-11:30	Coffee break
11:30-13:00	<b>Protected area targets</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where are we – inventory, overview, distance to target – Mette Lund (EEA)</li> <li>Benefits of pan-European prioritisation and initial results – Piero Visconti and Jeremy Dertien (NaturaConnect)</li> <li>Pledges and approaches in France - Constantin De Pontbriand</li> <li>Pledges and approaches in Italy – Eugenio Dupre/Susanna d’Antoni</li> </ul>
13:00:14:30	Lunch
Plenary session (Chair: Despo Zavrou)	
Time	Topics
14:30-15:30	<b>Conservation status improvement targets</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where are we – inventory, overview, distance to target – Irene Bouwma, WENR / BGP</li> <li>Pledges and approaches – Cyprus, Eva Pitta</li> <li>Pledges and approaches – Spain, Rafael Hidalgo</li> </ul>
15:30-15:50	Coffee break
15:50-17:30	Discussion in working groups
17:30-19:00	Break
19:00-21:00	<b>Knowledge Market</b> - Presentation of LIFE- and other projects. Opening by Marilena Papastavrou, Environment Officer, LIFE National Focal Point
19:30-21:00	Informal dinner during Knowledge Market

## Thursday 18th April 2024

EXCURSION	
9:00-14:40	Kavo Greco National Park

Parallel session 1 & 2		
Time	Sessions, topics and speakers	Session, topics and speakers
	<b>Theme 1 Pledges and strict protection</b> Chair: Yannis Kazoglou	<b>Theme 2. Site-specific conservation objectives and measures</b> Chair: Frank Vassen
14:40-15:00	Coffee break	
15:00-15:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Criteria for strict protection – Jutta Beher, NaturaConnect</li> <li>The roadless mountains initiative - Vasiliki (Kiki) Kati</li> <li>Experiences in Spain with strictly protected areas and national parks – Jorge Bonacho, OAPN (MITECO)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The French approach towards setting site-specific conservation objectives - Olivier Argagnon</li> <li>A methodology to identify conservation objectives and measures at site specific level, Francesca Pani (Italy)</li> </ul>
15:45-17:15	Break-out session	Break-out session
Plenary session (Chair: Maria Regodon)		
17:45-18:30	Mediterranean habitat working group - Shifting dunes (Maria Regodon)	
19:30	Dinner	

## Friday 19th April 2024

Parallel thematic sessions 3 & 4		
Time	Sessions, topics and speakers	Session, topics and speakers
	<b>Theme 3: Favourable Conservation Status/Favourable reference values</b> Chair: Ioannis Tsiripides	<b>Theme 4. Effective Management of Natura 2000 sites</b> Chair: Irene Bouwma
9:00-9:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>European Commission perspective- Greta Borg, DG-ENV</li> <li>Spanish approach to setting Favourable reference values - Antonio Camacho (Spain)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessing management effectiveness - Iva Obretenova, DG-ENV</li> <li>The Croatian experiences – Daniel Springer, Croatia</li> <li>Europarc’s efforts on protected area management effectiveness – Michael Hošek (Europarc federation)</li> </ul>
9:30-10:45	Break-out session	Break-out session
<b>10:45-11:15</b>	<b>Coffee break</b>	
Plenary Session (Chair: Andrea Vettori)		
11:15-11:35	Reporting Day 1: pledge discussion groups, Theo van der Sluis, Carlos Sunyer (Biogeographical Process)	
11:35-11:55	Reporting by Thematic working groups (Chairs of the 4 thematic groups)	
11:55-12:15	Next steps for the pledge process & roadmap for the Mediterranean region – Frank Vassen (DG-ENV)	
12:15-12:40	Interaction and discussion participants	
12:40-12:50	Short evaluation, Mentimeter	
12:50-13:00	Vote of thanks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elena Stylianopoulou, Director Department of the Environment, Cyprus</li> <li>The European Commission, Andrea Vettori</li> </ul>	
<b>13:00</b>	<b>Closure of the seminar</b>	

## Annex 2: LIFE Projects present at the knowledge market

### LIFE SAFE for VULTURES - First step to the restoration of the vulture guild in Sardinia

**Reference:** LIFE19 NAT/IT/000732 | Acronym: [LIFE SAFE for VULTURES](#)

In the last years, the Griffon Vulture population has increased thanks to the implementation of LIFE Under Griffon Wings (LIFE14 NAT/IT/000484), aimed at mitigating the main threats (food shortage, poisoning). However, the project was limited to a few Natura 2000 sites in north-west Sardinia. Thus, under current conditions, the expected increase in population size will likely lead to high mortality rates among dispersing birds, considering that in central, eastern and southern Sardinia, the main threats have not been addressed. The main aim of LIFE SAFE for VULTURES is to take the first steps to conserve the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) over the entire island of Sardinia. Some of its specific objectives are to enlarge the area of occupancy of griffon vultures and increase its carrying capacity, mitigate the risk of poisoning events, encourage a transition towards lead-free ammunition in ungulate hunting, and reduce the risks of collision and electrocution in energy infrastructures

### Conservation of threatened habitats and species which form the Garrigues Gardoises' Mediterranean ecological mosaic.

**Reference:** LIFE20 NAT/FR/001515 | Acronym: [LIFE TERRA MUSIVA](#)

The territory of Garrigues Gardoises, covering about 900 km<sup>2</sup>, is a hotspot for biodiversity and offers a representative sample of Mediterranean biodiversity. As a genuine mosaic landscape, it includes a large variety of habitats and species of Community interest. Unfortunately, a significant part of these habitats and species are under 'unfavourable' conservation status due to different types of pressures. These threats include the abandonment of extensive livestock farming practices, agricultural intensification and specialisation, light pollution, unsustainable forest management, invasive alien species, and the development of road/urban infrastructures. LIFE TERRA MUSIVA aims to restore and improve the conservation status of 4 threatened habitat types of the Garrigues Gardoises.

### Preventing a LIONfish invasion in the Mediterranean through early response and targeted Removal

**Reference:** LIFE16 NAT/CY/000832 | Acronym: RELIONMED-LIFE

The lionfish (*Pterois miles*) is a species native to the Indo-Pacific, which has invaded the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal. Cyprus, located near the entry point, is the first EU state that will face the negative impacts of this species. This project aimed to make Cyprus the first line of defence against the invasion of the lionfish. Objectives of the project include:

- Develop capacity and mechanisms in Cyprus against the lionfish invasion.
- Demonstrate the effectiveness of a range of lionfish invasion prevention measures.
- Build capacity and knowledge, which can be replicated by other countries of the Mediterranean.

It has succeeded in reducing its population in a 64%. Eight tournaments and 122 removal action teams were organised throughout the project period.



### [ELIFE, Improving the conservation of elasmobranch species \(sharks and rays\) promoting best conservation practices in the context of the EU professional fishing](#)

**Reference:** LIFE18 NAT/IT/000846 | Acronym: [Life ELIFE](#)

Based both on the current scientific baseline and on interviews to fishermen operating in the main Italian fishing harbours, its main objective is to reduce the by-catch of threatened elasmobranchs, the implementation of conservation measures with an eco-systemic approach to fisheries through the preparation and adoption of specific local management plans, and supporting management authorities for conservation and management policies of sharks.

### [Cyprus Capacity Building for LIFE](#)

**Reference:** LIFE14 CAP/CY/000006 | Acronym: CYCLamEn

CYCLam aims to increase performance levels in terms of both number and quality of proposals, therefore reversing the trend during the past four years which saw the number of submitted proposals and the number of approved proposals reduce significantly. The main expected result is the placement of strategic emphasis and direction on the function of the LIFE NCP.

### [Bird conservation in Lesser Prespa: benefiting local communities and building a climate change resilient ecosystem](#)

**Reference:** LIFE15 NAT/GR/000936 | Acronym: [LIFE Prespa Waterbirds](#)

The aim of the project is to contribute to the conservation of nine rare water bird species which live in Lake of Lesser Prespa. The means through which this will be achieved will create benefits to the local community as well. The project also aims to enhance transboundary collaboration on wetland management and protection.

### [Stewardship network for the conservation of peri-urban Bonellis eagles](#)

**Reference:** LIFE19 NAT/PT/000414 | Acronym: [LIFE LxAquila](#)

The Bonelli's Eagle, *Aquila fasciata*, has a unique population in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Portugal. In Europe, it is the only known population of this priority species to survive in a densely populated area and to nest exceptionally close to human settlements. This project is structured under the land stewardship approach to addressing property and uses rights and testing incentives related to the protection of breeding sites to bind Bonelli's Eagle stakeholders and policymakers to the effective, sustainable land management necessary for this species conservation. The main project objectives are to protect Bonelli's Eagle in the peri-urban, agro-forested landscape through the long-term protection of breeding sites and the enhancement of hunting areas by reducing disturbance during breeding season. Other objectives include reducing human-induced mortality, establishing an innovative, long-lasting and cooperative platform for Bonelli's Eagle conservation, and facilitating policy-making and adaptive strategies in face of global threats

## Mediterranean Wetlands Management and Restoration as Carbon Sinks

**Reference:** LIFE19 CCM/ES/001235 | Acronym: [LIFE WETLANDS4CLIMATE](#)

Wetlands are disappearing three times faster than forests. Policies, plans and programmes have underestimated their functions, and there is not enough information to guarantee an adequate register of their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The complexity inherent in the management of these ecosystems is probably the main barrier behind this situation. Traditionally, wetlands have been considered as net emitters of GHGs. Recent studies have shown, however, that this is not always the case, at least in coastal and salt lagoons and wetlands. This opens a new scenario in which wetlands conservation not only contributes to biodiversity conservation but also serves as a tool to fight against climate change.

The main objective of LIFE WETLANDS4CLIMATE is to establish management guidelines for Mediterranean wetlands so that they function as carbon sinks, while maintaining their ecological integrity and functionality to provide a full range of unimpaired ecosystem services.

## Cooperating for the conservation of the Bearded Vulture in Spain

**Reference:** LIFE20 NAT/ES/001363 | Acronym: [LIFE Pro BV](#)

The aim of Iberian Corridors Pro Bearded Vulture is to contribute to the creation of a metapopulation of Bearded Vulture in the Iberian Peninsula by means of its reintroduction in the former distribution area. The poster highlighted two cooperative actions that have proved to be very successful:

Cooperation with electricity companies has allowed them to become involved in the conservation of the species. One of them, REE, has developed a plan to avoid the collision of bearded vultures on its power lines. It is developing a program to mark 446 km of power lines before the end of 2025, of which more than 240 have been completed. This is being implemented with the company's own funds.

To avoid the abandonment of extensive goat farming in the Gredos, the value of goat production is being enhanced through the production of gourmet cheese, following the Pro-biodiversity model, which won the Natura 2000 Award.

## Olive Alive / Olivares Vivos: Towards the design and certification of biodiversity friendly olive groves.

**Reference:** LIFE14 NAT/ES/001094 | Acronym: [LIFE Olivares Vivos](#)

Olive groves extend over nearly five million hectares in the EU and are one of the main crops in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. With nearly 1.9 million olive farms, the olive sector is a vital source of employment and economic activity in many European regions. In Andalusia, almost 100.000ha of olive groves are located in the Natura 2000 network (RN2000). The olive has an important role to play in the conservation of biodiversity. Moreover, olive groves are a vital element of green infrastructure, connecting areas of high conservation value. Intensive cultivation of the crop, however, has led to the deterioration of this function. The LIFE Olivares Vivos project aimed to define an innovative model of olive growing with high demonstration value. The model would be agriculturally, economically, and socially viable while contributing to the halt in the loss of biodiversity in the EU by 2020. Among other objectives, it will establish profitability formulas based on an added value for consumers (biodiversity) to help curb the abandonment of traditional olive farming; develop a science-based agri-food

certification system linking oil production to the recovery of biodiversity; show that stakeholders, especially farmers, have a key role to play in the EU strategy on biodiversity, and promote their integration and active participation in such a strategy; provide an effective solution to the economic and environmental crisis that is affecting traditional olive farming; improve the ecosystem services provided by olive farming through restoration actions and the creation of a green infrastructure in demonstration plots and define restoration strategies that are technically, environmentally and economically viable and effective.

### Drawing the baselines for the good management of a Mediterranean key species, the wild rabbit

**Reference:** LIFE20 GIE/ES/000731 | Acronym: [LIFE Iberconejo](#)

The European rabbit is a keystone species of Mediterranean forests; it is the main prey of some of the most endangered Iberian top predators (the Iberian lynx and the Spanish imperial eagle), models the landscape, increases soil fertility and creates habitat for other species. Over the past 70 years Iberian populations of the European rabbit have declined by 90% because of changes in land use and diseases. European rabbit population declines have caused conservation problems when occurring within the distribution range of its top predators, jeopardising their conservation by seriously affecting their reproductive success. They have also caused socio-economic problems in rural areas where hunting is an important economic force.

There is currently a complete lack of governance, both at the national and Iberian level; species management occurs at the local level, different stakeholders apply measures with opposing objectives, there is no sharing of experiences or knowledge, and there are no standard protocols or monitoring methodologies (so comparable data are not available).

The project's objective is to set up a governance structure to coordinate the monitoring and management of the European rabbit in the Iberian Peninsula. This is essential for optimised long-term coordination between all current and future European rabbit-related conservation efforts.

### Community for Nature

**Reference:** [Interreg Euro MED C4N](#)

Community for Nature Project (C4N) is developed in the framework of the Interreg Euro-MED Programme Mission 2 on Protecting, restoring, and valorising the natural environment and heritage. This mission has as a main aim to meet the environmental objectives planned by EU and included in the EU Green Deal but also well detailed in the EU Communication on Sustainable Blue Economy and in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Barcelona Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In this framework, C4N works in close collaboration with its mirroring Project, Dialogue for Nature, supporting transnational actions addressed to develop effective governance frameworks and ensure increasing the sustainability of natural resources management.

C4N aims to transfer knowledge and best practices and harmonize policies to tackle the challenges related to biodiversity protection and climate change by establishing a Community of Practice that boosts relations between key actors in the Mediterranean region.

C4N exploits, reuses, and reshapes the available knowledge, the existing practices and infrastructure produced by Euro-MED thematic and strategic projects to mainstream transferrable results into concrete management practices and policies. It will deliver a catalogue of transferrable results and establish a Community Amplification Room to ensure identifying concrete opportunities to enhance

collaboration and promote the adoption of solutions, policy harmonization and innovative governance practices.

### Biodiversity in Archaeological Sites in Greece

Archaeological sites in Greece have been subject to access restrictions for a very long time, which in addition to protecting the cultural heritage, has contributed to the conservation of biodiversity, sometimes of unique species of flora and fauna. This project has mapped and documented the biodiversity of archaeological sites in Greece. This national project has been possible through an agreement between the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Environment, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency of Greece.

### Strictly protected areas in Greece: current situation and future prospects

The Greek government presented a poster with information on the Biodiversity Conservation Targets (Law 5037/2023) as well as on the Strictly Protected Areas and current situation of Protected Areas in Greece. The poster displays the distribution of the Natura 2000 Sites and Strictly Protected Areas and provides information on the total area of each category.

### Natura Connect - designing a resilient and coherent Trans-European conservation network for Nature and People



The work developed by Natura Connect was presented and several members of the team were at the Knowledge Market with media devices to explain what has been done in the last years.

### Compilation of Red Lists of Threatened Species of Plants, Animals and Fungi of Greece

The Greek Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency presented a poster with a synthesis of the information on the work that has been done to assess the conservation status of over 11.000 species of animals (6.600), plants (4.300) and fungi (400).

### Other projects

Representatives of other projects were also present, but no posters were displayed.

## Annex 3: List of registered participants

### Sorted by surname (alphabetical order)

Surname	First Name	Organisation	Country / organisation
Andreou	Marios	Nature Conservation Unit	Cyprus
Argagnon	Olivier	Conservatoire botanique national méditerranéen	France
Aristophanous	Marios	Department of Environment	Cyprus
Aubert	Gabrielle	IIEP	NaturaConnect
Bacchereti	Simona	CINEA	CINEA
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Valaoras	Georgia	ELMEN	Elmen
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Vassen	Frank	European Commission	European Commission
Ververis	Charalampos	Ministry of Environment & Energy	Greece
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Ioannou	Giannis	DFMR	Cyprus
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Tzirkalli	Elli	Cyprus Butterfly group	Cyprus
Zavrou	Despo	Department of Environment	Cyprus
Zomeni	Maria	Department of Environment	Cyprus
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Hosek	Michael	EUROPARC	EHF
Moreno	Laura	WWF Spain	EHF
Valaoras	Georgia	ELMEN	Elmen
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Vassen	Frank	European Commission	European Commission
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Hidalgo	Rafael	Ministerio para la Transición Eléctrica y el Reto Demográfico	Spain
Infante	Octavio	BirdLife Spain	Spain
Regodón	María	Tragsatec	Spain



## Annex 4: Input Theme 2, Site-specific conservation objectives

The following suggestions were (anonymously) received from participants on the question: ***What important questions regarding site-specific conservation objective would you like to discuss with the Commission (and expert institutions)?***

- How often should SSCOs (**site specific conservation objectives**) be monitored?
- How to deal with knowledge gaps or uncertainties?
- Why not provide guidance such as the Italian form to all MSs?
- Conservation objectives at different scales
- "Type of parameters. Quantitative only? Range? Qualitative?"
- Connection with appropriate assessment procedure?"
- Is the French way to deal with this, OK? How could it be improved
- How to set site-specific conservation objectives for species with home range that spans across multiple sites?
- Can you set conservation objectives for certain species at the level of group of sites and for others at site level? For example, have a different approach for large carnivores and flora species?
- Can the objectives of some species or habitats be nested within other species or habitats (key ones)?
- Can they be adapted/adjusted when better data/knowledge is acquired?
- The guidance and rules are established or are changing case by case?
- Does the conservation targets have to be at least equal to the present status of parameters (e.g. area)
- Setting numerical objectives for example number or individuals is something that could be impacted by a lot of parameters. setting objectives for the parameters that we can directly impact
- Why is there no full guidance or methodology published by the CION on setting SSCOs if so, many MS seem to have issues with it?
- In cases where species occur only at N2K level, FRVs should have the same values as conservation objectives?
- how often can the conservation targets be revised?
- Can current/ updated values be used to set SSCOs instead of previous values set in SDFs? New data may be due to new info and reflect realistic SSCOs
- Can conservation objectives be readjusted to lower levels after reassessments (e.g. at acquiring more data)?
- how much can we take into account societal needs to the string of conservation target?
- How do you advice on setting numerical area targets for mixed habitats or transitional habitats?
- If the commission accepts the more flexible approach of France, then why putting so much pressure on setting so specific objectives in other countries
- How are this conservation objectives at site level connected with the article 17th evaluation?
- Can we use a range for habitat area or species population size targets, or must it be a specific value?

- There are species like marine mammals or bears for which setting conservation objectives per site may not be relevant.
- EC should clarify to MS the difference between conservation objectives and conservation measures
- Do we realize that for many cases (species or habitats) there is not enough knowledge to decide quantitative targets and that much time and effort is needed to do so
- How flexible could be population size or area of a habitat type as conservation objectives? (f. ex. concerning environmental permitting)
- What about COs for serial habitats, like 4030, when it's occupying native forest areas?
- Due to the various implications of cons. obj. it may be best to have a guidance document that would limit/stop “the open to interpretation” approach...
- Are fast spreading plagues threatening some populations among those cases where the effectiveness of conservation actions is out of the MS control (similarly to climate change)?
- Why this issue (= conservation status / FRVs / conservation objectives....) is not a permanent core session in all the Biogeographic Seminars?
- when you have a conservation objective of 50 individuals and after some years the population is estimated in a very bigger number, e.g. 500, will there be potential problems arising from this?
- Are we obliged to set conservation objectives for all the species and habitats of the annex 2 and 1 for each site strictly? And if so, prioritizing later may be a way to putting in order the objectives
- How is Italian approach for defining COs linked to A17 evaluation?
- Due to climate change, various species have changes to the male/female ratio. This would create issues ultimately with the cons. obj.
- Every time a MS manage to set a FRV in a convincing way (i.e. using a solid approach), it should be made public in order to help other countries to use it.
- More resources could be available for research in order to set COs and to monitor their success, as this cannot be done only in the frame of the monitoring for art.17.
- Guidance on Appropriate Assessment related to COs could be also provided?
- Guidance documents with best examples of Site-specific conservation objectives and measures would be useful.

Given the interest from the audience and the large number of requests for further clarifications, the Commission indicated that it will consider holding a dedicated follow-up event on site-specific conservation objectives and measures, in late 2024 or early 2025.



### What could be better, and how can we improve future Seminars?

Participants were also asked to indicate one issue they felt needed to be improved during the seminar. From the comments received, it is concluded that the most requested thing is to make the seminars more practical and dedicate a whole day of excursion

In relation to making the seminars more practical, it was suggested:

Providing clear guidance on critical topics. This was the most demanded suggestion.

- Focus on problem-solving.
- Organize the working groups better to report clear messages.
- Make clear to the participants how the Commission considers the seminar results and how the process helps in building and improving environmental EC policy.
- Organise topic-specific seminars.
- Providing clear guidance on critical topics. This was the most demanded suggestion.

The second most demanded issue was to have a full-day excursion.

In relation to the work dynamics, it was suggested:

- To break out the groups a bit less.
- Organize the breakout groups better to report clear messages.
- More room for questions and answers.
- Organize less intensive seminars.
- Try implementing participatory activities for site management or inventory with participants.
- Sending material for discussion before the seminar (it is clear that not all the participants have read the background document).
- Give more importance to the knowledge market, introducing short (5-minute) presentations.

Other issues:

- Better representativity from national state authorities.
- Give more importance to ecological integrity and processes.

## Annex 6. Abbreviations

CCDA	Common Database on Designated Areas
EEA	European Environmental Agency
EU	European Union
FRV	Favourable Reference Value
OECM	Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures
SSCOs	Site-Specific Conservation Objectives