



Sustainable Hunting and Natura 2000

Natura 2000 is the European network of protected areas established under the Habitats and Birds Directives ("Nature Directives") with the aim to conserve and manage vulnerable species and habitats across their natural range within Europe. It includes forests, wetlands and many other different habitats, covering almost 18% of the EU terrestrial territory.

Based on the principle of conservation and sustainable use, the Natura 2000 Network seeks to ensure the lasting coexistence of human activities with the biodiversity values for which the sites were designated. Thus both Directives recognize the legitimacy of wildlife use, such as hunting, but they set a framework to regulate it and guarantee its sustainability and compatibility with the conservation objectives of the sites.

Hunting can have both positive and negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites. This document illustrates and provides examples for how sustainable hunting and the management of Natura 2000 sites can be mutually beneficial.

How do the EU Nature Directives regulate hunting activities?

The Birds Directive establishes a general system of protection for all wild birds in the EU. As an exception, the Annex II species may be hunted, although such hunting must comply with certain rules. The Habitats Directive sets different levels of protection for different lists of species (other than birds), but does not list huntable species.

*Hunters during the Capercaillie monitoring
in the Black Forest (Germany)*
© LJV Baden-Württemberg

The Birds Directive and hunting

- protects all wild bird species (Art. 1 and 5)
- limits hunting to species listed in Annex II (Art. 7)
- requires that the activity does not jeopardise conservation efforts for Annex II birds species (Art. 7). It also requires that the activity complies with the principles of 'wise use' and ecologically balanced control (Art. 7)
- prohibits hunting during the period of return migration to breeding grounds and during the breeding season (Art. 7)
- prohibits large-scale or non-selective means and methods, listed in Annex IV (Art. 8)
- requires the fulfilment of very strict conditions to derogate from these rules (Art. 9)

The Habitats Directive and hunting

- lists strictly protected species (Annex IV)
- does not include a specific provision on hunting

- prohibits any exploitation or disturbance of the "strictly protected" species listed in Annex IV (Art. 13)
- provides for managed exploitation (which includes sustainable hunting) of species listed in Annex V as long as the exploitation is compatible with maintenance in a favourable conservation status (Art. 14)
- prohibits large-scale or non-selective means and methods listed in Annex VI if species protected under the Directive are captured or killed (Art. 15)
- requires the fulfilment of very strict conditions to derogate from these rules (Art. 16)
- requires that in Natura 2000 sites (which include sites designated either under the Birds or the Habitats Directive) there is no deterioration of the natural habitats and the habitats of the species for which the sites have been designated and that any significant disturbance of these species is avoided (Art 6).

Environmentalists and hunters joined together to implement the Directives

In 2001 the European Commission launched the "Sustainable Hunting Initiative", aimed at promoting dialogue and co-operation between environmental and hunters' organisations in order to achieve and enhance sustainable hunting under the Birds Directive.

Sustainable hunting: The use of wild game species and their habitats in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biodiversity or hinder its restoration. Such use maintains the potential of biodiversity to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations, as well as maintaining hunting itself as an accepted social, economic and cultural activity. When hunting is conducted in such a sustainable manner, it can positively contribute to the conservation of wild populations and their habitats and also benefit society.

Source: **European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity** (Council of Europe, 2007)

Some of the most important outcomes of the initiative have been:

- the publication of a European Commission **Guide to sustainable Hunting under the Birds Directive**: it provides clear guidance for Member States and stakeholders on the legal and technical implementation of the Birds Directive's provisions on hunting;
- the adoption of an EU **Agreement on Sustainable Hunting**: signed in 2004 by BirdLife International and FACE (Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU), which provides the

basis for a constructive partnership between stakeholders involved in conservation (hunters, conservation groups, etc.) to ensure that the hunting of birds is properly managed;

- the launch of an **awareness-raising programme on Natura 2000 among hunters**;
- the publication of **EU Management plans for 13 huntable bird species** considered to be in an unfavourable conservation status.

The sustainable management and use of wildlife can represent a strong incentive to support the maintenance of habitats and species in Natura 2000 sites. If done in a way that is compatible with the conservation objectives of the site, hunting and the active involvement of hunters in the practical management of Natura 2000 sites can deliver mutual benefits both in terms of hunting and in terms of successful biodiversity conservation.

Gabor von Bethlenfalvy, Conservation Manager, FACE

"Member States have to ensure a favourable conservation status for Natura 2000 habitats and species. This requires financing, monitoring, conservation and restoration. Hunters contribute to all of these aspects and therefore Natura 2000 needs their support."

How can hunters and properly managed hunting territories contribute to Natura 2000?

- Some of the most important wildlife sites in Europe have survived the pressures of development and destruction due to the interests of game management.
- Hunters currently take part in the management of many Natura 2000 sites that sustain valuable

habitats and species precisely because of the way these sites have been managed up to now.

- It is in the long-term interest of hunters to ensure that huntable species and their habitats are maintained or restored to a favourable conservation status and that any factors contributing to population decline are effectively addressed.
- **Sustainable** hunting can be a tool to help achieve the conservation objectives of Natura 2000, i.e. by controlling some populations (invasive species, predators identified as a possible threat, grazing species...). Some management practices adopted by hunters benefit not only game species but also a range of other protected or endangered animals and plants.
- Hunters invest time and money in nature conservation, often in remote areas. Moreover, hunting can generate income and rural jobs as well as contribute to paying for certain costs that might otherwise have to be supported by public authorities.
- Hunters and their organisations can help law enforcement authorities by supporting the eradication of illegal activities, including the killing, trapping and trade of wildlife.
- The large community of European hunters present “on the ground” can contribute to biodiversity monitoring and provide valuable feedback when responding to threats (e.g. climate change, invasive species).

Stefan Leiner, Head of the Nature Unit, European Commission “*The Natura 2000 Network has benefits for, and needs the active support and engagement of all land users, including hunters & anglers*”.

How can hunters benefit from Natura 2000?

- Natura 2000 helps to protect and improve the living conditions of huntable species as well as maintaining their conservation status at levels that are healthy and robust enough to sustain harvest.
- It encourages the continuation of sustainable land (e.g. extensive agriculture) and wildlife uses that are compatible with the conservation of Europe’s rich and diverse biodiversity.

- It enables hunters to illustrate their investment in, and commitment to, nature conservation. The science-based approach of Natura 2000 allows all concerned to take a more rational approach on often emotional issues.
- It provides financial opportunities for land owners and managers, who in many cases are hunters. Funding aimed at managing Natura 2000 sites and at preserving habitats and species can support the conservation work carried out by the hunters.
- It encourages local hunters’ communities to be engaged in site management planning, implementation and monitoring and to work jointly in pursuing common conservation goals.

Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy, BirdLife International “*Natura 2000, if properly implemented, offers a strong yet pragmatic tool to reconcile hunting activities with biodiversity conservation needs in Europe’s most precious sites*”.

Practical examples of mutual benefits

Capercaillie conservation brings together diverse interests in the Black Forest (Germany)

The Black Forest, a forest mountain range in the region of Baden-Württemberg, in southwestern Germany, hosts three Natura 2000 sites (“Südschwarzwald”, “Mittlerer Schwarzwald” and “Nordschwarzwald”), which have been designated for the protection of different bird species, such as the Capercaillie.

Although the Capercaillie is listed in the Birds Directive as huntable in Germany, there has been no open season in Baden-Württemberg since 1972. This is because the species’ population has been in constant decline because of changing land-use and habitat fragmentation.

Since the Capercaillie is listed in the Hunting Law as a game species, hunters have a responsibility for its conservation. Therefore, in the 1980s they created special game keeping entities which formed the basis for the Capercaillie Action Plan of Baden-Württemberg. Its objective was to improve the population status of the species in the Black Forest and set out the frame for management plans for the three Natura 2000 sites.

The hunters are involved in the Plan’s implementation by:

- creating suitable habitat conditions (active habitat management, adapted Roe Deer densities, spatially adapted wildlife refuges);
- controlling predators (Red fox and Stone Marten);
- managing Wild Boar artificial feeding areas (quantity, distribution, time to access) to prevent egg-predation;
- monitoring display areas (leks) and mapping the species’ distribution.



Restoration
of open habitats
on the plateau
of Saint-Hubert
(Belgium)
LIFE03
NAT/B/000019
© P. Warlomont

In order to encourage an effective conservation of the Capercaillie, hunters have organised training courses on improving predator control methods, in particular for the Fox, and on how to further use their skins, incentivising the marketing of sustainable local products, in collaboration with the tanner, furrier and taxidermy businesses.

The hunters' long term commitment to the conservation of a game species in the area was an important catalyst for the elaboration of the Capercaillie Action Plan. Because of Natura 2000, hunters were able to contribute to the sites' conservation and management objectives, alongside other stakeholders who are involved in using the Black Forest's important natural resources (forestry, tourism, agriculture, marketing).

Working together for restoring peat and wet habitats to achieve more and better benefits (Belgium)

The Saint-Hubert Plateau is an upland area in the Ardenne region of southern Belgium. It includes two adjoining Natura 2000 sites ("Foret de Freyr" and "Haute-Wamme et Masblette") which have been designated for different wetland and forest habitats and their characteristic fauna and flora species.

Forest drainage works for the cultivation of spruce led to the disappearance of most of the area's natural wetlands and of their typical fauna and flora. The availability of suitable vegetation for ungulates had also been reduced which resulted in increased forest damage.

The local hunters' association decided to apply for EU co-funding under the LIFE program to reverse wetland decline. Although the land covered by the project belonged to very different owners, the hunters' association was able to gain their support. Restoration involved: removing unstable and not very productive spruce plantations from wet soils and bog areas, restoring a more natural water regime, control of purple moor-grass

colonisation by cutting and by sheep grazing, fencing of broad-leaved trees plantations.

A total of 472 ha of peatlands/wetlands were restored. Plants, butterflies, dragonflies and birds typical of these habitats have reappeared and the network of open areas provides numerous feeding areas throughout the forest, for Wild Boar, Roe Deer and Red Deer. Common Cranes have started to stop over on migration.

The success of the project and the broad partnership (hunters, owners, managers, environmentalists, etc.) clearly shows that nature conservation and the management of wild fauna (including game) can represent common interests and act as a basis for effective collaboration.

The following elements are important to enhance the mutual benefits between hunting and Natura 2000

- ▶ effective dialogue and partnership between hunters and environmentalists, farmers, landowners, authorities, with an open mind and mutual understanding to transform conflicts into solutions;
- ▶ readiness to recognise that well-regulated hunting can be compatible with conservation objectives and contributes to biodiversity in many sites, ideally within the framework of a management plan;
- ▶ acceptance that conservation objectives may require the establishment of temporary or permanent no-take zones in Natura 2000 areas, especially in wetlands;
- ▶ better awareness-raising and training of hunters on conservation issues and of environmentalists on hunting;
- ▶ full compliance with the law, a prerequisite to build trust and collaboration with others;
- ▶ willingness to assess the impact of hunting and to adapt sustainable practices when problems have been identified;
- ▶ collection of good quality data (bag data, population data), species and habitat monitoring and science-based management decisions;
- ▶ development of information exchange networks to transfer relevant expertise and best practice.

More information: Nature conservation and sustainable hunting in EU
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/hunting/index_en.htm

