

# Nature Conservation in Europe

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## Approaches and Lessons

European ecosystems and species remain under pressure from intensive agriculture and forestry, fishing, pollution, urban sprawl, invasive species and climate change. This book provides a detailed description and critical analysis of nature conservation responses, achievements and failures, motivated by the concerning state of nature and missed biodiversity targets. It summarises Europe's nature and the impact of human activities, and then gives an overview of relevant international biodiversity treaties and the EU nature conservation policy and legislative framework. The core of the book comprises chapters written by national experts, which cover the UK and 25 EU Member States, providing comparative case studies from which valuable lessons are drawn. Covering wide-ranging topics such as biodiversity pressures, legislation and governance, biodiversity strategies, species protection, protected areas, habitat management and funding, this book is of interest to a wide audience, including academics and professionals involved in nature conservation and related environmental fields.

**Graham Tucker** is an ecologist and a leading authority on European nature conservation policy, and has a particular interest in its achievements and failures. He has gained insights on these issues from 36 years of professional experience, including at Birdlife International and, more recently, at the Institute for European Environmental Policy, where he was Head of the Biodiversity Programme. This is his third book focusing on European nature conservation. He is now an independent consultant and proprietor of Nature Conservation Consulting.

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## Approaches and Lessons

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To all those striving to conserve nature in their respective  
ways – especially the unsung heroes.

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## Preface

The biodiversity crisis is as bad as ever over much of Europe. This is despite over 40 years of nature conservation efforts following the ground-breaking Bern Convention, the Convention on Migratory Species and the EU<sup>1</sup> Birds Directive, all in 1979. Since then, there has been the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the EU Habitats Directive in 1992, followed by many EU supporting measures such as the Water Framework Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and numerous national strategies and actions.

So why is it that nature is so impoverished and still declining? It is not a lack of knowledge: we know the main things that need to be done. It is definitely not a lack of biodiversity conferences, declarations, targets and strategies. The problem is the gap between nature conservation aspirations and achievements. This book explores the reasons for this, primarily by examining nature conservation in different countries and comparing their varying problems, solutions and outcomes.

The idea for this book and the national comparisons came from various conversations I had with numerous nature conservation experts across Europe, with whom I have had the privilege to work during the last three decades. These discussions increasingly focussed on the plight of nature and the apparent ineffectiveness of many so-called nature conservation measures. Whilst there have been successes, as described in this book, they have been too few to stem the tide of biodiversity loss. At the same time, countries have taken varying approaches and some seem to be doing better than others (at least in reducing the rates of decline), whilst others (or their political leaders) do not appear to have cared much and have only done the bare minimum. Whilst there have been numerous CBD, European Commission, European Environment Agency (EEA) and other reports based on indicators, there has been a need for a deeper comparison of national actions and actual biodiversity impacts – to see what really happened,

<sup>1</sup> Although the Birds Directive was adopted by the European Economic Community (EEC), for simplicity the European Union (EU) is sometimes used as the term to also represent what was the EEC, and then the European Community (EC), before the EU was formed in 1993.

what worked, what did not and why. About 10 years ago these conversations led to a blueprint for this book, with its main part consisting of national chapters written by national experts. The original intention was to cover all EU-28 countries plus a selection of other European countries for comparison.

Plans to commence writing were delayed in 2014 when the European Commission started a Fitness Check of the Nature Directives (i.e. the Birds Directive and Habitats Directive). As part of its regulatory reform programme, it set out to establish if they were effective, efficient, relevant, coherent with other EU policies and provided added EU value. This was concerning at the time, as there were clear political signals that some wanted the exercise to simplify and reduce the strength of the legislation. However, to some extent the Fitness Check was needed, and it carried out some of the analysis that was envisaged for this book, to draw lessons and ensure the directives were achieving their full potential. As many of us involved in the book were occupied in various ways in the Fitness Check, it was not an appropriate time to start writing. When the Fitness Check was over, the Commission concluded in 2016 that the Nature Directives were fit for purpose, and their key measures including the protection of sites and species worked well when implemented properly. However, the directives were not achieving their objectives because they were not being implemented sufficiently, primarily due to a lack of political will, and underfunding.

Although the reasons for the problems are explained in detail in the Fitness Check and supporting evaluation study, it was apparent that much more could be said, especially in terms of exploring the different national approaches and outcomes. This convinced me to go ahead with this book. Although it was ambitious, I knew that there were many excellent people willing to contribute. With the essential help of an assembled advisory group of leading nature conservation experts (see Acknowledgements) a detailed publication proposal was prepared and further potential chapter authors identified and invited to take part.

Following discussions, a consistent set of key topics was agreed for each country chapter including the natural characteristics of the country, the conservation status of habitats and

## Preface

species and main pressures affecting them, governance, policies and legislation, species protection, protected areas, spatial planning, habitat management, funding, monitoring and future developments. To avoid the chapters becoming too long it was decided that they should focus on the most important developments in the country, mainly over the last 40 years and particularly over the last decade and in relation to the EU's and CBD's biodiversity targets up to 2020. It was also agreed to add some introductory chapters, covering the principal nature conservation requirements and challenges in Europe, key international conventions, and the current EU nature policy and legislative framework. With these chapters, as well as a conclusion chapter to draw lessons, it was apparent that the book could be potentially huge and expensive. To prevent this, it now focusses on the EU and UK primarily and does not include additional comparative country chapters. Nevertheless, the book has attempted to cover Europe more widely where possible.

Thankfully, it was possible to find willing authors with the required knowledge to cover 26 countries (involving 50 contributors in total), despite the wide range of issues covered in each chapter and the considerable investment in time needed. Furthermore, as there has been no funding in the project, most of the chapters have been prepared by authors in their 'spare time'. Unfortunately, although authors were initially found for Luxembourg and Malta, they were unable to prepare the chapter due to their vital nature conservation work commitments. To help partially fill this gap, key data on the countries are included in the book where they are available.

An important aim for each country chapter has been for it to represent a balanced range of views. Many of the chapters have therefore been written by multiple national experts from universities, consultancies or institutes, as well as some NGOs. Although few staff from governmental authorities have been able to take part directly, many have provided information or critical reviews. Very fortuitously, a few recently retired senior staff from nature authorities and other institutions have authored some of the chapters, providing invaluable insights based on decades of experience. To further help ensure the chapters provide balanced accounts, each has been reviewed by

a range of experts, including from authorities and NGOs, and others with differing backgrounds to the authors.

The actual writing of many chapters started in 2018, once a publication agreement had been made with Cambridge University Press. Good progress was being made until the COVID-19 pandemic struck at the beginning of 2020. Fortunately, it was no worse than disruptive for any of us. But over the last two years the inevitable changes in working practices and personal situations delayed the completion of many chapters. As a result, some of the first submitted chapters became out of date and had to be updated, which the authors took on with great patience and understanding. Whilst it has not been possible to fully catch up on all issues in all chapters, the key developments in the EU and in each country up to the finalisation of the chapters in 2022 have been included as far as possible.

Now, as this book goes to the publisher in June 2022, there are more encouraging signs for nature conservation in Europe, most notably within the EU through some aspects of the European Green Deal, Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and proposed Regulation on Nature Restoration. Whilst such grand strategies have been seen before, the proposals for legally binding restoration targets in the EU could lead to the step change in the scale of action that is needed. There are also potentially very positive developments in the UK, including legally binding targets for habitat restoration and species, the introduction of mandatory biodiversity net gain from developments, and the transition towards the use of all agricultural subsidies for public goods, including biodiversity. However, the nature conservation outcomes of all these EU and UK initiatives will very much depend on their ambitions, specific targets and actual implementation. Hopefully, some of the lessons from this book, especially the need for strong enforcement of regulation, adequate targeted funding and wider societal involvement in nature conservation will guide these coming initiatives. For the moment, it is imperative that the lessons help improve the implementation of the Nature Directives and other important existing measures – to fill the current gap between conservation aspirations and achievements.

## Acknowledgements

There would be nothing to write about, or celebrate, if it were not for the countless number of people in Europe who are contributing to nature conservation in their own way. I therefore salute them all, and hope this book will go some way to showing the breadth of activities and dedication involved. In particular, I acknowledge the essential role of the often unsung heroes, including the legislators, policymakers, regulators and administrators (often rather dismissively referred to as bureaucrats), from EU to local level. Without their hard, unglamorous work, the relatively strong nature conservation legislation and comprehensive policy framework we have in Europe would remain unimplemented and unenforced; indeed, it would not exist in the first place. It is also apparent from this book that there are many outside the environmental sector who are making important contributions to nature conservation, including amongst hunters, farmers, foresters, fishers, water managers, various industries, many other sectors and wider society. All deserve appreciation and encouragement.

Obviously, I am completely indebted to the authors of the country chapters, as well as my co-authors of the other chapters. Without the depth and breadth of knowledge and insights that they have brought, together with their dedication and diligence, this book would never have been possible. They have given their time most generously, and I am especially grateful for their patience and perseverance, as this book has been more work and taken a couple of years longer than anticipated. Sadly, Andreas Demetropoulos, an author of the chapter on Cyprus, passed away before publication of this book. He was an inspiring conservationist, especially in relation to turtles and the marine environment, and it is an honour that he was able to contribute to this book. I also thank the many reviewers and other experts, as listed at the end of each chapter, who provided information and valuable comments and suggestions.

Neither would this book have materialised if it had not been for the wise guidance and positive support that I received from the following nature conservation experts who agreed to join an advisory group: David Baldock, Andreas Baumüller, Ariel Brunner, Wyn Jones, Petr Roth, Alberto Arroyo Schnell, Kerstin Sundseth and Agnes Zolyomi. The structure and contents of the book, and the guidance that was produced for the authors, benefited greatly from their wide-ranging experience and knowledge. The fact that excellent authors were found for 26 chapters is also largely due to their sharing of contacts and suggestions, and personal invitations in some cases. I especially thank Petr Roth for his support, as the idea for the book has much to do with conversations with him 10 years ago, and he has been an enthusiastic supporter and honest advisor ever since.

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Last, but not least, I thank my friends and family, and especially Claire Johnson, for putting up with my 'book obsession' over the last few years.

## Glossary, Abbreviations and Country Codes

§ Section

- ABNJ** Area Beyond National Jurisdiction  
**AECM** Agri-environment–climate measure  
**AES** Agri-environment scheme  
**AGR** Agricultural areas – CORINE land cover classes (see Table 1.1)  
**ALP** Alpine biogeographical region  
**Art.** Article  
**ART** Artificial – CORINE land cover classes (see Table 1.1)  
**ASCI** Area of Special Conservation Interest (under the Bern Convention)  
**ATL** Atlantic biogeographical region  
**BAP** Biodiversity Action Plan  
**BD** Birds Directive (when referring to articles, annexes and species)  
**BD species** Bird species covered by the Birds Directive (i.e. all wild bird species naturally occurring in the EU)  
**BHD** Birds and Habitats Directives  
**BLS** Black Sea biogeographical region  
**BOR** Boreal biogeographical region  
**BP** Before present  
**c.** Approximately  
**CAP** Common Agricultural Policy  
**CBD** Convention on Biological Diversity  
**CDDA** Common Database on Designated Areas (now the Nationally Designated Areas Inventory)  
**CFP** Common Fisheries Policy  
**CITES** Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora  
**CJEU** Court of Justice of the European Union (also informally known as the European Court of Justice – ECJ)  
**CLC** CORINE land cover  
**CMS** Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention)  
**CON** Continental biogeographical region  
**COP** Conference of the Parties  
**CORINE** Coordination of information on the environment (land cover data)  
**CR** Critically Threatened (IUCN Red List threat status)  
**DG** Directorate-General (of the European Commission)  
**EAFRD** European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development  
**EAGF** European Agricultural and Guarantee Fund  
**EAP** Environmental Action Programme  
**EC** European Community  
**ECA** European Court of Auditors  
**EEA** European Environment Agency  
**EEA-39** The EU-28 and Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey, and the cooperating countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The UK has since left the EEA.  
**EEC** European Economic Community  
**EEZ** Exclusive Economic Zone  
**EIA** Environmental impact assessment  
**Eionet** European Environment Information and Observation Network  
**ELD** Environmental Liability Directive  
**EMFF** European Maritime and Fisheries Fund  
**EN** Endangered (IUCN Red List threat status)  
**eNGO** Environmental non-governmental organisation  
**ENRD** European Network for Rural Development  
**ERDF** European Regional Development Fund  
**ESIF** European Structural and Investment Funds  
**ETC/BD** European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity  
**EU** European Union  
**EU-15** The EU Member States pre-enlargement in 2004  
**EU-25** The EU Member States as of 1 May 2004 and the accession of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia  
**EU-27** The EU Member States as of 1 January 2007 and the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, before the accession of Croatia. Not the EU after the departure of the UK.  
**EU-28** The EU Member States as of 1 January 2013, after the accession of Croatia, including the UK  
**EUNIS** European Nature Information System  
**FOR** Forests – CORINE land cover classes (see Table 1.1)  
**FTE** Full-time equivalent  
**GAEC** Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition, with respect to CAP payment conditions  
**GBIF** Global Biodiversity Information Facility  
**GDP** Gross Domestic Product  
**GEF** Global Environment Facility  
**GIS** Geographic Information System  
**HD** Habitats Directive (when referring to articles, annexes and habitats and species)  
**HD habitats** Habitats listed in HD Annex I  
**HD species** Species listed in HD Annex II and/or Annex IV and V  
**HNV** High Nature Value in relation to farmland or forestry  
**IAS** Invasive Alien Species: animals and plants that are introduced accidentally or deliberately into a natural environment where they are not normally found, with serious negative consequences for their new environment  
**IBA** Important Bird Area (as defined by BirdLife International)  
**ICES** International Council for the Exploration of the Sea  
**IPBES** Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services  
**IUCN** International Union for Conservation of Nature  
**JRC** Joint Research Centre – part of the European Commission  
**KBA** Key Biodiversity Area  
**LIFE** Financial Instrument for the Environment  
**LPIS** Land Parcel Identification System  
**MAC** Macaronesian biogeographical region  
**MAES** Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services (EU initiative)  
**MARPOL** International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships

**MATL** Marine Atlantic region  
**MBAL** Marine Baltic region  
**MBLS** Marine Black Sea region  
**MEA** Multilateral Environmental Agreement  
**MED** Mediterranean biogeographical region  
**MFF** The Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU  
**MMAC** Marine Macaronesian region  
**MMED** Marine Mediterranean region  
**MPA** Marine protected area  
**MS** Member State  
**MSFD** Marine Strategy Framework Directive  
**MSPD** Maritime Strategy Planning Directive  
**N2k** Natura 2000  
**Natura habitats and species** Habitats and species for which a Natura 2000 site is designated.  
**Nature Directives** The Birds and Habitats Directives  
**NBS/NBSAPs** National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans  
**NEAFC** North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission  
**NGO** Non-governmental organisation  
**NSC** North Sea Ministerial Conference  
**NT** Near Threatened (IUCN Red List threat status)  
**OECD** Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development  
**OECD** Other effective area-based conservation measures (see Box 1.2)  
**OJ** Official Journal of the European Union  
**OSN** Other seminatural and natural areas – CORINE land cover classes (see Table 1.1)  
**OSPAR Convention** The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic  
**PAF** Prioritised Action Framework  
**PAN** Pannonian biogeographical region  
**PoM** Programme of Measures  
**pSCI** Proposed Site of Community Importance  
**RBMP** River Basin Management Plan (under the WFD)  
**RDP** Rural Development Programme  
**REFIT** (European Commission) Regulatory Fitness Check and Performance  
**RSC** Regional seas conventions  
**s./ss.** Section/Sections  
**SAC** Special Area of Conservation  
**SCI** Site of Community Importance  
**SEA** Strategic environmental assessment  
**SEBI** Streamlining European Biodiversity Indicators (indicator set)  
**SPA** Special Protection Area  
**SPA species** Bird species that require the classification of SPAs (as per BD Article 4), so including species listed in BD Annex I, and other migratory species for which SPA designation is appropriate  
**SPAMI** Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance, created under the Barcelona Convention Protocol for Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean  
**SPEC** Species of European Conservation Concern (as defined by BirdLife International)  
**Spp.** Species (plural)  
**STEP** Steppic biogeographical region  
**UAA** Utilised Agricultural Area  
**UCS** Unfavourable Conservation Status, includes unfavourable–inadequate (i.e. poor) and unfavourable–bad (i.e. bad)  
**UNCLOS** The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea  
**UNDP** The United Nations Development Programme

**UNEP-WCMC** UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre  
**UNESCO** The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
**USAID** United States Agency for International Development  
**UTM** Universal Transverse Mercator  
**VU** Vulnerable (IUCN Red List threat status)  
**WDPA** World Database on Protected Areas  
**WET** Wetlands and water bodies – CORINE land cover classes (see Table 1.1)  
**WFD** Water Framework Directive

## Country Codes (ISO 3166)

**AD** Andorra  
**AL** Albania  
**AT** Austria  
**BA** Bosnia and Herzegovina  
**BE** Belgium  
**BG** Bulgaria  
**BY** Belarus  
**CH** Switzerland  
**CY** Cyprus  
**CZ** Czech Republic  
**DE** Germany  
**DK** Denmark  
**EE** Estonia  
**ES** Spain  
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**RS** Serbia  
**SE** Sweden  
**SI** Slovenia  
**SK** Slovakia  
**TR** Turkey  
**UA** Ukraine  
**UK** United Kingdom  
**XK** Kosovo