

PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPING THE PROPOSED EU FOREST ACTION PLAN





SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Forest conservation and management

1. Increase the level of forest protection to ecologically sustainable levels

- The EU Forest Action Plan should include a long term vision for increasing the amount of strictly protected forests to cover all the remaining natural old-growth forests in Europe, and provide for their enlargement through restoration if necessary for the reserves' long-term ecological viability.



Photo: Māris Strazds

2. Assess and improve the ecological integrity of the Natura 2000 forest network

- In the EU15 (Member States before 2004), finalise the designation of all forest Special Areas of Conservation;
- Evaluate the ecological viability of the Natura 2000 network in terms of its ability to provide for the survival of the species and habitats for which it is designated;
- In the EU10 (Member States from 2004), ensure that there is a sufficient number and area of Sites of Community Importance for all forest species and habitats;
- Designation of all Important Bird Areas as Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive;
- Set favourable reference values for all forest species and habitats listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives, and report on their status by 2007;
- Develop improved management regimes with measurable objectives for all NATURA 2000 sites, as part of achieving a favourable conservation status of species and habitats;
- Use the opportunities provided by the Habitats Directive Article 10 to improve the coherence of the Natura 2000 network.

3. Revise forest management practices to better support ecological and social objectives

- In forests across the EU, determine the size of Woodland Key Habitats by ecological criteria for continued viability, and enlarge their size as necessary;
- Develop guidelines for practising continuous cover forestry in different habitat types;
- Emphasise the use of environmentally low-impact silvicultural systems and ensure the inclusion of such commitments in National Forest Programmes;
- Ensure that National Forest Programmes do not restrict biodiversity, landscape and recreation delivery due to the economic interests of forest industries;
- Set minimum standards for sustainable forest management compliant with the Helsinki Principles of the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE);
- Ensure that information on the practice of and compensation for biodiversity-enhancing forestry measures are efficiently communicated to all forest owners throughout the EU;
- Promote the socio-economic, and biodiversity value of sustainably managed non-timber and low-extraction forest products such as preservation of cultural heritage, nature tourism, food products (e.g. mushrooms, berries), wood arts and crafts.

4.

Enhance biodiversity conservation in use of Rural Development funds

- Rural Development funds should continue to be made available specifically for conservation and restoration of naturally occurring forest types, including development programmes for rural areas where forests get protected and consequently become off-limits to logging, as well as information campaigns on the need for and benefits of forest conservation;
- Provide examples of good forestry practices to form the baseline for national forest environment schemes as well as examples of acceptable forest-environment measures that should be compensated by these payments;
- Comprehensive forest-environment schemes, analogous to agri-environment schemes, should be promoted in all Member States with the following basic requirements:
 - practising continuous cover or other forms of forestry limiting or eliminating clearcuts;
 - increasing the amount of decaying and dead wood to around 20–50 m³/ha wherever possible;
 - leaving permanently in the forest large trees of previous generations;
 - using only naturally occurring tree species in mixed stands, with natural regeneration;
 - favouring mixed stands where these occur naturally;
 - maintaining uneven age canopy structure;
 - creating sensitively managed buffer zones around protected and other significant forest areas.
- Ensure the inclusion of forest management measures for Natura 2000 sites in national Rural Development strategies and plans, and the allocation of adequate amounts of funding covering all types of eligible actions;
- Where appropriate, support forest grazing by livestock, traditional animal husbandry that contributes to development and maintenance of biologically rich but now rare anthropogenic woodland habitats. Such assemblages are now the second most threatened habitats after old natural forests.

5.

The role of the European Commission in forest management under RDR

- Approve National Rural Development Plans only if they provide good levels of forest protection;
- Raise forest managers' awareness of the Rural Development Regulation opportunities for biodiversity conservation;
- Provide for training of national/regional forest management advisors in biodiversity-enhancement measures for forestry, and for publications of training materials on this subject in national languages;
- Ensure through monitoring that rural development funds are spent without causing damage to the environment.

6.

Develop clear rules for afforestation

- Monoculture plantations of any tree species should be avoided;
- Forestry should be practised using mixes of locally naturally occurring tree species. There is no justification for spending EU funds on introducing non-native trees to any areas;
- Afforestation should be avoided on high value non-forest habitats;
- Inappropriately located plantations should be removed promptly and, if appropriate, replaced with native tree species. This measure would also help contain forest fires;
- In situations where eradication of non-native species can happen only in the long term, care should be taken that these species do not spread into surrounding native stands.

Protecting forests outside the EU

7. Ensuring that the EU's forest policies protect biodiversity also outside the union.

- Ban all imports of tropical timber where its origin cannot be reliably traced and verified as coming from legally approved sources and away from sites of known conservation importance;
- EU institutions and Member States must lead by procuring FSC certified timber/wood products from outside the EU;
- The EU's tropical forest conservation budget line should be increased and its funds directed more strictly for environmentally beneficial projects;
- EU development assistance to Developing Countries should undergo rigorous assessment to establish potential negative impact on natural forests in these countries; any such negative impact should be eliminated at the planning stage;
- EU trade policy should actively promote biodiversity-friendly wood products that contribute to maintaining species-rich forests outside the EU.

Enhancing and monitoring the status of the forestry sector

8. Putting the spotlight on the importance of forests for society

- The implementation of the EU Forest Action Plan should be the joint responsibility of all the relevant sectoral Directorates General in the European Commission (agriculture, environment, trade, development, etc.) and the sectoral Ministries at the Member State level. Both within the EU and the Member States, co-ordinating bodies should be established to harmonise efforts between the relevant sectors;
- Both EU and national funding should be allocated to awareness-raising campaigns targeted at decision-makers, stakeholders and the general public to increase the understanding and appreciation of the value of forests, both within and outside Europe;
- Promote the socio-economic benefits and biodiversity value of sustainably managed timber products, as well as non-timber and low-extraction forest products such as nature tourism, food products, wood arts and crafts.

9. Forest monitoring and research

- Ensure the continuation of the Forest Focus monitoring system under the LIFE+ funding instrument; ensure the co-ordination of forest monitoring efforts at the national level, including monitoring of forest biodiversity;
- Include the Common Bird Index of BirdLife/EBCC (European Bird Census Council), including an index on forest birds, to the shortlist of EU Structural Indicators;
- Support research into the valuation of the services of forest ecosystems;
- Support research into setting favourable reference values for forest species and habitats;
- Support research into the effect of climate change on forest ecosystems and key forest species;
- Support the development of an inventory and detailed mapping of old-growth natural forest remnants, forests of high conservation value, and forest protected areas partly through the adoption of the new proposed INSPIRE Directive.

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union Forestry Strategy was adopted in 1998 (COM(1998) 649, 03/11/1998). During 2004, the European Commission carried out an extensive consultation with the Member States and stakeholders via the Standing Forestry Committee, the Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork, and an internet-based stakeholder consultation, in order to evaluate the implementation success of the Forestry Strategy. The final Communication summarising the findings of the consultation was published in March 2005 (EU Commission 2005). One of the key recommendations was to develop an EU Action Plan for Sustainable Forest Management; the aim of the Action Plan would be to provide a coherent framework for the implementation of forest-related actions and serve as an instrument of co-ordination between Community actions and the forest policies of the Member States. In its response of 26th May 2005, the Council invited the Commission to elaborate a proposal for this Action Plan and to present it to Council by mid 2006. This paper is BirdLife International's contribution to the development of the new EU Action Plan for forests.

Current forest conservation and management policies in the EU are inadequate

In the Commission annex to The Communication on the Implementation of EU Forestry Strategy, the European Environment Agency (EEA) notes within the EU "a tendency towards more uniform forest structures, reduction of variety in tree species and loss of biodiversity". According to the EEA "the changes that forests underwent over the last few centuries have brought a great number of species to the verge of extinction in several European countries". Meeting the Gothenburg objective of halting the gradual loss of biodiversity by 2010, to which the EU Heads of State and Government made a commitment to in 2001, "can be expected to remain a demanding task for some time in the forest sector. (EU Commission 2005)"

Only ca. 1,6 % of European forest cover, excluding the European part of Russia, fall into IUCN Protected Area Management Categories I-II of Strict Protection (Table 1). This is not deemed sufficient, given that ecological studies indicate the need for a minimum of 10% strict protec-



The capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) is a bird of mature forests now extinct or endangered in Europe over much of its former range.

Photo: Jari Peltomäki / www.birdphoto.fi

Veronika Ferdinandova, Marcus Walsh & Zoltan Waliczky (eds).

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Together for birds and people

tion of forest habitat types to achieve stability of biodiversity (Angelstam & Andersson 2001, Hanski 2004). This figure also assumes relatively far-reaching biodiversity enhancement measures in commercial forests, as well as extensive retention of forest cover generally.

The main legal instruments of protecting forest habitats and species of Community importance are the Birds and Habitats Directives. One of the key requirements of the Directives is to set up an EU-wide network of protected areas called Natura 2000. This measure is key in achieving the favourable conservation status of species and habitats listed in the Habitats Directive, as well as those appearing in Annex I of the Birds Directive. According to the latest information from the European Environment Agency, the proposed Sites of Community Importance (SCI) under the Habitats Directive are expected to cover more than 40 million ha, of which about 30% are covered by forests. As of the end of 2004, Special Protection Areas (SPA) under the Birds Directive covered about 24.3 m ha, of which 25% were forests in the EU15 (= the EU member states prior to 2004). SPAs cover only about 50% of Important Bird Areas identified by BirdLife in these countries, so there is considerable room to improve the status of the network.

At Pan-European level, the Community is a signatory party to the resolutions adopted at the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE). In this context general guidelines for the conservation of biodiversity in European forests have been defined under MCPFE Resolution H2 of the Helsinki Conference of 1993. Reference to conservation and appropriate enhancement of biodiversity is also made in Resolution H1, in which general guidelines for the sustainable management of forests in Europe are set out. The gradual loss of biodiversity in Europe reported by the EEA, however, indicates that the MCPFE principles are not being implemented well enough to fulfil the biodiversity conservation objectives.

Table 1. Forest protection levels in Europe. Most countries have strictly protected only 0–1 % of their forests, corresponding to IUCN (World Conservation Union) categories I-II. See Ch. 1 for discussion. Sources: Parviainen et al. 2000, UNEP et al. 2000, Diaci 1999, Parviainen et al. 1999.

Country	Total forest area (ha)	Strictly protected (IUCN I-II)
Albania	1 030 000	14 500 (1.4%)
Austria	3 924 000	8 062 (0.2%)
Belarus	8 870 000	ca. 3–4%
Belgium	665 000	1 260 (0.2%)
Bosnia-Herzegovina	2 276 000	3125 (0.1%)
Bulgaria	3 357 000	ca. 2%
Croatia	1 775 000	2 856 (0.2%)
Czech	2 630 000	25 000 (1.0%)
Denmark	445 000	6 085 (1.3%)
Estonia	2 016 000	Around 7% ¹⁾
Finland	23 000 000	1 035 000 (4.5%)
France	15 156 000	14 000 (0.09%)
Germany	10 700 000	24 976 (0.2%)
Greece	6 513 000	142 000 (2.2%)
Hungary	1 811 000	3 665 (0.2%)
Ireland	570 000	5 736 (1.0%)
Italy	8 675 000	62 053 (0.7%)
Latvia	2 884 000	Around 1%
Lithuania	1 978 000	Around 1%
Macedonia	906 000	?
Moldova	324 000	?
Netherlands	334 000	3 028 (0.9%)
Norway	11 950 000	148 000 (1.2%)
Poland	8 942 000	46 202 (0.5%)
Portugal	3 306 000	2 827 (0.09%)
Romania	6 370 000	27 530 (0.4%)
Russia	816 538 000	ca. 2 400 000 (0.3%)
Slovakia	2 016 000	15 428 (0.8%)
Slovenia	1 099 000	10 420 (0.9%)
Spain	12 511 000	32 644 (0.3%)
Sweden	28 000 000	832 370 (3.0%) ¹⁾
Switzerland	3 955 000	1 018 (0.03%)
Ukraine	9 458 000	?
UK	2 305 000	10 000 (0.4%)
Yugoslavia	2 894 000	?

¹⁾ These countries have government programmes to raise the amount of strictly protected forest to 10 per cent

Within the EU, there are several legislative and financial tools to assist the sustainable management of forests. The most important of these is the Rural Development Regulation, currently under revision, which includes provisions for afforestation of agriculture land, for forest environment measures, and payments for forest management on Natura 2000 sites. The current Forest Focus regulation provides co-ordination and financial assistance for harmonising forest monitoring across the Member States. This regulation will be subsumed in the new LIFE+ regulation. The current LIFE regulation is the most important budget line for nature conservation projects, including those on forest sites, but is in serious danger of being axed unless there are significant changes to the LIFE+ proposal. There is a tropical forest budget line in DG Development to help conservation projects in developing countries, and some of the

bilateral financial assistance includes measures for sustainable forestry development in these countries.

The role of the EU in protecting forests has another dimension – the EU is a huge importer of tropical timber as well as an exporter of forestry know-how globally. It is therefore imperative that the EU develop a clear vision of what “sustainable forestry” implies, takes firm steps to implement this vision, and monitors these steps for results. The recent FLEGT initiative should help drastically reducing the amount of illegal timber arriving in the EU.

This paper emanates from the BirdLife Forest Task Force (FTF) response to the stakeholder consultation carried out in the late summer of 2004 on the implementation of the EU Forestry Strategy, as well as meetings between FTF and Forest units of DG Agriculture and DG Environment in June 2005. Its recommendations reflect recent advances in forest ecology and population

biology, based on decades of monitoring and research on the fluctuations of forest species and the quality of their habitats.

The BirdLife Forest Task Force (FTF) is a network of research institutes and conservation NGOs working for forest protection and sustainable commercial forest management across Europe. The FTF carries out scientific studies, provides forest conservation information and organises theme workshops, as well as working through BirdLife’s national Partner network to protect Europe’s most biologically valuable forests.

1. Increase the level of forest protection to ecologically sustainable levels

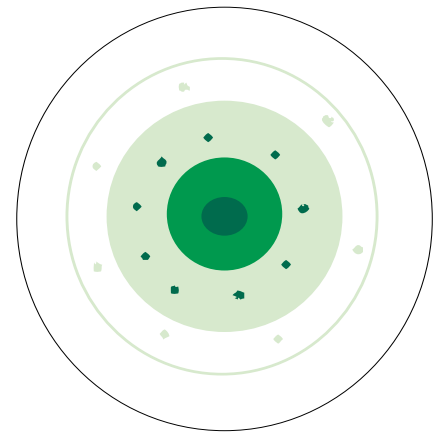
Objective: To gradually enlarge the area of strictly protected forests to ca 10 per cent of forest cover.

Forests preserving all or most of their natural features can still be found in some regions in Europe, especially the North and East of the continent, as well as in mountains (Angelstam and Lazdinis 2000). The need for protecting more of these forests has been proved by forest ecology research (Hanski 2004). Despite the NATURA 2000 process, the amount of strictly protected forest in Europe is so low – between 1–2 per cent on average, and everywhere less than five – that the threshold for the continued presence of many specialised species is not met. This is compounded by the fact that much of this protected forest was earlier in commercial use, and is therefore not yet suitable for some of the species it is supposed to protect. Several scientific papers have confirmed that even a “best practice” forest management policy is incompatible with the dynamics of a forest in a natural condition; management applied to a natural forest leads unavoidably to a change of the ecosystem character (Hanski 2004). These are the fundamental reasons why forest biodiversity in Europe continues to decline, as documented by the EU itself and numerous in-country studies on various specialised taxa (e.g. EEA 2004, Penttilä 2004, Pykälä 2002, Kurki et al. 2000, Rassi 2000, Väisänen, Lammi & Koskimies 1998, Siitonen & Martikainen 1994).

Species’ populations are inevitably connected with the availability of proper ecological conditions. In general, the population of a species over a region begins to decline rapidly and unpredictably once the amount of available suitable habitat drops below 20 per cent of the original amount. However, a 10 per cent forest protection level is acceptable, if these are chosen carefully to represent all forest types, and that simultaneously a much greater share of commercial forests are managed to become more imitative of natural conditions (Hanski 2004). Of EU Member States, Estonia and Sweden have already made long-term political commitments to set aside 10 per cent of forests for conservation and non-timber use. It is imperative that the rest of the EU follow suit if it is to fulfil its stated target to halt biodiversity loss by 2010.

Recommendations:

The FAP should include a long term vision for increasing the amount of strictly protected forests to cover all the remaining natural old-growth forests in Europe, and provide for their enlargement through restoration if necessary for the reserves’ long-term ecological viability.



Achieving biodiversity conservation in forests requires strictly protecting at least 10 per cent of forests (darkest green), managing a further ten per cent particularly sensitively (lighter green), and improving biodiversity-enhancement measures also in “ordinary” commercial forests (lightest green). The small dark green dots symbolise Woodland Key Habitats, rare habitat patches that should always be retained in all forest types (see p. 11). The outermost pale green ring and pale dots symbolise lost forest cover, which needs to be taken into account when calculating the amount of remaining forest to be protected and restored.

2. Assess and improve the ecological integrity of the Natura 2000 forest network

Objective: To revise the integrity of NATURA 2000 to establish an ecologically adequate and representative network of forest protected areas in the EU.

The implication of theoretical ecological research as well as inventory results from forests managed under attempts at biodiversity-friendly management schemes (e.g. under various certification schemes) during the last ten years is that in general the forest network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are not in themselves sufficient to achieve favourable conservation status of the species and habitats for which they were nominated (Hanski 2004). According to the European Environment Agency report on SPAs (EEA 2004), the median size of SPAs is lower

than 1000 ha for several countries including Finland, Sweden, Ireland and Belgium, and for most countries it is lower than 2000 ha (data is not available for the new Member States). This means that there are many, relatively small SPAs designated even in countries with very high forest cover. The implications of this for conservation of forest biodiversity need to be assessed as a matter of priority. Results from a joint BirdLife International-WWF project on mapping high conservation value forests in the Baltic States (Kurlavicius et al. 2003) revealed that a considerable amount of biologically potentially valuable forest lay outside existing protected areas.

In 2007, Member States are expected to report on the status of species and habitats listed in the Habitats Directive. In the report, they should identify favourable reference values for these species and habitats, including forests. Setting meaningful values will almost certainly imply restoration measures in some areas, as in many countries forest fragmentation and habitat quality have sunk to levels that undermine the viability of the remaining High Conservation Value Forests. To improve the coherence of Natura 2000 for forest ecosystems will probably mean the en-

largement of existing sites or designation of new ones, as well as more effective site management and implementation of biodiversity-enhancing measures within and outside designated sites. These measures should form a coherent whole aimed at connecting the protected sites into a functional ecological network.

Recommendations:

- In the EU15, finalise the designation of all forest SACs;
- Evaluate the ecological viability of the Natura 2000 network in terms of its ability to provide for the survival of the species and habitats for which it is designated;
- In the EU10, ensure that there is a sufficient number and area of SCIs for all forest species and habitats;
- Designation of all IBAs as SPAs;
- Set favourable reference values for all forest species and habitats listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives, and report on their status by 2007;
- Develop improved management regimes with measurable objectives for all NATURA 2000 sites, as part of achieving a favourable conservation status of species and habitats;
- Use the opportunities provided by the Habitats Directive Article 10 to improve the coherence of the Natura 2000 network.



The three-toed woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*) needs large areas of suitable habitat and would benefit from the concentration of conservation efforts in larger protected areas.

Photo: Jari Peltomäki / www.birdphoto.fi

3. Revise forest management practices to better support ecological and social objectives

Objective: To achieve truly multi-functional forestry in the EU.

Many forest-dependent birds, other animals and plants have a wide distribution and are dispersed over large areas of forests. The distribution of suitable habitat on a large scale is a crucial parameter to understanding how such species respond to fragmentation (Rolstad 1991, Andrén 1994 and references therein). For such species, protected areas alone are unlikely ever to be sufficient in maintaining their populations in the long term. To help maintain biodiversity in European forests, both the overall area and the ecological quality of the forests are important. For example, while the forest area in e.g. Finland has not declined for at least a century, intensive management for timber has considerably increased the number of endangered species in the last 50 years (Harkki et al. 2003). High forest cover per se does not necessarily correlate with forest species' well-being.

Managing commercial forests in a biodiversity-friendly way would benefit some less specialised but declining species (see references in Hanski 2004), and may make it possible for more specialised species to reach new suitable core areas more easily. Different measures benefit different species: many dispersed forest species benefit from

measures spread over large areas, for example increasing the amount and types of decaying wood in commercial forests (Bobiec et al. 2005). Other forest species are both locally concentrated and regionally dispersed: they live in often widely spread and naturally rare habitat patches. Such species typically have good dispersal ability but are dependent on finding new habitat patches for survival. It is important to retain such habitats – often referred to as Woodland Key Habitats (WKH) - in good ecological condition also in commercial forests.

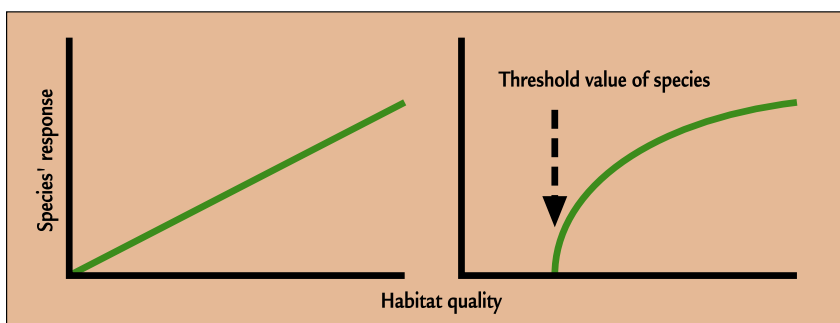
Often there are no restrictions on the management regimes of commercial forests outside of WKHs. As the above examples show, this approach alone does not work well for biodiversity conservation in boreal or nemoral forests, and biodiversity-enhancement measures should be extended into the entire forest area. WKHs are commonly also delineated too narrowly for the sites' characteristics' long-term survival following logging of the surrounding area (Pykälä, J. 2002).

Given information on the problem, it is likely that forest owners would be willing to accept biodiversity management objectives. For example, according to a recent study in Finland (Surakka & Walsh, in prep.) the majority of Finnish private and municipal forest owners would read-

ily manage their forests in a way preserving and enhancing the biological value of their forests if this were compensated or could be achieved without loss of revenue. Nearly a fifth of owners would be prepared to forgo also income. That such management is not realised in practice reflects the bias of current management advice towards intensive forestry based on clearcutting and replanting.

Recommendations:

- In forests across the EU, determine the size of Woodland Key Habitats by ecological criteria for continued viability, and enlarge their size as necessary;
- Develop guidelines for practising continuous cover forestry;
- Emphasise the use of environmentally low-impact silvicultural systems and ensure the inclusion of such commitments in National Forest Programmes;
- Ensure that National Forest Programmes do not restrict biodiversity, landscape and recreation delivery due to the economic interests of the nation's forest industries;
- Set minimum standards for sustainable forest management compliant with MCPFE Helsinki Principles;
- Ensure that information on the practice of and compensation for biodiversity-enhancing forestry measures are efficiently communicated to all forest owners throughout the EU;
- Promote the socio-economic, and biodiversity value of sustainably managed non-timber and low-extraction forest products such as preservation of cultural heritage, nature tourism, food products (e.g. mushrooms, berries), wood arts and crafts.



Two possible scenarios of species' response to changes in the quality of their habitat. On the left is a linear response, on the right a non-linear response. In the case of a non-linear response, the habitat quality has to exceed a threshold value for the species to have a viable population. Threatened species in particular tend to have a non-linear response. It is therefore important to consider how conservation efforts are distributed over the landscape.

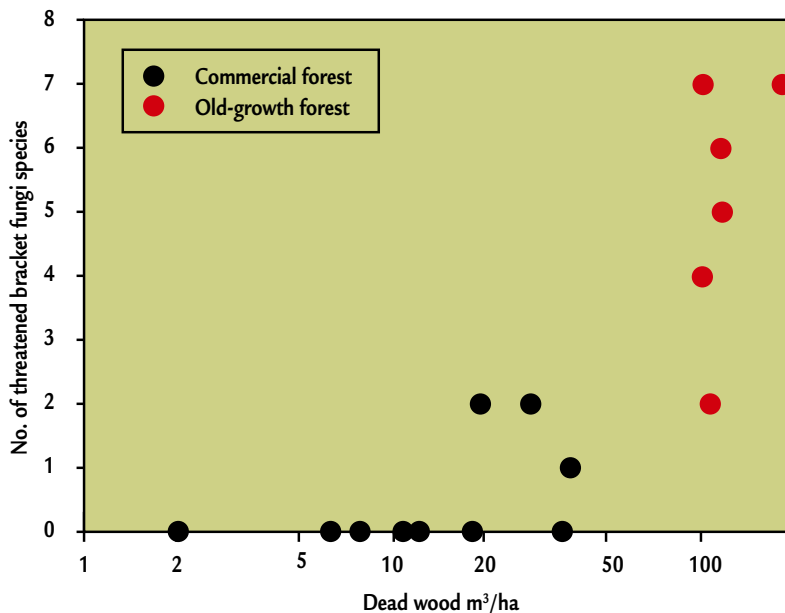
BirdLife International believes the EU should play an active role in ensuring that the Rural Development Regulation (RDR) delivers results for forest biodiversity. There are several key actions that should be undertaken at the EU level rather than left to the discretion of the Member States.

4. Enhancing biodiversity conservation in use of Rural Development funds

Objective: Maximise the use of Rural Development funds for forest biodiversity conservation.

Forest conditions vary widely within the EU, and the same goes for forestry operations and their socio-economic conditions. However, if Rural Development funds are to be used effectively throughout the EU to help more sustainable forestry, it is important to provide some overall guidance. EU guidelines need to be detailed for different biogeographic regions, and for broad categories of forest types. They should outline how the different instruments (forest-environmental measures, Natura 2000 payments, non-productive investments) can be translated into actual forest conservation schemes. The guidelines should draw both from the considerable existing scientific literature concerning forest ecology and from best practice experience throughout Europe.

Natura 2000 payments and forest environment measures are two of the most innovative and promising features of the new RDR. These hold promise for forest biodiversity conservation but, being innovative, require much assistance to Member States. EU guidelines and best practice exchange



Occurrence of threatened bracket fungi species in forest stands in North Häme (southern Finland) in relation to the amount of dead wood in the stand (Penttilä 2004). Compare with figure on threshold values in Ch. 3.

are particularly vital in this case. BirdLife International has identified the following actions as the most important to be supported through these instruments.

Recommendations:

- Rural Development funds should continue to be made available specifically for conservation of forests, including development programmes for rural areas where forests get protected and consequently become off-limits to logging, as well as for information campaigns on the need for and benefits of forest conservation;
- Provide examples of good forestry practices that should form the baseline for forest-environment schemes, as well as examples of acceptable forest environment measures that should be compensated by these payments;
- Comprehensive forest-environment schemes, analogous to agri-environment schemes, should be promoted in all Member States with the following basic requirements:
 - practising continuous cover or other forms of forestry limiting or eliminating clearcuts;
 - increasing the amount of decaying and dead wood to around 20–50 m³/ha wherever possible;
 - leaving permanently in the forest large trees of previous generations;
 - using only naturally occurring tree species in mixed stands, with natural regeneration;
 - favouring mixed stands where these occur naturally;
- maintaining uneven age canopy structure;
- creating sensitively managed buffer zones around protected and other significant forest areas;
- Ensure the inclusion of forest management measures for Natura 2000 sites in national Rural Development strategies and plans, and the allocation of adequate amounts of funding covering all types of eligible actions;
- Where appropriate, support forest grazing by livestock, traditional animal husbandry that contributes to development and maintenance of biologically rich but now rare anthropogenic woodland habitats. Such assemblages are now the second most threatened silvian habitats after old natural forests.



Photo: Jari Peltomäki / www.birdphoto.fi

5. The role of the European Commission in forest management under RDR

Objective: Enforce and strengthen the role of the European Commission in ensuring that the Rural Development Regulation delivers positive results for forest biodiversity.

The Commission has a role in ensuring that national Rural Development Plans are of good quality and take forest biodiversity conservation into account. This can be attained by providing Member States with technical guidelines on the use of the various instruments for forest conservation, facilitating exchange of best practice between Member States, and controlling the quality of plans submitted to the Commission for approval. Rural Development Plans (RDPs) should only be approved if they include convincing actions for biodiversity conservation, including forests. RDPs need to be

compatible with Member States' National Forest Programmes, and this should also be checked by the Commission.

The Commission has a role to encourage Member States to raise awareness among forest owners and managers as to the opportunities offered by the RDR. Promoting exchange of best practice among Member States and involving NGOs and local stakeholders can be extremely useful to this end.

The Commission needs to take steps to ensure that Rural Development funds are well spent and do not cause damage to natural habitats. The Commission should closely monitor the application of the RDR in all its phases and step in if funds are used in contradiction to EU legislation or policy. Such situations could arise from Rural Development spending on projects in Natura 2000 sites that have not undergone a correct impact evaluation, incorrect management of

forest undergrowth, or through afforestation projects damaging natural habitats or spreading alien species.

Recommendations:

- Approve National Rural Development Plans only if they provide good levels of forest protection;
- Raise forest managers' awareness of the Rural Development Regulation opportunities for biodiversity conservation;
- Provide for training of national/regional forest management advisors in biodiversity-enhancement measures for forestry, and for publications of training materials on this subject in national languages;
- Ensure through monitoring that Rural Development funds are spent without causing damage to the environment.



Key conservation measures for flying squirrels (*Pteromys volans*) are increasing the mix of deciduous trees in commercial spruce stands, as well as preservation of large aspens (*Populus tremula*) which this hole-nesting species needs for breeding.

Photo: LKA / Benjam Pönlinen

6. Develop clear rules for afforestation

Objective: To ensure that all afforestation financed by Rural Development funds contributes to maintaining or enhancing biodiversity.

Afforestation can be detrimental to the environment in several aspects. (1) It can be inappropriate in terms of planting non-native (exotic) tree species and creating monocultures, ignoring the ecological functions of the forest overall for mere timber production. (2) Planting of native tree species in inappropriate places – such as important peatland and grassland habitats under Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive – leads to degradation of other valuable non-forested habitats. (3) Inappropriately located afforestation can result in the establishment of unstable forest cover that gradually dies out because of the incompatibility with climatic or edaphic conditions of the site. Conifer plantations are also susceptible to pest outbreaks and facilitate the spread of forest fires, whereas drier regions' native trees are adapted and resistant to fire. Introduction of non-native tree species may lead to ecosystem change in large areas through uncontrolled spread of seeds originating from plantations.

Creation of new plantations must be avoided when another type of valuable habitat is jeopardised, as in the case of destruction of peat bogs, dry grasslands and Mediterranean scrub habitats. Measures should be included to properly locate new forests to ensure that they are not planted on ecologically valuable non-forest habitats. There must be continued support for removal of low conservation value forests from important open-ground habitats, e.g. peatlands in the UK and Ireland, steppes and dry grasslands in southern Europe, and for the



Photo: David Kjaer and rsfb-images.com

Spruce plantation in Scotland

substitution of non-native plantations with native forest species, e.g. Eucalyptus eradication and substitution with Cork Oak and Holm Oak in Spain.

Recommendations:

- Monoculture plantations of any tree species should be avoided;
- Forestry should be practised using mixes of locally naturally occurring tree species. There is no justification for spending EU funds on introducing non-native trees to any areas;
- Afforestation should be avoided on high value non-forest habitats;
- Inappropriately located plantations should be removed promptly and, if appropriate, replaced with native tree species. This measure would also help contain forest fires;
- In situations where eradication of non-native species can happen only in the long term, care should be taken that these species do not spread into surrounding native stands.

7. Ensuring that the EU's forest policies protect biodiversity also outside the union

Objective: To ensure that all actions of the EU contribute to the protection and sustainable use of forests outside its own territories.

A major part of the world's biodiversity is found in tropical forests. Tropical forests are being lost at an alarming rate through logging, burning, mining, conversion into agriculture land and other threats. The EU is one of the biggest consumers of imported timber from Developing Countries, including from tropical forests, which are often used unsustainably or cut illegally, hence contributing to the unacceptable loss of global biodiversity. The EU also has bilateral agreements for development assistance with several Developing Countries harbouring large areas of species-rich forests. Such agreements often include financial or technical assistance for the forestry sector, but also for projects that can damage forests. The European Investment Bank is one of the biggest of its kind, providing loans for infrastructure projects throughout the world, many of these resulting in the loss of forest biodiversity. The EU's trade policies also have a huge impact through driving the trade and consumption of goods produced in an environmentally unsustainable manner, often leading to further forest destruction (e.g. soybean, palmoil, bananas, coffee). The assessment of biodiversity impacts of these activities, directly or indirectly funded by the EU, is often missing or inadequate.

On the other hand, there is a specific budget line for conservation projects in tropical forests held by DG Development. It is intended for protection of biodiversity, although not all funded projects have done so. The EU's FLEGT initiative is aimed at combatting the import of illegally logged forest products, although the wording of

this action plan is very weak and non-committal. The implementation of the Kyoto protocol spearheaded by the EU could theoretically provide options for the protection of forests if carbon credits were directed solely at maintaining and enhancing natural forest cover in Developing Countries. This is not happening, however. Promoting and encouraging trade in goods produced in ways that help maintain biodiversity can also have a huge positive impact on retaining or restoring forest cover outside the EU. It is also politically imperative that the EU halt biodiversity loss in its own forests, as we cannot expect Developing Countries to carry out conservation measures we are refusing to implement ourselves.

Recommendations:

- Ban all imports of tropical timber where its origin cannot be reliably traced and

verified as coming from legally approved sources and away from sites of known conservation importance;

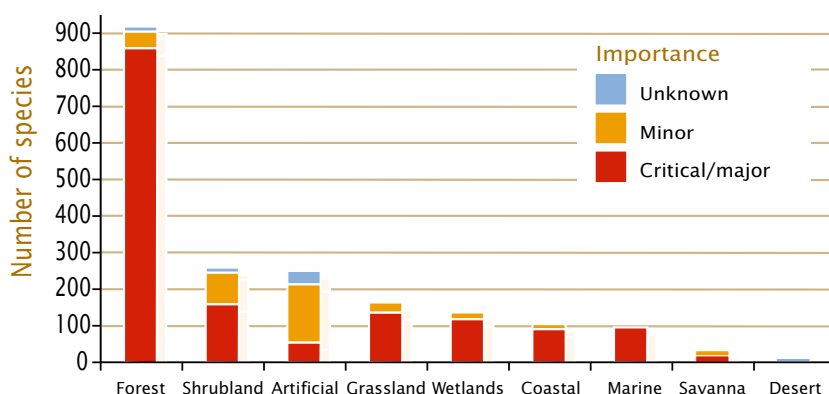
- EU institutions and Member States must lead by procuring FSC certified timber/wood products from outside the EU;
- The EU's tropical forest conservation budget line should be increased and its funds directed more strictly for environmentally beneficial projects;
- EU development assistance to Developing Countries should undergo rigorous assessment to establish potential negative impact on the remaining natural forests in these countries; any such negative impact should be eliminated at the planning stage;
- EU trade policy should actively promote biodiversity-friendly wood products that contribute to maintaining species-rich forests outside the EU.



Photo: M. B. Christiansen/BirdLife International

The relative importance of each major habitat type for globally threatened birds.

Source: BirdLife World Bird Database; Hilton-Taylor 2000.



8. Putting the spotlight on the importance of forests for society

Objective: To enhance the status of the forestry sector within the EU and its institutions.

In many EU Member States, the forestry sector has little strength, political power, or resources, mostly due to the relatively small contribution to the national economy and employment. Even where the timber sector is commercially significant, the multi-functional role of forests and the ecosystem services they provide to society are not captured in national accounts. The long rotation period of forests makes it difficult to evaluate their contribution to annual financial balance sheets. Sustainable forestry is also still mostly equated with maintaining forest cover regardless of the quality of the habitat.

The privatisation of national forests in several of the new Member States often results in their exploitation beyond their natural

regenerative capacity due to short-term economic interests. There is a clear conflict between the interests of the owners and managers of forests and the interest of society as a whole that needs to be addressed. Forests should be seen as a public good benefiting all and forest owners and managers regarded as stewards of this highly valuable resource in the long term.

Recommendations:

- The implementation of the Forest Action Plan should be the joint responsibility of all the relevant sectoral DGs in the European Commission (agriculture, environment, trade, development, etc.) and the

sectoral Ministries at the Member State level. Co-ordinating bodies should be established to harmonise efforts between the relevant sectors;

- Both EU and national funding should be allocated to awareness-raising campaigns targeted at decision-makers, stakeholders and the general public to increase the understanding and appreciation of the value of forests, both within and outside Europe;
- Promote the socio-economic benefits and biodiversity value of sustainably managed timber products, as well as low-extraction and non-timber forest products such as nature tourism, food products, wood arts and crafts.



Fungi are a classic non-timber forest crop of considerable commercial value

Photo: Javier Mansilla

9. Forest monitoring and research

Objective: To enhance the understanding of forests and monitor their functioning as natural ecosystems, as well as the impact of management regimes.

Forests are one of the most complex and species-rich ecosystems on Earth. Understanding the natural functioning of these ecosystems should be a top research priority to help the development of management

regimes that imitate natural processes and result in the least possible impact on the ecosystem and its parts. Climate change is likely to lead to big changes in the natural distribution of various forest habitats, as well as in their species composition and structure, which needs to be modelled, anticipated and mitigated or compensated. Monitoring the impact of both natural and man-made changes in forests is essential.

The EU's Forest Focus regulation includes provisions for biodiversity monitoring in forests, although the future of this

regulation is uncertain. The BirdLife/EBCC (European Bird Census Council) common bird index developed in recent years is the first biodiversity indicator available covering the majority of the EU member states, which also includes an index on the population trends of common forest bird species. The sensitivity of this index, as well as its geographical and species coverage will need to be increased in the near future and its delivery secured in the long term. The mapping of all remaining forests of high conservation value is another important tool (see Kurlavicius et al. 2003), which should help the development of policies and measures designed to maintain and enhance the overall conservation value of forest stands in the EU.

Sedentary hole-dependent birds are among the best avian indicators of forest ecosystem health

Photo: Jari Peltomäki / www.birdphoto.fi



Recommendations:

- Ensure the continuation of the Forest Focus monitoring system under the LIFE+ funding instrument; ensure the co-ordination of forest monitoring efforts at the national level, including monitoring forest biodiversity;
- Include the Common Bird Index of BirdLife/EBCC, including an index on forest birds, to the EU's shortlist of Structural Indicators;
- Support research into the valuation of the services of forest ecosystems;
- Support research into setting favourable reference values for forest species and habitats;
- Support research into the effect of climate change on forest ecosystems and key forest species;
- Support the development of an inventory and detailed mapping of old-growth natural forest remnants, forests of high conservation value and forest protected areas partly through the adoption of the new proposed INSPIRE Directive.

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The BirdLife European Forest Task Force

The BirdLife European Forest Task Force's goals are to:

- promote a vision of a European network of protected forests sufficiently large and strictly protected to prevent further extinction of forest species
- ensure that commercial forest management practices in Europe do not harm forests of high biological value
- support the recovery of biodiversity through restoration of intensively managed forests – both protected and commercial – to a more natural state
- promote the social and economic possibilities of forest protection and low-extraction uses of timber, especially for the benefit of rural communities
- develop and promote scientific monitoring schemes for assessing forest biodiversity

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