

FOREST CAPERS

Newsletter of the BirdLife Forest Task Force



#4 JANUARY, 2007

BirdLife European Forest Task Force

In this issue:

BIRDS AS FOREST INDICATORS

The past year saw a major breakthrough in the application of bio-indicators for assessing the health of the environment in the EU. The European Commission has approved the use of a farmland bird indicator developed by BirdLife International and other ornithological experts as an official measure of sustainable development. There is evidence this indicator performs well, not least because of the comprehensive data on birds available from across Europe, unmatched by any other taxa. Can we achieve a quality bird-based indicator for forests, a much more heterogeneous environment across the EU than farmland? It's certainly worth a try.

FOREST INDICATORS FOR EUROPE (FINE): THE FIRST YEAR BEHIND US

From June to October 2006 student volunteers from around Europe scrutinised a total of 80 hectares along 80 km of forest transects in Poland. Most of the plots represented either mixed oak-hornbeam forests, such as the famous Bialowieza forest, and montane beech forests, such as those of the Bieszczady mountains, both in E Poland. The plots represent a wide range of habitats, from close-to-natural to various degrees of disturbance. The first field season shows FINE to be an efficient tool for forest habitat quality assessment.

CONSERVATION PLAN FOR BIALOWIEZA READY

A plan for improving the protection of Poland's legendary Bialowieza Primeval Forest is in preparation. Based on a thorough inter-disciplinary analysis, the plan lays out the distribution of remaining old-growth, large ungulate and predator populations, the local demand for firewood and raw materials, the region's demographic trends, and non-timber values. The Bialowieza plan is entering the critical consultation phase, and will need to ride out the inevitable criticism from commercial interests. Preservation of Bialowieza Forest and improvement of its management is not just a Polish internal affair, but about whether Europe takes seriously conservation of its wildlife and natural heritage.

NEW FSC CONTROLLED WOOD REGULATION - GOOD MARKETING OR GRAVE ERROR?

Controlled wood timber is subject to considerably less environmental and social control than "real" FSC timber. Given the current tide of complaints over some certifiers' performance, the Controlled Wood standard's lax controls do not inspire confidence.

CORK ON TOP—FOR NATURE AND WILDLIFE

Cork and wine share a common history centuries old. Few oenophiles realise that a bottle of wine contains not only a pleasant drink but — through the demand that keeps cork oak forests standing—thousands of families' livelihoods, millions of birds wintering grounds, and the home of numerous endemic plant and animal species! Consumers show a clear preference of cork as bottle stoppers, but cork is nonetheless disappearing from the market. Synthetic substitutes are threatening to replace natural cork stoppers due to their lower price and more even quality.

THE USE OF RENEWABLES AND ITS EFFECTS

Promotion of woody biomass for energy production is likely to encourage further large scale afforestation in Europe. Large power plants will need large-scale wood harvesting, which threatens to introduce yet more intensive short-term plantations to satisfy ever-increasing energy needs. The forecast is negative effects on landscape management, soils and natural forest habitats.

FORESTS - THE CENTRE OF BRUSSELS' ATTENTION - FOR A MOMENT

On 24-25 October at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting, EU agriculture ministers adopted conclusions on the EU Forest Action Plan. The Council invited the Commission to appoint Action Plan Co-ordinators in all relevant Commission Directorates-General, and together with Member States "to ensure the effective and balanced implementation of key actions".

INNOVATIVE FINNISH FOREST CONSERVATION PROGRAMME YIELDS MIXED RESULTS

Raising the area of protected forest in S Finland to the biological minimum would require protecting ca. 1.1 million ha. This can be realistically achieved over a period of 20-30 years, but at current METSO (innovative forest conservation programme, follow-up to the Finnish Natura2000) programme recruitment rates the process will take some 240 years.

FOREST MAPPING GOES FURTHER SOUTH—JOB OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE FOREST TASK FORCE

In 2007 BirdLife's mapping of High Conservation Value Forests will extend to Bulgaria and Romania. Besides their warmer climate, altitudinal variation — high mountain chains, Black sea influence, and the Danube river — all add to the great diversity of the region's forest ecosystem types. For successful project implementation the FTF is looking to hire national forest officers in Bulgaria and Romania as well as a Project Manager and a Mapping Feasibility Officer. The latter will assess forest data availability in other countries for future mapping efforts.

If you wish to subscribe to FOREST CAPERS Newsletter please send your name, e-mail and organization to forest@birdlife.fi

BIRDS AS FOREST HEALTH INDICATORS

The 2006 FTF workshop was organised as part of a larger NGO symposium "The Global Importance of the Boreal Forest: Migratory Birds and the Paper Industry", held from 11-13 September in Cambridge. The forest bird indicator topic was introduced by one of the keynote-speakers — Prof. Sören Svensson of Lund University, Sweden. The discussion centred around the viability of various boreal bird species as potential indicators of natural conditions in forests: residents, short-distance migrants, and long-distance migrants. Prof. Svensson showed that species trends in Sweden and Finland correlated well, so they can be used to construct common Fennoscandian forest indices. Probably the data tell us something about trends also in the Baltic States and westernmost Russia. Professor Svensson discussed, among the other things, whether an indicator should be related to biodiversity in general, or to indicate a specific set of properties using a small set of specialist species. On the basis of the presented results it was recommended that there should be one forest indicator based on specialist bird species that correlate strongly with a high degree of "naturalness" in boreal forest and one general biodiversity indicator for boreal and hemiboreal region. The former should use resident old-growth and swamp forest birds while the latter one should include forest birds in general.

BIRDLIFE HEADS MAJOR ECOSYSTEM BIO-INDICATOR BREAKTHROUGH - BUT FORESTS STILL A CHALLENGE

A CHALLENGE

Marcus Walsh, BirdLife European Forest Task Force

marcus.walsh@iki.fi

Imagine a company putting millions of Euros into a product's quality improvement without any follow-up as to whether it was actually succeeding. Sounds unlikely, but it is what the forest and agriculture sector has largely been doing in the EU and elsewhere for well over a decade. Major measures for biodiversity, such as agri-environment schemes or forest certification, are designed to cut species losses by e.g. leaving patches of untouched habitat for wildlife. But are they having a sufficient effect? How do we measure it?

The past year saw a major breakthrough in the application of bio-indicators for assessing the health of the environment in the EU. The European Commission has approved the use of a farmland bird indicator developed by BirdLife as an official measure of sustainable development and the impact of the EU Rural Development regulation¹. There is good evidence² this indicator performs well (Fig.1), not least because of the comprehensive

data on birds available from all across Europe, unmatched by any other taxa.

Can we achieve a quality bird-based indicator for forests, a much more heterogeneous environment across the EU than farmland? It's certainly worth a try: birds are relatively easy and cheap to census, popular with the general public, and large data sets can and have been gathered through BirdLife Partners across Europe for an excellent price/quality ratio. Few birds are probably as sensitive to changes in forest structure as, say, specialised bracket fungi, but the practical advantages of a bird-based forest indicator are such that they merit careful attention.

Forest cover or ecosystem health?

European forest cover is increasing, but forest biodiversity is not, even in areas that have maintained forest cover (Fig.2). Although deforestation in Europe has been reversed, the replanted stocks, often coniferous monocultures of sometimes even non-native trees, are frequently little more than plantations. They are hardly even related to the majestic mixed for-

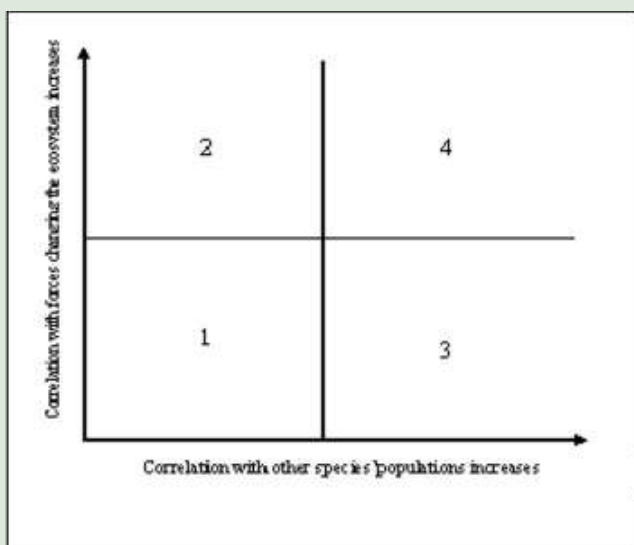


Fig. 1. The ideal indicator species or group of species is sensitive to both changes of its environment and changes in the populations of other species. Such an indicator is referred to as a type 4 indicator. An indicator may react better to specific driving forces affecting the ecosystem (type 2 indicator), or correlate well with changes in biodiversity in the system (type 3 indicator). Adapted from Gregory, R.D. et al. 2005: *Developing indicators for European birds. Phil. Trans. R. Soc. Lond. B.*

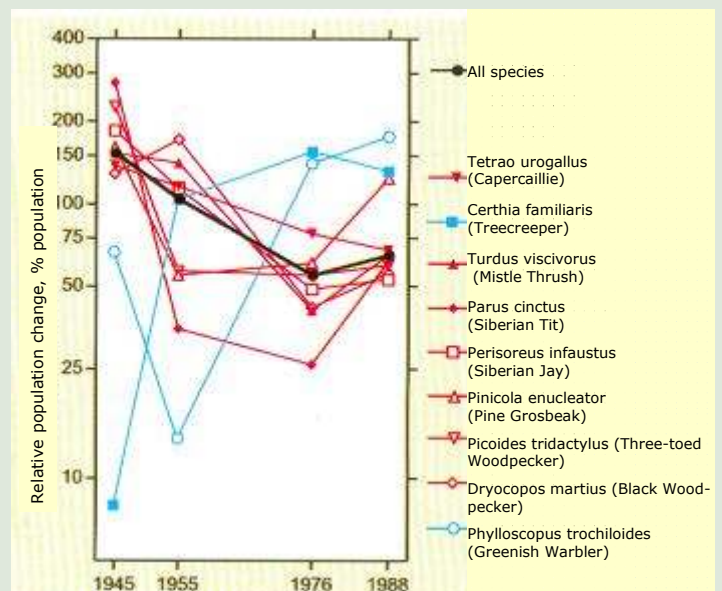


Fig.2. Trends in forest specialist birds in Finland show that forest ecosystem health has declined even though the country has maintained and even increased forest cover, at 70% the highest in Europe. Data from Väisänen, R., Lammi, E. & Koskimies, P. 1998: *Muuttuva pesimälinnusto (2nd Finnish Bird Atlas)*, Helsinki

ests that once dominated Europe and of little help in preserving natural variety. It is the status and restoration of our natural

¹See http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1998,47433161,1998_47437045&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

²Gregory, R.D. et al. 2005: *Developing indicators for European birds. Phil. Trans. R. Soc. Lond. B.*



The Willow Tit (*Parus montanus*) excavates its own nest hole in decaying wood, and where common may be a good indicator of natural conditions in spruce and mixed forests. Photo credit: Teppo Komulainen

forests we need to measure, not merely the presence of trees. The species of Fig.2 point to some of the answers of using birds as indicators. Four of them are hole nesters and all but two are non-migrants. Only three are common outside boreal or montane regions.

Collectively the species make up an indicator particular to their region, they are not affected by considerations at wintering grounds (few migrant European birds winter in forests), and are sensitive to changes in natural forest conditions such as fragmentation of habitat, loss of dead trees, and clearance of non-commercial trees and undergrowth. These are the factors affecting a range of other taxa as well.

Why aren't the birds of Fig. 2 in use already? Firstly, only some of the species range outside northernmost Europe, so that for other parts of Europe other species will need to be selected. This will be particularly hard in regions such as the British Isles and S Europe generally, where the very long land use history has reduced forest cover drastically, so that natural forests and their associated species have already virtually disappeared. In such cases it is not immediately obvious what kind of forest biodiversity one wants to measure.

Secondly, many of the species listed in Fig.2 are not easy to census either because they are hard to detect or too thinly distributed to be recorded in enough numbers to reliably estimate

population changes over time. One solution to this may be to use commoner sedentary birds as surrogates for rarer ones; they may not be as sensitive to environmental changes as specialists, but their populations do notably better in natural forests than commercial ones. Two examples of such species are given in Fig.3.

Current research

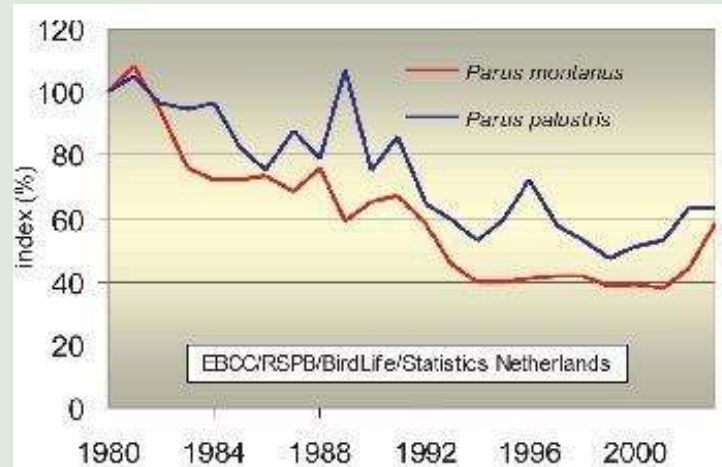


Fig. 3. Willow (*Parus montanus*) and Marsh (*P. palustris*) Tit populations have declined in tandem with loss of natural conditions in the EU's forests. Relative population change in annual censuses across Europe compared to 1980. Copyright European Bird Census Council, www.ebcc.info

Current research by BirdLife on the forest indicator issue includes statistical analysis of suitable regional species by the Pan European Common Bird Monitoring Group (see www.ebcc.info), and the FINE project (Forest INDicators for Europe) run by the Forest Task Force and the BirdLife Partner in Poland (OTOP), which is looking at correlations between commoner forest birds, forest structure, and other species groups such as beetles and plants. First results can be expected in 2007.

FINE: THE FIRST YEAR BEHIND US

Andrej Bobiec, a.bobiec@neostrada.pl

As presented in earlier issues of Forest Capers, the Polish BirdLife partner (OTOP) is spearheading development work of Forest Indicators in Europe ("FINE"). Thanks to the grant awarded by GEF/UNDP, 40 out of an eventual 120 plots have so far been set by FTF and OTOPI, a process to be completed by the end of 2007. As yet the project covers four types of forests: Middle — southern boreal and hemiboreal pine forest, Mixed oak-hornbeam forest, Lowland and submontane beech forest, and Montane beech and mixed beech-fir-spruce forest (nomenclature from "Indicators for forest biodiversity in Europe" BEAR <http://www.algonet.se/~bear/Bear2.pdf>).

From June to October 2006 fifteen student volunteers from Poland, Sweden, The Netherlands, Germany, and Russia scrutinised a total of 80 ha along 80 km of straight lines crossing forests randomly. All but one of the plots were situated in the eastern part of Poland. Most of them represented either mixed oak-hornbeam forests, such as the famous Bialowieza forest, or montane beech forests. The plots represent a wide range of habitats, from close-to-natural to those representing various degrees of disturbance. The first field season proved FINE an efficient tool for forest habitat assessment.

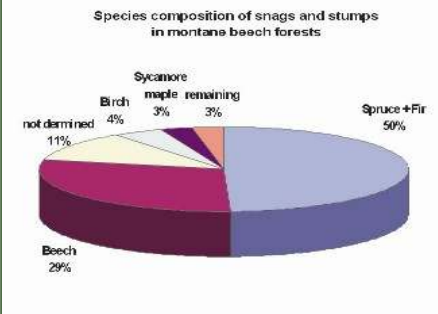
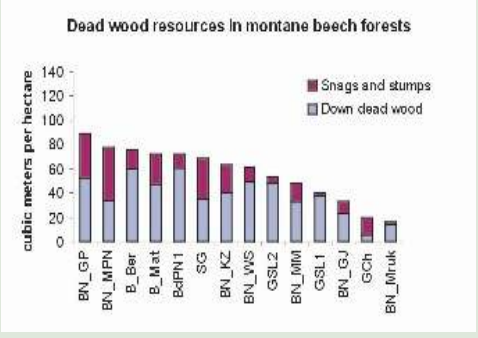


It was a great pleasure to work in the company of such highly motivated, hard working and reliable young researchers. Forest and national park administrations also provided invaluable support during plots location.

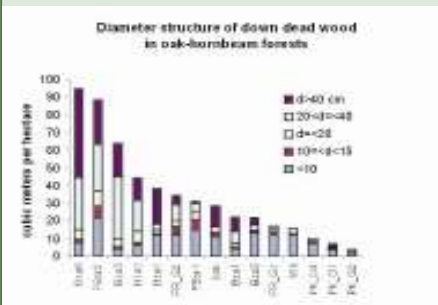
A Pan-European Forest Bird Diversity Monitoring workshop

was held under the auspices of The European Topic Centre on Biological Conservation and The European Forest Institute in September in Paris. It brought together 13 experts in bird and forest monitoring and inventory. The Participants presented data sets on European forests: EU biodiversity monitoring activities under the Forest Focus pilot programme BioSoil; an overview of Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring and the ETC/BD Feasibility Study on Linking Bird Monitoring and Forest Condition Monitoring. On the agenda was the integration of forest bird monitoring and forest structure datasets. The workshop revealed strong similarities between BioSoil and FINE (Forest Indicators in Europe—see adjacent article). The participants stressed the need for evaluation of different options for the development of forest bird monitoring. The follow-up of the Paris meeting will be preparation of a joint project proposal to bring European experts together to integrate bird and forest monitoring data under a comprehensive International Cooperative Programme.

Although only one third of plots have been set so far, first results indicate a higher average volume of dead wood in the inventoried forests than expected (50 m³ per plot, ranging from 6 to nearly 130 m³). Among mixed oak-hornbeam forest plots the strict nature serve of the Bialowieza National Park (Bza1, 3, 6) and the reserve Borki (PBor2) in the Borecka forest are obvious winners as to the total amount of dead wood, the amount of dead trunks thicker than 40 cm (the most important for biodiversity), and the percentage of the old-growth phase. These parameters seem to correlate quite well.



In SE Poland the montane beech and mixed beech-fir communities reveal a lower variability in the content of dead wood than the oak-hornbeam forests, ranging from 16 to nearly 90 m³ per plot, 57 m³ on average. Although the plot in the Bieszczady National Park (BdNP) held the highest amount of dead wood, protection form seems to play a smaller role as a factor of dead wood amount and old-growth area than in the lowland forests. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, conifers contribute to half of the standing dead wood volume in beech dominated stands.



As most of the plots investigated during the last season are situated in the largest and best preserved forest massifs, we expect the dead wood volume and the old-growth rate will be lower when new plots are established in other forest areas.

The project seems to have a high potential to become a tool used for the assessment of the effects of both conservation forms and forest management certification schemes. The Forest Task Force and OTOP are looking for financial and partnership opportunities that would help to extend the project to other regions and types of forest as well as to append the scheme with detailed taxonomic inventory.

As most of the plots investigated during the last season are situated in the largest and best preserved forest massifs, we expect the dead wood volume and the old-growth rate will be lower when new plots are established in other forest areas.

The project seems to have a high potential to become a tool used for the assessment of the effects of both conservation forms and forest management certification schemes. The Forest Task Force and OTOP are looking for financial and partnership opportunities that would help to extend the project to other regions and types of forest as well as to append the scheme with detailed taxonomic inventory.

We would like to express our gratitude to all the volunteers who took part in the project so far for their great contribution. You are all welcome to join again the next year, as soon as the snow melts ... There is still a lot to do to complete the current stage of the project, and we will be disseminating soon an additional call for volunteers.

Fieldwork is scheduled to finish in autumn 2007. We are planning to present our findings and discuss the future possible applications of the project at a forest indicator conference at the end of 2007.

PLAN FOR BIALOWIEZA READY!

As reported in the July edition of Forest Capers, the President of Poland has asked a special task force of independent experts to prepare a report on special legislation needed for efficient protection of Bialowieza Primeval Forest (BPF). The group of eighteen specialists in ecology, forest sciences, nature protection, economy, law and landscape architecture began its work at the beginning of July. On December 4th, 2006, the task force handed to the President the result of its intensive work consisting of three proposed legal acts: (1) National Park of Bialowieza Primeval Forest Act with a provisional protection plan; (2) An Amendment to the current Conservation Act; (3) Act on a Long-Term Programme of Sustainable Development for the Bialowieza Forest Region. The major changes in the Conservation Act refer to the park establishment procedure and, most importantly, to the new

definitions of protection regimes and rules of access to protected areas. Currently only strict preservation (23% of the Polish NPs' area in total) and active protection (usually abused for regular "sanitation cutting") are distinguished. Besides STRICT PRESERVATION the amended act foresees zones for:
 INTEGRATED CONSERVATION: traditional non-timber, low-intensity use of forest;
 ACTIVE CONSERVATION: the measures necessary to restore or to keep a community in a certain stage of development, activities aimed at increasing the amount of dead wood, secure adequate level of grazing, etc.; i.e. unlike today's "active protection", this precludes wood extraction from the forest;
 CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT: restoration measures changing artificial stands back to native forest.
 LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION: the "softest" conservation regime, applicable mainly to private or developed enclaves and to buffer areas outside the parks.

The plan for Bialowieza Primeval Forest was prepared on the basis of a thorough, inter-disciplinary analysis, looking at the distribution of the old-growth remnants, large ungulate and predator populations, local demand for firewood and raw materials, demographic trends in the region, contingent and other non-use values analyses. The National Park of the BPF, covering the whole of the Polish part of the forest, would consist of 20% of strict preservation, 43% integrated conservation, 6% active conservation, 29% of conservation management, and 2% of landscape conservation. The restoration management carried out in the conservation management zone will allow extraction of wood in order to satisfy the need in the Bialowieza region but will cease the current export which is about three quarters of the extracted amount of timber. The Long-Term Programme of Sustainable

Development for the BPF Region will require the financial involvement of state, private and EU resources. This should aim at revitalising the impoverished towns and villages based on collapsing timber extraction economies at the edge of the forest, and transform them into prosperous gateway communities capitalising on the protection of the unique natural and cultural values of the region.

The success of the Bialowieza project would mean fulfilment the goal of the worldwide and long-lasting campaign for conservation of this most precious remnant of primeval forests in Europe. It would also mean establishment of the new

model of the national park as an efficient steward of the natural heritage and a strong partner to local communities. It seems that such a model is not only needed in the Bialowieza region, but in many other Polish and European natural areas as well.

Hopefully the influence of opposite interests will not prevail and the high state authority initiative will eventually succeed. It is not just about a Polish internal affair, it is about the Europe's natural heritage and therefore deserves due attention and active support of the whole EU Community.

CORK ON TOP

For nature and wildlife

Cork is the bark of a tree species distributed only in the Western Mediterranean - the cork oak (*Quercus suber* L). Cork is an ecological, recyclable and biodegradable material. In Portugal, cork oak forests represent around 21% of the total forest area and are called Montados. Today's Montados are a unique ecologically and culturally stable system - the result of the harmonious co-existence of human and nature for millennia. Varying from arable land with single trees to dense oak forests, they provide excellent conditions for cattle-rearing, production of honey, cereals, mushrooms as well as hunting grounds and tourism opportunities.

This highly sustainable multifunctional agro-forestry system has increased carbon fixation rate due to mainly its non-timber uses—cork extraction. Cork oak forests also reduce soil erosion and fire (it is not a coincidence that cork trees cover the area that faces highest fire risk) and protect water resources, helping to prevent desertification of arid southern Portugal. Montados often overlap with regions where employment and income opportunities are scarce, which makes them also socially significant. Examples of such integrated system where environment, local people and industry all benefit are rare.

Portugal produces about 60% of the world's cork. Production of cork materials is a major contributor to the exports of the country, and not least local employment. Insulation materials, construction pavements and clothing are examples of cork products, but it is the manufacture of cork stoppers that generates about 70% of the industry's income.



Cork is harvested when the tree becomes 45 years old; on average its bark is being stripped around 16 times during its lifetime, at nine-year intervals. Photo: APCOR

Cork and wine share a common history for centuries. However, while market investigations among wine consumers have shown a clear preference for cork stoppers, retailers foresee cork soon disappearing from the market! Synthetic substitutes are threatening to replace cork due to their lower price and aggressive marketing strategies. At the same time wine producers and distributors are not eager to take an active role in promotion of natural cork.

With abandonment of agricultural land, the area of cork forests is actually increasing but nevertheless the cork sector is facing big challenges -

NEW FSC CONTROLLED WOOD REGULATION - good marketing or grave error?

November saw publication of the revised FSC "Controlled Wood" standard. The standard specifies what kind of non-FSC timber may be mixed with FSC timber for selling under the FSC "mixed sources" label. CW timber is subject to considerably less environmental and social control than "real" FSC timber. The idea is to offer companies a faster way to partial FSC certification in regions where FSC National Initiatives or standards don't exist. However, it is feared that controlled wood will not be a step towards rigorous FSC standards but a way to get around them.

There is a real difference between FSC certified and controlled in the forest as well. Timber may be labeled as FSC-Controlled by the producer if they can demonstrate that it comes from "non-High Conservation Value Forests" - i.e. not from biologically or socially controversial sources - is legally logged, and does not contain genetically modified wood. The regulation requires NGOs to be "consulted" over these issues, but the final decision as to what sources are "controversial" lies between the FSC-accredited certifying company and the timber company. Given the current tide of complaints over some certifiers' performance, the Controlled Wood standard's lax controls do not inspire confidence.

The Controlled Wood initiative may have its biggest impact in the tropics, where FSC has been slow to make progress and where the top priority is to save pristine HCVF rainforest areas from being logged. However, in many parts of the world it is not well known where HCVFs are. In Europe there is much forest of biological and cultural value outside of the FSC system, the whereabouts of which is many cases not well known. The danger is that a lot of this will be lost in blanket classifications of large areas as "non-HCVF" just because the valuable sites have not been mapped. Europe has so little remaining old growth and semi-natural forest remaining that this is unacceptable, especially under the guise of the FSC.

Designation of FSC Controlled Wood areas should only be made after thorough inventories of the area's forest types and ages, and cross checks with authorities on the presence of endangered species. The costs of these should be borne by those benefiting financially from the FSC Controlled Wood label.

production of cork stoppers has dropped by 20% in the last 5 years. Despite their high protection status (Portugal's environmental legislation protecting cork forests was first enacted in the early 13th century, and they are currently recognised also by the EU Habitats Directive), only economic incentives can save them from

replacement by other land uses. Environmentalists and cork producers in Spain and Portugal are struggling to preserve this unique system and secure its people and biodiversity well-being. Recognizing the threats, BirdLife Partner organizations in Portugal and UK, supported by the Portuguese Cork Industry, are campaigning

to inform consumers that along with a bottle of cork-stoppered wine they also buy thousands of families' livelihood, millions of birds' wintering and migrating grounds, and the home of many breeding birds as well as numerous endemic plant and animal species.

THE USE OF RENEWABLES AND ITS EFFECTS

In late summer of 2006 the EU Commission carried out a consultation on public attitudes to the use of renewable energy sources (RES) and obstacles impeding their wider utilization. BirdLife's response questioned the uncritical promotion of wood biomass with regard to the undesirable side-effects this could bring about.

Despite the fact that, unlike in many other parts of the world, the total forest area of Europe is increasing, much of this is of plantations and other heavily managed forests of little ecological or social value. The surplus in the annual wood growth increment in European forests is perhaps enough to satisfy the energy needs of people living in rural areas, but going for large scale reductions of greenhouse gas emissions through a more intensive use of wood is dubious. Renewable Energy Sources (RES) such as wood usually require small-scale and decentralized use. The transition from conventional energy sources requires big investments in the new technologies' products which could be much more efficient when burning wood but simply not affordable for ordinary consumers.

This means that promotion of wood biomass will inevitably encourage the building of large scale power plants, the servicing of which will likely increase plantation-style conifer afforestation similar to that of the post-war period 1950s-80s. More negative effects on landscapes, soils and habitats could also be expected.

There is already money assigned for new

plantations waiting to be picked up. Almost half of Rural Development Fund money for forestry measures in the previous programming period was spent on afforestation. In some cases it left a trail of destruction, to mention a few examples from Latvia, UK and Spain, where it irreversibly destroyed grassland, peatland and steppe habitats – all important biodiversity strongholds. The promotion of biomass can be expected to exacerbate threats to precious non-forested habitats. Nevertheless, development of common guidelines for afforestation as proposed by the Commission were almost unanimously rejected by Member States. Recently, a workshop organized by Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy Secretariat and MCPFE discussed an IUCN paper on Recommendations for afforestation and reforestation. While the original document correctly identified the potential threats to biodiversity caused by afforestation and reforestation, the revision made by the participating states made the text fuzzy and soft.

Another ecological problem is the extraction of decaying woody biomass and intensive collection of fallen residues. It leads to reduced nutrient availability as well as excessively low levels of decaying wood. The latter reduces the availability of habitats of many endangered species and causes disturbance of ecosystem functions such as water holding capacity—decayed logs act like a sponge—they absorb and can hold over twice its own weight in water.

The use of biomass should also be looked

at in terms of its carbon-energy balance. Biomass for energy production is more "carbon-neutral" compared to the production of biofuels due to the omission of refinery and distillery processes which are also energy-demanding. However, besides acting destructively on the environment, the use of biomass can also increase the C footprint: About 25-30% of global greenhouse gas emissions are the consequence of deforestation (FAO). In areas with high standing stock carbon such as the old-growth forest, often the most favourable solution is to leave it out of production. For example the forests and peatlands in Canada store an estimated 67 billion tonnes of carbon - almost eight times the amount of carbon produced by human activities worldwide in 2000. Up-rooting stumps followed by deep ploughing lead to carbon emissions released by the soil; short-term forestry with frequent removal of above-ground and/or underground stump biomass may lead to more intensive atmospheric weathering and the more rapid release of carbon stored in the rocks and soil.

Rushed targets for RES use may prove unrealistic, bringing instead only negative environmental impacts deepening the problem, or pushing it to other direction. Benefits to the mitigation of climate change brought by the use of RES should be carefully measured and the effect they have on biodiversity and other components of the environment clearly indicated. Any support to renewable energy should be conditional to an evaluation of the life cycle of greenhouse gases balance and wider environmental sustainability.



Plantations are common picture in many regions in Europe

FORESTS - THE CENTRE OF BRUSSELS' ATTENTION - FOR A MOMENT

On 24-25 October at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting the agriculture ministers adopted conclusions on the EU Forest Action Plan. The Council invited the Commission to appoint coordinators in all relevant Directorates General and together with Member States "to ensure the effective and balanced implementation of key actions".

For implementation of the EU Forest Action Plan a five-year work programme was proposed by the Commission with a number of activities under each of the 18 key actions. Expected result, working methods and time frames for each activity are indicated in the programme. The FAP implementation will rely on the following tools: sessions of the Standing Forestry Committee (SFC), internal JRC research, call for tenders under 7th Research Framework Programme, studies and proposals under LIFE+, exchange of information etc. Some studies such as the effect of globalization on the economic viability of EU forestry, and elaboration of a European forest monitoring system, have already been launched.

Biodiversity protection is backed by six

activities including sharing of experiences among the Member States on the implementation of Natura 2000 in forest areas; SEBI* process reports and JRC studies; debriefing of the SFC after CBD meetings; joint meetings of EU Nature and Forest Directors. If clearly formulated the action for evaluation of the necessary area coverage of forests undisturbed by man could be considered as one of the most sensible and worthwhile, but it is envisaged to start only in 2009. The additional actions and recommendations to MSs such as



developing afforestation guidelines, promotion of Natura2000 forest measures and promotion of schemes for voluntary environmental commitments are, unfortunately, not given due attention in the work programme and no concrete measures for their implementation are suggested.

All the sectors presented at the Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork (AGFC) is recommending to the Commission to focus attention on several key actions, one of them being "Count-down 2010". Another common concern of otherwise usually opposite opinions is the use of biomass for energy generation. But while the paper sector see biomass as a rival for forest resources conservationists are anxious about the large-scale afforestation project that, blessed by the European policies, will proliferate largely in near future.

The EU Commission can intervene in forest issues to only a limited extent, since activities concerning forests are largely in the hands of the Member States. The Commission also lacks large scale competence in forest issues. Strengthening the role of the SFC reflects the helplessness of the EU to deal with forest issues on a higher level, but is also an instrument for Member States to take on higher responsibility corresponding to their decision-making rights.

[*Streamlining European 2010 Biodiversity Indicators](#)

More about FAP at

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/action_plan/index_en.htm

Draft work programme available from veronika.ferdinandova@bspb.org

INNOVATIVE FINNISH FOREST CONSERVATION PROGRAMME YIELDS MIXED RESULTS

The first stage of a five-year innovative forest conservation programme ended in November in Finland with the publication of its impact assessment. Called METSO (Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* in Finnish), the programme is based almost entirely on private forest owners' voluntary conservation initiatives. If their forests fulfilled certain biological criteria, the owners were offered compensation for not logging for either a fixed period of time ("conservation rental" for 10 or 20 years), or permanently. In the latter case the owner could choose compensation in either cash or forest of the equivalent timber value (but of less biodiversity importance) on state-owned land.

Once the rental agreements expire, the owners will be free to do with their forest what they wish. About half announced they would for sure continue the protection agreement, a quarter were going to pass on the protected forest as inheritance, and another quarter had yet to decide on the long term future of their forest. One third of renters would have protected their forest even without compensation, while two thirds would have logged it.

METSO is conceptually an about-turn by Finnish conservation authorities, who were earlier castigated by private landowners' organisations over their handling of the Natura 2000 programme in Finland. In a few regions, landowners were not contacted in advance sufficiently well, and learned only through official documents or newspapers that their lands had been inventoried and classified as Natura sites.

Although legal, such "talking down" to landowners about the future of their land, without personal negotiation, caused anger and were used by landowners' associations to drum up anti-environmental feeling in general. The overall need to calm things down led to development of the METSO programme. METSO is feasible partly because an increasing number of forest owners live in towns and are no longer financially dependent on or as emotionally attached to their land. For many such owners, the decision to protect is purely financial; sometimes protection is a preferred choice.

Biologically, METSO is an essential follow-up to the Finnish Natura 2000 programme. Concentrated on the southern two thirds of the country, where over 70% of land is in private hands, METSO's aims are to gradually increase the protected area of forests in the region, currently standing at a woeful 1-

2%. Nearly 40% of Finland's endangered species live in her southern forests; they gained almost no benefit from the Natura 2000 programme, despite the EU Habitat Directive's target of assuring the long term "favourable conservation status" of species and habitats. Unfortunately it appears the Commission has approved Member States' Natura 2000 networks with scant attention to what boreal species' "favourable conservation status" actually requires.

If METSO was successful politically and psychologically, it left a lot to be desired in terms of results on the ground. During more than four years it succeeded in protecting just a few thousand hectares, of which more than a third under temporary rental agreements. The sites are mostly small fragments situated randomly in the landscape without being part of systematic efforts to build up larger protected units of greater importance to both biodiversity and recreation. This needs to be corrected in the next METSO round, due to start up in 2007, when state, municipal, and forest industry-owned forests will also need to contribute more to protection efforts.

Raising the area of protected forest in S Finland to the biologically absolute minimum would require protecting ca. 1.1 million out of Finland's 20 million+ forest hectares. This can be realistically achieved over a period of 20-30 years, but at current METSO recruitment rates the process will take some 240 years!

METSO is off to a good start, but still needs to credibly demonstrate that a purely volunteer approach can really save valuable forests' biodiversity.

For an English language summary of the METSO evaluation report, see

<http://www.b.mmm.fi/metso/international/evaluation/index.html>



Larger tracts of deciduous stands are now rare in Finland. Typical Finnish White-backed Woodpecker habitat."

FOREST MAPPING GOES FURTHER SOUTH

In the past, designation of protected forest areas suffered from lack of understanding of species' conservation needs for long term persistence. The EU's Natura 2000 programme attempts a more systematic approach, but political dealing, as well as local environmental officials' time and funding restrictions, is leaving a lot of precious sites out of the network. For example, first results of the BirdLife Forest Task Force (FTF) mapping project in Poland and Belarus showed that in Poland most of the forest types are not sufficiently represented in Natura 2000. Belarus does not apply Natura, but more than 50% of the HCVMs identified there do not fall under any of national "protected forest" categories.

In 2007 Bulgaria and Romania will be the next two countries with identified forests of high conservation value to join BirdLife's forest mapping initiative. Biodiversity is generally higher further south; in less developed countries such as like Bulgaria and Romania it is still quite well preserved, with outstanding conservation opportunities. Besides their warmer climate, the Balkan countries have altitudinal variation: high mountain chains, the Black sea influence, and the Danube river add to the great diversity of forest ecosystem types. The proximity of the Mediterranean and Asia Minor means species exotic for the rest of Europe also occur in the region.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES AT THE FOREST TASK FORCE

For the new mapping project, the FTF is looking to hire national forest officers in Bulgaria and Romania as well as a Project Manager. Other European countries will also be assessed as part of a feasibility study as to where in Europe High Conservation Value Forests still need to be searched for. For more information and project job descriptions please see <http://www.birdlife.org/jobs/index.html> or contact Forest Task Force at forest@birdlife.fi. Application deadline—18th of January, 2007.

BIRDLIFE FOREST TASK FORCE CONTACTS:

Veronika Ferdinandova (veronika.ferdinandova@bspb.org), BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria - TF coordinator and Head of Working Group on Biologically Valuable Forests

Andrzej Bobiec (andbob@tlen.pl), Poland — Forest Task Force Head of Biodiversity Research

Sini Harkki (sini.harkki@sll.fi), Finland - Head of the FTF working group on forest certification

Maris Strazds (mstrazds@latnet.lv), Latvia – Head of Forest Indicator Species and Monitoring WG

Marcus Walsh (marcus.walsh@iki.fi), Finland – Head of WG on Biodiversity-friendly Forestry

Ariel Brunner (ariel.brunner@birdlifecco.net) – FTF Liaison for the European Community, BirdLife International, Brussels