

Eleonora's falcon *Falco eleonora*

Background

The European Action Plan (Ristow, 1999) was developed in 1999 and adopted in 2000. The action plan has not been revised, nor its implementation reviewed. Its geographical scope covers Algeria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Morocco, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey: as well as countries where the species spends some time when not breeding: Albania, Bulgaria, France, Madagascar, Malta and Portugal. This review covers only the relevant European range of the species, including Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain and the Canary Islands, and Turkey. Greece is considered the most significant country for the conservation of the Eleonora's falcon, hosting more than 85% of the global population (Dimalexis et al., 2007). No information has been provided by Albania.

General overview

Progress in the overall implementation of the action plan is moderate and further work is still needed (overall IS=1.8.). Greece (the country holding the largest proportion of the population) has made good progress, largely due to the implementation of two LIFE projects⁹⁸. The 2003-2007 LIFE project 'Conservation Measures for *Falco eleonora* in Greece' focussed mainly on monitoring, research and awareness-raising and this is very much reflected in the implementation scores of these actions.

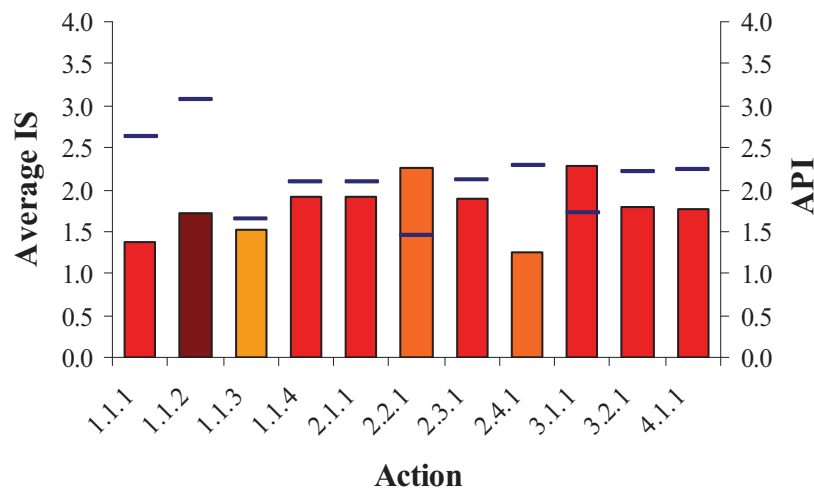


Figure xii Average implementation score (IS) and Action Priority Index (API) for each action listed in the Eleonora's falcon species action plan. Colours represent Priority Score.

⁹⁸ LIFE project codes: LIFE03 NAT/GR/000091; LIFE 04 NAT/GR/000101

Status review

Eleonora's falcons are distributed throughout the Mediterranean region (14,300-14,760 pairs⁹⁹) and off coastal north-west Africa (320-325 pairs¹⁰⁰), with the centre of the species' range being in the Aegean archipelagos of Greece - holding more than 85% of the global breeding population (12,300 pairs¹⁰¹). The species winters in Madagascar and possibly a small proportion of the population in Tanzania. The apparent increase in the size of the breeding population in Greece should be attributed to the improved monitoring scheme of the 2004-2006 study rather than to a true population growth, as the previous estimate (Birdlife International 1999) was significantly underestimated. The overall population trend for the species is therefore considered as stable.

Table 29 Breeding population estimates and trend by country

Country	Population at the time of the 2000 SAP (pairs)	Year	Current population (pairs)	Year	Breeding trend	Reference
Albania	0	1999	-	-	-	-
Bulgaria	0	1999	0-6	2007-2009	Unknown	¹⁰²
Croatia	100-150	-	54-93	2000-2009	Fluctuating	
Cyprus	60	1999	93-130	2005-2009	4% Increasing	¹⁰³
Greece	4,550	1999	12,300	2004-2006	Stable	¹⁰¹
Italy	400	1999	638-704	2005	Stable	¹⁰⁴
Malta	-	-	0	-	N/A	-
Portugal	0	1999	0	2008	N/A	-
Spain	730	1999	957-1170	2004-2007	20-50% Increasing	¹⁰⁵
Spain - Canary Islands	100	1999	260-280	2007-2009	Increasing	¹⁰⁶
Turkey	20	1999	32-76	2004-2006	Unknown	¹⁰⁷

Objective(s)

To maintain and enhance the Eleonora's falcon's colonies especially through preserving the uninhabited islets for their importance as breeding sites and their biodiversity value.

Evaluation

The target of the plan has been achieved as the European breeding population of the Eleonora's falcon is stable and no colonies are known to have gone extinct since the implementation of the action plan.

⁹⁹ Estimate calculated using data obtained from this review

¹⁰⁰ Snow & Perrins, 1998; Ristow, 1999; Burfield & Kreiser, 2004

¹⁰¹ National population census conducted between 2004-2006. Dimalexis et al., 2007

¹⁰² BSPB, 2007

¹⁰³ Miltiadou, 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Gustin et al., 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Del moral, 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Gangoso, 2007; 2008; 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Personal data from breeding population census. Research supported by RSPB

Conservation and Legal Status

The Global IUCN Red List Category of the Eleonora's falcon is Least Concern because it has a very large range, and so does not approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the range size criterion (Extent of Occurrence <20,000 km² combined with a declining or fluctuating range size, habitat extent/quality, or population size and a small number of locations or severe fragmentation). It was Lower Risk/Least Concern in 1988-2000 when such category existed.

The species is listed as Declining (SPEC 2) due to 'moderate recent decline' in the European IUCN Red List (BirdLife International, 2004), and is listed in Annex I of the EU Council Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC, 'Birds Directive'), in Appendix III of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) and in Appendix II on the Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Relevant recommendation on regional and international conventions have been implemented and enforced in Greece and Malta, but not in Croatia, Spain and Turkey.

Work has been undertaken in Cyprus to prepare the ratification of the Protocol on Mediterranean Biodiversity with the transposition in national law expected in November 2010. The species is legally protected in all European range states covered by the plan.

Overview of past and current threats

Table 30 Table of importance of Eleonora's falcon threats by country¹⁰⁸. The current level of importance of threats listed in 1999 SAP and newly identified threats are listed for each country. The original importance level of the threats as listed in the 1999 SAP are included in brackets

Country	Threats identified in 1999							Threats identified in 2010		
	Introduction of other species (high)	Human disturbance in colonies (high)	Predation by cats & rats (medium, locally high)	Natural factors (low)	Persecution & illegal trade (low)	persecution in wintering grounds probably (unknown, medium)	Habitat degradation probably (unknown, medium)	Wind farms	Poisoning by pesticides	Infectious diseases (esp. West Nile virus)
Bulgaria	N/A	N/A	N/A	Low	Low	N/A	N/A	Unknown		
Croatia	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low			
Cyprus	N/A	Medium	Low	Low	N/A	N/A	Medium			
Greece	High/Med	Med/Low	High/Med	Low	Low	High	Med/Low		Low	
Italy	Medium	High	High	Low	Low	Medium	Medium			
Malta	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Critical	N/A	Low			
Portugal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A			
Spain	High	High	Medium	Low	N/A		Low			
Canaries	High	High	High	N/A	N/A		Medium			Low
Turkey	Medium	Critical	Low	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A			

¹⁰⁸ No response on threats facing the Eleonora's falcon were received from Albania.

Assessment of the implementation

National and regional species action plans

Only Italy has a national action plan for the species, although in Croatia the "Eleonora" Association are now working on developing an action plan. There are regional action plans in the Valencian Community, Spain (Sarzo et al., 2009).

National working groups coordinate the activities in Croatia and Greece (established as part of the 2003-2007 LIFE Nature project¹⁰⁹ 'Conservation measures for *Falco eleonora* in Greece').

Species conservation

Despite human disturbance being listed as the main threat to the species, and limitation of disturbance being a high priority action in the SAP, very little work has been carried out to ensure tourism policies limit the impact of disturbance on the species and promote environmentally friendly, sustainable tourism and recreation. In addition, very little progress has been made to establish non-intrusion zones on land and at sea during the breeding season.

Although national legislation for the protection of the species is fairly well enforced in countries holding significant breeding populations, the implementation of wardening and prohibiting of hunting during the breeding season has received little work by these countries.

Despite the low level of implementation of wardening measures in Greece, there has been a reported population improvement due to the species protection measures in place. This is likely due to the work carried out during the LIFE projects which involved the development of a wardening plan in Greek SPA sites that host Eleonora's falcon colonies, and by implementing project specific wardening schemes in the most threatened sites. In Croatia, good progress has been made in limiting human disturbance to colonies by preventing access of local people and tourists to breeding sites. In Cyprus, all coastal cliff areas within the Republic and Western Sovereign Base Area are either closed during the autumn hunting season, so no hunting disturbance is suffered by the species during the reproductive period. Although game wardens of the State Game Fund patrol breeding areas in Cyprus, they do not monitor Eleonora's falcons specifically, but prevent general poaching. While the species is fully protected under National law, illegal hunting of birds of prey is a serious and widespread problem in Malta as law enforcement is weak and the police units responsible for dealing with illegal hunting are under-resourced.

There has been some work carried out to implement predator control at colonies, with the majority of the work being conducted by Spain. In Greece, pilot predator management measures were implemented as part of the 2003-2007 LIFE project, resulting in a reported population improvement due to these measures. However, there has been very little progress in preventing the introduction of terrestrial predators on uninhabited islets with colonies. In Croatia, predation by introduced species is a low threat, however educational brochures have been produced to inform people of the threat to the species. The majority of the species' nests are inaccessible to predators in Cyprus.

¹⁰⁹ LIFE03 NAT/GR/000091

Site conservation

There are 63 IBAs designated for the species in the action plan range, of which 54 are in Europe and 55 in the EU. The 72 SPAs in the EU designated for the species include 90-100% of the European breeding population. The most important colonies in Greece, Italy and Spain are included in protected areas (reserves, national parks). Only one of the SPAs in Greece (Tilos) has a management plan, as a result of the 2004-2008 LIFE Nature project¹¹⁰. However, 5 Special Environmental Studies with draft Management plans for Astypalaia, North Dodecanese, Kinaros, Kythira and Amorgos were prepared through a previous LIFE project in 1999.

In Cyprus, breeding colonies within the Government controlled area (Aspro cliffs) and Episkopi / Akrotiri Sovereign Base Area are protected by relevant National/EU legislation, but there is still no real action on the ground and no management plans for the areas.

In Italy some coastal SPAs have now been designated (in Sicily and Sardinia).

Habitat conservation

Overall, habitat conservation measures have received little work by the range countries, particularly limiting the destruction and degradation of the species' habitat by tourism, recreation and development, which is an essential priority action. In particular, the countries holding the largest populations have made very little progress in ensuring appropriate environmental assessments are carried out to assess all development/construction plans, policies and programmes. However, the majority of existing colonies are protected against habitat alteration, although this is not always enforced, such as is the case in Malta.

With the exception of Croatia, little to no work has been carried out to develop a European-wide coastal zone strategy, prioritising coastal IBAs, which is an essential priority action.

In Greece, a 'Special Planning Strategy for the Coastal Zone and Islands' was presented for public consultation in August 2009. The Strategy has not yet been voted for in parliament.

Land use change and agricultural intensification is an unknown (potentially medium) threat to the species and so there has been little work carried out to ensure agricultural and rural development policies are sensitive to the species and its conservation.

There has been very little implementation of actions to conserve important habitat for the species in its non-breeding range. In Cyprus, the species feeding/migration areas are protected in part through the network of SPAs, but no specific action has been taken for this species on a national level.

Monitoring and Research

Monitoring programmes exist in most countries at a national level and in protected areas in Greece, Spain and Cyprus.

The majority of work has focussed on monitoring the distribution, population and breeding success of the species. During 2004-7 an international population census was

¹¹⁰ LIFE04 NAT/GR/000101

conducted through the 2003-2007 LIFE project, during which population counts were performed in Spain, Italy, Croatia, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey and Tunisia (Morocco and Algeria populations were not censused). In Greece, the large majority of the work carried out for the 2003-2007 LIFE project was focussed on monitoring and research. This work included conducting the first national population census, monitoring of colonies and breeding success, assessing the primary causes of mortality for the species, satellite tracking of migration in Greece, developing and implementing an effective monitoring scheme for the species, and establishing exchange of information through the *Falco eleonora* Network (FEN). The threats to the species were also investigated through monitoring and assessment of the impact of human activities at selected colonies and monitoring of improvement of breeding success after rat eradication operations. Following on from the 2003-2007 LIFE project, national censuses are planned every 10 years in Greece.

In Spain SEO/BirdLife co-ordinated a national census in 2004-2007. There are also regional surveys conducted by the regional Autonomous Communities but with variable frequencies. In the Canary Islands research is being conducted on limiting factors and has identified a new potential threat for the species (West Nile virus – Gangoso et al., In Press).

An international survey of breeding birds organised by BirdLife Cyprus was conducted in 2004. An annual breeding count is conducted along the SW coast of Cyprus by BirdLife Cyprus during autumn breeding season which covers all the colonies.

In Croatia, the largest colony has been studied since 1998 and since 2000 the abundance in all nesting areas is monitored annually by NGO "Eleonora". LIPU annually monitors one reserve colony in Italy and occasionally monitors other colonies. In Turkey, monitoring is carried out by one individual from Ege University Natural History Museum Research and Application centre. In Bulgaria, bird observations take place at most of the sites where the species may occur.

Public awareness and stakeholder involvement

Raising awareness of the need to protect EF and its habitat, and provide adequate training for people involved in conservation and monitoring of the Eleonora's falcon is a high priority action that has received little work, with the distinct exception of Greece and Croatia.

An extensive and well focused public awareness campaign targeting various key social groups, for the conservation of *Falco eleonora* was implemented in Greece through the 2003-2007 LIFE project. This involved the production of a documentary on the species, leaflets, information kiosks, webpage and other information material. The focus of the campaign was to draw attention the Eleonora's falcon's role as an indisputable part of the Aegean islands and to change the image of the Greek islets from deserted places to islets of life and biodiversity.

In Cyprus, annual meetings are held with the local population to educate people on the species. Brochures have been produced as well as educational materials for children.

Community financial support

Six LIFE projects¹¹¹ have been implemented in Greece (2), Italy (3) and Spain (1), during the period 2000-2010, with total budget of more than 4.4 million Euros, of which the European Union contribution was more than 3 million Euros. In addition, over 435000 Euros of national government funding has been invested in research and monitoring and management actions. However, over 90% of these funds have been spent in the EU with no funding reported Turkey and very little funding in Croatia. However, there has been a small-scale project implemented in Spain investigating the ecology, migration, juvenile dispersal, population structure, and wintering in Africa of the Eleonora's falcon.

Conclusions

The progress in the implementation of the action plan is moderate (Average IS=1.8) with the country holding the largest proportion of the population (Greece) making good progress in monitoring/research actions as well as implementing regional and national conventions and protecting the species' habitat. However, but little progress has been made in prevention of habitat destruction/degradation and reduction of human disturbance.

National implementation scores (NIS) are highest in Croatia and Malta, average in Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain and Turkey, and lowest in Bulgaria, Portugal and the Canary Islands.

Further measures/work still needed especially in the field of:

- Ensuring Environmental Impact Assessments are conducted on all developments in coastal areas
- Developing and implementing of effective actions to protect coastal areas in Europe.
- Implementing non-intrusion zones (marine and terrestrial) at colonies during the breeding season.
- Ensuring national and international coastal tourism policies discourage development of new resorts and favour environmental friendly, sustainable tourism.
- Identifying wintering areas and ecological requirements and threats identified in those areas.
- Protecting the species' habitat in wintering quarters and along migration routes.
- Monitoring development and human activity in the vicinity of EF colonies.
- Investigating impact of rat predation on EF colonies
- Promoting the value of the species' habitat and raising awareness of the species.

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¹¹¹ LIFE project codes: LIFE03 NAT/GR/000091; LIFE04NAT/GR/000101; LIFE98 NAT/IT/005136; LIFE98 NAT/IT/005093; LIFE97 NAT/IT/004125; LIFE98 NAT/E/005300.

Appendix 1

Table 31 Implementation of the action plan in the European range states¹¹². PS = Priority Score; Ave. IS = Average Implementation Score; API = Action Priority Index; National IS = National Implementation Score.

Action	Measure	PS	BL	HR	CY	GR	IT	MT	PT	ES-C	TR	Ave. IS	API		
1.1.1	Disturbance from tourism and recreation limited	3	1	2	1	1.3	2	1	0	1.7	1	0	1.4	2.6	
	a. Coastal tourism policies concentrate on quality improvement of existing resorts rather than developing new ones.	3	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1.0	3.0		
	b. National and international tourism policies favour environmental friendly, sustainable and high quality ecotourism.	3	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1.1	2.9		
	c. Human disturbance of EF colonies is limited.	3	0	3	1	2	2	0	0	3	1	0	2.0	2.0	
1.1.2	Destruction and degradation of EF habitat by tourism, recreation and development is limited	4	1.3	4	1.3	1	0	2.7	0	1.3	1	1	1.7	3.1	
	a. Strategic Environmental Assessments conducted to assess all coastal development policies, plans and programmes.	4	1	4	1	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	1.5	3.3	
	b. Detailed EIAs carried out for individual construction/ development schemes in coastal areas.	4	2	4	2	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	1.8	3.0	
	c. The 5th Environmental Action Programme is implemented by the EC and a European wide coastal zone strategy is developed, with Coastal IBAs identified as priority zones.	4	1	4	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	1.7	3.1	
	d. Non-EU countries adopt a similar approach to coastal management as outlined above.	4	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	1	2.5	2.0	
1.1.3	Agricultural and rural development policies are sympathetic to wildlife and are compatible with the conservation of the Eleonora's falcon.	2	0	3.7	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1.5	1.6	
	a. Environmental friendly farming systems promoted and enhanced to ensure the food availability for EF.	1	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1.4	0.9	
	b. Subsidies for reduction of livestock grazing on islets available in all countries hosting EF colonies.	2	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2.0	1.3	
	c. Agricultural disturbance and over-grazing limited in EF areas.	2	0	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1.8	1.5	
1.1.4	International co-operation in place between all range states, with relevant recommendation on regional and international conventions fully implemented and actively enforced	3	0	1	2	3	0	3.5	0	1	0	1	1.9	2.1	
	a. All contracting parties of the Barcelona Convention ratify the New Protocol on Mediterranean Biodiversity.	3	0	1	2	4	0	4	0	1	0	1	2.2	1.8	
	b. The criteria is completed for selection of SPAs of Mediterranean importance according to the New Protocol of the Barcelona Convention.	3	0	1	2	2	0	3	0	1	0	1	1.7	2.3	
2.1.1	Effectively protect EF habitat	3	2	2.3	1.3	1.8	2.3	0	0	2	2.7	1	1.9	2.1	
	a. All existing colonies protected against habitat alteration and human disturbance.	3	0	1	1	2	3	0	0	3	0	3	0	2.2	1.8
	b. All IBAs which host EF colonies are protected.	3	3	0	2	3	4	0	0	3	4	0	3.2	0.8	
	c. Sustainable tourism developed in sensitive coastal habitats.	3	1	3	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1.3	2.7	
	d. Non-intrusion zones, in the sea and on land, at colonies implemented during the breeding season.	3	0	3	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1.3	2.7	

¹¹² BL=Bulgaria; HR=Croatia; CY=Cyprus; GR=Greece; IT=Italy; MT=Malta; PT=Portugal; ES=Spain (National); ES-C =Spain-Canary Islands; TR=Turkey.

2.2.1	Establish effective species protection for the EF	2.5	2	3.5	3	1.5	2.7	2	0	1.7	1	3	2.3	1.5
	a. National legislation for the protection of the species (adults, eggs, chicks) fully enforced.	2	2	4	4	3	4	2	0	2	1	3	2.8	0.8
	b. Wardening implemented to avoid disturbance and nest robbery where necessary.	3	0	2	1	1	2	0	0	2	1	0	1.5	2.5
	c. Where breeding colonies cannot achieve legal protection status, hunting prohibited on breeding sites before end of breeding season.	3	0	4	4	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	2.2	1.8
	d. Transportation of livestock prevented on uninhabited islets with colonies during the breeding season.	2	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2.0	1.3
2.3.1	Implement predator control to limit predation of EF	3	0	4	0	1.5	1	0	0	2	1	0	1.9	2.1
	a. Rat and cat populations controlled on all islets that host colonies.	2	0	4	0	2	1	0	0	2	1	0	2.0	1.3
	b. Introduction of terrestrial predators prevented on uninhabited islets with colonies.	3	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	2.0	2.0
2.4.1	Conserve important habitat for EF in non-breeding range	2.5	1	0	2	1	0	2	1	1	1	1	1.3	2.3
	a. The species needs addressed in national strategies for wetland management and conservation (policies).	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1.0	2.0
	b. EF habitat in wintering quarters and along migration routes adequately protected.	3	0	0	3	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	1.5	2.5
3.1.1	Monitor the distribution, population and threats to EF	3	1	3	2.8	2.6	2.3	0	0	1.9	1.7	3	2.3	1.7
	a. Total breeding world population of EF assessed through international coordinated census.	3	1	1	4	4	3	0	0	2	4	3	2.8	1.3
	b. Annual census of the breeding numbers on selected colonies undertaken across the whole species range.	3	1	4	4	3	0	0	0	3	1	0	2.7	1.3
	c. International census conducted every 10 years.	3	1	4	0	3	2	0	0	2	1	0	2.2	1.8
	d. Breeding success in selected colonies monitored annually.	3	0	2	4	4	4	0	0	3	3	0	3.3	0.7
	e. Presence and population levels of introduced predators (especially rats) monitored in the vicinity of EF colonies.	2	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	1.4	1.7
	f. Human activities and use on uninhabited islets with EF colonies monitored.	3	1	4	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1.5	2.5
	g. Development (tourist, industrial, agriculture) in the vicinity of EF colonies monitored.	3	1	4	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1.4	2.6
3.2.1	Conduct research on the threats to EF colonies and non-breeding areas, along with ecological requirements and ranges.	3	1.5	2.3	1	3	1.8	0	0	1.9	1.9	1	1.8	2.2
	a. Impact of rat predation determined for colonies.	3	0	1	1	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	1.4	2.6
	b. Impact of disturbance determined for colonies.	2	0	4	1	3	2	0	0	2	1	1	2.0	1.3
	c. Causes of mortality in colonies identified.	2	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	1	1	0	1.3	1.8
	d. The range of the vicinity used by EFs of a colony and their ecological requirements for this area determined.	2	0	4	1	3	2	0	0	1	1	0	2.0	1.3
	e. Migratory routes and strategies identified.	3	1	1	1	3	3	0	0	3	3	0	2.1	1.9
	f. Wintering areas located and ecological requirements and threats identified in those areas.	4	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	2	3	0	2.0	2.7
	g. Information exchanged on monitoring and research between experts and conservation bodies.	3	2	3	1	4	2	0	0	3	3	0	2.6	1.4
4.1.1	Raise awareness of the need to protect EF & its habitat, & provide adequate training for all people involved in conservation and monitoring of the EF	3	1	3.2	1.5	3	1.5	0	0	1.2	1	0	1.8	2.2
	a. The value of uninhabited islets is promoted through targeted media campaign(s).	4	0	4	0	3	1	0	0	1	1	0	2.0	2.7
	b. Awareness raised of EF biology, threats and need of conservation within key organisations through awareness campaign.	3	1	4	1	3	1	0	0	1	1	0	1.7	2.3
	c. Private boat owners informed about the "Code of Conduct" on uninhabited islets.	3	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	2.0	2.0
	d. Seasonal information centres established in appropriate locations.	2	0	1	0	3	2	0	0	1	1	0	1.6	1.6

e. People involved in conservation and monitoring of EF are adequately trained.	2	1	4	2	3	2	0	0	2	1	0	2.1	1.2
National & Average IS		1.3	2.9	1.7	1.9	1.9	2.3	1.0	1.5	1.3	1.5	1.8	

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