



David Tipling (rspb-images.com)

An objective of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy is to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010.

Nature conservation and EU biodiversity policy

What is the EU's biodiversity policy?

Over the years, the European Union has adopted a range of binding and non-binding legal tools (Directives, Regulations, Strategies and Communications) in the area of nature protection, which together form the EU's policy on preserving and enhancing biological diversity (biodiversity in short).

The EU is also a signatory of over one hundred international environmental agreements, including several that focus on biodiversity protection. The most prominent and overarching of these is the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that was agreed in 1992. In 1998, the EU adopted a Biodiversity Strategy and four thematic Action Plans, which indicate how it wishes to fulfil its obligations under the CBD. The Biodiversity Strategy, although non-binding, represents the most comprehensive approach of the EU to protecting nature and wildlife in the EU and beyond.

What is the 2010 target?

In 2001, the Gothenburg European Summit agreed on the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. Within this Strategy, one of the objectives is "Protect and restore habitats and natural systems and halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010." This objective has become known as "the 2010 target".

This target is repeated in the EU's Environmental Action Programme and has been reinforced by both the European Parliament and Council several times since. This is a unique, high-level commitment by EU heads of state to protect nature in all its forms, which stands alongside similar commitments to sustainable development, competitiveness and economic growth.

In 2002, the CBD adopted its strategic plan, which includes the overall target to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010, mirroring the stricter target set by the EU to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. The CBD target has subsequently been endorsed by the world's Heads of State and Governments at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) and is now one of the Millennium Development Goals.

What policies has the EU adopted to achieve the 2010 target?

During 2003, the European Commission initiated a process to review the Biodiversity Strategy and to develop a delivery plan to achieve the 2010 target. The review process culminated in the stakeholders' conference "Biodiversity and the EU – Sustainable Life, Sustaining Livelihoods", which took place in May 2004 in Malahide in Ireland. At this conference a framework was agreed with priority objectives and targets to achieve the 2010 target, called "Message from Malahide".

Subsequently, in May 2006, the European Commission adopted a communication on "Halting Biodiversity Loss by 2010 – and Beyond: Sustaining Ecosystem Services for Human Wellbeing".

The Eurasian otter is protected under the Habitats Directive and is now recovering across most of Europe, thanks to conservation measures.



Mark Hamblin (rspb-images.com)



Male common blue butterfly. The world economic value of insect pollination of crop plants is estimated to be over €150 billion.

The communication underlined the importance of biodiversity protection as a pre-requisite for sustainable development, as well as setting out a new detailed EU Biodiversity Action Plan to achieve this.

What is the role of the Nature Directives in EU biodiversity policy?

Within the territory of the EU, the Birds and Habitats Directives are the most important legal tools for protecting Europe's biological diversity, the richness of its unique wild fauna and flora and landscapes. They present a comprehensive set of obligations for Member States, including the establishment of the world's most extensive international network of protected areas, Natura 2000. The Directives have proven to be flexible tools that have withstood the test of time and are unique in their international reach, now covering 27 countries. When fully implemented and financed, and with public support, they will go a long way to achieving ecological sustainability and halting the loss of biodiversity within the EU.

The Directives also work in synergy with a number of other cross-cutting EU environmental laws, including the Directives on project-level and strategic environmental impact assessment, on

environmental liability, and on environmental crime. A growing number of EU laws on wider environmental and other topics also refer to the Directives, including the Water Framework Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and the regulations underpinning the EU's main funding mechanisms.

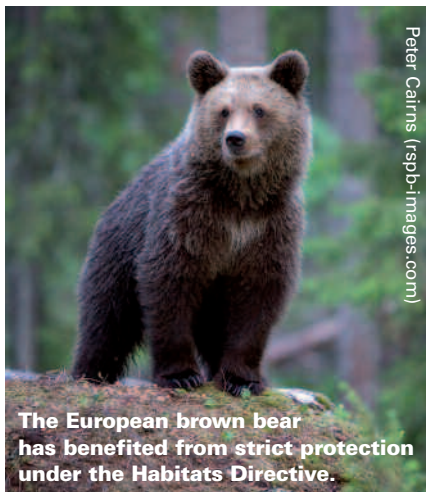
Will the EU meet the 2010 target?

In November 2008 the Commission published the Communication "A Mid-Term Assessment of Implementing the EC Biodiversity Action Plan" (COM (2008) 864 final). This assessment states that the EU is a long way from achieving the 2010 target, and that significant efforts are

needed even to ensure that the target is not missed by a wide margin. This is partly due to the fact that implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives at national level is still far from complete in several member states.

What can the European parliament do?

- Urge the Commission and Member States to accelerate progress towards achieving full implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Call for the full implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives across the EU and for measures to be taken to ensure that Natura 2000 sites are properly protected, managed and monitored, and their conservation status improved.
- Push for a comprehensive EU biodiversity policy and a new target after 2010, building on and strengthening the existing legislative framework.



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The European brown bear has benefited from strict protection under the Habitats Directive.

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The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way.

We belong to BirdLife International, the global partnership of bird conservation organisations.

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