

Title



The terrestrial Natura 2000 network currently includes around 26,000 sites and covers almost a fifth of the EU territory.

For the first time, a large group of countries (the 27 EU Member States) have agreed to set up jointly an international network of protected areas, with binding rules for site selection and protection. Nature doesn't know any borders, so nature conservation can only work in an international framework. At the same time Natura 2000 provides investors who operate in the EU's Single Market a "level playing field" with clear rules and planning security.

Natura 2000 represents and shows the huge variety of European landscapes: from the last untouched forests of Eastern Poland, to the extensive cork-oak-pastures in Spain, from peaceful Mediterranean islands to the busy port of Antwerp – Natura 2000 sites can be found in densely populated areas as well as on remote mountain peaks.

Natura 2000 sites are selected on a scientific basis, for animal and plant species as well as for certain habitat types. There are clear rules for site selection as well as a clear framework for how the sites should be protected and managed by the EU Member States.

### **Designation of Special Protection Areas for birds (SPA) as a component of Natura 2000**

The [1979 Birds Directive](#) does not provide explicit criteria for the selection of Special Protection Areas (SPA), which from 1992 on also became part of Natura 2000. BirdLife International has developed a set of scientific criteria for the selection of

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) of European Union importance that satisfy the requirements of the Birds Directive. Using these criteria, and the data and expertise from its huge network of scientists and volunteers, BirdLife has produced national inventories showing the IBAs of all EU Member States. All together BirdLife has identified 3,404 IBAs in the 27 Member States to date (2008).

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has in several of its rulings against Member States highlighted the exceptional value of BirdLife's IBA inventories as the best scientific evidence available for the selection of SPAs. A list of relevant judgements of the ECJ can be accessed [here](#).

### Related topics

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- [The Birds and Habitats Directive](#)
  - [Natura 2000 designation](#)
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Natura 2000 is the centrepiece of EU nature & biodiversity policy. It is an EUwide network of nature protection areas established under the 1992 Habitats Directive. The aim of the network is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. [More information](#).

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Currently almost 70% of IBAs have been designated as SPAs and are part of the Natura 2000 network. However the designation of marine Natura 2000 sites is still far behind while economic pressures on the marine environment, including on key sites for marine biodiversity, is increasing.



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