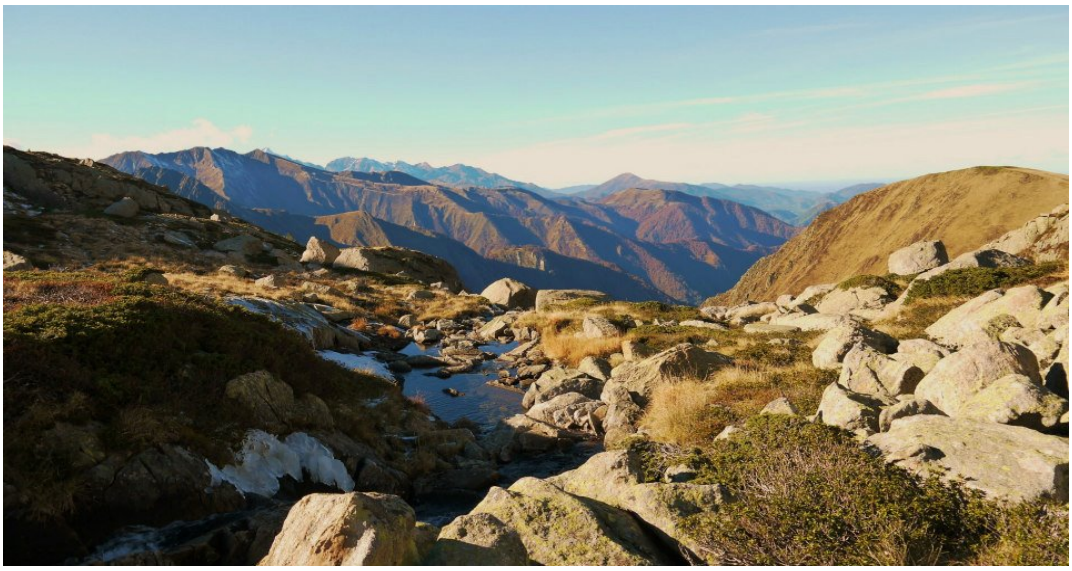
Title



The EU Birds and Habitats Directives are an invaluable tool for protecting Europe's most important sites for nature, together with stakeholders. Despite this, SPAs (Special Protection Areas - Natura 2000 sites designated under the Birds Directives) frequently come under threat, or are even destroyed, by harmful development or land use changes. In many cases this happens when authorities and developers do not follow the appropriate procedures for assessing the impact of their activities, ignore alternative solutions with lesser impact or fail to provide adequate compensation measures for any loss of wildlife and habitats.

BirdLife Partners and the European BirdLife Secretariat in Brussels monitor threats to SPAs. If actions at the national level don't bear the required results, there is always the option of filing a formal complaint to the European Commission, who then has the obligation of assessing each case. If it finds the Member State in question neglecting their obligations under the Birds or Habitats Directives, the Commission can start a legal process that can lead to a Judgement from the European Court of Justice against the Member State. Over the years, BirdLife Europe has successfully launched and followed many such complaints, not only to protect individual sites but also for the lack of designation of SPAs.

Related topics

- Scientific expertise for the benefit of society

- The Birds and Habitats Directive
- Natura 2000 designation
- Natura 2000 management
- Site protection
- EU Biodiversity Strategy
- Back to EU Nature and Biodiversity

The Habitats Directive (together with the Birds Directive) forms the **cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy**. It is built around two pillars: the Natura 2000 network of protected sites and the strict system of species protection. All in all the directive protects over 1.000 animals and plant species and over 200 so called "habitat types" (e.g. special types of forests, meadows, wetlands, etc.), which are of European importance

---

A Special Protection Area (SPA) is an area of land, water or sea which has been identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds found within the European Union. SPAs are European designated sites, classified under the European Wild Birds Directive which affords them enhanced protection. More details.

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.

Stichting BirdLife Europe gratefully acknowledges financial support from the European Commission. All content and opinions expressed on these pages are solely those of Stichting BirdLife Europe.