Managing plant diversity via the Natura 2000 network

Guaranteeing the protection of endangered plant species relies principally on the management of Natura 2000 sites. Across Europe, Member States are implementing conservation measures on these sites, but this activity is not without its challenges.

According to Article 6 of the Habitats Directive, Member States are required to undertake conservation measures in order to maintain species and habitats at a "favourable conservation status". If necessary, these measures may involve appropriate management plans.

The Commission has consistently encouraged Member States to draw up management plans to ensure the appropriate conservation management of the sites and to verify how different uses are compatible with conservation objectives. Management plans are also an excellent way of involving the key interest groups affected by the designation in the management decision-making process, thus meeting the concerns of local stakeholders and other users.

However, Natura 2000 sites with a high level of plant diversity present a considerable challenge in terms of conservation and, therefore, in the drawing up of management plans. There are a number of reasons for this. Plant species often exist across only a small area, and the populations are normally isolated, and frequently there is also a lack of scientific or monitoring data, and little local experience in managing Natura 2000 sites for plants.

Photo: Olga Baeta, J. B. Madeira - LIFE99 NAT/P/006431

Natura 2000 species management - helping to conserve populations of rare and endangered plant populations

Generally speaking, there is a low level of awareness of the threats to plants, especially when compared to the understanding of threats to animal species. Furthermore, plant populations are sometimes located on private land, or dependent on sustainable agricultural or forestry activities.

Funding from the EU's LIFE-Nature programme has been used to assist in the preparation of a number of management plans that include measures and management guidelines for specific plant species. Examples include projects in Spain, Greece and Slovenia.

Ophrys fusca*, a micro-reserve orchid species, Slovenia*

Photo: Josip Otopal - LIFE02 NAT/SLO/008587

Creating a network of flora micro-reserves in the Valencian region

The aim of this project was to set up a network of 100 small botanical Spanish reserves – up to 20 ha in size – which together would contain the main populations of rare, endemic and endangered plant species, as well as the different vegetation types present in the Valencian region. Ultimately, the project established 158 micro-reserves, with an area of 285 ha, 77 of which were officially proclaimed and included in the Natura 2000 network. The project also implemented the propagation protocols for 20 endangered endemic plant species and implemented recovery and management plans for 12 Annex II plant species.

Micro-reserves cover 56 priority habitats listed in Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive and 12 plant species included in Annex II. Together, these sites form the core of the Natura 2000 network sites for the Valencian region.

The micro-reserve plant conservation model is now being adopted by other Spanish territories and beyond, as a valuable management tool of the Habitats Directive and is helping in the implementation of the Natura 2000 network. A network of micro-reserves has been established on the island of Minorca, in the Kraški rob region of Slovenia, and in Crete, Greece under the aegis of three other LIFE-Nature projects (LIFE00/NAT/E/007355, LIFE02 NAT/SLO/008587 and LIFE04/NAT/GR/000104).

Project reference:
LIFE93 NAT/E/011100 (1st phase) and LIFE95 NAT/E/000856 (2nd phase)
Website:
www.gva.es/coma/_espacios/flora_amenazada/flora1.htm