



State of Nature: Largest ever assessment draws a mixed picture for Europe's habitats and species

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The Commission has adopted a new report providing the most comprehensive picture yet on the 'State of Nature in the EU'. The findings show that the majority of birds have a secure status, and some species and habitats are doing better. Targeted conservation actions have brought successes, but a much greater effort is required for the situation to improve significantly.

Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella, said: "*This report is significant and timely. While it shows a mixed picture overall, it clearly demonstrates that efforts to improve vulnerable ecosystems can be highly effective. It also underlines the scale of the challenges that remain. We have to rise to those challenges, as the health of our nature is linked to the health of Europe's people, and to our economy.*"

The report is the first assessment to cover both the Birds and Habitats Directives, and it results from the largest collaborative data-collection and assessment of nature ever undertaken across the Member States in the period 2007-2012.

Looking at **birds**, the report concludes that more than half of all wild bird species assessed (52 %) have a secure status. However, around 17 % of the species are still threatened and another 15 % are near threatened, declining or depleted. This includes once common farmland species like the Skylark, *Alauda arvensis* and the Black Tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*.

Looking at **other species** protected under the Habitats Directive, almost a quarter (23 %) have a favourable assessment. However, over half (60 %) are still in an unfavourable status (with 42 % considered to be unfavourable-inadequate and 18 % unfavourable-bad). Grasslands, wetlands and dune habitats are of particular concern.

Status of EU habitats and species

Population Status (2008-2012)	BIRDS	Conservation Status (2007-2012)	SPECIES	HABITATS
Secure	52%	Favourable	23%	16%
Near threatened, declining or depleted	15%	Unfavourable - inadequate	42%	47%
Threatened	17%	Unfavourable - bad	18%	30%
Unknown or not evaluated	16%	Unknown	17%	7%

Habitat types, on the whole, show a worse conservation status and trend than species, as only 16 % of habitat-assessments are favourable. The overwhelming majority of habitats have an unfavourable status, with 47 % of the assessments being unfavourable-inadequate and 30 % being unfavourable-bad.

The main threats to habitats identified are certain agricultural practices (including modification of cultivation practices, over-grazing, abandonment of pastoral systems, fertilisation and pesticides), and human-induced "modifications of natural conditions" (mostly relating to hydrological changes).

The report also presents success stories of **targeted conservation action** led by the EU. The Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* and the White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* both have EU Species Action Plans, and benefitted from the EU LIFE Fund, and their numbers have seen substantial improvements. The EU **Natura 2000** network of protected areas, which is 18% of the EU's land area and is the largest network of protected areas in the world, has also had an important positive influence on the conservation status of species and habitat types.

Background

Every six years, Member States report on the conservation status of species and habitat types protected under the EU Directives. The report covers all wild bird species (about 450), 231 habitat

types and more than 1200 other species of EU interest. This 'State of Nature in the EU' report is supported by a more detailed technical report prepared by the European Environment Agency, which also includes country-specific data. The reports serve as input to the coming Mid-Term Review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. The findings of the report will also feed into the ongoing Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitats, which is part of a broader exercise of taking stock of EU legislation to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

For more information:

State of Nature in the EU – Commission report: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/index_en.htm

DG Environment website: General: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/index_en.htm; Important: Publications (brochure): http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/info/pubs/directives_en.htm

State of Nature in the EU – EEA technical report: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu/>; <http://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/state-of-nature-in-the>

Look up tool for status and trends of habitats and species (EEA): <http://art17.eionet.europa.eu/article17/reports2012/>; <http://bd.eionet.europa.eu/article12/>

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