

THE 2007 ASSESSMENT OF CONSERVATION STATUS OF SPECIES AND HABITATS OF EUROPEAN INTEREST :Can restoration help?

Rania S. Spyropoulou¹

¹ Biodiversity, Spatial analysis and Senarios Programme, European Environment Agency , Kongens Nytorv 6, 1060 Copenhagen C, rania.spyropoulou@eea.europa.eu

Abstract

Regular reporting on the implementation of the EU habitats Directive is an obligation of EU Member States and includes an assessment of the conservation status of selected species and habitats of European interest. The first results of the EU member states reports to the European Commission in 2007 shows that less than 50% of the species and habitat types of European interest are in favourable conservation status in the different biogeographic regions and marine regions in Europe. Most of the remaining species and habitats are in unfavourable- inadequate status or unfavourable -bad status or unknown conservation status, with very few of them reported as not assessed. Accounting for natural assets such as these selected species and habitat types of European interest is an important process, expected to contribute to the evaluation of current biodiversity policies and identification of further actions both at national and at European levels. Incorporating ecological restoration needs and costs in the relevant policy discussions would greatly enhance the future prospects of these species and habitat types, within the wider objective of halting biodiversity loss.

Keywords: biodiversity policy, biodiversity reporting, favourable conservation status of species and habitat types, habitats directive, Natura 2000 sites network

Introduction

The Habitats Directive is a major component of the European biodiversity policies, aiming to the maintenance of favourable conservation status of a number of selected species of fauna and flora (not including bird species). In 2007 the EU member states, with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, delivered their second report on the implementation of the Habitats Directive (Article 17, DIR 92/43/EC), according to the Framework for Monitoring and Reporting agreed in 2005.

The most impressive feature of the 2007 reports is the assessment of conservation status of the species and habitat types featuring in all the Annexes of the Directive, which are considered of European interest for nature conservation. This assessment is organised across the relevant Biogeographic Zones distinguished across Europe (Figure 1) and 4 marine regions added to these for the purpose of this reporting exercise in the Baltic, North Atlantic, Macaronesian and Mediterranean Seas.

This presentation highlights the first results available from the European Topic Centre for Biological Diversity (ETC-BD), by July 2008 on the basis of the reports of the Member States. The European Topic Centre has also carried out an assessment of conservation status for each species and habitat type at the European/Biogeographical region level, based on these reports and other information, which is currently under scientific /public consultation on the Internet.

Assessment, monitoring and reporting Conservation Status under Article 17: Framework, explanatory notes and guidelines

The assessment of conservation status covers all habitat types and species listed on Annexes I and II of the Directive (those for which the countries must propose and designate sites forming part of the Natura 2000 network) together with species noted on Annex IV (species strictly protected) and Annex V (species whose exploitation requires management). The basis of the assessment is the definition of "Favourable Conservation Status" given in the Directive. The overall conservation status is assessed by combining the results of the 4 parameters presented in Figure 2, in accordance with the agreed framework and guidelines. The full documentation is listed in the references.

The results given below are based on counts of how many species /habitats have been recorded by EU member states as being in a favorable conservation status, inadequate, bad, unknown or not reported per regions and per group. When a member state is entirely within one biogeographic region, only one report for each species and for each habitat is required. If a member state is part of two or more regions, then one report per species (and per habitat) per region is required.

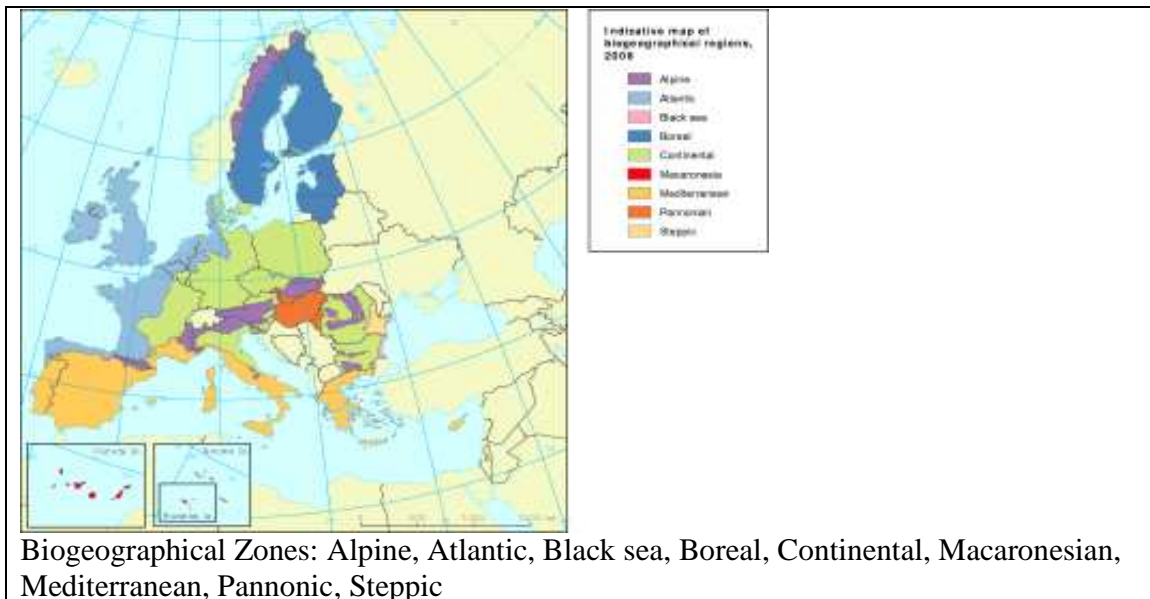


Figure 1. The biogeographical zones used for Article 17 reporting , Source: ETC-BD, Paris, 2006
<http://dataservice.eea.europa.eu/download.asp?id=15376&filetype=.pdf>

In total, 2756 files were submitted electronically by national authorities with assessments for habitat types. The number of the habitat types assessed is as follows : coastal habitats (28), dune habitats (21 types), freshwater habitats (18), heath and scrub (10), sclerophyllus scrub(13), grassland (29), bogs,mires and fens (12) , rocky habitats (14), forest habitats (71). A full account is provided in <http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17/habitatsprogress>.

As for species, 6075 files were submitted electronically with assessments for species. The number of species assessed is follows: Reptiles /amphibians (161), Fish (99), Invertebrates (164), Mammals (128), Plants (612). A full account is provided in <http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17/speciesprogress>.

The first results: an overview

Both Figures 3 and 4 establish that less than 50% of the species and habitat types of European interest are in favourable conservation status in the different biogeographic regions and marine regions in Europe. Most of the remaining species and habitats assessed for the 2007 reports are in unfavourable- inadequate status or unfavourable -bad status or unknown conservation status, with very few of them reported as not assessed. High records of unknown conservation status, especially in the Meterranean region and the marine regions is also noted, thus obscuring the overall picture. The percentage of records in the Unfavourable-Inadequate U1 status for habitat types is around 30% for all regions, while it ranges from 10-40% for species across the regions.

Looking at habitats by regions in Figure 3a it is interesting to note that **highest records for Favourable V** are shown in the Alpine and Mediterranean terrestrial regions; the marine region of Macaronesia followed by the marine Mediterranean have the highest FV records for coastal and marine; **the highest Unfavourable - Bad U2** being in the Pannonian, Atlantic and Continental regions for terrestrial and in the Atlantic region for marine. In Figure 3b, across the groups of habitats reported, most records on Favourable conservation status are present in rocky habitats and sclerophyllus scrubs while Unfavourable- bad is highest in grasslands, bogs,mires and fens and dunes.

Species	Habitats
Range	Range
Population	Area
Suitable habitat	Structure & Functions
Future prospects	Future prospects

Each of these parameters is reported as one of the following four classes

Favourable -	FV ('green')
Unfavourable – inadequate -	U1 ('amber')
Unfavourable – bad -	U2 ('red')
Unknown -	XX ('grey')

Figure 2: Parameters used in the assessment of the conservation status of a species or habitat type in Article 17 reporting, Source: ETC-BD, Paris, July2008, <http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17>

Looking at species by regions in Figure 4a, it is interesting to note that **highest records for Favourable V** are shown in the Boreal, Alpine and Macaronesian terrestrial regions and the marine region of Atlantic has the highest FV records for coastal and marine species; **the highest Unfavourable - Bad U2** being in the Continental and Atlantic regions for terrestrial and in the Baltic region for marine. In Figure 4b, across groups of species, the favourable V records are almost equally spread around 20% in all groups, while arthropods and molluscs are presented with the highest records of Unfavourable bad U2.

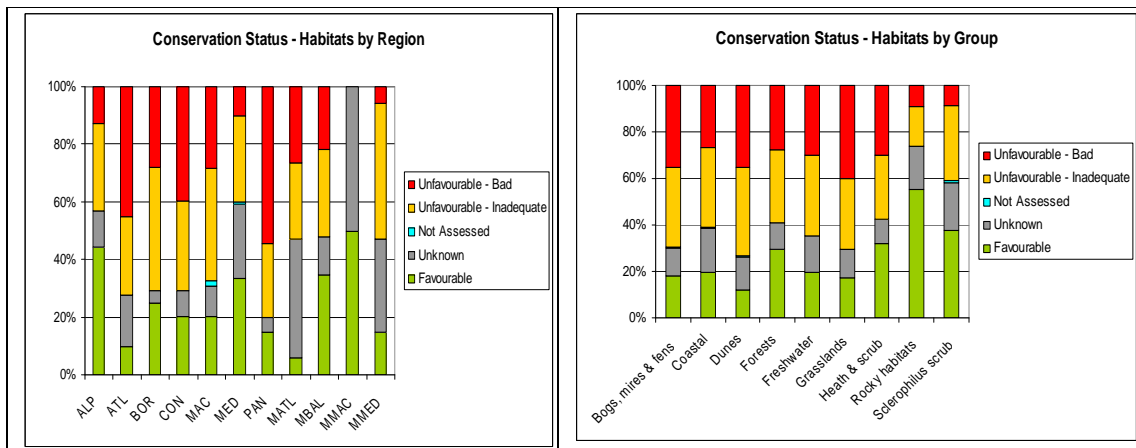


Figure 3. An overview of Article 17 results for habitats (3a habitats by region, 3b habitats by groups), as reported by member states, Source: ETC-BD, Paris, July2008, <http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17>

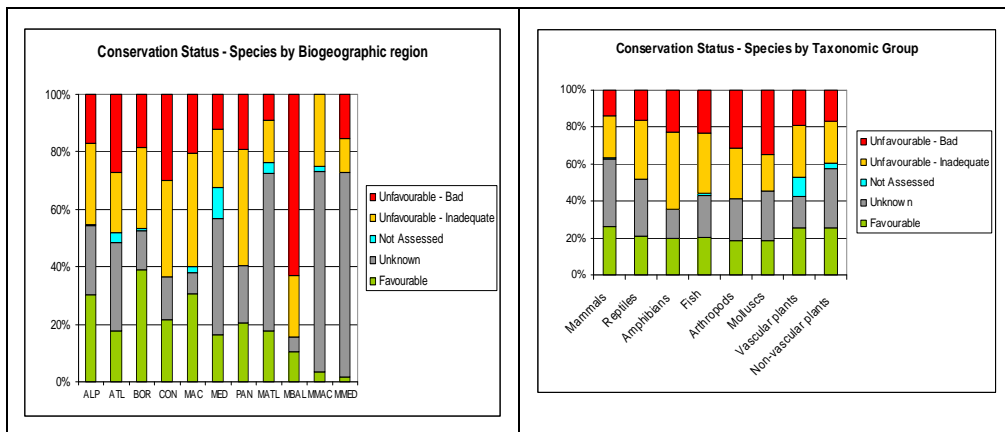


Figure 4. An overview of Article 17 results for habitats (4a habitats by region, 4b habitats by groups) as reported by member states, Source: ETC-BD, Paris, July2008, <http://biodiversity.eionet.europa.eu/article17>

Concluding remarks

1. The facts so far established by the Article 17 reporting process imply that the present measures employed for the conservation of the species and habitats of European importance need to be strengthened considerably across Europe. The future prospects of the species and habitats, as included in this assessment must be restored.

2. The valuable information gathered in this reporting process allows for different types of analysis which should aim in establishing methods and guidelines for actions need to be taken. This further analysis of the 2007 assessment of conservation status will probably raise several issues with regard to the management of the Natura 2000 site network, which is designed to ensure favourable conservation status for several of these species and habitat types. It will also raise several issues in relation to the management of protected areas and wider countryside as a whole, to changing land use patterns and water resource management, to the management of marine environment and to climate change and adaptation.

3. Following such analyses, the potential for ecological restoration needs to be further identified. Different threats need to be addressed at different spatial scales and with different types of interventions. There are costs to be met, but these costs should be addressed as investments to maintain important ecosystem goods and services.

4. The identified gaps of information and knowledge must be addressed as a priority in order to allow full accounts on the status of this subset of biodiversity components that enjoys high policy recognition. The next reporting round on Article 17 is foreseen for 2013 and the highest possible quality of assessments must be achieved.

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