



NATURA 2000 ITALIA

INFORMA

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20 years of **Habitat Directive:** effective management of **Natura 2000 Network**

IN MAY AND June 2012, two twentieth anniversaries recur: the one of the Habitat Directive 92/43/EEC establishing the Natura 2000 European network, a European's protected areas network, the main pillar of the European Union's policy on biodiversity conservation, and the one of the Rio de Janeiro's International Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Two important anniversaries that deserve to be brought out, specially in this period of European and global financial crisis, in order to remember that "only 2 decades ago" the world and Europe have concluded a long process of remarks and negotiations that led to the definition of important reference tools for States and Governments, addressed to the conservation of biodiversity.

Exactly with the definition of the term biodiversity, a neologism coined by the scientific world in the late 80s of last century, it has been ratified at a global level that the awareness for the conservation of natural resources and living organisms on the planet is a key requirement for the survival and the welfare of the human species. To draw the attention of heads of State and Government on the issue of conservation of biodiversity was the first step towards the integration of this value in all the intervention areas, not only in the one specifi-

cally dedicated, until then known as "nature conservation".

Despite the concrete results achieved in the past decades, which, at the national level, led to the identification of 2287 SCIs and 601 SPAs (approximately the 21% of the national area) and, finally, to the drafting of an important planning instrument as the National Biodiversity Strategy (October 2010) already implemented, we believe that the

best way to celebrate both anniversaries is to look forward, "roll up their sleeves" and focus on the management and the effective implementation of what is been built up to now. It took much effort to be able to build a coherent network of areas that, starting from single regional situations, could express, at the national level, the high biodiversity values of community relevance, ensuring a coverage and a coherent and meaningful representa-



During 2010, through a process of participation and sharing among the different institutional, social and economic stakeholders our country adopted the National Strategy for Biodiversity.

tion in 3 the different Bio-geographic Regions present in our country.

Finally, when the management of Natura 2000 sites will be launched, the challenge is to go through in a balanced and consistent way, so that, alongside with an approach mostly conservative, will put with determination and conviction the enhancement of biodiversity and of ecosystem services that can offer, in a perspective that identifies them as a real resource for the whole co-

untry, the only one able (if properly considered and managed) to produce substantial, irreplaceable and renewable annual interests.

With these intentions and conditions, and sure of the challenges and opportunities offered by the Natura 2000 Network, despite this time of great economic difficulty, it's been possible to find the necessary resources to publish three issues of the Newsletter "Natura 2000 Italia informa", an initiative grew out of the Life Project "Verification of Natura 2000: management models", which was very successful in Italy and abroad.

Unlike the first series, these three numbers wish to give voice, in particular, to the territories and to the direct experiences, and will face topics on which nowadays the attention is focused at Community and national level, seeking to promote comparison and communication in view of the new programming period of 2014-2020 of Community funds that coincides with the targets set for 2020 by the Convention on Biological Diversity at global level.

This first issue opens with the national process of designation of Special Areas of Conservation, placing them as areas in which to implement concrete experiences of active management that not only enhance the effectiveness of the protection, but become the real driving force for the economies that should pay attention to the maintenance of biodiversity values. The following article is on the Community Planning 2014-2020, with a focus on Prioritized Action Framework (PAF), which constitute the essential tool for the takeoff of the Natura 2000 Network at local level.

There is also an article on the new Life Program which highlights the strong connection with the actions for the climate, linked to the article on the mobilization of resources within the CBD which highlights the need to raise transversally the needs necessary to protect biodiversity. To complete the issue there are three territorial experiences on the Natura 2000 Network in collaboration with the regions of Valle d'Aosta, Lombardia and Sicilia. ■

The Natura 2000 Network in the National Strategy for Biodiversity.

The National Strategy for Biodiversity in the work area 2 faces both the issue of the protected areas coming from the national relevant legislation, and the one established and designated as a result of the implementation of Eu directives. In particular with reference to Natura 2000 Network are outlined the 4 specific goals and the 10 priority actions listed below.

Specific objectives:

- 1. **to implement** policies aimed to complete and support the management of Natura 2000 Network, in land and marine environment, and to ensure its enhancement and promotion as an added value to the programs of economic and social development of territories, through a proper and coherent use of Structural Funds and of the EU CAP financing and a strengthening of mechanisms and participation processes also to make clear the benefits and problems to overcome;
- 2. **to enhance** the effectiveness and efficiency of the procedure for impact assessment at central and peripheral level;
- 3. **to define** monitoring protocols, providing the roles and methods of collection, transfer and validation of data, aimed at assessing the state of preservation, consistency and characteristics of habitats and species of community interest, with particular reference to the priority ones, and identifying favourable reference values and the factors of direct and indirect threat, on the whole national territory, through the use of common comparable and shared methodologies;
- 4. **to strengthen** the integration of Natura 2000 Network and of conservation measures dedicated to the habitats and species of Community interest, within the existing planning instruments and, at the same time, enhance and improve the value and the commitment of the Management Plans and of the management instructions included

Action priorities:

- a) to implement the actions and the foreseen and expected synergies necessary to proceed quickly with the designation of SACs and the identification of the related conservation measures, according to the deadlines set by the European Action Plan;
- b) **to implement the actions and synergies necessary to quickly complete the Natura 2000 Network in the marine environment;**
- c) **to implement** programs and projects aimed at strengthening the competent offices to issue the notice of assessment of incidence, increasing the qualified staff and promoting effective training activities, both at central and peripheral level;
- d) to achieve national guidelines on impact assessment which also clarify the most problematic concepts, such as "mitigation measures". To proceed with the revision of Annex G of the DPR 120/2003 in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the procedure;
- e) to adapt and complete at regional level the implementation of DM n. 184, of October 17th, 2007 in order to make effective and consistent the conservation measures of the sites in our country and ensuring the same level of protection and also to provide concrete measures to encourage the start-up within the sites;
- f) identification of the site operators, with particular reference to the SPAs, by Regions and PA who have not yet done so;
- g) to proceed with the approval of the Management Plans issued, implementing the application of management information included;
- h) **to start monitoring programs on a regional scale with the support and participation of protected areas** and their qualified staff;
- i) to prepare a **remarkable** and widespread communication campaign, on national scale, about the Natura 2000 Network, involving all relevant authorities and protected areas with particular reference to the National Parks, in order to promote the knowledge of the values concerning biodiversity and the social acceptance of the Network, emphasizing the cultural importance and real development opportunities, even from the tourist point of view, that only a proper and supported enforcement can produce;
- j) **to increase and to optimize the rising of European funds necessary to ensure the supervision, management and monitoring of sites** related to the Natura 2000 Network and use the existing ones in a more consistent way with the aims of the Directive and focused on conservation, management, education, training and sustainable development objectives.

The National Biodiversity Strategy and National Strategy Guide can be downloaded from the following links of the Ministry of Environment website:

- http://www.minambiente.it/export/sites/default/archivio/allegati/biodiversita/Strategia_Nazionale_per_la_Biodiversita.pdf
- http://www.minambiente.it/export/sites/default/archivio/biblioteca/protezione_natura/dpn_guida_strategia_nazionale_biodiversita.pdf

The designation of **Special Areas of Conservation** (SACs): from the protection to the active management

THE DEFINITION OF appropriate conservation measures and the subsequent designation of the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), represent the current key elements for the continuation of all activities related to the implementation of the Habitats Directive in our country.

In fact, according to such Habitats Directive (Article 4, paragraph 4), within a maximum of six years starting from the selection of Sites of Community Interest (SCIs) through the adoption of the relevant lists by the European Commission (and publication of the list of the sites for Bio-geographical Region in the European Official Journal), the Member States should have identified the priorities and the necessary measures of preservation in order to adopt the SCIs as **Special Area of Conservation** (SACs).

The delay in the SCIs selection process, which continues through the improvement of the lists that have come to the fifth update, has consequently involved a consistent delay even in the SACs designation that, today, due to the regional and national experience acquired, should proceed quickly and effectively to respect the timing scheduled for the Bio-geographic Region list and the commitments undertaken by the adoption of the Community strategy on biodiversity up to 2020.

In the setting of a dynamic follow-up of



Maintenance and proper management of grazing are essential for the preservation of many semi-natural habitats of Community interest. Photo by E. Calvario

the Natura 2000 Network, such lists are periodically reviewed to improve and augment the value and the ecological coherence of the Network in terms of presence of habitats and species, where required, by proposing new sites and / or improving the data within the forms. To date, 5 updates were made to the lists of the three Bio-geographic Regions present in Italy and the last update is scheduled in 2012. After that time the only option for upgrading the standard forms will be following the results of the national reports, issued in implementation of Art. 17 of the Habitats Directive. At national level, after each update of the sites list made by the Community, specific

ministerial decrees are issued and published in the Official Journal (Gazzetta Ufficiale) of the Italian Republic, the

Definition of Special Area of Conservation

The Habitat Directive, Article 1, paragraph 1, defines a Special Area of Conservation, "a site of Community importance designated by the Member States through a statutory, administrative and / or contractual act where are applied the necessary conservation measures for the maintenance or restoration, at a favourable conservation status, natural habitats and / or populations of species for which the site is designated".

From this definition there is a clear willingness from the part of the European law maker, to bring out the need for specific measures of "active conservation", such as those spelled out in Art. 6 paragraph 1 of the Directive, referring to the need for regulatory administrative acts and / or contracts in order to make cogent and apply the conservation measures.

Timing for the SACs designation

It's been conventionally agreed at Community level that the six-year countdown starts from the moment in which a site is included for the first time into a decision of the Commission regarding the List of Sites of Community Importance.

The European Commission adopted the first lists of SCIs, for the three Bio-geographic Regions present in Italy, through the following decisions:

- **Alpine Bio-geographical Region** (decision 2004/69/EC of 22nd December 2003)
- **Continental Bio-geographical Region** (decision 2004/798/EC of 7th December 2004)
- **Mediterranean Bio-geographical Region** (decision 2006/613/EC of 14th July 2006)

The Framework Program Agreement between MATTM and Fedeparchi for the designation and monitoring of SACs in the National Parks and Marine Protected Areas is launched.

With the aim of ensuring a smooth and timely implementation of the Natura 2000 Network within the protected areas of national importance, in synergy and coordination with what is on at Regional Administration level, under a Framework Agreement between MATTM / DPNM and Fedeparchi aimed at a more systematic collaboration in the field of biodiversity conservation, in May 2012 was approved the Operational Plan of the Convention which provides a specific activity dedicated to the full implementation and integration of Natura 2000 Network in the planning tools and management of National Parks and Marine Protected Areas.

In this regard it is recalled that Art. 2, paragraph 2 of the Decree of October 17th, 2007 "Uniform minimum criteria for the definition of conservation measures related to the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)" foresees that for the SACs falling entirely or partly within natural areas or marine protected areas of national importance established under the legislation, the conservation measures are identified as possible integration of the safeguard measures, in other words of the statutory provisions defined by their existing planning and regulatory instruments.

last of which are related to the fifth updated list of the sites of Community importance for the Alpine, Continental and Mediterranean Bio-geographic Regions as follows:

- Decree of March 7th, 2012 - (OJ of the Italian Republic n. 79 of April 3rd, 2012). Fifth updated list of sites of Community importance for the Alpine Bio-geographic Region in Italy, under Directive 92/43/EEC.
- Decree of March 7th, 2012 - (OJ of the



The Circeo National Park includes 8 Natura 2000 sites among them several coastal lakes that are home to many species of aquatic salt birds: in the photo a showy flowering saltworts. Photo by E. Calvario



The National Park of La Maddalena is almost totally included in SCIs and SPAs; hosts many habitats of Community interest, including six priority and significant land and marine species such as the Audouin's Gull (*Larus audouinii*) and subspecies of the Mediterranean Shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii*) whose populations inside the area represent the 1% and 3% of the world population. Photo by E. Calvario

Italian Republic n. 79 of April 3rd, 2012). Fifth updated list of sites of Community importance for the Continental Bio-geographic Region in Italy, under Directive 92/43/EEC.

- Decree of March 7th, 2012 - (OJ of the Italian Republic n. 79 of April 3rd, 2012). Fifth updated list of sites of Community importance for the Mediterranean Bio-geographic Region in Italy, under Directive 92/43/EEC.

The National Trail for the designation of SACs.

With the decree of the Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea, October 17th, 2007 "Uniform minimum criteria for definition of conservation measures relating to Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)" (OJ November 6th, 2007, n. 258), Italy has outlined the procedure for the national designation of SACs in implementation of article 3, paragraph 2 of Presidential Decree 357/97 and s.m.i. Regulation implementing the Directive 92/43/EEC regarding the conser-

Technical document of the European Commission for the designation of SACs

The purpose of the guideline document, whose final version is dated 14th May 2012, is to provide a tool to support the Member States in the main obligations related to the designation of SACs. In particular, in the document are given technical guidance regarding the purpose of the designation, the legal implications, the deadlines to be met, the procedural aspects, the legal provisions applicable, the type of legal status to insure.

The document can be found on the website > http://circa.europa.eu/Public/irc/env/habitats/library?l=/habitats_committee/meetings_in_2012/meeting_april_2012/documents/versions_committee/designation_14052012doc/_EN_1.0_

vation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

The article 2 of the Decree foresees, in fact, that the SACs are designated by issuing decrees of the Ministry of the Environment, Land and Sea, adopted in agreement with each Region or Autonomous Province concerned, indicating the reference to the act with which the same Regions or Autonomous Provinces have already adopted the conservation measures necessary to maintain a favourable conservation status of habitats and species for which the site (still SICs) has been identified, in accordance with the policies set forth in the Decree of the Minister Environment and Protection of Natural Resources of September 3rd, 2002 "Guidelines for the management of Natura 2000 sites" and the provisions of the DM 17th October 2007, ensuring the coordination of economic and social actors of the territory involved.

The emphasis on the need to involve the stakeholders has helped to improve the sharing and understanding of the goals and opportunities offered by the Natura 2000 Network, often little known in Italy and, consequently, underused.

Currently, there is active collaboration between the Ministry, the Regions and Autonomous Provinces for the Alpine Bio-geographic Region in order to prepare the first ministerial decrees designation of SACs in Italy, as requested by DG Environment of the European Commission in a memo dated June 13th, 2012 addressed to all Members States, to which is attached a specific guideline document. Beyond the legislative formal aspects, which vary depending on the system of reference for the implementation of the Habitats Directive in each Region and Autonomous Province, for each SACs is underway the verification of the items listed below, with the technical support provided by a specific "database for the management of Natura 2000 sites" prepared by the Ministry:

- species, habitats of species and habitats of Community interest at whose presence



A salamander of the genus *Hydromantes*: one of the Amphibians of Community interest present in Italy. Photo by E. Calvario

the SACs will be designated, with particular reference to the ones significantly present within the site as per the standard form;

- mapping of the site;
- identification of the managing subjects;
- the main objective of conservation to be achieved within the SACs in terms of maintenance / repair of natural values of Community interest in a favourable conservation status;
- the coherence of the network (at regional and national level) and the actual implementation of the conservation measures

identified to ensure the conservation objectives of the site and the achievement of favourable conservation status for species, habitats of species and habitats of Community interest significantly present in it;

- the necessary link between the verification of the effectiveness of conservation measures taken and the conservation status of habitats and species, as defined and required by the monitoring pursuant to art. 17 of the Habitats Directive;
- the system of legal protection put into place to make mandatory the conservation measures adopted and the definition of incentives and obligations necessary for their activation.

The process has already started and also for the other two Bio-geographic Regions the process is on the way; it is necessary to maintain a strong impulse to accelerate and conclude this process in a short time even according to the new addresses of the Community who see in the Prioritised Action Framework (PAF), the document of national and regional economic planning that defines the "framework of priority actions for Natura 2000", a document which, as we shall see in the following article, is closely related to the objectives of the path of national designation of SACs described herein. ■



The Marsicano brown bear *Ursus arctos marsicanus* one of the species most endangered mammals in Italy with an estimated population in 2008 of 37-52 individuals. In the picture a female with a cub. Photo by F. Cianchi

The future of the Natura 2000 Network in EU programming 2014-2020

Cohesion Policy 2014-2020

THE PROTECTION OF the environment and the fight against climate change will be the cross-cutting strategic priorities of the future EU budget; the integration of sector priorities within the policies is one of the tools through which promoting synergies in the use of funds and, at the same time, setting a greater consistency and spending efficiency.

The investments in environmental protection and efficient use of resources will contribute to the achievement of the goals for a sustainable growth foreseen in the 2020 Strategy.

The protection of biodiversity, restoration of ecosystems and of the services they provide will help to ensure the productivity and the quality of life and will offer new and real opportunities for developing a green economy through the innovation of processes and products, and the creation of new skills and new employments.



It is essential to integrate biodiversity into all relevant policies. Photo by E. Calvario

Financing Natura 2000 - Future Perspectives

In a European context that aims to the renewal and economic revitalization to overcome the ongoing global crisis, it emerges the need to ensure an increase of investments to be assigned to the protection and management of Natura 2000 Network and, more in general, to the biodiversity; this need is supported by the data, not very encouraging, regarding the new assessments on the conservation status of species and habitats in Europe, and coherent with the

commitments to be addressed in order to achieve the objectives of the European Strategy for Biodiversity:

- ensure good management of the Natura 2000 Network;
- ensure adequate funding;
- increase awareness and participation of all stakeholders;
- improve and streamline the monitoring and the reporting.

The actions listed above are the ones to take for protecting and improving the conservation status of habitats and species by 2020, in order to achieve the targets set by the European Strategy.

In order to effectively support the implementation of Natura 2000 Network, and more in general to implement actions foreseen to protect the biodiversity, the goods and the ecosystem services provided by it, it is essential to ensure the valid financial support. In order to draw attention to the importance of investing in the Natura Network 2000 network and to positive impact on the environment and humans, the European Commission published a working paper¹ which focuses on funding opportunities listed in the Communication on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 and in specific sectorial proposals for each fund², the document reiterates the need to strengthen integrated planning to fund the priorities of Natura 2000, stimulating, even through the creation of partnership with private entities, innovative financial mechanisms that will add to public resources.

Prioritized Action Framework (PAF)

The story begins far away; in fact, already in Article 8 paragraph 4 of the Habitats Directive is introduced the concept of Prioritized Action Framework (PAF): «*In the light of the assessment referred to in paragraphs 2 and 3, the Commission, following the procedure stated in Article 21 and taking into account the sources of funding available depending on the suitable community instruments, adopts a framework of actions li-*

Note

¹ SEC(2011)1573 final

² COM(2011) 612 final, COM(2011) 614 final, COM(2011) 625 final, COM(2011) 627 final, COM(2011) 804 final, COM(2011) 874 final.

The proposed Legislative Package that will shape the future EU cohesion policy.

On the 6th October 2011, the European Commission has adopted the following rule proposals:

- A global range Regulation establishing a set of common rules to manage the European regional development fund (ERDF), the European social fund (ESF), the Cohesion fund, the European agricultural fund for rural development (EAFRD) and the European fund for maritime affairs and fisheries (EFMAF). In this way it will be possible to get the best combination of funds to increase the impact of EU action.
- Three specific regulations for the ERDF, the ESF and the Cohesion Fund.
- Two regulations concerning the European territorial cooperation goal and the European group of territorial cooperation (EGTC).
- Two regulations on the European globalisation adjustment fund (EGF) and on the Program for social change and innovation.
- A Communication on the European Union solidarity fund (EUSF)

The proposals will be discussed by the Council and by the European parliament to be adopted by the end of 2012, in order to start in 2014 a new generation of cohesion policy programs.

sted by priority in which are pointed out the measures that require co-financing in case of sites designated according to Article 4, paragraph 4».

This regulatory step proves to be highly relevant and appropriate regarding the European programmatic context that is emerging, which requires a stronger focus on the results and greater effectiveness and efficiency of the impact of EU funding.

The Commission has asked Member States to identify priority actions of intervention with particular reference to Natura 2000, to be translated into regional multi-year documents for the period 2014-2020, in which it would be possible to identify the priorities for the protection of habitats and species and to plan, through an integrated approach, the type and amount of funds needed to implement these priorities. In this sense, the informations contained in the instruments applied locally in order to manage the Natura 2000 sites (management plans, conservation measures) will help the public authorities making the choices in order to better invest in the Network 2000.

The Italian Natura 2000 Network, together with the network of parks and protected areas, is in fact the National Ecological Network of fundamental importance for the protection of biodiversity. A reality not only strictly related with the conservation of biodiversity, but also a driving force to promote sustainable land development activities, for integration with the social and economic aspects in particular for agricultural side, thanks also to the use of Community resources dedicated to Natura 2000 sites, such as the EAFRD funds.

In this context, PAF, if well planned at the regional level, is really an essential tool to respond positively and effectively to the needs of the Natura 2000 Network management for the next decade.

The new European approach to integration between funds is fully implemented in the PAF, it is therefore crucial on one hand to be able to identify priorities for management of the Network and the actions needed to meet these priorities, on the other hand to quantify the financial needs, identifying possible sources of those resources. This could be put in practice into the new

What the Paf foresees

Analysis of the state of fact

- a) Introductory overview of the Natura 2000 Network on the territory concerned
- b) Conservation status of habitats and species of Community importance
- c) Legal and administrative rules for the protection and management of Natura 2000 sites
- d) Up-to-date experience exploiting EU financial instruments

Opportunities and valuations for the future

- e) Financial requirement assessment for the current management of Natura 2000 within the territory
- f) Strategic conservation priority for the Natura 2000 Network in the period 2014-2020
- g) Description of the key measures for achieving the priorities

Check of results

- h) Monitoring, evaluation and update of PAF

Operational Programs only through a careful survey on regional scale of the problems and potentialities of Natura 2000, with a necessary involvement of councilors who will manage the next Regional Planning and European funds, in particular for agriculture, fishing, programming, training and work.

The event is scheduled at the end of 2012, time by which the MS must send the regional PAF to the European Commission, considered by it essential to try to steer the negotiations for the future planning within European Union that will end in 2013 in favor of the instances of Natura 2000.

But it's already known that the most important game will be played by the Member States and Regions that in the definition phase of the Operational Programmes will have, through the strengthening of governance and a programmatic logic more innovative than before, to use the PAF to inte-

grate the needs of protection and sustainable improvement of Natura 2000 network within the national and regional policies, ensuring a careful long-term planning of financial resources to be assigned to it.

The PAF fully reflects the requirements of the future cohesion policy on the environment. It is in fact a useful tool for planning conservation measures for Natura 2000, as an essential value to be protected, giving full implementation to the EU Habitats and Birds directives, but it requires more engagement than before in plannings, as it foresees also the identification of strategic priorities of the network that could represent a new boost to a sustainable development of territories, which would be innovative and leading to the creation of new job opportunities in the "green" sector; linked to the management of biodiversity, our common good. ■



The Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* a species of Community interest in bird population nesting on beaches where human activities associated with seaside tourism are conducted in a sustainable manner. Photo by F. Cianchi

The new LIFE program for **environmental** and **climate** action

IN THE PROPOSAL of a new Multi-year Financial Framework 2014-2020 the issues of climate and environment are considered integral parts of all the sectorial policies. However, the main EU funding instruments do not properly meet the specific environmental and climatic requirements and therefore it was decided to continue and strengthen the program currently managed by the LIFE + Regulation.

Past experience of LIFE

This year is the twentieth anniversary of the LIFE program and the results it has achieved throughout the European Union are well known. Only speaking about the projects for the conservation of nature and biodiversity, in Italy there are over 200 funded since 1992. The contribution of this sector has grown even more since 2007, with the transit from LIFE III to LIFE+. In the four years from 2007 to 2010 a total of 50 projects as part of the Nature and Biodiversity were financed, for about 56 million euros of Eu funding that have reached nearly 100 million euros of total investment.

Among the Eu Member States, every year Italy reaches the top (along with Germany and Spain) in the use of the LIFE Nature and Biodiversity component, both in number of projects and in total amount of co-financing.

To these projects we have to add those, numerous too, referred to biodiversity and that were funded as part of the Information and Communication sector and of Environmental Policy and Governance (primarily forests, but also marine environment, governance of protected areas etc.).

As time went by the beneficiaries of the LIFE program have been the Central Government (including the Environment and the SFC, the State Forestry Corps), many Regions and autonomous Provinces, national parks and not national protected areas, Ngos and many local authorities. The use of this instrument has increased considerably in recent years, probably because of the difficulty in finding general resources. In the last call 2011 were presented about 100 projects related, in different ways, to the issues of biodiversity and nature conservation. Amongst the main conservation goals that LIFE Nature has allowed to achieve we should mention the actions on endangered species that put forward, for example, the repopulation of the brown bear in the Alps. On 213 animal species, including 14 priority ones listed in the Habitats Directive and present in our country, more than 30% were involved in LIFE projects.

Even more important is the essential contribution made by LIFE to the structuring of the Natura 2000 network in our country. The projects have involved approximately 600 sites representing one quarter

of the total of designated sites. In addition, through the funding of three projects of the Ministry of Environment – “Habitat Italy”, “Bioitaly” and “Check the Natura 2000 network in Italy and the management models” – Italy was among the first European countries to submit to the Commission the list of proposed Natura 2000 sites and to prepare guidelines for the management of these sites, supported by a technical manual providing guidance for the management of habitats of Community interest.

The LIFE innovations

Comparing it to the past, the new LIFE presents some important innovations:

- The enlargement to the actions for climate
- The shift from the pure bottom-up approach followed up to now
- The introduction of integrated planning.

The total budget proposed for the new program of the years 2014-2020 increases from 2,143 million euros to 3,618 million euros (current prices) allocated between the two sub-programs:

- Environment sub-program: 2,713.5 million euros
- Sub-program Action for Climate: 904.5 million euros

Climate

The new LIFE will be structured as Framework Programme with two separate sub-programs under the jurisdiction of different Eu General Directorates: Environment (GD ENV) and Climate Action (GD CLIMATE).

The sub-program Climate - which updates the previous thematic



The agro ecosystems semi-natural habitats are extremely important for the conservation of biodiversity: is essential to ensure buffer zones with low impact agriculture, especially near wetlands. Photo by F. Cianchi



The agro ecosystems that maintain the presence of hedges, copses and rows are essential for the conservation of many species of birds included in Annex 1 of the Birds Directive. Photo by E. Calvario

strand of “climate changes” under the Environmental Policy and Governance sector of LIFE + - will itself be divided into three sectors of priority actions:

- Mitigation of Climate Changes
- Adaptation to Climate Changes
- Climate Governance and Information

New strategic approach

The evaluations conducted on the past highlighted how the impact of the policies of the LIFE program is restricted by the lack of a clear strategic direction. This is due on one hand to the bottom-up approach used for the selection of projects, which made not possible to steer the demand towards the needs of EU policies for the environment and climate.

Therefore the new program provides the transition from a pure bottom-up approach to a flexible top-down one. The Commission will develop work programs in consultation with the Member States, suitable for at least two years and containing, among other things, the priorities and allocation of resources between the types of funding and the targets for the period of time.

The priorities indicate in the programs, however, will not be exhaustive, in order to allow applicants to submit some proposals in other areas, incorporate new ideas and face new challenges.

Integrated Projects

Another new important feature is represented by the introduction of the concept of “integrated projects” which may be submitted for the areas: nature, water, waste, air and climate.

The “integrated projects” are complex projects, aimed to the imple-

mentation of planning / programming instruments existing, necessarily on large scale and where, hopefully, some of the measures will be financed through financial instruments other than LIFE (ERDF, EAFRD, FEAMP, ESF, HORIZON 2020 etc..) “integrating” in this way the environment into other policies.

In the Nature field, the integrated projects will be the reference financial instrument designed for the implementation of Prioritized Action Framework (PAF) finalized to the implementation of management plans / conservation measures of the Natura 2000 network.

It will be maintained the opportunity to present “traditional” LIFE projects, but the favourite indication expressed by the European Union towards the use of integrated projects it is clear, as it is seen as the best opportunity for multiplication of resources and for which the criterion of geographic balance that will ensure an adequate number of projects for each Bio-geographical Region and for each Member State will apply.

The open questions

The ongoing negotiation on the new LIFE in Brussels should be completed by the end of the year, with the approval of both the Eu Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. The questions still to be defined, at least by the Council, are mainly related to the criteria of geographical distribution of resources, that is how the principle of “geographic balance” will concretely work and how much it will deviate from the current system of national indicative allocations.

Other issues of concern still open are about: the eligibility of VAT and the costs of permanent staff - which sees almost all States opposed to the Commission that would like to delete these statutes now in force; the percentage of co-financing - the Commission would like to eliminate the rate 75% for priority species and habitats; the funding of projects outside the borders of the EU - while it is acquired the ability to fund single actions that take place outside the EU related to special needs (eg projects on migratory species).

But the real battle on LIFE will take place on broader negotiating tables discussing the whole 2014-2020 EU program.

The projection of Life towards the integrated planning and to the synergistic use of resources coming from different instruments could be achieved only if it will not remain confined to the LIFE Regulation but it will become a formalized acquisition of the new Community Strategic Framework.

The goal to which the Ministry of the Environment is working on, and that already appears in the writing of the Partnership Agreement, is that each Member State shall submit to the EU to draw the use of funds for the next seven years, and that there should be a clear reference to the integrated planning built under LIFE and therefore a push to bring together the resources of sector instruments for environmental objectives and, specifically, to biodiversity and Natura 2000 Network. ■

The mobilization of resources within the CBD: a national commitment to Biodiversity



The agro ecosystems with the presence of dry stone walls are essential for the conservation of many species of reptiles and small mammals, and exert an important anti fire action. Photo by F. Cianchi

IN ORDER TO PROTECT biodiversity adequate financial resources are needed. This awareness is present in the Rio de Janeiro's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) from the beginning (as stated in Article 1) but it has been put aside for too long, putting more effort on the development of strategies and action plans then remained on the paper due to lack of suitable means to achieve them, while the finding resources was undertaken in an episodic way, relying at world level now on one and then on another big donor, according to the financial seasons or political convenience of the moment .

The Nagoya's conference in 2010 has changed the approach, making the Resource Mobilization Strategy (RMS) as integral part of the CBD Strategic Plan and wondering to herself and to all the stakeholders to adopt a strict and technically reliable schedule (with quantifiable goals, indicators and monitoring mechanisms) to increase substantially the resources (financial, human and technical) coming from all the sources by 2020, for an effective implementation of the goals of the Convention. To meet this commitment at the national level, the Ministry of Environment has promoted the establishment of an interministerial Table together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economy and Finance, later extended to the Agriculture, Economic Development and to the Regions (through Piedmont, that is the leader). In fact, in our country, the policies for biodiversity at central

level have no funding sources specifically dedicated and the sections of the budget of the Environment can barely cover the obligations of international participation. The interministerial Table shows, therefore, an assumption of responsibility of the whole "country system" to meet the commitments taken in charge. Knowing that only the transversal contribution of all the policies and all the sectorial available resources (starting from those of the Community for development and growth) will make an attempt to respond to all the needs.

The first activity undertaken by the National Table RMS (with the invaluable help of ISPRA and ISTAT) has been addressed at quantifying the current level of government expenditure for biodiversity, because only by setting the starting point we can quantify the future efforts. The task was difficult because of the transversal feature of biodiversity expenditure and of the inadequacy of our national accounts system, which just from 2010 started testing the Eco balance in which, still with many limitations, the budget's items of the various environmental issues are classified.

This work will provide adequate base information for the delicate decisions that Italy should take in the next CBD conference in October on the targets for increasing the resources in 2020. The next challenges for the RMS National Table will focus on the involvement of the private sector and the start of a comparison on the planning of 2014-2020 Eu funds. ■



The agro ecosystems managed in a traditional way ensure high level of Biodiversity. Photo by E. Calvario

The NATURA 2000 Network: regional experiences



VALLE d'AOSTA

The course to discover the Natura 2000 Network in Valle d'Aosta started, like in the other Italian regions, in the mid-nineties; in the following years, after investigations, the original list has been expanded and defined in greater detail. Today the network consists of 30 sites, including 25 Sites of community importance, 2 Special Protection Areas (Mont Avic-Mont Emilius and Val Ferret) and 3 SCIs / SPAs (Gran Paradiso National Park, glacial environments of the Monte Rosa and the natural regional reserve of Les Iles Saint-Marcel) for a total percentage of 30,4 per cent of the region territory.

In addition to the Gran Paradiso National Park, Mont Avic Regional Park and natural reserves, there are habitats of great floristic and vegetational interest, such as the deep valleys of Urtier and Grauson, in Cogne Valley, the wetlands in Val Ferret, the environments of calcareous at a high altitude of the valley-head of Rhêmes, the Aymavilles Castle and the nearby abandoned mines hosting colonies of nesting bats and the glacial environments of high altitude of Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa, surely one of the greatest natural treasures of the region.

Rocky habitats are the more extended ones, including, in fact, not only the walls but also the rocky scree and glaciers, widespread in the Valle d'Aosta sites. Followed by grassland, shrubs and forests; peat bogs occupy a smaller area, while the flowing water, stains and woods of sclerophyllous and stagnant water have very small extensions. More specifically, the habitats 8220 - siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation - is present in 18 of the 30 sites, covering approximately an area of 12000 ha; the 8320 - permafrost - affects only 6 sites but with significant extensions, is around the 30% for both the Glacial Environments of Mont Blanc and the glacial en-



A typical example of alpine forest system of mixed conifer wood in autumn dress, the habitat of several species of Galliformes. Photo by E. Calvario



The maintenance of open areas within forest systems is an important management practice to be encouraged as relevant from the ecological-functional point of view. Photo by E. Calvario



Image of a winter snow-covered coniferous forest, ideal environment to carry out activities of trekking immersed in an extremely suggestive landscape. Photo by E. Calvario

vironments of the Monte Rosa. Follow the Alpine wood of *larix decidua* and *pinus cembra*, the siliceous screes and calcareous screes, distributed in different sites.

The priority habitats are twelve, with an area of approximately 16000 hectares covering about 16% of the total area of SPAs and SCIs. They are, however, the 29% of Natura 2000 sites in the Valle d'Aosta. We report 4 habitats (7110, 7210, 7220, 7240) typical of peat bogs or wetlands, 4 belonging to the forest types (9180, 91D0, 91E0, 9430), 3 are grassland (6110, 6210, 6230) and only one (8240) is a rocky habitat. The largest is the 6230 - *Nardus* grasslands, rich in species, on siliceous substratum of mountain and submontane areas of continental Europe (nearly 8000 ha).

The 54% of total habitat presents an excellent state of preservation, but in fact, the area covered by these habitat is more than 90% of the total hectares occupied by Natura 2000 habitats. The number of habitats with medium or low conservation status is equal to 2% but the area in hectares is only 0.01%. It is therefore evident that the habitats with medium or low conservation status, the weaker ones, occupy a very small area compared to the total. In general, therefore, the state of conservation of Valle d'Aosta is really good.

Taking into account the species of Annex II of the Directive 92/43/EEC, the network is home to 6 species of mammals (wolf, lynx and 4 species of bats), 1 species of amphibian (crested newt), 2 species of invertebrates (*Callimorpha quadripunctaria*, *Euphydryas aurinia*) and 7 plants (*Asplenium aduterinum*, *Astragalus alopecurus*, *Buxbaumia viridis*, *Cypripedium calceolus*, *Riccia breidlereri*, *Scapania massolongi*, *Trifolium saxatile*). Amongst the many species included in Annex I of the Birds Directive, the most widespread are: the golden Eagle, the Chough, the rock Partridge, the Grouse and the Ptarmigan.

On the level of protection, a first regulation that dates back to the regional law n. 13/1998 regarding the approval of the territorial landscape plan (R.L. 13/1998), where the art. 38 clearly states that "the sites of



Italian Crested Newt *Triturus carnifex*, a species of amphibians of Community interest present in Valle d'Aosta. Photo by M. Broglio

natural interest decided by the EU or by the national TLP are object of conservation“ and for these areas are stated specific requirements for new buildings and for soil changes. Then, in 2002, were defined the criteria for the application of impact assessment and, in 2007, the regional law No. 8 was approved, which, in fact, implemented the Habitats Directive in line with the DPR 357/1997. Date back to 2008, the first conservation measures for SPAs designated under the Regional Law 8/2007 and Ministerial Decree of 17 October 2007 while, with the law n. 45/2009, were set out the new regulations for the protection of the alpine flora, updating a law dating back to 1977.

The ongoing work of academic investigation, updating databases, processing the maps on habitats distribution through photo-interpretation, the sites monitoring and management, although experimental, has allowed an always increasing definition of the cognitive framework

and of the actual needs. These activities, carried out largely through territorial cooperation projects which have promoted the exchange of knowledge with neighbouring France and Switzerland, have highlighted the need to establish conservation measures for all sites of Community importance and the management plans for some sites, such as the two natural parks and the sites in the Valle d'Aosta district of Mont Blanc, area of great natural value subject to significant human anthropic pressure, especially due to tourism.

At the end of 2011 the conservation measures for all sites of Community importance were at last approved, as the final step towards the fulfilment of the designation of Special Areas of Conservation. The measures were developed given priority, as far as possible, to the adaptation to the Valle d'Aosta reality, adopting the criteria provided by the ministerial decree in matters not ruled by sectorial regional laws and deferring, when present, to specific regional rules. Relevant factors were, in addition to the conservation status of habitats and species, the clarity and the concreteness of measures and



A small alpine lake near Cogne, in the Gran Paradiso National Park. Photo by M. Broglio

their effective possibility of implementation, the sustainable use of resources, with particular attention, in order to ensure an appropriate balance between the conservation needs and socio-economic development, to agricultural and forestry activities, particularly representative of the local economy, important in sustaining the mountain area and the high level of the existing biodiversity.

The technical document identifies the general measures for all sites, defined on the basis of uniform minimum standards of ministerial and regional arrangements, and measures for each site and, within this, for the different types of habitats and species on the ground.

Along with the specifically instructions for habitat management the measures are consistent with other planning tools in place, they collect and resume all relevant provisions already enacted at the regional level in specific sectors such as, among others, the regional plan to protect waters, the regional provisions for the installation of solar and wind power plants, and urban regulatory planning.

The development of measures has seen the involvement of other regional structures qualified in agriculture, forestry, water resources, energy and environment, the park authorities, the municipalities in whose territories are the sites and a fruitful discussion with the technical departments of the Ministry of Environment and Protection of Land and Sea.

The approval of conservation measures has allowed primarily to meet the demands of the competitive operational Programme on the criteria for eligibility of projects funded during the programming period 2007/2013, that at regional level has allocated funds amounting to 4,675,000, 00 euro. Secondly, was integrated the measure 213 "Natura 2000 payments" of the Regional Development Plan, already activated in 2010, with the definition of the new tasks employing resources for about 2,000,000.00 euro in favour of farms operating in Natura 2000 sites. ■

► **Santa TUTINO**

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The NATURA 2000 NETWORK: regional experiences

Lombardia



SINCE 2007 THE Region Lombardia has promoted the drafting of the first management plans for Natura 2000 Network sites, according to the guidelines defined by the "Manual for the management of Natura 2000 sites", compiled by the Ministry of the Environment and the Territory protection and the Sea in 2006.

The process of implementation of manage-

of sites, habitats and species of Community interest; ...

The managing bodies of the sites for the SACs and the SPAs take the necessary conservation measures, based on the guidelines issued by the Region, to be incorporated into the respective planning documents and they also take appropriate contractual, administrative or regulation measures, which meet ecological requirements of natural habitat types and species present in the sites; ...

In fact, with the DGR 1791/2006, it is expected that the management bodies of the Natura 2000 sites are the ones that will finally approve the management plan, once obtained the compulsory and binding opinion of the Region.

For the evaluation of management plans adopted, is expected the action of a regional interdisciplinary working group with expertise related to the sectors that deal with biodiversity, protected areas, landscapes, forests, agriculture, hunting and fishing, water conservation, etc. But when the plans are fully integrated with other ones approved by the Regional Council (for example in the case of coincidence of the site with natural reserves) the Region can approve the plans directly. Management plans, approved in the final form by the respective managing bodies, are published in the web site www.natura2000.servizirl.it.

The management plans of the Lombard Sites will be essentially the Conservation Measures, provided by the art. 6 of the Habitats Directive, added to the Minimum Measures for the SPAs, approved by the Region with DGR 9275/2009, pursuant to the DM 184 of 2007.

Up to now, 130 management plans on 241 Natura 2000 sites were produced. For the sites that do not have a specific plan, is expected the definition of the Conservation



Great White Egret *Ardea alba*, Lombardia is one of the few Italian regions hosting heronries of the species. Photo by E. Calvario

ment plans was afterwards promoted by the issue of notices of co-financing emanated by the Cariplo Foundation in the period 2007-2009; in 2009 was also enabled the Measure 323A of the Rural Development Program, which allowed the preparation of 53 management Plans and of 48 integration Projects of the existing planning.

At the normative level, the regulations concerning Natura 2000 Network are incorporated by the article 25 bis of Law 86/83: ... *The Region: contributes to the definition of the Natura 2000 Network in the region range, including the issue of guidelines and general conservation measures for the management, the conservation and the monitoring*

Measures, through one of the actions to be undertaken within the project Life + 2011 GESTIRE (MANAGE), which will also allow to update and contextualize the existing measures.

The program management of Natura 2000 Network in Lombardia is in fact centred, as shown in the Regional Development Programme and in the goals of the qualified regional structures, on the fulfilment and implementation of Conservation Measures of the sites, with particular reference to the integration with other sectorial regional policies.

GESTIRE (MANAGE) project is expected to develop a single planning tool containing:

- The conservation measures for species and habitats present in the 121 sites of the Natura 2000 Network which has not yet subject to planning;
- The necessary measures for the interconnection of sites, and therefore for the management of the ecological network.

The starting point of the project will consist of an analysis of the best management practices available at Community, national and regional level in order to develop specific measures for the conservation of habitats and species present in the Region, which will take account of interventions that have proved to be more effective in reducing / mitigate threats to habitats and present species.

The project as a whole will prove the validity of integrated, unitary and coordinated network of natural sites, in terms of biodiversity conservation and adaptation to climate change.

Instructions on how to manage the conflicts between different conservation requirements of species / habitats will be provided. The planning document will be approved by a Resolution of the Regional Committee and will update and improve the conservation strategy of the Natura 2000 sites implemented to date, extending the concept of protection to the regional system of "network".

It will be in fact analyzed in detail the Regional Ecological Network (RER), approved by DGR n. 8/10962 of 2009 and included in the General Plan on regional protec-



The Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* is present in Lombardia with more than 20% of the colonies present in Italy. Photo by E. Calvario



Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*, Lombardia is home to several colonies of the species. Photo by E. Sarrocco

ted areas (Article 3ter of the regional law n. 86, 1983), to highlight any gaps in its function of interconnecting sites and suggesting any need for additions and improvement.

The RER and the criteria for its implementation provide to the Regional Territorial Plan (RTP) the framework of priority sensitivities existing from the nature point of view and a drawing of the main elements of the ecosystem of reference for the assessment of strengths and weaknesses, of opportunities and threats present in the regional territory; it helps the RTP to develop the task of orientation for the territorial plans of the Provincial Coordination and the municipal TGP / GRP; it helps RTP to play a coordinating role regarding plans and regional sectorial programs, to identify the priority sensitivities and to set specific targets so that they can take into account the needs of ecological re-balancing.

Even with regard to regional sectorial planning the RER can provide a guiding nature / ecosystem framework and show the opportunities to identify compatible actions plan besides suggesting to the offices in charge of the grant's allocation for agri-environmental measures the

priority geographical areas for the overall improvement of the system. It can also be a strategic tool for the identification and definition of the mitigation / environment compensation actions.

Currently, by analogy with what other regions are doing and in agreement with the MATTM (Ministry of Environment and Protection of Land and Sea) it's in course of implementation a database with the minimum information necessary to the preparation of the acts of assignment of the SAC (taken by the management plans of the sites).

It will be necessary a careful joint consideration, at national and regional level, involving also the subjects responsible for the programming of structural funds and agricultural and rural development policies.

The main challenge that we must take up at European level consist in fact in guaranteeing the protection and management of designated areas, in particular through the implementation of conservation measures (Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive) scheduled and in line with the European Union Programme post-2010 on the conservation of biodiversity (European Strategy 2020 and 2050 vision).

The management program of the Natura 2000 Network in Lombardia will contribute to the discussion regarding the Alpine and Continental bio-geographical regions foreseen in the "Natura 2000 Bio-geographic Seminars process", started in late 2011 by the European Commission: an exchange of experiences in management of habitats / species / sites Natura 2000 between the Member States with seminars organized ad hoc, in order to achieve a satisfactory conservation status of habitats / species in each of the nine bio-geographic regions. The objective of this process aims to achieve consistency in management, monitoring, funding and reporting of the Natura 2000 Network, hoping that the Member States will support the operating implementation and the network's management. ■

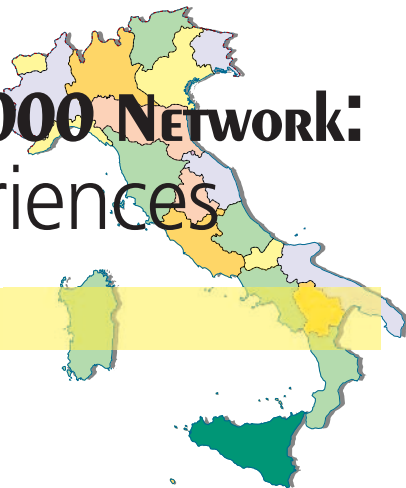
► **Anna Rampa**

Lombardia region-GD green systems and Landscape Structure Improvement of protected areas and biodiversity

The NATURA 2000 NETWORK: regional experiences



Sicilia



SCI ITA 040015 "Scala dei Turchi" view of the cliffs along the coast of Realmonte (AG). Photo by A. La Mantia

THESE ARE THE figures of Natura 2000 Network - Sicilia: 208 Sites of Community Importance (SCIs), 15 Special Protection Areas (SPAs), 15 SCIs and SPAs areas simultaneously, for a total of 238 sites that include the 4 Regional Parks and 77 Nature Reserves established and almost all included in the Unesco's "World Heritage List". These places cover the 17.5% of the regional surface.

The goals that the Natura 2000 Network aims to achieve are to ensure protection, preservation, restoration of habitats and species of particular natural interest or particularly threatened and, at the same time, to protect the wildlife that inhabit them.

In 2007 the Sicilian Regional Department of Environment started all the necessary activities for the preparation of Management Plans (MPs), a strategic tool of knowledge, direction, management and territorial planning of a large area.

The first step was to determine the number and geometry of the Management Plans to drawn up, to quantify the amount of financial resources to be allocated for each plan and to identify who is responsible for preparing the MPs. At this stage a multidisciplinary task force, constituted by the Ministry for the Environment and the Protec-

tion of Land and Sea inside the Department, had the task of assisting the Administration, in the following stages of direction and support of the editors during the processing of the Mps and in that of the evaluation of documents and their validation. The procedure used was based on objective indicators and has been divided into four steps:

- 1. identification of a hierarchy of priorities amongst the Natura 2000 sites;
- 2. identification of grouping of the Natura 2000 sites;
- 3. allocation of financial resources;
- 4. assignment of the beneficiary institutions.

To establish a priority index that would allow to 'reorder' the Natura 2000 Sites in Sicilia and to find a unique and objective criterion to employ the available economies, focusing on the areas that showed to have greater needs, proved to be actions of primary importance. Thus, in order to assign to each Natura 2000 site a value that would represent at the same time richness of biodiversity and vulnerability due to the pressures (both anthropic and not) on it, it was defined, by using multi-criteria analysis, a priority index. Such index was calculated as a weighted average of nine indicators:

$$I_{\text{priorità}} = \sum_{i=1}^N p_i * A_i$$

where A_i is the i -th indicator and P_i represents the weight of the indicator i -th.

The indicators fall into two categories:

Biodiversity Indicators:

- 1. number of priority habitats;
- 2. number of non-priority habitats;
- 3. number of priority species;
- 4. number of non-priority species;
- 5. number of endemic species.

Pressure Indicators:

- 1. number of anthropic pressures;
- 2. percentage of unprotected area;
- 3. belonging to the coast area;
- 4. degree of isolation.

Based on the results obtained and in order to achieve homogeneous MPs for habitat type and geographic areas, we proceeded to define groups of sites based on their spatial proximity and ecological homogeneity. The result was the identification of 58 MPs that put altogether the SCIs and SPAs of Sicilia.

At this point, the economic resources necessary to prepare each of the 58 plans have been divided on the basis of three parameters: total area, degree of complexity, level of existing protection.

Finally, 20 subjects were identified to draw up the MPs. The parameter that has supervised to such an operation has been the presence / absence of protected areas within sites forming part of the Plan. In the first case the drafting of the MPs has been assigned to the management body of the protected area; in the second case, to the competent Regional Province, when sites grouped within the plane would fall entirely within the territory of one province, or to the Azienda Regionale Foreste Demaniali (Regional Public Forests Company) when more provincial areas are involved.

The Management Plans of Natura 2000 Network Sicilia, validated by the Department of Land and Environment, outline a comprehensive and updated knowledge framework of the territories' state and the factors that threaten its integrity; indicate the essential measures of conservation and the initiatives of environmental protection - including the placing of restrictions and prohibitions - to be taken to protect the Sicilian extraordinary nature heritage, to restrain the degradation and provide the rehabilitation; propose specific interventions and development guidelines to ensure improvement and socio-economic growth of these



SCI ITA 070014 "Monte Baracca, Contrada Giarrita" on the Etna Volcan: a view of a recent lava flow with the presence of *Betula Aetnensis*, endemic species unique in the world. Photo by D. Colomela

areas, shaping a new model of governance of the territory that, with sensitivity and respect for the environment, combines indissolubly a strong idea of balanced development and, at last, environmentally compatible.

With the drafting and approval of the MPs, an hard course that lasted 4 years has seen the involvement of all the social actors directly and indirectly affected and the use of the more sophisticated and innovative technical and scientific instruments, the Department's activities did not end but found its natural continuation in 2011, when it appeared the essential need to edit a single document, shared and participated by the Managing Authority of the Rural Development Plan and by the institutional partnership, that would collect and integrate the conservation and preservation measures already contained in the individual MPs in order to achieve a higher level of uniformity and coherence.

These rules also represent, on the base of the 2007-2013 Community planning on promoting a sustainable development in areas of high naturalness, the opportunities for integration of conservation policies and those of promotion and enhancement of the cultural, natural and landscaped attractors in the regional territory.

The Department of Environment, as agreed with the Ministry of the Environment and Land and Sea Protection, also completed in May 2012 the update of the information of the Standard Forms, included in the database "Natura 2000" that follows the specifications of the new Form produced by the European Commission, and the corrections of the perimeters of the sites resulted from the comparison between those in force at the scale of the original representation (1:25.000) and those with more details traced in the Regional Technical Map (1:10.000). Furthermore, under the same update, the proposal of four new SCIs was forwarded to the Ministry, together with to the two new marine SCIs already presented in September 2011. The long and complex process described so far will have definitive fulfilment, as required by the Habitats Directive implemented in Italy with DPR No. 357, 1993, subsequently amended and integrated with the DPR No. 120, with the forthcoming establishment of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). ■

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NATURA 2000 ITALIA informa

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