



"Jewels in the crown"

Good practices Natura 2000 and leisure





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Foreword

Natura 2000 and leisure

The European Union is striving to protect biodiversity. To that end, a comprehensive ecological network is being set up. In all European member states, companies and organisations from the leisure sector (tourism, recreation, sport) and authorities are involved in the implementations resulting from the Birds and Habitat Directives. Each country will have to consider what opportunities this will provide.

The Birds and Habitat Directives also provide opportunities for improving the quality of the product. By the very nature of its product, the leisure sector (tourism, recreation and sport) depends on spatial and natural quality (using green spaces and perception of nature, peacefulness and space). Because of this, the sector can benefit from nature protection resulting from Natura 2000. There are many areas under directives in which certain (economic) activities are being developed within the framework of considerations. Moreover, being situated in a Natura 2000 area also offers new opportunities for niche-marketing and advertising, targeting a new customer base precisely because of the proximity of valuable biodiversity. The challenge is formulating opportunities within the protected areas, thus creating win-win situations for both leisure and nature protection.

The Netherlands' Interests

The Netherlands also have to deal with situations in which nature and leisure go hand in hand in certain places, but do not go well together in others, particularly as our country has a relatively large number of inhabitants living in a small area. The Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality is searching for possibilities for nature and leisure to fit in well together, so we have set up various activities. For instance, at the beginning of 2004, we organised an expert meeting, with the theme Natura 2000 and leisure, and invited colleagues from five other countries to exchange their examples and experiences of how well leisure and nature can go together. I am offering you this brochure, a result of this expert meeting. It contains a number of examples from various European countries, in which leisure and Natura 2000 are combined in a favourable manner. Every country deals with the issue in a different way. Here in the Netherlands for instance, we developed a "growth & shrink vision" for the Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied, as we call it. However, you will be able to read about it later in this booklet.

Let's learn from each other

The expert meeting taught us that we, as European countries, can learn from each other's experiences, which is why we have collected a number of best

practices in the field of Natura 2000 and leisure ("jewels in the crown"), and have distributed it widely throughout all the countries of the European Union. Here in the Netherlands, we are learning from it, I hope you will do so too, and that you are able to use these ideas in your own Natura 2000 areas. I am also offering you a challenge: inform us, and also your colleagues from other countries in Europe, of your own best practices, so that we can all profit from each other's knowledge.

May this booklet offer you much pleasure.



PHOTO: MIKE VAN ENGELEN

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read 'K.J. de Ruiter', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

K.J. de Ruiter
Director Rural Affairs
Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and
Food Quality

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The Wadden Sea, a feeding, resting, mewing and breeding area for a large number of water birds.



PHOTO: MIEKE VAN ENGELEN



Introduction

■ The Birds and Habitat Directives were initiated to protect biodiversity. Together they provide a comprehensive ecological network: Natura 2000. On the Natura 2000 sites, all new plans and projects have to be tested for their impact on nature via a framework of considerations.

This new legislation stimulates economic sectors (including tourism, recreation and sport) in these special nature areas to implement their new activities carefully. The leisure sector depends on the quality of both space and natural habitats. Because of this, the sector can benefit from nature conservation resulting from Natura 2000. Natura 2000 offers possibilities for sustainable product development.

How do the various countries deal with the implementation of the Birds and Habitat Directives in relation to tourism and recreation? The challenge is to generate opportunities alongside the restrictions in the areas protected under the Birds and Habitat Directives, thereby creating win-win situations for both leisure and nature conservation.

In this brochure, we have brought together and described 10 cases of good practices, each one being a pro-active project in the area of recreation and nature. The cases are different examples of how recreation and nature can strengthen each other. The 'good practices' can relate, for example, to information and communication, collaboration and support canvassing, research or spatial and site management measures.

But what do we mean when we talk about the relationship between Natura 2000 and recreation and tourism?

2010 target

The EU has been involved in efforts to protect the continent's natural heritage for the past 30 years. The Sixth Environmental Action Plan (EAP), 'Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice', which sets out the EU's environmental policy agenda until 2012, highlights nature and biodiversity as a top priority, stating that responses must be found to the pressures from human activities on nature in Member States and the biodiversity nature supports.

In 2001, when EU heads of state and government launched the EU Sustainable Development Strategy in Gothenburg, they declared that the decline in biodiversity must be halted by 2010. A '2010 target' also exists at the international level: during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, world leaders committed themselves to significantly reducing global biodiversity loss by 2010. The aim of EU policy is to reach these targets and to incorporate nature conservation into other policy areas, such as farming, fishing and industry. Two EU Directives deal with the conservation of European wildlife, focusing on the protection of sites as well as species: the Birds Directive (1979) and the Habitat Directive (1992).

Birds and Habitat Directives

The main aim of the Birds Directive is the long-term protection of all bird species living in the wild in the EU. The directive refers to 181 threatened (sub-)species that require special care. Member States are responsible for designating special areas of conservation, in particular with the aim of protecting migratory birds.

The main objective of the Habitat Directive is the conservation of wild plants and animals and their

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The natural environment of the Swiss Alps is a major attraction for visitors.



PHOTO: MICHAEL PUTSCH

Left: Canoeing is a popular activity in nature areas.

Right: A wooden grating track in the Polleur bog, the Walloon Region.



PHOTO: MARLEEN ARIENS

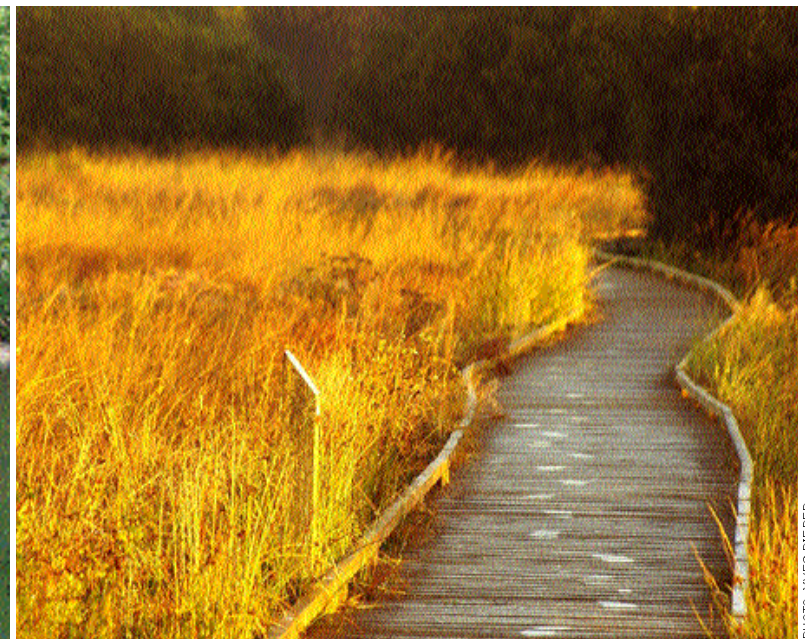


PHOTO: YVES PIEPER

natural habitats. In this case too, Member States must designate special areas of conservation. In addition, they must also draw up management plans in order to achieve a sustainable development strategy by combining long-term conservation measures and the economic and social activities of people. The directive refers to approximately 200 types of habitats, 200 animal species and more than 500 plant species of Community interest which require protection.

Natura 2000

The special areas of conservation referred to in both directives together form the Natura 2000 network, the cornerstone of the nature conservation policy pursued by the European Community. Under the directives, “Special Protection Areas” (SPAs) and “Special Areas for Conservation” (SACs) have been or are being created.

For the 15 old Member States the list of sites should be largely established by the end of 2004. The network will also be extended to the new Member States. Today more than 18% of the EU’s territory has been designated as Natura 2000 sites (more than 15,000 sites covering 460,000 km²). This is co-financed through the Commission’s LIFE programme (set up in 1992 to develop EU environmental policy) and other Community finance instruments.

Many of the Natura 2000 habitats are habitats used by man. Natura 2000 is also a scheme for the protection of landscapes because it seeks to conserve typical landscape elements such as hedges, baulks, small woods, ponds and bogs as well as traditional agriculture.

Sustainable development

Article 6 of the Habitat Directive lays down important principles for managing the areas and preserving the balance between nature conservation

and economic, social and cultural requirements. The intention is to promote sustainable development and at the same time protect biological diversity by means of the directive. The Natura 2000 areas are therefore not only intended as nature reserves, but also as areas for human activity. According to the EU, this network and economic progress actually go together very well and profitable activities such as agriculture/animal husbandry, tourism and many others can be developed further. Provided, of course, that these do not conflict with the intended nature conservation.

Tourism can play a number of positive roles in Natura 2000 areas. For instance, it can help raise awareness among tourists and local people of the need for conservation. It can also contribute to the local economy by providing an additional attraction or source of revenue. This encourages a greater acceptance of the protected area within the local community and can also raise additional funds for the conservation of the site itself.

This fits in well with the wish to make more room for sustainable tourism.

Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism is tourism that is economically and socially viable without detracting from the environment and local culture. As the product ‘tourism’ is largely based on environmental, cultural and social quality, the sector – if not managed in a sustainable manner – is at risk of deteriorating or even consuming its own income-generating resource base, and thus of being economically and socially unsustainable.

In most parts of Europe the traditional cultural landscape provides the suitable natural and cultural resource which is a prerequisite for the tourism product. Wise land-use is a crucial factor in sustainable destination development.

Management

There are also significant challenges involved in ensuring that the Natura 2000 sites are adequately protected and managed. Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Habitat Directive in May 2002, Europe’s Environment Ministers signed the ‘El Teide Declaration’ committing themselves to important objectives and principles that should be followed in managing the Natura 2000 network:

Promoting awareness and understanding of Natura 2000 and supporting experience-sharing and good practice;

- promoting the development of partnerships involving a broad range of stakeholders;
- supporting the sustainable use and management of Natura 2000 areas for educational and recreation purposes;
- ensuring that the needs of Natura 2000 are considered in other EU policies;
- recognising that these objectives require targeted resources.

To ensure that Natura 2000 will be a success, better communication is needed with all audiences, from policymakers to stakeholders to citizens. It is important to explain the value of the Natura 2000 sites, what it really means to designate areas as Natura 2000 sites and why everybody benefits from these. Natura 2000 sites are not a burden ‘imposed by Brussels’ but rather a real source of wealth and an opportunity for sustainable rural development for all communities and citizens directly concerned. Natura 2000 sites should be considered as ‘jewels in the crown’ rather than undesirable areas of unproductive land.



■ The “Hautes Fagnes” nature reserve is located near Belgium’s highest peak at Botrange, in the eastern part of Belgium. The nature reserve covers 4,600 hectare. The Polleur bog of 53 hectare is part of the Hautes Fagnes Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The site is very close to Mont Rigi, where there is a permanent information desk of the Nature and Forest Department DNF (Division de la Nature et des Forêts) and a restaurant. The Polleur bog is easily accessible from the Eupen-Malmedy national road (N 68).

In former times, the Polleur bog was used as a peat extraction site by neighbouring village communities. In 1957, it was declared a nature reserve and is now part of the European Natura 2000 Network. The area is owned by the Walloon Region.

This case shows how, by taking spatial measures, a good balance can be achieved between nature conservation and tourism.



PHOTO: YVES PIEPER

A site, there to be discovered by all

The Polleur bog, the Walloon Region

Endangered habitats and species

In the Polleur bog, visitors will be able to discover the following endangered habitats protected by EU regulations: dry and wet heaths, degraded raised bogs and quaking bogs.

The area is also a habitat for several endangered bird species, like black grouse, northern wheatear, grey shrike, hen harrier, stonechat and whinchat. The Polleur bog is mainly used for educational purposes and is usually always open to the public. It is only when there is a risk of bushfires and during nesting periods that access to the track network is limited and subject to special regulations.

Tourism

Tourism is an important economic sector in the eastern part of Belgium. 500,000 visitors come to this part of Belgium each year. According to the local tourism office OTCE (L'Office de Tourisme des Cantons de l'Est) this creates employment for 2,500 people i.e. 8 % of the total local employment and generates a total sales turnover of 75,000,000 euro. The main attractions for tourists in the eastern part of Belgium are large forest areas, lakes and nature conservation sites. The OTCE aims to develop soft tourism activities, like walking and biking. According to the DNF information desk, around 200,000 visitors discover the Hautes Fagnes each

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Special website on the accessibility of nature for persons with mobility problems:

http://mrw.wallonie.be/dgrne/dnf/dcnev/acces_nature

Left: Access zoning by development of a wooden grating track across the Polleur-bog.

Right: Visitors are interested in the landscape of the Hautes Fagnes.



PHOTO: YVES PIEPER

year. The visitors are French-speaking (1/3), German-speaking (1/3) and Flemish/Dutch-speaking (1/3) and come mostly from Belgium and neighbouring Germany and the Netherlands. Most visitors are interested in trekking, skiing, nature, landscapes and Belgium's highest peak (694 metres above sea level).

Access zones

In the past, there was no regulation of visitors' access to the site and they could therefore enter almost all the areas of the nature reserve. This had a negative impact on protected species and sensitive habitats. Since the eighties, different access zones have been demarcated in the Hautes Fagnes and a 100 kilometres network of recommended tracks (mostly on wooden boardwalks) has been set out.

The 2.5 kilometres long wooden boardwalk across the Polleur bog has been developed by the DNF in close cooperation with a non-governmental organisation. The track is 1.20 metres wide and is equipped with security railings for wheelchairs. These railings can also be used as guides for the blind. Wider sections of the boardwalk have been created to allow wheelchairs to pass each other. The DNF, Malmedy forest district, is responsible for this. Access to this circuit is free.

For nature conservation purposes, dogs are not allowed in the nature reserve. Additional auxiliary guards have therefore been recruited to provide information, raise awareness and ensure that specific rules are observed.

Today, even with 200,000 visitors per year, a good balance has been created between nature conservation and tourism. Nature supports recreation via the uniqueness of the Hautes Fagnes landscapes and the particular value of the endangered species that can be observed there. In turn, recreation supports nature by raising public awareness about the conservation and management of this Natura 2000 site.



The booklet series “Unique in Schleswig-Holstein: Natura 2000” and special brochures on Natura 2000 and leisure activities.

Raising awareness and sensibility Schleswig-Holstein, Germany

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■ In Germany the majority of coastal ecosystems, which are special areas of conservation, are situated in Schleswig-Holstein. These habitats include particularly the Wadden Sea, tidal estuaries, heath lands and fens. Particularly in the season of bird migration Schleswig-Holstein is one of the European areas with the largest number of birds. There are 88 endangered bird species living in Schleswig-Holstein.

Some are part of the European ecological network Natura 2000. Under the Habitat Directive these are about 114,000 hectares, which corresponds to approximately 7.4% of terrestrial area. Additionally there are 578,000 hectares of Wadden sea and water

surface. In Schleswig-Holstein, 270 sites have been designated under the Habitat Directive and 46 under the Birds Directive (six of them being designated under both Directives). The government of Schleswig-Holstein owns most of these areas, others are in private ownership.

Public Information and Participation

The Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Agriculture of Schleswig-Holstein strives to keep the public well-informed about the designation process of Natura 2000. There are special participatory proceedings to raise objections and submit proposals.

On the local level conflicts still exist as a result of the designation process of Natura 2000 areas because local stakeholders feel that they have been lacking information and that participation has not been satisfying. Therefore the ministry is intensifying the public relations work necessary to ensure the information of citizens. For example: In the spring of 2004 the ministry organised an “information tour on the protection of birds“. An information truck visited several cities in Schleswig-Holstein. All citizens were given the opportunity to ask questions and get information about Natura 2000. Furthermore, the ministry attempts to inform the public about fundamental principles of Natura through its internet pages.

The aim of the booklet series “Unique in Schleswig-Holstein: Natura 2000 – to preserve and develop habitats” published by the ministry, is to increase public awareness and sensibility for the relevance of Natura 2000 areas. The fundamental principles of Natura 2000 and the additional information about areas that are to be declared are comprehensibly explained in a basic information sheet. The importance of different ecosystems of Schleswig-Holstein for biodiversity as well as the significance of protecting these areas is demonstrated by the presentation of several endangered species. The brochure “Klartext” takes up common prejudices against the Natura 2000 and refutes them with sound arguments.

Tourism in Schleswig-Holstein

Tourism is an essential part of the economy in Schleswig-Holstein. Its share of gross income amounted in 2001 to around 4.6 % with a yearly turnover of 5.2 billion euro and far exceeded the average German gross income (2.8 %). It has to be considered that because of the difficulties in recording turnovers referring on tourism the real net

product of tourism presumably is far higher. As a result of travel analysis of the “Forschungsgemeinschaft Urlaub und Reisen” in 2003, an important motivation to travel to Schleswig-Holstein is to experience nature, and German tourists prefer destinations where nature is still intact. The experience of nature is often combined with sportive outdoor activities like cycling, trekking or hiking.

The ministry works on concepts that promote the experience of nature in a natural and environmentally sound way. The ministry supports above all voluntary agreements between the stakeholders from nature conservation, sports, tourism and public.

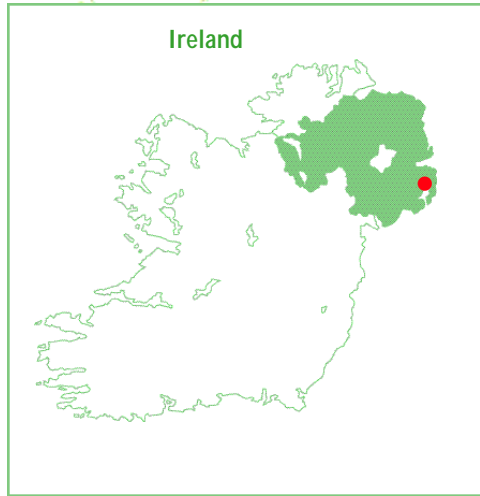
Sports and leisure activities: The approach

Because of its diversity in water ecosystems and landscapes Schleswig-Holstein is attractive for all kinds of water sports. The area is especially an El Dorado for sailing and canoeing. The Ministry of Environment of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and the Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Agriculture of Schleswig-Holstein cooperate with the two sailing associations of their states. On the basis of voluntary agreements a concept was developed to organize environmentally sound sailing. This concept is realized in the coastal Natura 2000 areas of the two governments. Twelve areas in the German Baltic Sea are presented in the brochure “Wind in den Segeln” published by the ministries of the environment of the two states. This brochure for yachters can also be used as a travel guide. It includes descriptions of sights, hints for trips to points of interest and guidelines for proper behaviour in ecological sensitive regions. Maps for each of the 12 regions display the described information.

The ministry has developed a similar brochure for canoeists in cooperation with associations of sport and tourism that is called “Kayaks, canoes, kilometres”. In March 2001 the cooperation partners committed to supporting environmentally friendly canoeing in a voluntary agreement. The focus of the work lies on developing an infrastructure that is compatible with nature and to establish guidelines for canoeing in sensitive areas.

Different hiking and cycling tours through Natura 2000 areas are presented in a special brochure, and can be found in press releases and on the internet. Each source contains detailed descriptions of the routes with information about the distance, sights, landscape and ecological peculiarities as well as a map and further information on how to get to the area by public transport.





■ Strangford Lough is a large shallow sea lough (30 kilometres from head to mouth) on the east coast of Northern Ireland. Its northern end is only 6 kilometres from the outskirts of Belfast. Strangford Lough is one of the 12 Marine SACs LIFE projects, a four year partnership project involving all four countries in the UK. Its overall goal was to establish management schemes on 12 candidate marine SAC (Special Areas for Conservation) sites. A key component of the project was to assess the interactions between human activities, including recreational activities and the development of related infrastructure, and interest features on these sites.

Nature

The Lough has an indented shoreline and contains a huge variety of marine habitats and species. It has been submitted as a candidate SAC, primarily as a large shallow inlet and bay, but also for other interest features including Common Seal, saltmarsh and reefs.

based activities such as sailing, windsurfing, diving and some jet-skiing. On and around the Lough there is a long tradition of wildfowling and many people simply come to walk, cycle or horse ride or visit the many historic properties around its shores. People are attracted to Strangford Lough because of its outstanding landscape, sense of tranquillity and its rich wildlife and heritage. To a large degree, sustaining recreational activity, and the tourism revenue that it generates, is dependent on maintaining a high quality environment. Thus there is much to unite conservation and recreational interests around the Lough although there have been times in its recent history when such consensus was very hard to find.

Cooperation

Recognising the wide range of interests and activities that take place on and around the Lough, Government established the Strangford Lough

Working together on a management scheme Strangford Lough, Northern Ireland

The Lough's extensive mudflats and eelgrass beds provide plentiful food for spectacular numbers of overwintering waterfowl. There are seven features for which Strangford Lough has been classified as an SPA (Special Protection Area), including three species of breeding terns and the internationally important population of overwintering Light-bellied Brent Goose.

Recreation

Strangford Lough's proximity to Belfast provides ready access for a large population to an attractive coastal environment and to numerous recreational opportunities. The Lough is protected from open sea waves but not from winds. There are many water-

Management Committee (recently re-named Management Advisory Committee) in 1992, partly in response to pressure from the local community. The Committee brings together the statutory bodies and the main stakeholder groups to advise on how sustainability may be achieved on the ground and on the water. It helps to clarify and communicate important management issues and serves to take the heat out of otherwise contentious issues, such as national and international designations. The Committee, working closely with Government's Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) and with the local councils, has achieved much in its twelve years' existence. It has collaborated with local recreational

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Sailing is one of the many water-based activities on Strangford Lough.

PHOTO: EHS DEPARTMENT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND



interests to produce codes of good conduct and has published information on public access around the Lough to enable visitors to make the most of their visit to the Lough without disturbing wildlife.

Management scheme

Given that the Committee contains a wealth of local knowledge and experience, the EHS sought its help in preparing a management scheme for the Natura 2000 designations on the Lough. Indeed the Committee and its staff played a key role in collecting and collating data, organising local workshops and in drafting the management scheme document and accompanying public information booklet. The full management scheme is a comprehensive document that includes an analysis of how different activities, including recreational activities, could impact on the SPA and SAC features. This has

presented a picture of the susceptibility of different aspects of the Natura 2000 site to new recreational developments. The EHS has subsequently made this information widely available to developers, planners and site managers. It is a key source of information in the determination of planning applications and other proposals for development that have the potential to affect the Lough and its wildlife.

Factors for success

By working closely with local user groups, community organisations and specialist interests represented on the Committee, it has been possible to demonstrate that many activities can proceed alongside nature conservation in Strangford Lough.

There are a number of factors for success and these include:

- voluntary controls and codes of conduct which have a key role to play in the management of recreational activities;
- making information widely available to the public which can encourage considerate behaviour;
- generic guidance and site specific management plans which can be helpful in reviewing the potential effects of different forms of recreation on the features of Natura 2000 sites.

The management scheme included a three year action plan which is currently being reviewed by the statutory bodies responsible for the management of the Lough in close consultation with the Committee. This will include further targeted research on human impacts.



A camp site, one of the many holiday accommodations in the Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied.

Restructuring of holiday accommodations Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied, the Netherlands

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■ The Netherlands is a densely populated country. There are 16 million inhabitants and approximately 400 people per square kilometre. Right in the middle of the Netherlands lies the Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied, the largest wood and heath area of the country. It encompasses approximately 900 square kilometres. Around 30 million visitors flock to this area every year and they spend more than 1 billion euro. The recreation sector provides employment for more than 20,000 people and is one of the fastest growing and most durable sectors regarding employment and the economy in the area.

The Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied is a leading area for recreation and tourism, as well as a vital area for biodiversity. The area has been designated because of the Birds Directive for some types of birds. Furthermore, it has been designated in accordance with the Habitat Directive for certain habitat types and species. It is unique that a densely populated country such as the Netherlands houses a wildlife area that can compete with wildlife areas elsewhere in Europe. The unique landscapes of shifting sands, heath and forest help make up the exceptional character of this area. Because of its size, silence and darkness can still be found here. This makes the Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied very appealing to

both people and animals. Large mammals such as red deer, fallow deer, roe deer and wild boars can be found in the the Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied.

Growth and shrink project

The Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied is threatened by numerous developments. One of these is the location of holiday accommodations in extremely sensitive areas. Precisely because they are situated in a nature area many of these businesses cannot expand in order to meet the ever increasing quality requirements of tourists.

The recreation and nature sectors have long been at odds because of conflicting interests. In the past few years, both sides have started to consider each other's points of view more respectfully. In 2001 the provincial authorities published a policy document entitled "Veluwe 2010, a quality impulse". This document served as a new starting point in order to improve the quality of the Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied. This requires all parties to be on the same wavelength in order to achieve the aims of "Veluwe 2010". As a spin-off the recreation and nature sectors signed a declaration of intent in 2002, agreeing to create scope for growth of holiday accommodations in places where this fits in with nature and at the same time shrink businesses where this would greatly benefit nature.

The aim of this project instigated by the provincial authorities is a higher quality of both holiday accommodation and nature in the Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied. Central to the growth and shrink vision is that on balance the holiday accommodations surface area does not increase. Growth and shrink offers recreation operators in existing clusters of businesses the opportunity to expand. Growth is not permitted in areas with qualifying Birds and Habitat Directives values. Furthermore, holiday accommodations are removed from the Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied, taking into account the restoration and development specifications of the Birds and Habitat Directives.

This process must be completed in 2010. The ultimate aim of the growth and shrink project is 100 hectares of growth and shrink respectively. Given what is now known and taking into account the procedure of the provincial authorities, it is expected that there will be no significant harm to the qualifying Birds and Habitat Directives values.

Factors for success and failure

Up till now there is little experience with such an approach. However, something can be said about the factors for success and failure. Factors for success are:

- the integral approach regarding the area benefits both recreation and nature;
- aiming for the same goal (quality improvement) improves the cooperation between both sectors;
- daring to differentiate in nature values (in some parts of the Centraal Veluws Natuurgebied no values occur at all, according to the Birds and Habitat Directives) means more space.

Factors for failure are:

- financing: the high costs involved when removing and replacing recreational businesses;
- the chosen approach for the Birds and Habitat Directives areas is only effective in large or interdependent areas with a wide spread of nature values;
- the approach will only work if both sectors consider each other respectfully.

The provincial authorities are executing the growth and shrink scenario in practice, through (the preparation of) the purchase of camp sites, but also by creating visions for cluster development, for the expansion of the businesses situated in these clusters.





■ Skjern River Delta is situated in Ringkøbing County - in the western part of Jutland. The Skjern River rises in the hilly part of central Jutland and flows in a westerly direction over a distance of about 90 kilometres before it flows into Ringkøbing Fjord. There are two main towns near the fjord – Skjern and Tarm. At the mouth of the Skjern River a low-lying floodplain and delta area of approximately 4,000 ha has been created during the past few centuries.

The nature restoration project

The river valley used to be a vast marshland with a mixture of wetland habitats. From 1962 till 1968 the meandering river was channelled and diked over a stretch of 20 kilometres and the whole delta area was reclaimed and converted into intensive farmland. The reclamation project had a serious negative impact on the wild flora and fauna. Only few natural wetland habitats were left in a

A nature restoration project Skjern River Delta, Denmark

predominantly agricultural landscape. The reclamation had also serious adverse effects on the water quality, and thereby the fish and waterfowl populations of Ringkøbing Fjord. In 1987 the Danish Parliament decided to restore the Skjern River to its original flow. The next twelve years were dominated by public debates, information campaigns, scientific and technical studies, major land acquisition, design, environmental assessments and legislation. Finally in 1998 the Danish Parliament adopted the “Skjern River Restoration Project”. The reconstruction work started in 1999 with a project area of 2,200 ha out of the 4,000 ha which had originally been reclaimed.

Nature

The whole project area is designated as a Site of Community Interest under the EC Habitat Directive and a part is designated as a Specially Protected Area under the EC Birds Directive. The river is a habitat for the following species and vegetation types: atlantic salmon, otter and floating waterplantain.

Two of the main objectives for the nature restoration project were:

- recreating a natural wetland habitat of international importance;
- developing the river valley for leisure activities and tourism.

The Skjern River Delta is now a wetland habitat of international importance for breeding and resting waterfowl, with more than 40 kilometres of new meandering river where the numbers of salmon and otters are on the increase and where the floating waterplantain flourishes.

Most of the nature area is owned by the State. The Danish Forest and Nature Agency under the Ministry of Environment is responsible for managing and maintaining the area. Nature management comprises making agreements with neighbours and local people about leisure activities and maintaining recreational facilities as well as providing information and interpretation.

Recreation and public participation

Leisure and tourism are a big priority in this nature area. The local people were not used to having an internationally important habitat area right on their doorstep. In order to find out what needs and expectations local people and tourists had as regards the newly created nature area, an interest group for leisure activities was set up by the Ministry of the Environment in 1998. The group consisted of representatives of all stakeholders (ranging from hunters and farmers to the local museum and the

For more information:

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The Skjern River Delta is a wetland habitat of international importance with more than 40 kilometres of meandering river.

PHOTO: MARIANNE LINNEMANN



nature protection organisation). In 2001 this group drew up a proposal for access and leisure activities in the Skjern River Delta all the while bearing wildlife in mind. In the light of this proposal the departmental order “Access for the public and the recreational use of the Skjern River Restoration project” was decreed, and the Forest and Nature Agency came up with an outdoor recreation plan for the nature area. A plan with the objective to give the local people and tourists the best possibilities for good nature experiences and recreational activities while safeguarding development of nature and ensuring nature protection. To keep in touch with local people and to have a platform to inform, to discuss and to continue communication, the Forest and Nature Agency set up a new interest group for nature management, leisure activities, recreation facilities and information in 2001.

Information and interpretation

The Forest and Nature Agency has also drawn up an information and interpretation plan which is partly carried out together with the local authorities. The objective is to provide visitors with knowledge about nature and culture in the area, as well as inspiration and curiosity to visit the sights in the Skjern River Delta. The interpretation methods are nature centres with exhibitions, small “on site outdoor exhibitions”, information boards, leaflets, booklets, a homepage, guided walks and outdoor education.

Results

Implementation of the restoration project was a long but necessary process. In 1987 the local people were against the nature restoration project and the farmers were bent on preventing the project from taking shape. The attitude of local people to the project has today

changed for the better. The process has benefitted enormously from local participation. Just as important was the input of farmers where the purchase of lands and rights was concerned. The area now attracts many local people and tourists. The local people love to walk, ride their bicycles, ride horse and go for a run in the area. Many tourists visit and use this internationally important nature area for all kinds of leisure activities. Several of the facilities are suitable for wheelchair users. The recreation and information plans should ensure that access is guaranteed and leisure activities can take place while safeguarding wildlife.

Barbara Engels: “Tourism and Natura 2000, good communication needed”

Barbara Engels works for the Bundesamt für Naturschutz and is an expert in the field of nature conservation and tourism/leisure.

Introduction

How is the Bundesamt für Naturschutz organised and what are the main activities?

The Bundesamt für Naturschutz (Federal Agency for Nature Conservation) is a Federal authority reporting to the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU). We advise the ministry on all issues relating to national and international nature conservation and landscape management, promote nature conservation activities, support research projects and act as the authority permitting the import and export of protected species of animals and plants.

What is your job for the Bundesamt für Naturschutz?

The Bundesamt für Naturschutz focuses on the common ground between nature conservation and other sectors. The working unit for which I work is engaged in tourism, sports and recreation. I concentrate specifically on international contacts.

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Implementation of Natura 2000 in Germany

How is the implementation of Natura 2000 organised in Germany?

The implementation of Natura 2000 in Germany is not easy. Competences are shared between the Federal State and the German Länder. The Federal State is responsible for the national evolution of the sites proposed by the Länder and establishes the proposed Sites of Community Interest. The sixteen Länder all have a different approach to Natura 2000 regarding designation, management, implication, assessment and monitoring. The present situation is that there is a large number of sites, but the overall territory is comparatively small.

Which problems occur with the implementation?

In Germany there was widespread concern in several sectors that introducing Natura 2000 would have negative consequences for the implementation of economic activities. Also within the tourism sector there was concern that activities would be halted. All sectors were too ill-informed to pass judgement on these matters. On top of that, the feeling was that the authorities didn't do enough to involve them in the process. The authorities tried to introduce Natura 2000 too rashly, resulting in opposition to it from those concerned. Such an approach ensures that, even before they start the process, the authorities lack even basic support. My foreign contacts tell me that the same problem also occurs in other countries.

To analyse the conflicts between Natura 2000 and tourism activities in Germany, a research project was started in June 2003. What was the research method? Which were the main results of the research project?

Through questionnaires, interviews and meetings in tourism destinations with important Natura 2000 sites, data on conflicts were gathered and potential strategies for resolution and possible synergies were collected. The main results of the project were:

- hardly any acceptance of Natura 2000;
- severe lack of information, especially for the tourism sector;
- prejudices can be overcome;
- willingness to co-operate;
- planning and participation processes should create the conditions for co-operation between stakeholders.

Especially as far as “willingness to co-operate” is concerned, the tourism sector is “open minded”. The sector realizes full well that areas need to be protected. At a workshop several stakeholders indicated for instance that they would gladly co-operate, but that they needed more information. That is why it is essential to indicate what implementation of Natura 2000 means for the tourism sector.

For instance, state clearly that the current recreational infrastructure can remain in place. In order to achieve economic development, expansion of the recreational infrastructure is sometimes necessary. This expansion is only feasible when upsetting the balance has been ruled out. Research will have to show that no disruption will occur. In general this research is costly, something that has to be borne in mind. Especially some sports activities (such as mountain biking and water-skiing) often create most disruption.

Barbara Engels: "Effective communication is a key factor."

operates with the main sector organizations. By communicating the message through an intermediary umbrella organization, the message will be more readily accepted.

In order to acquaint tourists with Natura 2000 and the specific nature values, information about the area has to be promoted in an attractive way and fulfilling the needs of tourists. Make sure the information is useful to the visitor, for instance by adding a map. Information must be presented as an attraction and not in a formal way.

Can you name any interesting cases in Germany in which these recommendations are used?

The Bundesamt für Naturschutz and Deutsche Sportbund (German Sports Association) together compiled a brochure highlighting the case for Natura 2000. The Deutsche Sportbund is an umbrella organization for all the sporting organizations and consequently has a structural contact with all sporting organizations. On account of this publication I have, for instance, received an enthusiastic response from a sectoral division of the Sportbund Deutscher Aeroclub who can put the information to good use. The Ministry of Environment in Mecklenburg Vorpommern launched the information campaign "Sailing and Natura 2000". In the brochures simple arguments are used in order to dispel preconceived ideas about Natura 2000. To that end brochures have been compiled aimed at different target groups.

Expert meeting Natura 2000 and Leisure

Last May you attended the Expert meeting Natura 2000 and Leisure. What was the aim of this meeting? What kind of people did you meet at this meeting? What are for you the most important conclusions of this meeting?

The aim of this informal meeting was to share and exchange ideas on the relationship between Natura 2000 and Leisure. Besides the participants of the European Commission, representatives of the national governments of France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and of the governments of the Flemish and Walloon region of Belgium also attended; all experts in the fields of nature and tourism policies.

The meeting inspired me greatly. It is interesting to meet people from other countries and to discover that each country has its own organization of government. Each country has the same problems but chooses different solutions. Exchanging experiences is therefore very instructive. From the cases in the various countries it appears that effective communication is a key factor in promoting the acceptance of Natura 2000.

Future

What are points of interest for the future? Is it worthwhile to promote the exchange of knowledge with experts of other countries? What is the best way to organise this exchange?

Exchanging knowledge about this subject is vital, also in the future. That is why this brochure is a good first step to compare notes. This brochure provides people with food for thought.

It makes sense to enlarge the expert meeting that took place and invite countries from Northern, Southern and Eastern Europe to join in. Also "new member states", which still have to start implementing Natura 2000, benefit from previous experiences. It should not be forgotten that tourism is an important opportunity for countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Croatia.

Other, as walking and biking activities fit in very well. However, large groups can also cause a lot of disturbance. Management measures such as zoning can limit disturbance, through e.g. route structures and the layout of the area. Natura 2000 makes sure that the relation between nature and tourism is carefully weighed up. In that way the surplus value of the area is retained, resulting in sustainable development, also as far as the economic future is concerned!

What do the results imply for the communication aspects of Natura 2000?

Well-differentiated communication concepts are essential. The message has to be adapted to the target groups. To adapt the information on Natura 2000 to different sectors, the Bundesamt für Naturschutz co-





■ The nature reserve Houterenberg-Pinnekenwijer is situated in the Gerhagen nature and walking area of the community of Tessenderlo in the Belgian province of Limburg. The reserve occupies some 100 hectares. The area is characterised by land dunes lying on top of sandstone hills. Vegetation consists of forests and heath, an occasional mere or 'wijer' can be found in the lower parts. The Flemish Community owns the nature reserve. Nature management and preservation is the responsibility of its Nature Department. The nature management aims at rejuvenating and consolidating the open heath land and creating open spaces in the wooded areas. This case demonstrates the creation of an accessibility plan with the involvement of all concerned.

Nature & Recreation

In 2000 the Nature Department started drawing up nature management plans for a number of Flemish

Involving stakeholders

Houterenberg-Pinnekenwijer, Flanders

nature reserves. The main goal of these plans is to create more biodiversity, especially in favour of threatened species.

In Houterenberg-Pinnekenwijer nature and recreation both are important factors. While drawing up the nature management plan for this reserve, it soon turned out that extra research into the recreational-use of the Gerhagen area was needed. In order to streamline the interaction between nature management and recreation, an accessibility plan was drawn up for the entire Gerhagen area. The nature management plan describes the measures necessary to facilitate the development of nature. The accessibility plan of Gerhagen stipulates which

recreation activities are tolerable in which areas and where recreation may have to be scaled or moved in order to realize and support the development of nature.

The process

The Nature Department opted for an open research process. During the entire period of the research, participation of and feedback to the target groups (the visitors of the area) was organized. As a result, the target groups got an insight into the aims of nature management and accessibility measures. At the same time they had their say and were able to communicate their questions and wishes. The aim of the communication with target groups and everyone involved, was to ensure the support of the community for the nature management plan for the reserve as well as for the accessibility plan for the Gerhagen area.

During the process, target groups were informed that development and maintenance of the ecological values is the primary goal in every Flemish nature reserve. While setting up the accessibility plan for Gerhagen, the efforts to both preserve nature in the area and make it accessible for recreational use, made during a number of years by various parties such as local authorities and nature organisations, were taken on board.

The approach

The measures of the accessibility plan were thoroughly investigated by a team of researchers, various site managers and by inhabitants and visitors of the area. Through various surveys both on site and by mail, the most important recreational bottlenecks were brought to light and the needs were catalogued. Moreover, various meetings were organized attended by committees, locals, visitors, representatives of target groups etc.

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Only walkers will be admitted where intensive recreation is undesirable.

PHOTO: AFD, NATUUR BELGISCH LIMBURG



The surveys and meetings showed that most users live in the vicinity of the Gerhagen area and that people were very pleased with the possibilities for recreational co-use. They love to cycle, walk and jog in the area. The adjusted infrastructure makes the area attractive for wheelchair users as well. Visitors enjoy the peace and quiet as well as the natural surroundings.

Results

Based upon the accumulated information, the relative spread and the nature of recreational pressures were charted.

By comparison with the ecological vulnerability, problem areas were decided upon. As a result, a plan for recreational zones was worked out in a draft accessibility plan. This draft was discussed with all parties involved.

The accessibility plan distinguishes different zones, each with their own possibilities for recreational co-use. In -mostly open- areas where intensive recreation is undesirable, only walkers will be admitted. In the less vulnerable wooded areas, accessibility for the various target groups is indicated by signs. During the breeding season, certain parts of the reserve will be closed for walkers as well. Moreover four playing fields have been designated, mostly in the wooded areas.

Cooperation

The strength of the accessibility plan for Gerhagen lies in the positive contribution of all concerned. Communication and cooperation was conducted in a very open and constructive manner. Everyone is convinced that this plan will contribute to a durable recreational co-use of this beautiful and valuable area and that everyone should shoulder some responsibility in order to achieve this.



Over 70,000 people visit Abernethy annually for a variety of purposes such as mountain biking.

Promoting awareness

Abernethy Forest, Scotland

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■ The Abernethy Forest Nature Reserve is located south-east of Inverness, on the northern slopes of the Cairngorm Mountains. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' (RSPB) nature reserve is of exceptional importance for nature conservation. Scenically magnificent, it covers 13,713 ha of ancient Caledonian pinewood, moorland, lochs and mountains. Of the 17,500 ha of ancient Caledonian pine forest left in Scotland today, Abernethy comprises the largest remnant. It is also a very important site for key species such as capercaillie and black grouse, pinewoods birds such as crested tit and crossbill and supports important areas of other priority habitats such as bog woodland.

Management and key objectives

Nature conservation is the primary management objective at Abernethy. There is an ongoing programme to remove non-native conifers and thin and restructure Scots pine plantations. Deer populations are kept low by culling and a range of experiments to manipulate ground vegetation has started.

Expansion of the native forest is a key objective at Abernethy. The current forest area is 4,100 ha made up of 2,300 ha of native pines and 1,800 ha of Scots pine plantation. There is potential for an additional 4,500 ha of new forest on adjoining moorland with a

further 2,000 ha of alpine scrub beyond the tree line. Abernethy followed on from the pioneering work at Creag Meagaidh as one of the first sites in the UK to use deer control rather than deer fencing as the main tool to achieve native woodland expansion.

Visitors

In common with most of upland Scotland Abernethy has an open access policy. Over 70,000 people visit annually for a variety of purposes such as walking, mountain biking and bird watching. Nearly all these visitors use the network of tracks which primarily exists for estate management purposes. Few people wander off the tracks, and much of Abernethy is rarely disturbed by visitors. Visitor management at Abernethy is zoned into two areas. The lower forest has a visitor attraction, called the Osprey Centre, and several kilometres of waymarked trails which are interpreted by signs. The Osprey Centre is signposted from main roads and is advertised nationally in specialist and national press. The upper forest is not promoted in any way and there are few signs to guide the public. Visitors are welcome but have to be self-reliant. The aim of zoning is to attract visitors to the Osprey Centre and reduce disturbance to vulnerable species and habitats elsewhere.

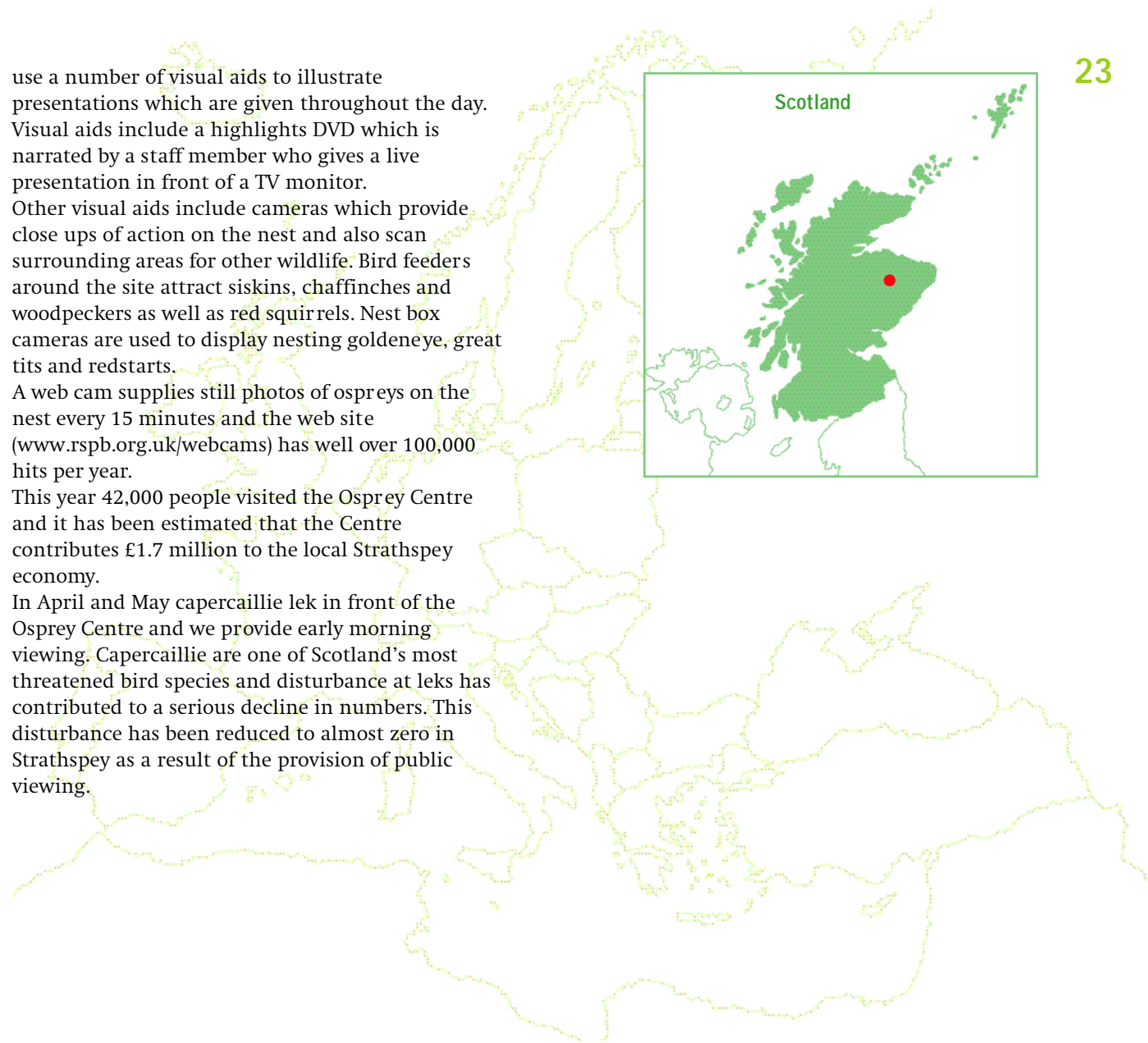
Presentation

The Osprey Centre overlooks the site where ospreys first re-colonised Scotland in 1954. A pair have continued to breed on this site virtually every year since. The Centre allows visitors to view the nest and interprets the osprey conservation success story. The Centre is open from April to early September when ospreys are on site. We employ one full time staff member at the Centre with a further 9 people employed seasonally. The emphasis is placed firmly on speaking directly to visitors rather than on written interpretation. Staff attempt to speak personally to all visitors or visiting groups and also

use a number of visual aids to illustrate presentations which are given throughout the day. Visual aids include a highlights DVD which is narrated by a staff member who gives a live presentation in front of a TV monitor. Other visual aids include cameras which provide close ups of action on the nest and also scan surrounding areas for other wildlife. Bird feeders around the site attract siskins, chaffinches and woodpeckers as well as red squirrels. Nest box cameras are used to display nesting goldeneye, great tits and redstarts. A web cam supplies still photos of ospreys on the nest every 15 minutes and the web site (www.rspb.org.uk/webcams) has well over 100,000 hits per year.

This year 42,000 people visited the Osprey Centre and it has been estimated that the Centre contributes £1.7 million to the local Strathspey economy.

In April and May capercaillie lek in front of the Osprey Centre and we provide early morning viewing. Capercaillie are one of Scotland's most threatened bird species and disturbance at leks has contributed to a serious decline in numbers. This disturbance has been reduced to almost zero in Strathspey as a result of the provision of public viewing.





■ Due to special habitat conditions, diversified land use and special regional traditions, the southern part of Bavaria and the alpine area are characterized by a high diversity of species and habitats in a small area. As a result, the percentage of protected areas is high. In addition it is an important region for recreation and tourism.

The village of Fürstenfeldbruck borders a Natura 2000 area. The river Amper runs through this area. Many citizens of the town requested the construction of a pedestrian bridge across the river. Since the bridge will be located in a Natura 2000 area, the question of appropriateness of the project arises immediately.

This case shows that an evaluation of the possible ecological deterioration caused by development plans or projects is only possible when detailed information about the current and the potential future recreational use is included in the assessment.

because this sensible habitat would now be accessible to many citizens in a very convenient manner. However, no data are available about the current recreational use of the area.

Method

To decide whether an FFH assessment is required, these missing data had to be assembled first. To that effect, visitor user counts and interviews were undertaken on select days.

The monitoring data documented significant differences between the west bank of the river, adjacent to the community, and the east bank, which so far had only limited access. For instance, the west side recorded about six to seven times more visitors with dogs. Along the east bank, on the other hand, the proportion of bicyclists is almost triple the amount compared to the west bank. The reason for this discrepancy is the long distance that needs to be covered to reach

Research into sustainable development

Southern Bavaria, Germany

The FFH-assessment

When significant effects are to be expected, the respective plans and projects need to be subjected to a so called Fauna-Flora-Habitat (FFH) assessment. This assessment pertains only to those effects which relate to the specific conservation goals of the Natura 2000 sites. A preliminary investigation determined that the construction of the bridge did not constitute a significant impairment, and consequently no deterioration. However, the administration responsible for nature conservation argued that this foot bridge could lead to some deterioration in the adjacent Natura 2000 sites,

the east bank; also, the eastern trail is part of a regional bicycle trail network.

The interviews revealed that the area is visited predominantly by repeat visitors. Most of them visit the floodplain at least once a week. Two thirds of all visitors are urban, mainly from the surrounding communities. These numbers emphasize the importance of the floodplain for routine recreation purposes.

A different part of the analysis was trying to get additional information about how visitors behaved; such as where they went and when they came to visit.

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The east bank of the river Amper which so far had only limited access.



PHOTO: ULRIKE PROBSTL

Predicting future recreational use

In order to assess the intensity of use it was needed to predict the expected changes in use patterns caused by the project. Based on the information generated during the structural mapping process and additional user counting, the construction of the foot-bridge would lead to the following changes of recreational behavior:

- an increase of the proportion of bicyclists;
- the number of walkers will increase especially in the more remote eastern part of the Natura 2000 sites;
- with the increasing number of bicyclists and walkers, one can expect a proportional increase in the number of dogs.

Result of the FFH-assessment

Based on the above described predictions one can derive several conclusions regarding the affects on the species and habitats listed in the directives. According to these affects and the expected distribution of visitors in the differentiated sub-areas one can rule out any significant deterioration of habitat types and protected species in the Natura 2000 area associated with the construction of the bridge.

Conclusion

This case documents the frequently encountered problem of the lack of recreation data for a complete FFH-assessment. It emphasizes the importance of recreation planning and its contribution to biodiversity conservation in Europe. Visitor monitoring and visitor surveys collect essential

background information for assessments concerning possible impacts on Natura 2000 sites. In the absence of such data it would be impossible to determine the potential effects of changes to the recreational infrastructure and its associated uses on protected areas.



Various local activities take place on the banks of the Loire and its tributaries.

Bringing the main parties together

La Vallée de la Loire, France

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■ France has designated “La Vallée de la Loire” as Natura 2000 site. This extensive site covers 14,700 ha with 57 towns and villages scattered all along the Loire valley from Nantes to Pont-de-Cé (about 70 km), and some of its tributaries. This example of good practice is based on an interview with Mrs. Le Nevez, the general secretary of the ‘Conservatoire des rives de la Loire et de ses affluents’ (manager and chief coordinator of Natura 2000 sites). The ‘Conservatoire des rives de la Loire et de ses affluents’ (CORELA) is an organisation responsible for protecting the banks of the Loire and its tributaries.

Communication strategies

The ‘Conservatoire’ has placed considerable emphasis on local consultation by creating local committees. This approach allows large numbers of individuals, associations and other organisations to have their say, ask questions and take part in technical meetings. The ‘Conservatoire’ also needed to tackle the rumours and misinformation that were being spread, for example “Would I have the right to let my cattle graze without being accused of ‘disrupting’ habitats?” To complete the information network, the organisation created a mobile exhibition, a

newsletter and also a contact file available in public areas (town halls, administrative centres, and utilities). Key documents, minutes of meetings and other official notes have been included in the file. It is not clear whether it is consulted very much, but it forms a common point of reference.

The borders of the “habitat” sites and the “birds” sites are now almost identical, which is why a single Objectives Document has been developed to bring together management proposals for the application of the two directives.

Disruption

Before the site was designated, hunting representatives and popular tree cultivators began a campaign against Natura 2000. But thanks to meetings that specifically brought together the main parties concerned, the ‘Conservatoire’ was able to work out the content and formulation of a specific “Disruption” note that became part of the Objectives Document. The note defines the idea of disruption and suggests courses of action adapted to the various local activities: agriculture, fishing, hunting, tourism (water sports, and other sports including cycling), and motor sports (motorbikes, quad bikes, 4x4s).

As far as hunting is concerned, negotiations led in particular to decrees on the biotopes of certain river banks, and it has also been established that hunting methods ordinarily permitted by current legislation do not disrupt either habitats or birds.

As far as both organised tourism (for example canoeing and cycling) and independent tourism (“beach” sports on the river banks) are concerned, the ‘Conservatoire’ has experienced some difficulties in assessing the extent of these, and therefore the possible disruption caused.

However, consultations are continuing to assess the

effects of all the activities or conflicting uses, before suggesting actions from the Objectives Document.

For example:

- In order to avoid disrupting the beaver population, with the agreement of the canoeing associations, the ‘Conservatoire’ proposes to prohibit night-time canoeing on the Loire.
- The prefects from both départements have issued decrees prohibiting the use of jet skis and regulating the stretches of water affected by the use of water skis.
- An “effects” study is planned in collaboration with the Loire à vélo association with the aim of establishing a cycling route along the Loire that does not disrupt natural habitats and species.
- Another working group is attempting to assess tourist activity on the site; the ‘Conservatoire’ is looking for indicators of popularity and numbers of visitors, for example to what extent pleasure boats are used.

The Internet survey on the French NATURA 2000 web site.

The Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development wanted to know who visited the site (<http://natura2000.environnement.gouv.fr>) and for what reasons. In April and May 2004, 5,519 people (16% of the visitors to the site) completed a questionnaire.

Who are they?

The site is visited by a greater and more diverse range of people than previously thought:

- 39% of those surveyed consult the site for educational, study and research purposes;
- 33% for professional purposes (linked directly to Natura 2000 or not);
- 22% for “recreational” or “group” purposes;
- 6% because they live on a Natura site, and 1% because they are appointed to do so.



Which information is most sought after?

- Top spot: 48% visited to find information directly relating to Natura.
- Pages relating to the Natura sites were also very popular and came second (39%).
- Overall, pages relating to the “species” were less sought after (29%), but some (like golden eagles and otters) were individually more popular than the pages relating to the sites themselves.

Conclusion

This survey caters for people’s need for information concerning all things to do with nature, particularly those people who participate in recreational activities. It also confirms that the Internet sites, which originally had a scientific purpose, are now essential tools to provide information about and promote Natura 2000.



■ The Wadden Sea is the largest and most natural nature reserve in the Netherlands. This is an area of outstanding natural beauty and falls under both the Birds Directive and the Habitat Directive. The Wadden Sea is a tide-land. Every low tide large mud flats are being uncovered. The area is important to many plants and animals ranging from salt-loving vegetation on the salt marshes to two types of seal. It is also the breeding, mating and nursing ground for many fish species, crustaceans and shellfish as well as a feeding, resting, mewing and breeding area for a large number of waders and other types of water birds.

The Wadden area (including the islands) is also very attractive to tourists. Visitors to this area give 'space, peace and nature' as the most important reasons for a holiday. The Wadden Sea is particularly popular among water sports enthusiasts because they can get so close to nature. During low tides many yachters beach their vessel on the uncovered mud flats. Also

Visitor's being accountable

The Wadden Sea, the Netherlands

hikers cross the flats from the mainland to the islands. Tourism creates a considerable benefit for local and regional economic and social development. In many areas tourism is the most important source of income for the residents.

Code of conduct

The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV) is primarily responsible for the nature policy in respect of the Wadden Sea and has designated the Wadden Sea as a state nature reserve. In the notes accompanying the designation it is stated that it is not permitted to beach a vessel beyond 200 metres from the buoyage of the waterway. This provision is

intended to protect seals and foraging or resting birds.

The water sports organisations made it clear to the ministry that they regarded this as a rigid and sometimes counterproductive regulation. The ministry subsequently invited the sector to find an alternative that provides the same or better protection for the natural values and features. The sector took up the challenge and came up with a proposal for a different approach according to which it is permitted to beach a vessel anywhere (except in the closed-off areas) on condition that the "Wad I love you" code of conduct is observed. For a trial period of four years it will be possible for yachters to beach vessels beyond the 200 metre line from the channel. To this end, the joint authorities and the water sports organisations in the Wadden Sea area have signed the policy document 'Responsible beaching in the Wadden Sea'.

As a result of the code of conduct, LNV has agreed to the four year trial regarding the beaching of vessels. It agreed to this on condition that the water recreation organisations urge their members to adhere to the code of conduct and that they take measures within their organisations if the code is violated. The organisations committed themselves to this and are now implementing measures when necessary.

The code of conduct does not only apply to yachters, but to everyone on the Wadden Sea. Also hikers crossing the mud flats must follow the rules laid down in the code of conduct. The code of conduct is especially geared towards people's behaviour in respect of the species and habitats to be protected on which the Wadden Sea's designation as a Natura 2000 site is based. For example, the code spells out which areas must be avoided and how close people can get to seals and birds. One of the rules states, for

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During low tides many yachters beach their vessel on the mud flats.



PHOTO: ELS KNOLL-LICHT

example, that as soon as a seal lifts its head, you are too close.

The leaflet is widely distributed and can be found at all marinas and in all tourist information shops. In addition to the leaflet, the information is also spread via the specialist journals and club magazines of the various water sports organisations. Hydrographical maps of the Wadden Sea area also refer to the code of conduct.

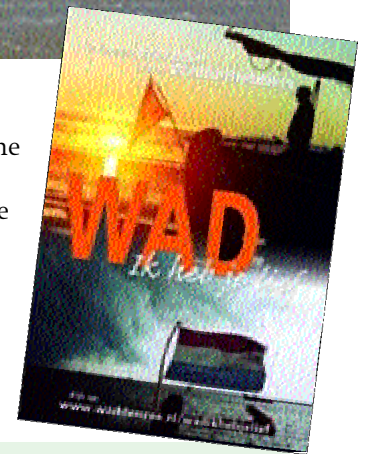
Evaluation of the trial

The trial is evaluated each year and will also be evaluated at the end of the four years. An interim report is drawn up each year. All the parties involved fill out identical forms on which they give their observations on the area; these forms are then used in the evaluation. A type of disturbance, for example, may be indicated on the form.

By involving all the various parties, like the members of the water sports organisations, nature organisations and the inspection services, it is possible to get a good picture of the behaviour of visitors in the Wadden Sea area.

If necessary, interim measures are taken on the basis of the evaluation results. For example, after the first year it became clear that dogs running free on the flats constitute a serious problem. They disturb foraging birds. It is because of people's ignorance that they often do not realise the consequences of this. People have been made more aware of this problem through reports in the media. A trial period of four years was chosen so that the assessment of the trial would not be influenced by chance circumstances in a specific yachting season. After this period, a final assessment will be made by all

the parties on the basis of the interim evaluations. It will then be decided whether the relaxing of the beaching requirements will be laid down in law or whether the existing legislation will remain in force.



Extract from the Code of conduct regarding birds:

1. Only disembark when foraging birds have gone. Make sure you are back in time before the tide rises, without disturbing the birds.
2. Stick together as a group and do not wander off on your own.
3. Should birds fly up, you have come too close.
4. Keep some extra distance from bigger birds such as curlew and spoonbill.
5. Keep well away from breeding birds and birds tending their young.
6. Do not sail close to places of refuge at high tide.
7. Do not drop anchor there.
8. Do not approach flocks of birds around high tide.

Patrizia Rossi: “ Sustainable tourism benefits all”

■ Europarc is the umbrella organisation of Europe’s protected areas. It is a prime example of an organisation where knowledge and experience of how to start up and permanently manage protected areas is exchanged. The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in protected Areas, initiated by Europarc, has been recognised by the EU as a tool for implementing sustainable tourism in Natura 2000 areas (EU Seminar in Lisbon, december 1999). In this interview with Dr Patrizia Rossi, Chair of the Europarc European Charter Evaluation Committee and Director of the Parco Naturale Alpi Marittime (Italy), the activities of Europarc are discussed. Many subjects relating to the cases described above are featured.

Europarc Federation

Europarc unites national parks, regional parks, nature parks, biosphere reserves and other types of protected areas in 37 countries. The common aim is to protect Europe’s unique variety of wildlife, habitats and landscapes. It has now become the recognised, professional organisation for European protected areas. Europarc is an independent, non-governmental organisation. Its membership brings together the organisations responsible for the management of over 400 protected areas.

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www.european-charter.org

The key aims of the Europarc Federation are:

- promoting good practice in the management of protected areas;
- facilitating the establishment of new protected areas;
- raising the profile of protected areas as a vital means of safeguarding many of the continent’s most valuable natural heritage assets, and thereby increasing support for their future protection;
- influencing the future development of public policies and programmes, especially with the European Union, to the benefit of the objectives for protected areas.

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

The quality of the natural environment is increasingly seen as a major attraction by visitors. The many thousands protected areas provide an amazingly rich resource for tourism. Handled sensitively, this can be a strong force for conservation and sustainable development, generating income for parks and their local communities as well as awareness and support from visitors and within a wider public arena. On the other hand, pressure from visitors and tourism development can be a threat to protected areas. The challenge is to ensure that tourism in these areas is well managed and sustainable.

In 1995 Europarc took the initiative to set up the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, with a project funded by the EU’s LIFE programme and led by the Fédération des Parcs naturels régionaux de France.

For this ten European pilot parks together with representatives of the tourism industry and NGOs active in the tourism and environment fields, contributed their combined experience and wisdom and outlined their needs. The Charter defines the shared

responsibilities of the protected area authority, tourist businesses and tour operators. Now 23 parks have been recognised as Charter parks. In becoming members of the Charter, protected areas demonstrate that they are co-operating to a high level with local stakeholders and tourism partners to address strategic tourism issues. At the same time, in joining the Charter, they are making a 5-year commitment to further that co-operation, to implement agreed joint actions with their partners, and to continue to strive for excellence in the management of tourism in their regions. The European Charter is thus neither a conventional quality label nor a conventional partnership agreement, but combines elements of both to encourage and support truly sustainable development of tourism in Europe’s protected areas.

Key issues

Each protected area is different. Strategic priorities and action programmes should be determined locally. However, the Charter requires certain key issues to be

Patrizia Rossi: “Each protected area is different”.

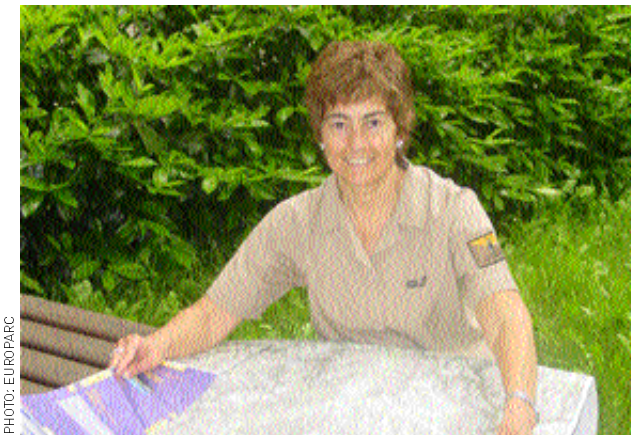


PHOTO: EUROPARC

Mountaineers enjoying the scenery of the Alps.

addressed. In order to realise key issues, attention should be paid to (recreation) research, information and communication, and zoning and management plans. Combined, these methods can provide durable development of the protected areas.

The following key issues should be addressed:

- Protecting and enhancing the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, by monitoring impact on flora and fauna.
- Providing all visitors with a high quality experience in all aspects of their visit, by researching the expectations and satisfaction of current and potential visitors.
- Communicating effectively to visitors the special qualities of the area, by providing readily available and high quality visitor information in and around the area, as well as providing educational facilities and services that interpret the environment and heritage of the area to visitors and local people.
- Encouraging specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area, by providing and supporting activities, events and packages involving the interpretation of nature and heritage.
- Increasing knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism, by providing or supporting training programmes for staff of the protected area, other organisations and tourism enterprises, based on an assessment of training needs.
- Ensuring that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents, by:
 - involving local communities in the planning of tourism in the area;
 - ensuring good communication between the protected area, local people and visitors identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts that may arise.
- Protecting the area from excessive tourism development, by controlling tourism in sensitive

PHOTO: ERIK TUUNTER



locations. One can for instance encourage activities which support the maintenance of his toric heritage, culture and traditions while at the same time controlling and reducing activities which adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water.

- Monitoring and influencing visitor flows to reduce negative impacts, by:
 - keeping a record of visitor numbers (when they come and where they go), including feedback from local tourism enterprises;
 - creating and implementing a visitor management plan.
- Increasing benefits from tourism to the local economy. This can be done by promoting the purchase of local products and encouraging the employment of local people in tourism.

What's in it for Charter parks?

Protected areas recognised by the Charter will be able to display this achievement in their own literature and publications and at the same time benefit from working with others with a similar commitment to sustainable tourism across Europe. It will provide them amongst others with a basis for strengthening relationships with local tourism stakeholders and the wider tourism industry. And it provides them with an opportunity to work with and learn from other European parks in a network. Most importantly though, parks and protected areas which meet the requirements of the Charter will benefit from the economic, social and environmental advantages of well-managed sustainable tourism.

Colophon

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November 2004

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Editor: Hanneke Gijsbertse

Direction: Annemarie Janssen

Translations: Aramis Translations, Den Haag

Under the authority of: Ministry of Agriculture,
Nature and Food Quality, Department of Rural Affairs
internet: www.minlnv.nl



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Graphic design: Henk S. Wijma, Sassenheim

Printed by: Den Haag Offset

Paper: Reviva mega matt

Published by: Stichting Recreatie, Expert Centre on Leisure and Recreation
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