

Not the Right Time to Amend the Annexes of the European Habitats Directive

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Recently, Hochkirch *et al.* (2013) argued for a new vision for the Natura 2020 network in Europe. The present Natura 2000 network has the Habitats Directive (EU 1992) and the Birds Directive (EU 1979) as the legal basis in the European Union (EU) and is recognized as one of the most powerful conservation policy tools in the world (Lockwood 2006). Hochkirch *et al.* (2013) argue for (1) a greater flexibility of the species and habitat lists in the annexes of the Habitats Directive (cf. Cardoso 2012), (2) the implementation of local species action plans, (3) a better monitoring system, and (4) education and financing for biodiversity conservation.

Although we largely agree with the *scientific* arguments of the authors and subscribe to the last three mentioned points, we believe now is not the time for such amend-

ments. All efforts of EU Member States should go into full implementation of the existing Directive, as envisaged in the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

The mismatch between the species present on the Annexes and their Red List status in the EU is clearly shown by recent analyses for butterflies and dragonflies. For the 421 butterflies in the EU, 30 species are listed in the Annexes II and/or IV of the Habitats Directive of which only 11 (35%) are threatened (CR, EN, or VU). On the other hand, 32 butterfly species are considered threatened in the EU, but only 11 of them (34%) are on the annexes of the Habitats Directive (van Swaay *et al.* 2011). The same holds true for dragonflies with 16 species on the Annexes II and/or IV of which only 3 (19%) are threatened. And 22 dragonfly species are considered threatened in the EU,

but only 3 (14%) are listed in the Annexes (Kalkman *et al.* 2010).

EU Member States have agreed to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services and to restore them by 2020. The Habitats Directive calls for measures additional to site designation and management to improve the coherence of the network and this could be used, along with the EU's planned Green Infrastructure Strategy, to underpin the stronger action needed for biodiversity at a landscape scale. Seeking to amend the Annexes now would divert attention and resources and risks being counter-productive. The priority now should be to fund and implement the necessary management measures to achieve favorable conservation status across the 18% of EU terrestrial area currently designated as Natura 2000 sites. This would benefit listed and other characteristic species of a wide range of habitats. Additionally, we would urge individual countries to make full use of the regularly updated European IUCN Red Lists of different taxonomic groups and national or regional Red Lists (e.g., Fox *et al.* 2011; Maes *et al.* 2012) to identify priorities for conservation action in addition to the requirements of the Habitats Directive.

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