

NATURE SCORE CARD



Cyprus

Cyprus has been a member of the European Union since 2004. Its Natura 2000 network consists of 63 sites, covering 1784 km². Terrestrial sites cover 1653 km² (28,82% of the land area) while marine N2000 sites cover 131 km². The below analysis and recommendations suggest that national authorities still need to make efforts in order to fully implement the Birds and Habitats Directives and effective conservation of threatened species and habitats to be achieved on the ground.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transposition • Designation • Habitats and species monitoring • Promotion of research • Stakeholder engagement, public participation and communication
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of sites • Species protection • Avoid deterioration of sites, disturbance of species and implementation of appropriate assessments • Landscape connectivity • Funding and Resources • Non-native species

ACTION PLAN FOR NATURE IN CYPRUS

Active management to achieve favourable conservation status

- All Proposals for Management Plans for Natura 2000 sites to be implemented and to have their respective Ministerial Decrees adopted.
- Coordination of Natura 2000 management to be achieved, bridging the split of responsibilities between departments, services and ministries.

Prevention of negative impacts

- Review and strategically assess national policies that recurrently trigger Article 6 of the Habitats Directive.
- Proper land-use planning that takes into consideration pressures on protected sites to be conducted at a strategic level, to allow for projects proposed in Natura 2000 sites with obvious adverse effects to be rejected by default due to their placement, without the Appropriate Assessment becoming the only way to control them.
- Efforts against illegal trapping and poaching to be enforced and the political will to be shown to effectively combat this issue
- Capacity to be built for proper patrolling, and wardening to be put in place with the authority to respond swiftly to damaging interventions in Natura 2000 sites.

Monitoring and research

Funding of scientific research for protected habitats and species to be promoted and existing available data generated from government-led research to be made publicly available e.g. through publications.

Funding

- Funding to be secured for the implementation of the conservation measures of Natura 2000 sites and to support the employment of relevant personnel, including wardens.

Transposition and designation

- Marine Natura 2000 areas to be identified and designated.

Stakeholder engagement

- Public awareness of Natura 2000 areas to be increased, both on a national scale and in targeted communities and groups, where great disagreements exist. .

The information in this scorecard is based on expert analysis from Terra Cypria and BirdLife Cyprus. Full details on the following pages.

LEGAL REQUIREMENT	STATUS IN CYPRUS
<p>Transposition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyprus transposed the Birds and Habitats Directives onto its national legislation through two laws approved in 2003, prior to its accession to the EU. Various amendments were made to both laws since their approval, adjusting them to comply with the Nature Directives. • Although the laws complied with the EU Directives, a controversial amendment of the Birds Law voted in 2017, introduced relaxations and loopholes, undermining its reflection of the Birds Directive. • The laws are in force in all areas where the Acquis Communautaire applies.
<p>Site designation</p> <p>Designate and establish sites that form the Natura 2000 network of protected areas</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 3 & 4</i> <i>Birds Directive, art. 3 & 4</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terrestrial Natura 2000 designation is almost complete in Cyprus, but some insufficiencies still remain. • With 63 Natura 2000 sites designated, Cyprus demonstrates one of the highest percentages of land area covered by the Natura 2000 network in Europe, amounting to 29% of the area of the island under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus. • Considerable overlap between sites protected under the Habitats and under the Birds Directive mean that of the 63 sites, 29 are SACs and 30 are SPAs, while 11 SCIs are identified awaiting SAC designation. • Designation issues remain for some habitat types which, according to the 2012 Mediterranean Biogeographical Seminar Conclusions, are underrepresented in the SCIs of Cyprus. Regarding the Birds Directive, two cases exist where SPAs have considerably smaller boundaries than the equivalent IBAs (Akamas Peninsula and Paphos Plain). • Marine Natura 2000 sites have not been designated yet, which is a serious gap, especially considering that plans for exploiting offshore gas reserves in Cyprus's EEZ are moving ahead. • A number of systems are in place for area protection under different national legislations, such as Town Planning Zones and archaeological sites. Strictly related to biodiversity protection however, Natura 2000 sites form the major part of Cyprus's protected area system, together with various protection regimes derived from the Law for the Protection of Forests and the Law for the Protection of Beaches, which are the only main counterparts to Natura 2000 sites in the national legislation.
<p>Management of sites</p> <p>Establish site protection measures in Natura 2000 sites</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 6(1)</i> <i>Birds Directives, art. 4(1) & 4(2)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposals for Natura 2000 management plans have been developed for all Natura 2000 sites (SCIs and SPAs) in Cyprus, through tenders issued by the Environment Department and the Game and Fauna Service respectively. • Site-specific conservation objectives and specific measures to achieve favourable conservation status of species have been set for SPAs through the Management Plans. Contrarily, no clear conservation objectives at site level arise from the SCI Proposals of Management Plans, which are also now outdated, due to delays in implementation. • Management Plans are not being implemented. In particular, specific nature conservation and management provisions arising from them would still need to be integrated in Ministerial Decrees to gain legally binding status. Of all the Natura 2000 sites in Cyprus, only four have such Ministerial Decrees. Those decrees were issued in 2011 and 2015, but their content does not provide for site specific management actions or prohibitions and they have not helped towards the on-the-ground management of the areas. • Clearly designated management authorities for Natura 2000 sites do not exist in Cyprus, and responsibilities and jurisdictions are split between departments and services. This unsatisfactory arrangement has repeatedly resulted in management and protection that is inconsistent and uncoordinated, and therefore ineffective.
<p>Species protection</p> <p>Ensure species protection</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 12-16</i> <i>Birds Directive, art. 5-9</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Species action plans have been prepared and some have been implemented within the frameworks of LIFE+ or other projects. These are usually focused on the species populations found in Natura 2000 sites targeted by the projects. Island-wide species action plans have not been developed. • While some exceptions exist, the continuation of implementation actions after the completion of such projects, even in the cases when continuation was an obligation, present challenges, mainly financial. • Derogations or permits that impact protected species are not being issued by the competent national authorities but such a threat is looming, as a

	<p>derogation for the ‘selective hunting of blackcaps’ has been proposed in the approved Strategic Action Plan for tackling illegal bird trapping in Cyprus (May 2015). This option has not been removed from the plan, even though the European Commission has called upon the Republic of Cyprus to remove it (February 2016), as it cannot be allowed under the Birds Directive.</p>
<p>Avoid deterioration of sites, disturbance of species and appropriate assessment</p> <p>Ensure no deterioration of habitats and disturbance to species in Natura 2000 sites</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art.6(2)</i></p> <p>Ensure that plans or projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites are subject to appropriate assessment</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive 6(3)</i></p> <p>Ensure that developments affecting the integrity of the site are not approved unless there are no alternative solutions, and for imperative reasons of overriding public interest and if compensatory measures are taken</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive 6(4)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While there is still a lot of space for improvement, considerable progress relating to the Appropriate Assessment process has been made during the last years. • Article 6.3 and 6.4 provisions have, in effect, been taken into serious account since 2011 when an ad hoc committee was established to assess relevant studies. Members of this ad hoc Committee are government employees from relevant departments, NGO experts with specific knowledge on the issues and, in some rare cases, external independent experts. • At the same time, common problems faced include the low quality of some studies, the lack of assessing all the checklist’s parameters and the issue of the non-independent nature of studies. The latter is due to the fact that the project applicant hires the person/company who undertakes the study directly. Political pressure to influence the outcome of the assessment is also an issue. • Issues exist with the misuse of the term ‘Overriding public interest’ due to political pressure, the criteria for which were only met once and not in a way that was in line with the Directive. Compensation measures are usually absent and even when included in a study, they are being poorly applied, or not at all. • In general terms, forest Natura 2000 sites are under stricter protection and more control, for a number of reasons. Firstly, forest Natura 2000 sites usually include a large proportion of state-owned land, as opposed to privately-owned land where greater pressures for development exist. Secondly, a strict national forest law adds to the laws that already govern these forest Natura 2000 sites. Lastly, and while serious wardening issues exist, of all the government departments with Natura 2000 jurisdictions, the Forestry Department is the most appropriately-staffed, while its personnel includes rangers. • Lack of adequate surveillance is a crucial issue, linked to the deterioration of Natura 2000 sites and disturbance of species. Even though the relevant departments are trying to find ways to overcome this issue, by hiring external ‘rangers’ (Environment Department) and Game Warders (Game and Fauna Service), this problem has not been tackled. There is still a lack of suitably trained and capable staff, solely hired to undertake surveillance responsibilities and equipped with the authority to respond to damaging interventions.
<p>Landscape connectivity</p> <p>Encourage the management of landscape features to improve the ecological coherence of the Natura 2000 network</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive art. 3(3) & 10</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rivers and their banks, which link and transverse Natura 2000 sites, are protected by national legislation which prohibits any kind of interventions within a buffer zone. • Special geological formations are also strictly protected through the Rural Planning policy. • CAP subsidies are ineffective and unclear on the protection of landscape features and remnants of natural vegetation within the farmed landscape. • In general terms, the country’s Planning Policies present a series of issues, while they also do not take landscape connectivity into account. • At the same, Natura 2000 management plans do not integrate landscape connectivity.
<p>Funding and resources</p> <p>Identify funding needs</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 8</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) for Natura 2000 sites for the EU multiannual financing period 2014-2020 had been developed, with appropriate stakeholder involvement, and was submitted to the European Commission by the Environment Department in 2013, with no updates since. • Funds for the drafting of Proposals for Management Plans had been secured in the past. However funds to ensure the Management Plans’ implementation have not been secured, with some exceptions that include the national budgets of the Forestry Department, which are limited and cover actions restricted to state-owned forest land, as well as the national budgets of the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research which cover specific marine actions. • The Environment Department has recently secured funding from the European Regional Development Fund for Natura 2000 sites in Cyprus.

	<p>Information about the budget (8.2 million) will be made available in the near future. So far however, there is lack of evidence for this spending on concrete conservation actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the same time, Natura 2000 payments for farmers are not adequately being implemented through the Rural Development Programme, since there is not much willingness by farmers to apply for them. • Regarding resources, government units focused on Natura 2000 site management and protection in Cyprus are severely understaffed, and split between departments, services and ministries.
<p>Habitats and species monitoring</p> <p>Undertake monitoring of the conservation status of habitats and species of Community importance</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art.11</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When it comes to surveillance, Cyprus still has a long way to go. Adequate surveillance is taking place in forest areas. This is not the case for the rest of the Natura 2000 areas, where there is an obvious lack of qualified staff to undertake this specialised task. • In Cyprus, monitoring takes place as an obligation of article 17 of Habitats Directive and article 12 of Birds Directive. Monitoring of some habitats and species under HD Article 17 is conducted on-the-ground by external experts through tenders issued by the Environment Department. Others are monitored by the competent authorities, especially in the case of forests. Regarding BD Article 12, monitoring this is conducted by external experts through tenders issued by the Game and Fauna Service. Habitats and species have thus been monitored, but not in depth, except in the case of birds. Funding support for ongoing monitoring of birds – a group that has been tracked much better than others – is however uncertain and threatens long-term monitoring. • Regarding the habitats and species monitored under the Habitats Directive, an inaccuracy is speculated to exist in the methodology followed by the Government to determine conservation statuses. This speculation is justified by the erroneously high percentage of habitats and species in a Favourable Conservation Status in the Government’s 2013 report, compared to the EU27 average (for habitats 98% compared to the 16% EU27 average, for species 69% compared to the 23% EU27 average) • Monitoring for certain species that belong to the Red book of flora is undertaken by the Forestry Department, as well as monitoring for the Cyprus Mouflon and some forest species. For certain marine species like the sea turtles, monitoring is tendered out by the Department of Fisheries and Marine Research. • A very important problem is that, in most cases, the government has not managed to establish an early response system when an illegal activity threatens species and habitats. As a result, damage to biodiversity takes place and there is nobody on the spot to prevent it from happening.
<p>Promotion of research</p> <p>Encourage research and scientific work</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 18</i> <i>Birds Directive, art. 10</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government-led research on some terrestrial species is being conducted by the relevant departments, the results of which are not widely available in publications. • In recent years, state tenders that call for species research have been mainly focused on marine species. • Research and scientific work on threatened species is not one of the priorities of the national body responsible for supporting and promoting research. • The scientific community of Cyprus that focuses in the field of research on threatened species directs its efforts in securing funding from European and private grants for relevant research projects.
<p>Non-native species</p> <p>Ensure that introductions of non-native species do not prejudice native habitats and species</p> <p><i>Habitats Directive, art. 22</i> <i>Birds Directive, art. 11</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although this EU Regulation has been in place since 1st January 2015, the transposition has been delayed in Cyprus. • In December 2016 the Environment Department had undertaken a public consultation regarding the preparation of a draft national law for the transposition of Regulation 1143/2014 relating to IAS. The law has not been taken to the Parliament for voting yet. • Where relevant, proposals for SPA and for some SCI Management Plans address threats by invasive alien species, while SPA Management Plans also propose foresaw measures to tackle the issue. Issues still remain however, with the majority of plans not having gained legally binding status and the lack of implementation.
<p>Stakeholder engagement, public participation and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terrestrial site designation, especially regarding SPAs was not a very participatory process, with consequences evidenced today in the lack of

communication

Stakeholder engagement and public participation are key to ensuring effective implementation

awareness and understanding of Natura 2000 sites by local authorities and the public.

- Stakeholder participation and public consultation for the development of proposals for Management Plans more recently developed, has been adequate.
- Sufficient stakeholder participation is also achieved under Article 6, with the establishment of the ad hoc committee for the Appropriate Assessment, which includes relevant authorities, experts and NGOs.
- Decision-making that impacts nature however is often top-down, in the form of policies and ministerial decisions, taken in a non-transparent and non-participatory way and which directly affect Natura 2000 sites. Such examples include Town Planning policies.
- There is no communication strategy for awareness-raising on Natura 2000 on the national or local level. Such activities are limited and are mostly done in the framework of relevant LIFE+ projects that encompass outreach.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CYPRUS

- All Proposals for Management Plans for Natura 2000 sites to be implemented and to have their respective Ministerial Decrees adopted.
- Funding to be secured for the implementation of the conservation measures of Natura 2000 sites and to support the employment of relevant personnel, including wardens.
- Coordination of Natura 2000 management to be achieved, bridging the split of responsibilities between departments, services and ministries.
- National policies that put pressure to Article 6 of the Habitats Directive (namely golf, marina, isolated housing, consolidated development, quarry and renewable energy development policies) to be reviewed and strategically assessed.
- Proper land-use planning that takes into consideration the pressures on protected sites to be conducted at a strategic level, to allow for projects proposed in Natura 2000 sites with obvious adverse effects to be rejected by default due to their placement, without the Appropriate Assessment becoming the only way to control them.
- Efforts against illegal trapping and poaching to be enforced and the political will to be shown to effectively combat this issue.
- Marine Natura 2000 areas to be identified and designated.
- Capacity to be built for proper patrolling and wardening to be put in place, with the authority to respond swiftly to damaging interventions.
- Funding of scientific research for protected habitats and species to be promoted and existing available data generated from government-led research to be made publicly available e.g. through publications.
- Public awareness on Natura 2000 areas to be increased, both on a national scale and in targeted communities and groups, where great disagreements exist.