

NATURA 2000 IN SLOVENIA



PEOPLE WITH NATURE, NATURE FOR PEOPLE



The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation is a professional organisation for nature conservation in Slovenia. The work of seven regional units is coordinated by its central unit in Ljubljana.

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ISBN 961915053-8



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WHAT IS NATURA 2000

Natura 2000 is the European network of ecologically significant areas of nature, as defined by the EU Bird and Habitat Directives, which jointly constitute an international legal basis and a professional framework of the European nature conservation. Through strict observance of these Directives, the principle of sustainable development and other international conventions from the sphere of biodiversity conservation are brought to effect. The most significant among them is the Convention on Biodiversity, adopted in 1992 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro.

Biodiversity (for which the terms biological diversity and biotic diversity are also used) denotes diversity of the living organisms on the land, in the sea and in other water ecosystems. Biodiversity thus includes diversity of species themselves and among them, and diversity of ecosystems.

Natura 2000 areas (or Special Protected Areas) are areas of ecological concern, significant in the EU territory for the conservation or attainment of a favourable status of bird and other animal and plant species, their habitats and habitat types, whose preservation is in the interest of the European community. The areas of each country, selected in compliance with uniform standards, jointly constitute the network, which is a basis of the transborder protection and conservation of natural riches.

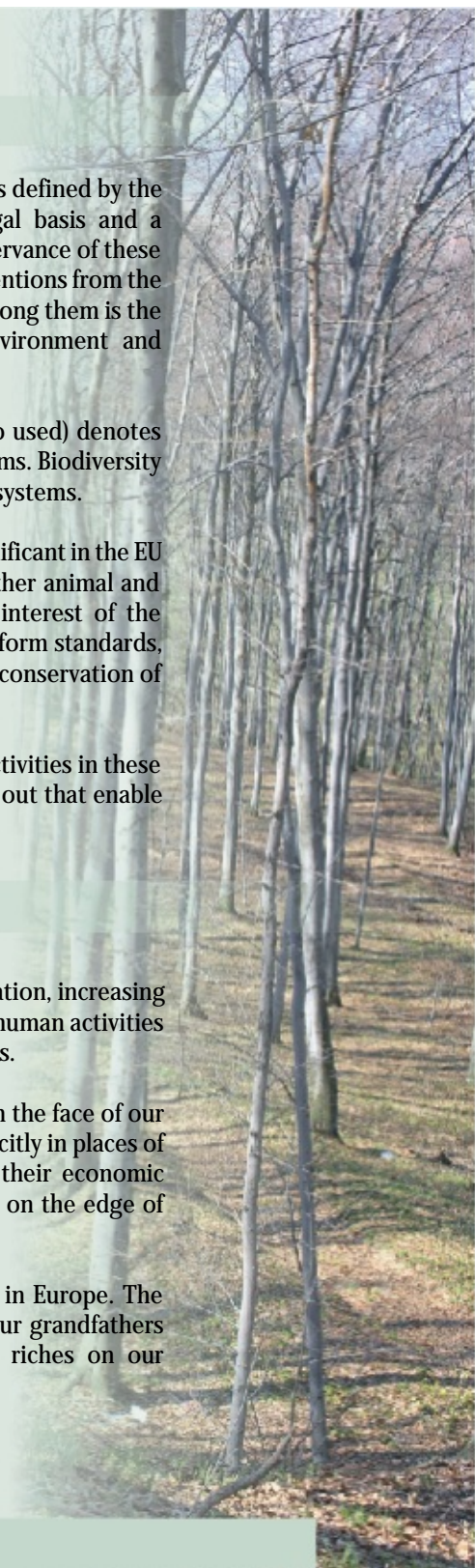
Natura 2000 is not a system of strict nature reserves that would limit all human activities in these areas, but a network of protected areas in which such activities are to be carried out that enable conservation of biodiversity and pay regard to the principles of both Directives.

WHY NATURA 2000

In Europe, biodiversity has been greatly reduced in the last few centuries. Urbanisation, increasing development of infrastructure, intensive agriculture and forestry as well as other human activities have led to the loss or reduction of several plant and animal species, or their habitats.

Thus mostly wetlands, riverine forests and wet meadows began to disappear from the face of our planet. At the same time, great changes occurred in cultural landscape, most explicitly in places of easier access to man and those habitats that are of little interest in view of their economic exploitation. In turn, numerous plant and animal species thus found themselves on the edge of survival, whereas some of them have already become extinct.

Today, the Natura 2000 network is one of the mainstays of nature conservation in Europe. The diversity of plant and animal kingdom in Slovenia is the treasure left to us by our grandfathers through sustainable land-use. Natura 2000 has enabled us to bestow these riches on our grandchildren as well.



THE BIRD DIRECTIVE

Directive on the protection of endangered free-living birds species, or Bird Directive, was adopted in 1979 and obligates the EU member states to stipulate their Special Protected Areas (SPAs) for the purpose of protecting the endangered bird species, as stated in Annex II of the Directive, as well as regularly occurring migratory bird species if in need of protection. The areas include their nest-sites, wintering quarters and resting places.



THE HABITAT DIRECTIVE

In 1992, the Directive on conservation of natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora, or Habitat Directive in short, was adopted, which obligates the EU member states to stipulate their Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for the purpose of protecting the endangered plant and animal species, and habitat types.

Natura 2000 links and incorporates two types of areas as stipulated in the Bird and Habitat Directives. The most important and unique natural environments are thus integrated in a uniform network. On these grounds, the EU member states prepare plans for long-term conservation and management of these areas.

EUROPEAN AREAS NETWORK



The older EU member states stipulated their Natura areas by the year 2000, while the new members were obliged to do so prior to their entry into the Union (May 1st, 2004, as far as Slovenia is concerned). Each state chose its own areas on the basis of the lists of habitats and lists of species from both Directives. Altogether, the lists include over 170 habitats and some 900 plant and animal species. Each member state stipulated its areas in view of the share of occurrence and the state of preservation of habitats and species in its territory.



THE PROCESS OF NATURA 2000 FORMATION IN SLOVENIA



Slovenia accepted the preparation of proposals for its areas to be included in the European ecological network Natura 2000 as its associate obligation. Upon its entry into the EU on May 1st, 2004, it submitted to it the list of proposed areas to be included in the Natura 2000 network. At that time, the Bird and Habitat Directives came into force as well.

Slovenia's preparation of proposals took place within the national project led by the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning. Four different governmental services took part, as well as various institutions and NGOs.

The result of their work was their expert proposal for 35% of the national territory to be included in the Natura 2000 network. This relatively high share of stipulated areas reflects the fact that nature in Slovenia is very rich and well preserved.



Slovenia has already proclaimed its Special Protected Areas according to the Bird Directive and prepared the national list of Special Areas of Conservation. The European Commission examines these lists, but may also demand to be supplemented. The procedure regarding confirmation of these lists can last for a few years.

An important part of the project is also cooperation with the public. Numerous meetings have been held, at which the public was acquainted with separate areas included in the Natura 2000 network. The key development objectives and manners of nature conservation have been presented, as well as development possibilities significant for the inhabitants of these areas and landowners.

PREVENTING THE SPECIES TO BECOME EXTINCT AND PRESERVING THEIR FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS



The European Union set up the Natura 2000 network with the intention to prevent extinction of plant and animal species and their habitats. And it was high time to do so, too, considering that many wetlands had already dried up, that montane pastures were already overgrown to a high degree and that in some parts of Europe the very last areas of natural forests began to disappear. In the last few years, over 30 plant species, which used to prosper only in Europe, have become extinct. More than 60% of marshes, bogs, fens, heaths and steppes have disappeared as well.

The main reason for the extinction of species is the disappearance of their habitats. Amphibians and aquatic birds cannot survive without marshes, pools and ponds. Insects, mosses and woodpeckers need dead trees in natural forests. Numerous flowering plants and butterflies need mown meadows. And we, the people, are after all in need of well preserved nature for quality spending of our spare time activities.



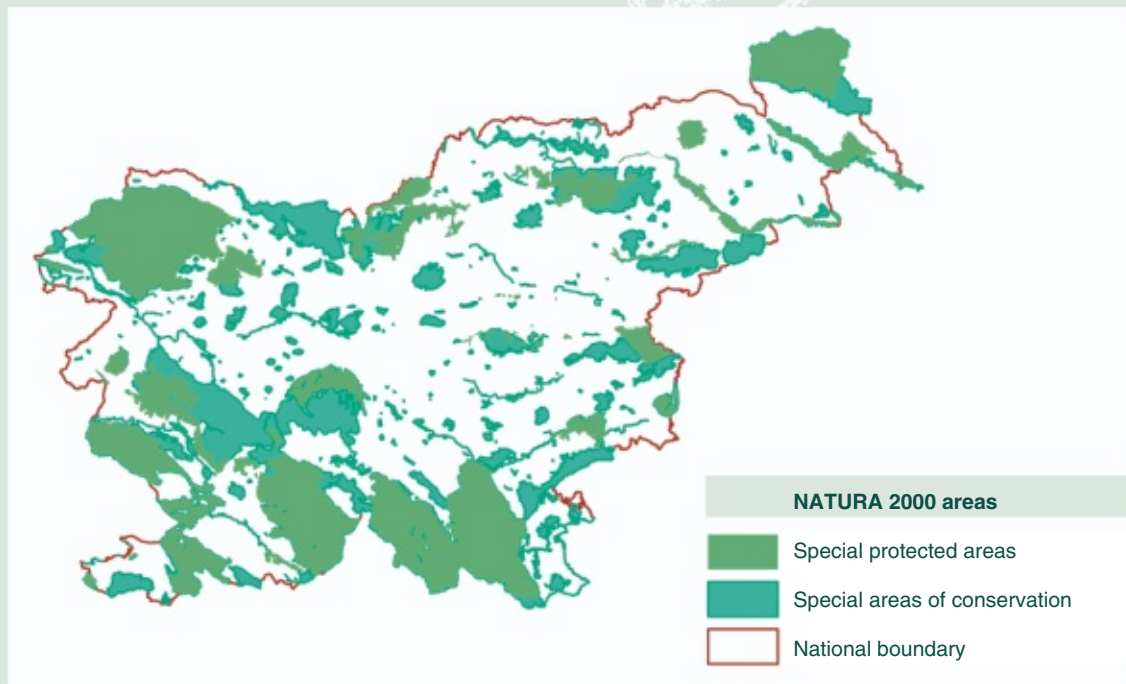
NATURA 2000 IN SLOVENIA



Characteristic of Slovenia are its extremely high biodiversity and very well preserved nature. The country boasts 109 bird species from the Bird Directive as well as 61 habitat types of European concern and 140 plant and animal species from the Habitat Directive.

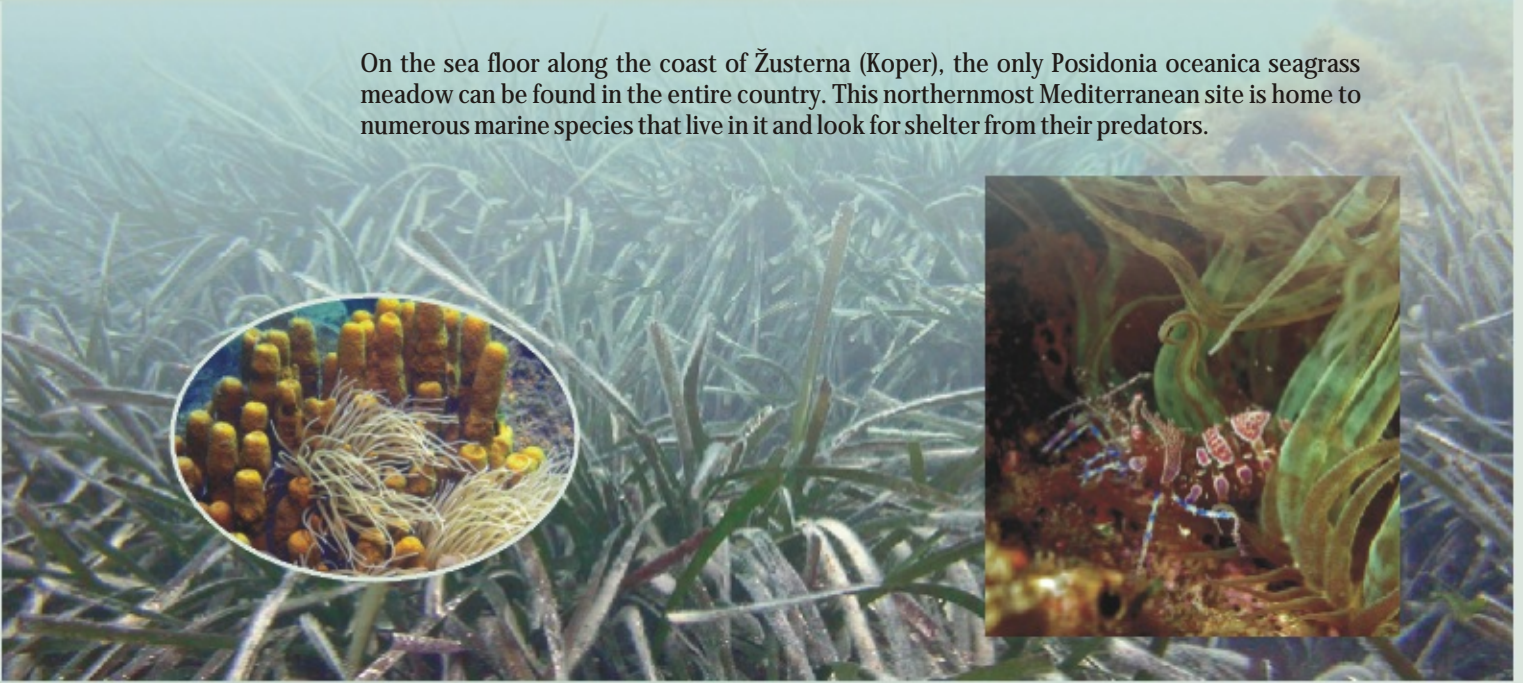
On this basis, 26 areas for the conservation of endangered bird species have been delineated, covering 496,046 ha. 260 areas for the protection of endangered or rare plant and animal species and their habitats, covering 639,878 ha, have also been stipulated. The areas proclaimed in compliance with the Bird Directive and the areas proclaimed according to the Habitat Directive partially overlap. The Natura 2000 areas or special protected areas thus jointly cover a little more than 35% of the national territory.

A quarter of the Natura 2000 network is situated within the already existing protected areas, i.e. national, regional and landscape or nature parks, reserves and nature monuments.



THE UNDERWATER WORLD

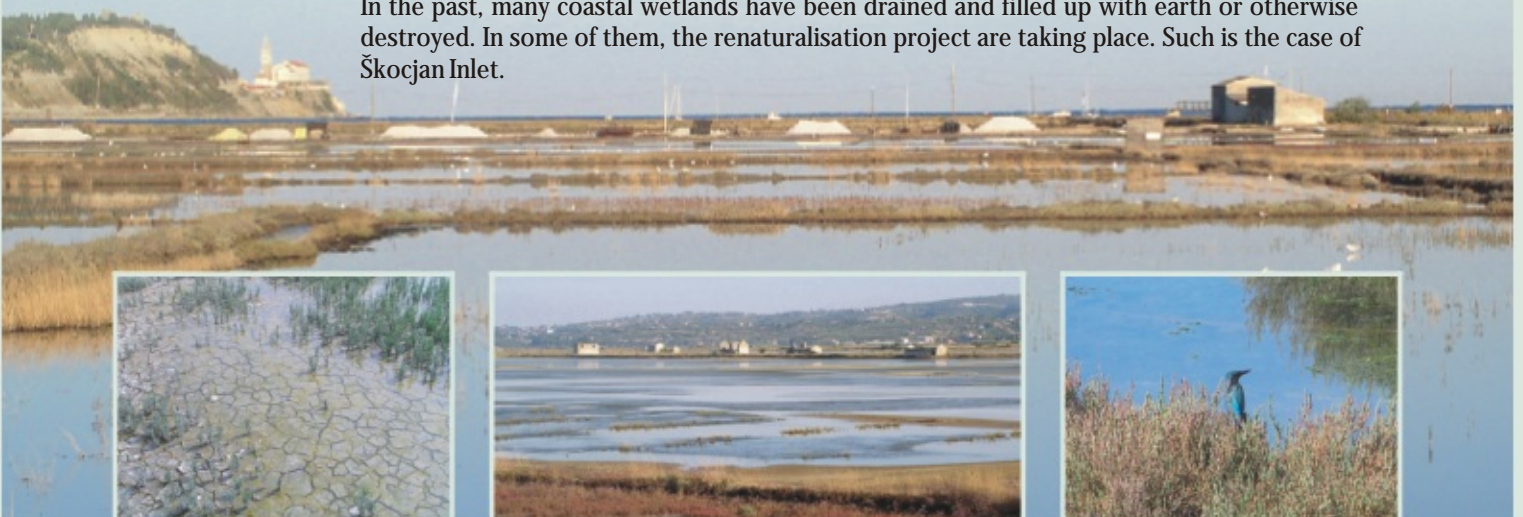
On the sea floor along the coast of Žusterna (Koper), the only *Posidonia oceanica* seagrass meadow can be found in the entire country. This northernmost Mediterranean site is home to numerous marine species that live in it and look for shelter from their predators.



COASTAL WETLANDS

The Se-ovlje and Strunjan salt-pans and other coastal wetlands are the habitats of halophilous plants, such as Samphire, Glasswort and Sea-lavender. Here live and spend the winter numerous birds, looking for food in silt and sand.

In the past, many coastal wetlands have been drained and filled up with earth or otherwise destroyed. In some of them, the renaturalisation project are taking place. Such is the case of Škocjan Inlet.



THE KARST

The Slovene Karst is the third largest special area for the conservation of endangered bird species. Its grasslands, scrubs and rockwalls are inhabited by the Eagle Owl, Barred Warbler, Blue Rock Thrush, Tawny Pipit, Rock Partridge and Short-toed Eagle.

With regular mowing of dry grasslands or grazing in them, further overgrowing of these habitats will be prevented, enabling the rare plant and animal species, such as Dalmatian Wall Lizard, to survive there.



THE WORLD OF CAVES



Slovenia is well known for its numerous karst caves. They hide not only the wonderful stalactites but numerous cave animals, specially adapted to the life in eternal darkness. The Postojna-Planina cave system is one of the richest in the world as far as its fauna is concerned. Here, the unique olm *Proteus anguinus* and cave beetle *Leptodirus hohlenwarti* can be found. Other caves are important roost sites for bats.



THE MOSAIC-LIKE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE



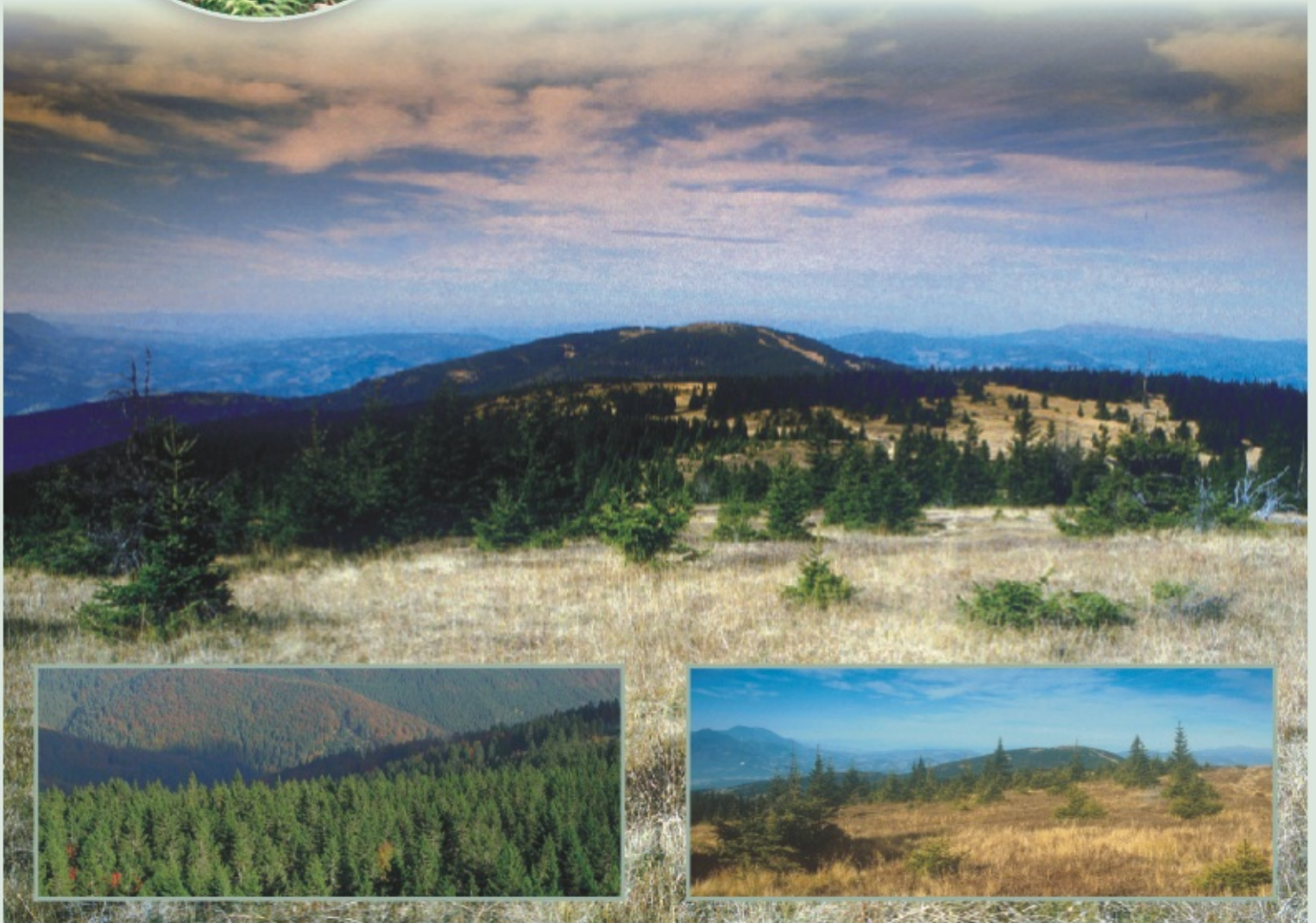
Here, nature and the work of human hands interact with each other. Fields, extensively farmed meadows and forests are intertwined with villages, traditional orchards with high-stemmed trees, streams and hedges. The characteristic landscape has been preserved through traditional farming. The orchards are home to insects and birds, the meadows to butterflies, the streams and pools to various amphibian species.



MONTANE FORESTS



Montane forests of the Pohorje Mts. are significant for the conservation of some rare and endangered bird species. In the well preserved stands of coniferous forests, the Capercaillie, Black Grouse, Pygmy Owl, Tengmalm's Owl and other species can still find natural environment suitable for them. The beech forests are inhabited by the Alpine and Beech Longhorn Beetles, whereas fens and moors with Mountain Pine are home to many other endangered plant and animal species of European concern.



BOGS AND FENS



These are very special types of habitats, their main characteristic being permanent or periodical stagnation of water. This is the reason why hygrophilous plants, e.g. peat mosses, thrive in them. Šijec, for example, is classified as a raised bog. The ecological conditions here are very specific, for the plants are supplied only by rain harvesting. As merely a few plants have adapted to it, only highly specialised species can be found in raised bogs.

RIVERS AND OXBOWS

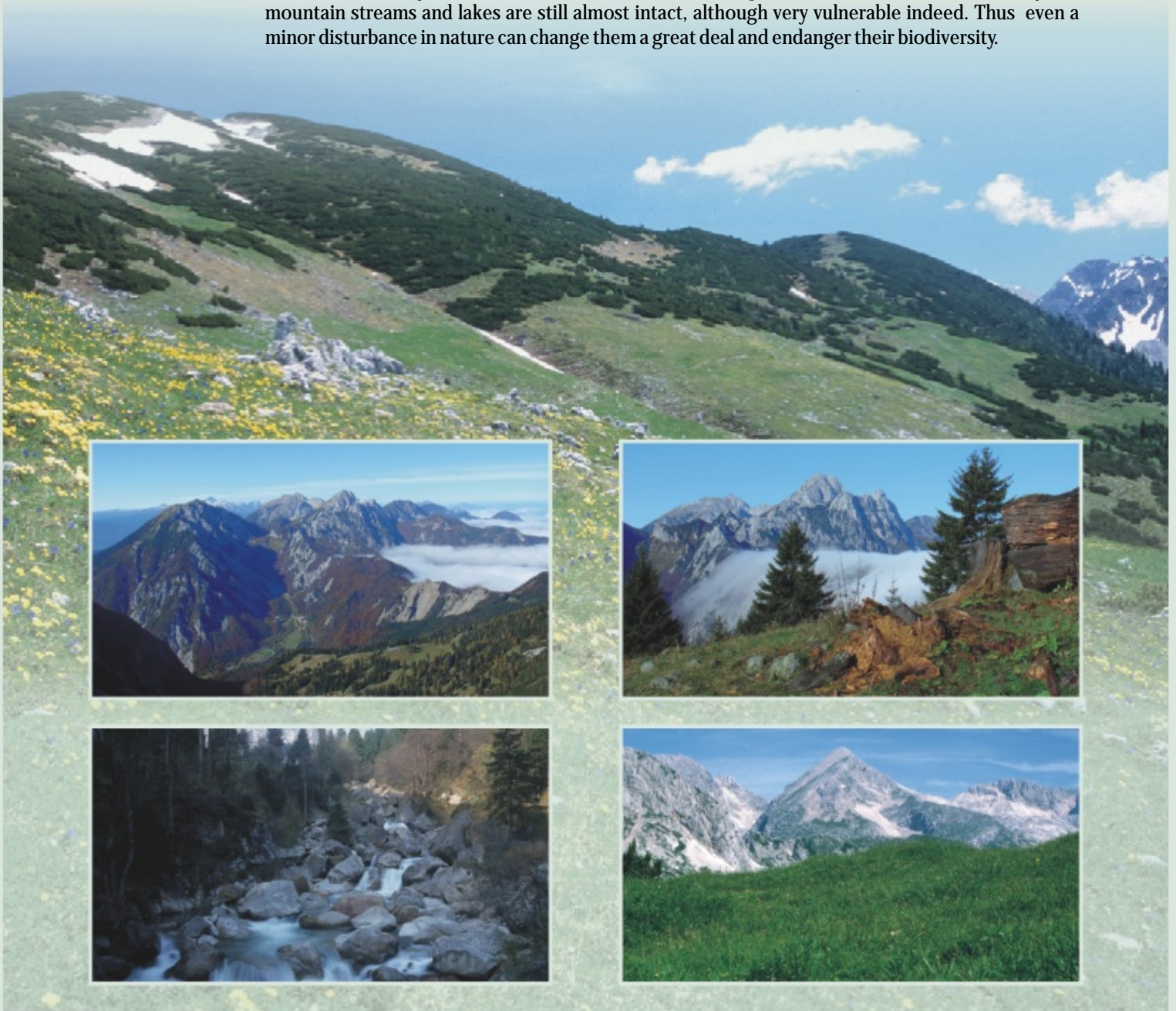


Numerous rivers and streams have already been confined by concrete banks, tubes, and channels. The care to preserve the rivers is advantageous not only for plants and animals but also for man, for if caring for nature we are taking care of drinking water as well.

The Mura river is one of the best preserved lowland rivers in Slovenia. Its unique branches, oxbows and floodplain forests further increase the diversity of its habitats.

MONTANE COUNTRY

Mountain Pine stands and the areas above the tree-line, mosses and lichens, grasslands, talus and beech forests are just few of the habitats found in the uplands. Due to their inaccessibility, the mountain streams and lakes are still almost intact, although very vulnerable indeed. Thus even a minor disturbance in nature can change them a great deal and endanger their biodiversity.



LOWLAND MEADOWS



Across the wet meadows of Ljubljansko barje (Ljubljana Moors), Lake Cerknica, Planinsko polje and Jovsi, the Corncrakes' singing can be heard echoing during the spring and summer nights. These birds choose wet meadows as their homes mainly owing to the fact that the meadows are mown so late and that the young Corncrakes are so big at that time that they can escape the mowing machines. Without regular mowing, however, the meadows would soon be overgrown, causing the Corncrakes' and other grassland birds' rare nest-sites to disappear.

LOWLAND FORESTS



One of the largest preserved lowland forests in Slovenia is Dobrava. In it, Pedunculate Oak and Hornbeam prevail. These trees are home to the Oak Longhorn Beetle and the Middle Spotted Woodpecker, one of our rare bird species, which makes nest holes in their trunks. This is the reason why a sufficient number of old oaks, dead and fallen down trees should be preserved.

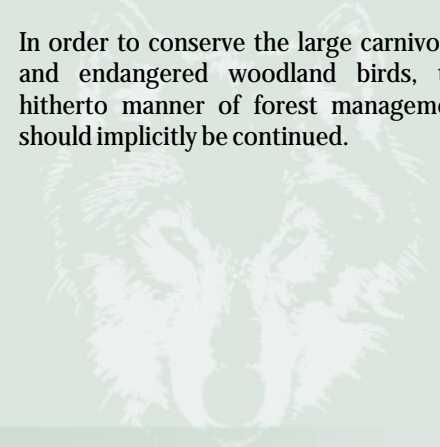


FIR-BEECH FORESTS AND LARGE CARNIVORES



The immense Snežnik, Javorniki and Ko-evje forests are home to the lynx, wolf and brown bear. The Ural Owl breeds in cavities of the area's coniferous trees, with the highest known density of this owl species in Europe established in the Javorniki Mts.

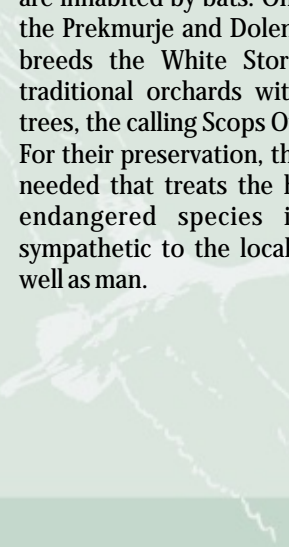
In order to conserve the large carnivores and endangered woodland birds, the hitherto manner of forest management should implicitly be continued.



NATURA 2000 IN THE VILLAGES AS WELL



Animal species of European concern are also found in the immediate vicinity of human settlements. The attics and belfries of churches, castles and other structures are inhabited by bats. On the chimneys of the Prekmurje and Dolenjska regions still breeds the White Stork, while in the traditional orchards with high-stemmed trees, the calling Scops Owls can be heard. For their preservation, the human hand is needed that treats the habitats of these endangered species in the manner sympathetic to the local environment as well as man.



ROCKY MASSES



These masses are not just lifeless blocks of rocks and stones. The rock walls and faces of the Posavje Mts. are home to the Peregrine Falcon and Golden Eagle. Other rock walls are used by the Crag Martin and Rock Bunting as their nest-sites. Under the walls of Kraški rob (Karst Edge), the Eagle Owl, our biggest owl species, is still heard, especially during spring mating. For this reason it is of utmost importance that suitable places and time are chosen for various recreational activities, such as free-climbing and parachute gliding, in order not to disturb these birds. This is particularly important in the breeding season, when these species are explicitly sensitive.



CONSERVATION OF THE FAVOURABLE STATUS OF SPECIES AND HABITATS



All EU countries are obliged to provide for a favourable conservation status of habitats and endangered or rare plant and animal species and thus for their permanent survival.

The conservation status can be influenced by numerous factors. Habitats must be large enough as well as of suitable structure and characteristics, whereas the populations of characteristic species must be sufficiently big and interconnected.

The areas stipulated for the protection of separate species should be inhabited by a sufficient number of individuals, but should also fulfil a series of other conditions in order for these species to reproduce effectively, raise their young and overwinter.



All the habitats and species in the Natura 2000 network of course cannot be conserved in the same manner; the conservation measures can differ from one case to another. Sometimes, an active management or reestablishment of the original state is needed; sometimes, nothing has to be done at all. Each EU state stipulates the necessary conservation measures entirely by itself.



NATURE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

In Slovenia, the stipulation and proclamation of Natura 2000 areas has caused, the same as in other European countries, much anxiety in terms of development limitation. Implementation of both Directives is a novelty in our country. Numerous questions and doubts derive from the lack of information, insufficient communication and, in places, from misleading information.

This apprehension, however, is often unfounded, for in numerous cases our nature is so well preserved owing to the people's hitherto cohabitation with nature and their participation in its shaping. Many habitats depend on people's regular activities. In a number of places, only the existing state has to be preserved and provided for by resumed grazing or mowing of dry and wet meadows after the flowering of grasses and nesting of birds, by resumed sustainable forest management, and by preservation of wetlands and watercourses with riparian vegetation. Some limitations will be necessary only upon destructive spatial activities by man.



MANAGEMENT PLANS

Although the prime objective of Natura 2000 is to protect the precious natural habitats, this of course does not mean that sustainable use and social development should be stopped. Decisions on the activities that are allowed and those that must be stopped are made for each case separately.

Management plans stipulate the purpose and objective of the conservation of separate areas. Each plan will include description of natural riches that are to be preserved in a certain area, the necessary measures, as well as when and how the conservation measures are to be implemented. It will also stipulate the people responsible for the area's management and the activities that may endanger certain species and habitats protected by Natura 2000.

An important role in the preparation of conservation plans will be played by landowners and users, who know separate areas very well and are also interested in their further sustainable use. In each Natura 2000 area, there are often several interested partakers (councils, landowners, groups of interests, NGOs, etc ...), and it is of utmost importance that as many of them as possible are included in the preparation of management plans.



MONITORING OF THE CONSERVATION STATUS IN THE NATURA 2000 AREAS

The Habitat Directive obligates the member states to monitor the conservation status and to evaluate and report on the conservation status of species and habitats of European concern. Every six years, the member states are obliged to report to the European Commission on the preservation of natural habitats and plant and animal species, owing to which the Natura 2000 areas were stipulated in the first place. Furthermore, they are liable to report on the conservation measures implemented by them in these areas, as well as on their impacts on the protected species and habitats.

As many field days will be needed for the monitoring of endangered species and their conservation status, numerous professional and amateur nature conservationists will take part.



THE ASSESSMENT OF ACTIVITIES' IMPLICATIONS

The activities that take place in Natura 2000 areas are likely to have significant effect on the environment have to be given a preliminary permit by appropriate administrative body. The activities can be carried out if implemented in the way that cannot impair the favourable status of natural riches in the area or if the activities do not threaten or in any way change the status of habitats or species protected in the area.

Prior to the planned project in a Natura 2000 area, the investor is liable to attain a permit for it. The application must include a report on the impact on the environment, an assessment of the activities' implications on the environment, and possible alternative solutions. The application is to be addressed to the competent state body.



Exceptions in public interest

The Natura 2000 regulations are outlined in the manner that allows the competent state body to issue permits also for the projects that will be detrimental for natural riches, although only in exceptional situations. This may happen if no alternative solutions exist for separate activities that are of public interest, i.e. if the people's health or safety is at stake.

In the instances of this kind, a state permit is to be obtained and a report written to the European Commission. The country concerned is obliged to inform the European Commission about the issued compensation measures.

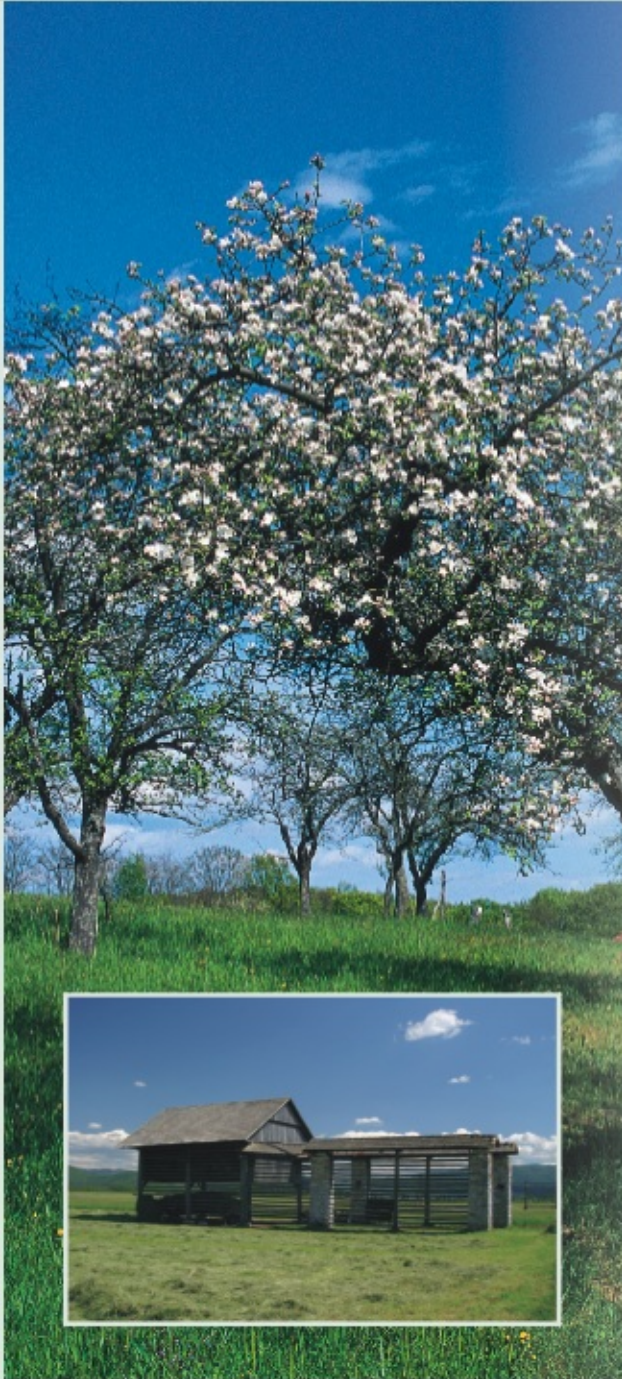
DEVELOPMENTAL POSSIBILITIES IN NATURA 2000 AREAS

In relation to its well preserved nature, Slovenia has a series of unutilised development potentials. Links between agriculture, tourism and the high share of preserved nature, which we should be particularly proud of, should therefore be found.

In this respect, Natura 2000 is an additional incentive, for as a brand it can call attention to the areas where people can still enjoy themselves in unspoiled nature. Such brand increases the products' price, for it vouches for the produce and products to have been produced in ecologically friendly and sustainable way. Natura 2000 keeps reminding us that nature around us has to be continually taken into consideration and looked after. For these areas, various forms of the so-called ecotourism are particularly appropriate.



EUROPEAN FINANCIAL MEANS FOR NATURA 2000 AS WELL



Europe has no uniform system for the financing of Natura 2000 areas. Concerning the conservation needs, several possibilities are at hand, such as various financial sources, from means for the needs of the province and environmental subsidies for agriculture to subsidies for the projects that support the activities of sustainable development from the structural funds.

Anyone who is implementing nature conservation project in Natura 2000 areas can apply for financial means from the European LIFE Nature financial programme that supports the implementation and development of the European Natura 2000 ecological network. With a specially high share of co-financing (up to 75%), the European Union supports the projects concerning species and habitats of European concern.

With the aid of LIFE Natura financial programme, 9 projects have been financed in Slovenia from 2001 till this year to a total value of 6.8 million EUR. The EU co-financed these projects with a very high share, i.e. 67% on average, to a total value of 4 million EUR. In the future, the EU is planning a new programme called LIFE+.

Structural funds are the main financial instrument of the EU's regional policy. The means of these funds significantly supplement the various domestic measures in the sphere of development support. Apart from them, the EU is further offering four initiatives (e.g. Interreg III. Leader +) that also enable financing of the projects supporting the implementation of European directives.

The Slovene agricultural-environmental programme has been designed to stimulate agricultural production that suits the needs of consumers, protects the people's health, provides for sustainable use of natural resources, enables the conservation of biodiversity and the characteristics of the Slovene landscape. The programme includes 22 different measures, through which the rightful claimants can acquire financial compensations for the ecologically friendly farming.

Natura 2000 - in a nutshell

Natura 2000 - network of areas of the greatest European nature-conservationist concern. Natura 2000 areas are stipulated in all EU member states in order to prevent loss of rare and endangered species and habitats. Slovenia has proposed 286 areas, covering a total of 35% of its territory.

Bird Directive (Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds) was adopted on April 2nd, 1979, with the intention to protect and conserve the endangered bird species.

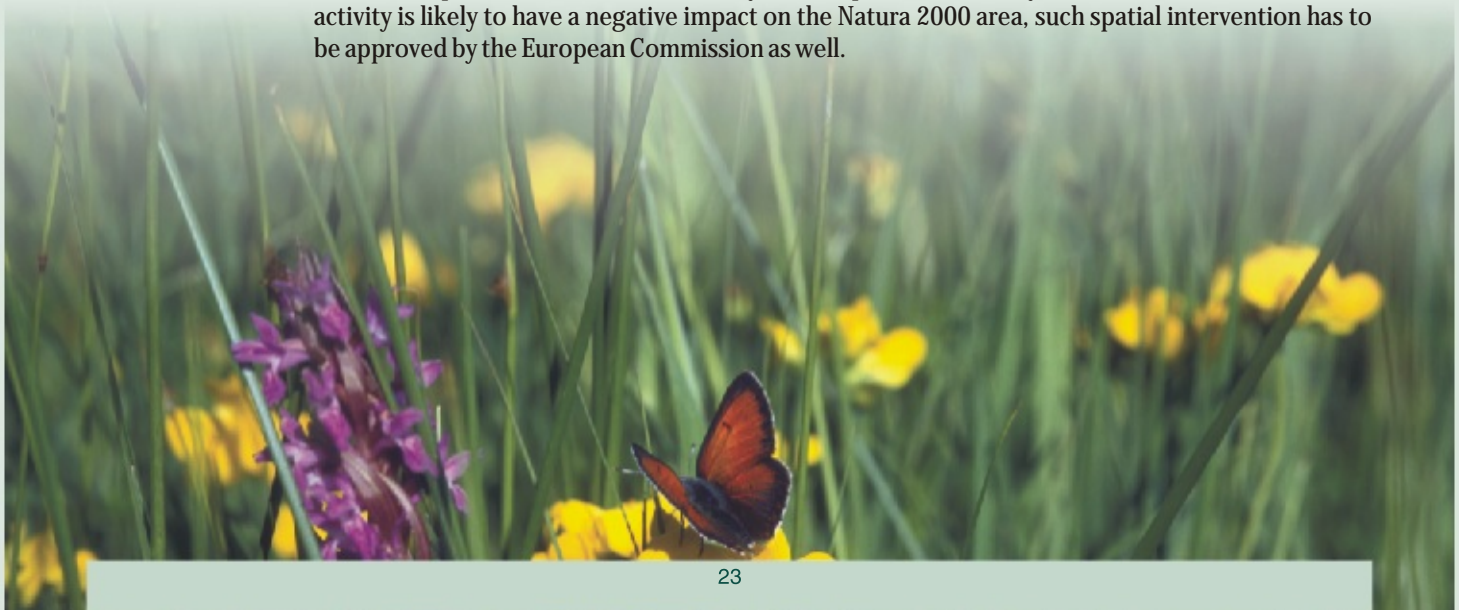
Habitat Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora) was adopted in May 1992 with the intention to protect and conserve the endangered habitats and biodiversity.

Endangered species and habitats: The two EU Directives, which stipulate Natura 2000 areas, embrace over 900 plant and animal species and over 170 habitat types on the lists of endangered and in Europe unique species and habitat types.

Favourable conservation status: The basic concept of Natura 2000. The EU member states are liable to implement the Natura 2000 regulations in such a manner as to provide for a favourable conservation status of species and habitats inscribed on the Directives' lists.

Management plans: The Commission recommends preparation of such management plans for the Natura 2000 areas that describe, in detail, what, when and in what way something is to be protected. The plans are to be prepared jointly with landowners and other partakers.

The needed permits: For the activities with potential impacts on the environment within Natura 2000 areas, permits are needed (issued by the competent state body), while in the instance when an activity is likely to have a negative impact on the Natura 2000 area, such spatial intervention has to be approved by the European Commission as well.



NATURA 2000 IN SLOVENIA - SUMMARY

Natura 2000 is a European network of ecologically important protected sites, as defined within the EU Birds and Habitat Directives, which jointly constitute an international legal groundwork and a vocational framework of the European nature conservation.

The main objective of the EU's »Natura 2000« project is to conserve the areas of internationally important animal and plant species habitats. These areas, selected by each country on the basis of uniform criteria, jointly constitute a network, which is the foundation of crossborder conservation and protection of natural heritage. Today, the Natura 2000 network is one of the mainstays of nature conservation in Europe.

The diversity of plant and animal kingdom in Slovenia is the wealth bequeathed to us through sustainable land-use by our grandfathers. And Natura 2000 will now enable us leave this wealth to our grandchildren.

The process of Nature 2000 formation in Slovenia

Slovenia accepted the preparation of proposals for the inclusion into the European ecological Natura 2000 network as an association member's obligation.

The preparation of Slovene proposals took place within the national project's framework led by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning. In the project, numerous governmental services, expert institutions and NGOs took part.

The result of their work was a proposal to include in the Natura 2000 network a good 35% of Slovene territory. This relatively high share of stipulated areas reflects the fact that in our country nature is very rich and well preserved.

In Slovenia, 109 birds from the EU's Bird Directive occur, and the country can further boast 61 habitat types of European concern as well as 140 plant and animal species from the Habitat Directive.

On this basis, 26 areas for the conservation of threatened bird species, covering 496,046 ha, were stipulated, as well as 260 areas for the conservation of threatened or rare plant and animal species and habitats, covering a total of 639,878 ha. The areas proclaimed on the basis of the Bird Directive and those proposed within the Habitat Directive partially overlap each other. All Natura 2000 areas or special areas of conservation thus cover a good 35% of Slovene territory.



Home:
Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning:
http://www.gov.si/mop/podrocja/uradzaokolje_sektorvarstvonarave/projekti/natura2000/

Foreign:
European Commission, Environment Directorate:
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm>

Other countries' websites:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/nature_conservation/useful_info/links/member_states/index_en.htm

<http://www.natura2000benefits.org/>

LIFE programme:
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/home.htm>

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

502.7(497.4)

NOSE Marolt, Mateja
Natura 2000 / [besedilo Mateja Nose Marolt in sodelavci ;
fotografije arhiv Notranjskega regijskega parka ... [et al.] ;
risbe Samo Jenčič]. - Ljubljana : Zavod Republike Slovenije za
varstvo narave, 2005

ISBN 961-91505-3-8
1. Gl. stv. nasl.
223784960

Edited by: Mateja Nose Marolt
Text: Mateja Nose Marolt and associates
Expert revision: Matja Je , Robert Turk
Translated by: Henrik Cigli
Production: Argos
Photographs: Arhiv Notranjskega regijskega parka, Matej Demšar,
Karin Gabrovšek, Jurij Guli , Špela Habi , Lidija Ho evar,
Andrej Hudoklin, Samo Jen i , Matja Je , Mitja Kaligari ,
Irena Kodela Krašna, Matev Lenar i , Tihomir Makavec,
Toma Miheli , Mateja Nose Marolt, Hrvoje Oršani , Slavko Polak,
Metod Rogelj, Ljudmila Strahovnik, Tina Trampuš, Martin Vernik,
Barbara Vidmar
Drawings: Samo Jen i
Layout: Duša Arsovska, Boris Radjenovi
Print: G-offset tisk

Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation
December 2005

The brochure was published with financial support of the European Union
and the national Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning within
the framework of the Interreg III B. CADSES "Ipam - Toolbox" project

