

Effectiveness of conservation measures for birds in 100 European Union Special Protection Areas

TASK 3. VALIDITY OF THE CLASSIFICATION ACT

Methods

Information on classification acts, the legally binding instruments protecting sites and which in many EM Member States (MS) are the key source of information for the public, was sought by internet searches, especially of the websites of the relevant government ministry and/or its agency responsible for protected areas.

The content and status of each existing SPA classification act was assessed against required standards, including whether they are legally binding instruments, and whether they included the following elements:

- clear identification of the site, its location, size and boundaries, including a map with boundaries that do not differ from the [Natura 2000 viewer](#);
- classification purpose, i.e. species for which the site has been classified; and
- legal provisions applying, e.g. to prevent deterioration of habitats or disturbances affecting the birds, and the obligation to apply conservation measures.

Each classification act was also systematically cross checked against the relevant SDF and Natura 2000 viewer to see whether all relevant information was properly reflected in each classification act analysed in particular as regards the location and boundaries of the site (including a map), the species and their relative importance.

TASK 4. ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY OF DEFINED “SPECIAL CONSERVATION MEASURES”/CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES FOR THE SITE

Site-specific Conservation Objectives and Conservation Measures are required by Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directiveⁱ to ensure that each “Natura 2000 site is managed effectively and contributes to ... achieving a favourable conservation status for the species and habitats protected under the directive across their natural range within the EU. Site-specific conservation objectives and measures should correspond to the ecological requirements of the habitats and species present on the sites (below). ... Natura 2000 management plans are a way to set objectives and measures in an open and transparent manner” (European Commission, 2012b). COs are also needed to correctly implement appropriate assessment procedures under HD Article 6(3).

According to the European Commission (2012a), COs must be site specific; comprehensive (i.e. covering all qualifying species, representing different habitats, pressures and threats); realistic (i.e. achievable); quantifiable (i.e. numeric and comparable); and measurable (i.e. monitoring of population size on the site). They should be specific to the feature; specific to the envisaged condition (i.e. clearly identify the condition to be achieved for the species and their habitats in the site); clear on whether restoring or maintaining the conservation

condition of the relevant feature is envisaged); correspond to species ecological requirements; and reflect the importance of the site for achieving Directive objectives.

CMs must be based on the site-specific COs; correspond to species' ecological requirements; address all significant pressures and threats; be complete; clear and precise; final; sufficiently specific; detailed and quantified; and quantified in terms of implementation costs (European Commission, 2012b). The nature of CMs can be both interventionist and non-interventionist and should be subject to periodic review.

Methods

Information on CO and CM quality was drawn from a range of sources, commencing with an assessment of the process of their establishment as defined in national legislation - what procedure is used; whether they are established at site level (for individual or a group of sites) or at higher level; and where the relevant information can be found.

Main information sources were site management plans or other management instruments (where extant); and as relevant, other sectoral plans (e.g. for forestry, agriculture, water), or statutory, administrative and contractual measures, etc.; as well as within species action plans, recovery plans or strategies.

Attention was paid to species having unfavourable conservation status in the corresponding MS and Biogeographical region. Assessments used checklists for each SPA which reflecting the elements above. This allowed the comparisons and conclusions to be drawn at country level and wider.

Information was sought on the involvement of stakeholders in the development and subsequent implementation of CO/CMs, noting the international acknowledgement of such engagement as representing best practice (Worboys et al., 2015).

TASK 5. ASSESSMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSERVATION MEASURES (I.E. EXISTENCE OF MANAGEMENT PROCESSES)

Methods

As management plans are a key reference source for most SPAs, their implementation was assessed through the questionnaire sent to site managers and relevant as outlined above. At least two responses per site were sought (although up to eight were invited at some SPAs). Details of responses varied considerably, from those who were able to provide a comprehensive overview status quo, to those who provided only partial/minimal information. To fill gaps, interviews with contacts were undertaken where possible. These helped to collect further information not fully captured through questionnaire and clarified issues raised as well as reaching non-respondents or those who had left many questions unanswered.

Further information was obtained through review of other publicly available material, especially management plans and supporting documents, scientific papers, and other documents such as EU Prioritised Action Frameworks and results of LIFE and other projects.

TASK 6. ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTIVENESS OF IMPLEMENTED CONSERVATION MEASURES (I.E. EFFICACY OF MANAGEMENT PROCESSES)

Methods

The analysis was based mostly on the replies to questionnaires (main paper Table 1). Where possible and available, other information sources were also used such as national or regional bird monitoring programmes, survey results, relevant scientific studies and grey literature, management plans, results of conservation projects, reports on the implementation of conservation measures and their results.

Typically, however, poor monitoring (above) meant that detailed comparisons of current bird population sizes compared to baseline levels at the time of original classification were hard, or impossible, to undertake. Where possible, comparative assessments were generally feasible mainly for waterbirds where regular monitoring through national International Waterbird Census schemes allowed species at sites to be readily placed in national and international contexts.

The assessment also considered other issues that could affect the effectiveness of the measures implemented, such as possible changes in land uses or human activities in the SPA, which could be either beneficial or detrimental to the conservation of the qualifying species. Possible reasons behind the lack of effectiveness were also explored (poorly defined COs and CMs, lack of capacities and resources, lack of monitoring or mechanisms to adapt CMs).

Reference

Worboys, G.L., Lockwood, M., Kothari, A., Feary, S., & Pulsford, I. (eds.) (2015). *Protected Area Governance and Management*. Canberra: Australian National University Press. 967 pp.

ⁱ Article 6(1) of the Habitats Directive does not apply to SPAs, but analogous provisions in Articles 3, 4(1) and 4(2) of the Birds Directive apply ([Managing Natura 2000 sites - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#) p. 18)