



Factsheet

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1. THE FACTS OF NATURE ALERT

- 60% of animals and plants of European importance and 77% of their habitats are considered to be at threat. ([EEA, 2015](#));
- [60% of animals and plants have disappeared from Europe since 1700](#);
- 17% of mammals, 40% of freshwater fish, 23% of amphibians, 20% of reptiles, 16% of dragonflies, 13% of birds and 9% of butterflies are threatened in Europe ([IUCN European Red List](#));
- In the past 30 years we have lost over [420 million European birds](#). Farmland birds have fared particularly badly, with 300 million fewer birds today than in 1980, representing a loss of 57%;
- [Grassland butterfly](#) populations have fallen by 60% since 1990. The main driver behind this decline is thought to be changes in rural land use — primarily intensified farming and abandonment of land by farmers ([EurActiv, 2014](#));
- 9% of wild bee species face extinction;
- Our seas are overfished, with cases like [the Mediterranean where 95% of assessed fish stocks](#) are overfished;
- [More than 40% of rivers](#) and coastal water bodies are affected by diffuse pollution from agriculture, and only 53% of Europe's water bodies are likely to achieve good ecological status by 2015, missing the target set by the [EU Water Framework Directive \(EEA 2015\)](#).

2. NATURE & ECONOMY

- Ecosystem services provided by Natura 2000 and related socio-economic benefits can be valued as €200-300 billion/year, amounting to around 1.7 - 2.5% of EU GDP (far more than 5,8 bill euro/year needed to manage the sites).
- The benefits delivered by the marine areas currently protected by the network (4.7%) are worth about €1.4– 1.5 billion/year. This would increase up to €3.0–3.2 billion/year if 10% of the sea areas were protected.
- Visitors' spending for the Natura 2000 network was estimated at €50 to €90 billion in 2006 for 1.2 to 2.2 billion visitor days per annum, which generated an additional income of between €50 and €85 billion (Bio Intelligence Service, 2011).
- Natura 2000 sites also play an important role in mitigating and adapting to climate change ([Guidance on Climate Change and Natura 2000, 2014](#)). Natura 2000 sites currently store around 9.6 billion tonnes of carbon, equivalent to 35 billion tonnes of CO₂, which is estimated to be worth between €600 and €1,130 billion (stock value in 2010).
- Tourism and recreation activities related to the Natura 2000 network have been estimated to support between 4.5 and 8 million FTE jobs (Bio Intelligence Service, 2011).

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES SUSTAINING OUR ECONOMY

- Every year bees & other pollinators contribute at least €22 billion to European agriculture;
- Bees & other pollinators help pollination of over 80% of Europe's crops & wild plants;
- 33 of 105 world's biggest cities get their drinking water from protected areas.

THE ECONOMIC COST OF NATURE DAMAGE

- Damage from floods has cost more than €150 billion over the past 10 years, and air pollution costs around €537 billion every year ([WWF report 2015](#));
- EU industries import every year more than €500 billion of raw materials no longer available in Europe ([WWF report 2015](#));
- [Each year Europe loses 3% of GDP due to the loss of biodiversity](#). That costs the EU €450 billion year after year;
- Air pollution is the number one environmental cause of death in the EU, with over 400 000 premature deaths every year ([State of the Environment 2015](#)). The external costs for this were between €330-940 billion in 2010. ([EU Commission, 2012](#)).

3. NATURE & HEALTH

THE HEALTH COST OF DAMAGING NATURE

- Europe's 2003 heat waves caused up to 70,000 deaths over four months ([source](#));
- Air pollution is the largest environmental health risk in Europe. The EEA ([State of the Environment 2015](#)) estimates that poor air quality was responsible for more than 400,000 deaths in the EU-28 in 2012.
- [40% of the population in EU countries is exposed to road traffic noise at levels exceeding 55 db](#). In 2010, 75% of Europeans lived in cities and urban areas. This is expected to reach 80% by 2020;
- 27% of the EU adult population (18–64 years) experienced at least one mental disorder during the last 12 months.

THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF PROTECTING NATURE

A 2016 IEEP study "[The Health and Social Benefits of Nature and Biodiversity Protection](#)" funded by the EU Commission shows that:

- European societies are increasingly urbanised and nature appears distant from daily living and working environments. At the same time, physical health issues related to sedentary lifestyles are on the rise, as are mental health problems like depression.
- Green spaces within 1-3 kilometres from people's living environment result in them having lower levels of obesity, depression and anxiety, and increased longevity.
- Visiting nature areas during or after a day of work reduces stress. Proximity to nature has been shown to increase the frequency and duration of physical activity.
- Green areas support children's concentration and cognitive development, and provide environments that promote physical and mental health for elderly people. Living in green neighbourhoods has also shown to reduce morbidity and income-related health inequalities.
- The EU's 27,000 Natura 2000 sites could be seen as pre-emptive health care centres in Europe, offering not just biodiversity benefits, but also functioning as health hubs, zones of social engagement, as well as contributing to local economic development.

More information [here](#).

4. EU NATURE DIRECTIVES AND NATURE PROTECTION

To tackle the loss of nature, Europe has put in place two important pieces of legislation, the Birds (1979) and Habitats (1992) Directives.

These laws are the cornerstones of EU nature protection policy and have brought about the creation of Natura 2000, the world's biggest network of protected areas, covering:

- 1 million square km of land (over 18% of EU land)
- 250,000 square km of marine sites (about 4% of EU marine sites)

This means [27,000 sites](#) and more than [1,000 species](#) are under special protection.

Where properly implemented, laws have succeeded to bring positive results: some [populations of rare species](#) are recovering and the loss of valuable habitats is slowing down.

The Iberian Lynx

The world's most endangered feline that lives only in the Iberian Peninsula, has increased from 100 to about 404 animals in 2015, the highest number since the species was found to be the most endangered cat in the world in 2002 (more info on [the Lynx](#) and Europe's [Beauties of Nature](#)).

The majestic [white tailed eagle](#) that underwent dramatic declines between 1800 and 1970 and became extinct in many regions of Europe is up to 10,000 pairs.

Populations of five large carnivores that had almost disappeared from Europe like the brown bear in Karelia and Spain, the wolf in Germany and Poland, the wolverine in the Scandinavian countries and the [Eurasian Lynx](#) in UK, France and Germany have doubled in population in the last ten years thanks to legal protection. **EU Nature Laws** have played a crucial part in the rehabilitation of large carnivores ([WWF, 2014](#)).