

# EUROPEAN HABITATS UNDER THREAT

First ever Red List of all habitats on our land and in our seas.

For the first time, a comprehensive assessment of European habitats has been carried out, providing a clear picture of the state of the 490 habitats in 35 countries across Europe, from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean Sea, and in neighbouring coastal waters of the North Atlantic, Baltic, Mediterranean and Black Seas. Over 300 experts have contributed their knowledge and expertise to produce an assessment of the level of threat of European habitats. The European Red List of Habitats was funded by the European Commission and coordinated by a partnership formed by Wageningen Environmental Research (Alterra), IUCN, NatureBureau and consultants Susan Gubbay and John Rodwell.

What they reveal is stark. Over a third of all land habitats are currently under threat: more than three-quarters of bogs, over half of grassland habitats, and almost half of our lakes, rivers and coasts. Forests, heaths and rocky habitats have fared better but are still of great concern.

In all our neighbouring seas, mussel beds, seagrass beds and habitats in estuaries are everywhere threatened. In the Mediterranean Sea, almost a third of all habitats are at risk of collapse; in the North-East Atlantic, nearly a quarter. Also of great concern is the large number of marine habitats about which we still know too little, particularly in the Black Sea.

European habitats are declining in extent and quality for many reasons, and many threats are having increasingly large impacts. Intensive farming and abandonment of traditional grazing lands, drainage and pollution, invasion of alien plants and animals, urbanisation and associated infrastructure development all of these continue to pose dangers to terrestrial habitats. At sea, it is pollution, nutrient enrichment, destructive fishing practices and coastal defence and development that are most threatening. Some damaging effects of climate change are already apparent in both marine and terrestrial systems and are likely to worsen.

Together, these habitats form the rich tapestry of our many different European landscapes and seascapes. They provide a home for many thousands of plants and animals and provide important ecosystem services, such as protecting soils, capturing carbon and helping alleviate global warming. These habitats can yield valuable crops, sustain livestock, game and fish and provide places for tourism and recreation. They offer inspiration and delight to all and are a precious heritage for future generations.

The European Red List of Habitats provides an entirely new and all-embracing tool to review commitments for protecting and restoring the land and seas of Europe. It covers a much wider range of habitats than those legally protected under the Habitats Directive and will help us measure progress towards the targets of the EU2020 Biodiversity Strategy.

Further information on the Red List can be found at  
[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/knowledge/redlist\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/knowledge/redlist_en.htm)



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## Background

**Wageningen Environmental Research** (formerly **Alterra**) is the environmental research institute of Wageningen University and Research, which offers a combination of practical and scientific research in a multitude of disciplines related to environmental systems and sustainable use. The Institute combines expertise on water and soils, ecosystems, water and climate, landscape, and geo-information for environmental assessments and resource economics. Over four hundred scientists are employed. The Institute is part of the PEER network (Partnership for European Environmental Research Initiative), an active member of the ALTER-Net EU Network of Excellence and one of the partners of ETC-LUSI. Wageningen Environmental Research experts have been involved in the preparation of the Birds and Habitats Directives and in projects to assist the development of Natura 2000 in several EU Member States. John Janssen can provide further information about the project, with emphasis on terrestrial results, on +31 6 22730548 or [john.janssen@wur.nl](mailto:john.janssen@wur.nl)

**IUCN** is the world's oldest and largest global environmental organization, founded in 1948, with more than 1,300 government and NGO members and thousands of volunteer experts. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 staff in 45 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world. IUCN is well known for its sound scientific base and know-how in conservation and sustainable natural resource management. It has an extensive track record on providing up-to-date knowledge on how biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management can support human well-being. In addition, IUCN is an advocate for policy based on the identification of key issues by its science networks. It has a long experience in managing multi-stakeholder policy development, bringing natural and social science into the dialogue with other stakeholder views to formulate relevant and acceptable policy. Rebecca Miller can provide further information about the IUCN Red List of Ecosystems at [Rebecca.Miller@iucn.org](mailto:Rebecca.Miller@iucn.org)

**NatureBureau** is a wildlife conservation consultancy based in the UK. It specialises in marine and coastal ecology, nature conservation policy, management planning, graphic design, communications and project management. Established in 1990, NatureBureau provides biodiversity and nature conservation advice to a range of inter-governmental, non-governmental and commercial clients with considerable experience in UK and EU partnership-based projects. NatureBureau can provide further information on the marine Red List assessments on 01635 550380 or [ecology@naturebureau.co.uk](mailto:ecology@naturebureau.co.uk).

**Susan Gubbay** is an independent marine scientist working in biodiversity conservation in the UK and across Europe. She can provide further information about the marine Red List assessments on [sgubbay@mayhill.wyenet.co.uk](mailto:sgubbay@mayhill.wyenet.co.uk)

**John Rodwell** is an independent consultant ecologist working in the UK and across Europe. He can provide further information about the state of Europe's grasslands and how the Red List rates the land habitats of the UK on 07908-420058 or [johnrodwell@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:johnrodwell@tiscali.co.uk).