

In a recent *Bulletin* (75: 9-10), Eric Bignal and Mike Pienkowski outlined plans for a loose network of three groups that have been addressing aspects of the ecology and conservation of traditionally managed, extensive agricultural systems. This network will further develop co-operative working between the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism, BirdLife International's specialist group on steppes and dry grasslands, and the Wader Study Group's project on wet grasslands. The network will bring together expertise in ecology, nature conservation and extensive ecology and aim to collaborate with other partners to sustain vulnerable cultural landscapes, their biodiversity and social fabric.

As part of this collaboration, we reprint here two papers presented to the fourth meeting of the European Pastoralism Forum held in Trujillo, Spain in November 1994. The first paper by Pienkowski and Martin-Novella outlines the history of the Forum and serves as a most valuable introduction to the issues considered at Trujillo and at earlier meetings. The second paper, by Bignal, McCracken and Corrie, summarises results of a study of low-intensity agricultural systems in nine European countries undertaken by the Institute for European Environmental Policy. A third paper on lowland wet grasslands will be included in December's *Bulletin*.

Whilst containing fewer direct references to waders than most papers published in the *Bulletin*, the issues addressed by these papers are fundamental in any consideration of the conservation of many European breeding waders.

Opportunities for the European Pastoralism Forum to influence European and Spanish thinking

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This paper provides background information on the general aims of the Forum series, the outcomes and achievements arising from previous meetings, and the objectives of this meeting of the Forum. Consideration is given as to (1) why it has proved so difficult to get the message over about the importance of extensive farming systems for nature conservation, and (2) what needs to be done to ensure the maintenance and conservation of biodiversity in Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

These Fora are concerned with the importance of low-intensity agriculture to wildlife populations, and the sustainable use of land. This is important throughout Europe and indeed elsewhere. Such crucial land-use systems are in danger of being lost - this would be a severe blow both to biodiversity conservation and to rural human communities, as well as to our heritage as a whole.

It is particularly appropriate that this year's meeting is in Spain - and we shall be visiting important areas in Extremadura later in the week. I took the opportunity last week to take a few days' holiday in Asturias and Cantabria, and then drove to the conference through many other interesting areas of Spain. If anyone has any

doubts about the importance of these agricultural systems to wildlife and landscapes, I fully recommend such a visit - which is satisfying to all human senses including taste!

In this paper, we introduce five topics to help focus our efforts during this meeting of the Forum:

1. What is the problem that the Forum series is addressing?
2. What have we done about it so far?
3. What should we do next?
4. Why do we have so much difficulty in getting over the message about the importance for nature conservation of extensive agriculture?

5. The linked issue of identifying priorities and influencing policies.

1. WHAT IS THE PROBLEM THAT THE FORUM SERIES IS ADDRESSING?

One of Europe's key contributions to global biodiversity is based on the fact that agricultural interactions with nature have been the dominant land-use across much of the region for longer than any other vegetation type (Pienkowski & Bignal 1993). Over several thousands of years agriculture has developed regional characteristics depending on the natural environment, and modifications have taken place at a rate which seems to have allowed natural processes to continue and wildlife populations to be maintained, and possibly even enhanced. In recent decades, the rate of agricultural change, including drainage/irrigation, chemical applications and other intensification, has accelerated markedly in many areas. The regions which are still farmed in an extensive way retain tremendous natural interest as well as being far more compatible with the concept of sustainability. However, the importance of these areas is little recognised.

In recent years ecologists have been very successful in describing and quantifying the destructive and detrimental effects of agricultural practice, for example the effects of pesticide and fertiliser use and intensive management techniques which cause drastic simplification to the countryside through the removal of field boundaries, hedges and woodlands and the cultivation of monocultures. As a result the accepted wisdom is that farming is intrinsically bad and 'environmental measures' need to reverse current trends. But at the same time many reserve managers are finding that to maintain ecological diversity they need to adopt management techniques which have in the past been part of normal agricultural practice, for example seasonal grazing by livestock of pastures, mowing of meadows and producing 'mosaics' of natural vegetation communities and cropped land.

A neglected area of study (and of understanding) is the ecological importance of low intensity farming practices in Europe which have associated with them land of high ecological value; for example mountain pastures, hay meadows, wood pastures, grazing marshes and a wide range of early successional stages of vegetation development held stable by agricultural practices. Additionally, the agricultural matrix that many semi-natural biotopes survive within is itself of high ecological value in these areas. Examples are dry cereal production in Iberia, the dehesa wood pastures and the British uplands - areas which are often not regarded as farmland.

Coupled with (and probably associated with) the neglect this subject has from ecological research, is a slow recognition of its importance by conservation managers and policy makers. As a result, its value has largely gone unrecognised and, whilst there are numerous efforts and initiatives to reinstate ecological value in degraded (intensive) agricultural landscapes, ecological value in

low-intensity systems still being lost through either intensification or abandonment - as has been stressed in earlier meetings of the Forum.

It is clear that the ecological relationships on farmland are caught up in a string of policy issues, such as the reduction of food surpluses, maintaining farmers' incomes and the justification for continuation of agricultural support measures. There are few incentives for academics, ecologists or even policy-makers to take a stand and focus attention on low-intensity agriculture.

Some of those who are understandably most vocal in nature conservation terms come from areas where the countryside has been most intensified. As this Forum has noted in the past, a consequence of intensification is that the landscape becomes simplified to intensive agriculture in some areas, intensive forestry in others (often uplands), and nature survives only in islands of protected sites. In such a situation, conservationists may see nature conservation and agriculture as incompatible. However, if we reach this stage in other areas, we are simply repeating the mistakes of those who have already intensified. This would be a defeat. As a leading ecologist and conservationist recently remarked in a very public forum, a strategy based solely on protecting nature reserves with no action outside would not fulfil the needs of conservation, nor the commitments that many governments have made under the recent UN Convention on Biological Diversity. Unfortunately, the same speaker then went on to stress that the most valuable additional element would be to make bigger nature reserves, rather than ensuring the integration of nature conservation requirements into other land-uses, and the maintenance of low-intensity systems which farm sustainably.

This is all the more crucial in that, once such areas with long continuity of natural processes are lost, reinstatement on any reasonable timescale becomes impracticable. It may be possible to re-establish, or encourage the recolonisation by, some of the larger and more popular species, and here I could note our success in Britain, with invaluable help from colleagues in Navarra and Aragon, in reintroducing Red Kites *Milvus milvus* to England and Scotland (Evans *et al.* 1994). One can also encourage the slow spread of the less mobile species into widening areas around sanctuaries and nature reserves. However, the re-establishment of the full assemblage of species and natural processes over wide areas is not something that can be achieved on any reasonable timescale in most natural and semi-natural ecosystems. Therefore, we need to maintain our low-intensity systems.

We suggest then that our aims might be described as follows:

- Getting the value of extensive agriculture to nature conservation, biodiversity and sustainability recognised.
- Ensuring the availability, dissemination and exchange of supporting information, science and expertise.

- Developing and promoting policy options which ensure the maintenance of these cultural landscapes.

2. WHAT HAVE WE DONE ABOUT IT SO FAR?

The first meeting of the Forum took place in November 1988 in west Wales and focused on a flagship species, the Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*. From the start, participants were intent that some focused recommendations should come out of the meetings - and I recall having to work with colleagues through most of the night pulling together the conclusions from the meeting, and conducting a lively and active debate at which participants agreed recommendations. These were published in nine relevant languages in the proceedings (Bignal & Curtis 1989). Those recommendations which were directed to the participants themselves have generally made progress. These included the establishment of the European Forum, and furthering of research and some of the conservation measures within the scope of participants. However, some of the recommendations relating to more general policy measures of governments remain. Nevertheless, there have been a few small changes in line with these recommendations, although one could not claim these changes to be the results of the Forum alone.

The second Forum, in October 1990 on the Isle of Man, focused on birds and pastoralism (Curtis, Bignal & Curtis 1991). Since then, there has been further progress relevant to its recommendations on site management and species initiatives. However, again those related to more general policy issues have not made a great deal of progress. It is, however, true to say that the Forum was by then beginning to raise the profile of the issue of extensive agricultural land.

The third meeting of the Forum was held in July 1992 at Pau in France (Bignal, McCracken & Curtis 1994). In the preparation, participation and follow-up to this meeting, attention was focused on how to synthesise the discussions to identify the stages of work needed to progress further the conclusions of that meeting and its predecessors towards influencing policy. The first output of the meeting was a discussion document (Bignal & McCracken 1992).

The key issue identified by the Forum was:

"... the continuing breakdown of agricultural systems in which extensive livestock grazing and the associated use of open, semi-natural vegetation is an integral part. The Forum concluded that a root cause of this process is the indiscriminate application of European Community agricultural support policies. Modifications to these policies are necessary to provide positive protection of these endangered agro-pastoral systems and the wildlife which depends on them."

The Forum was concerned:

"... that the way in which the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union is reformed and implemented will be the key to the future of these threatened systems, their human communities and the associated wildlife: it is thus vital that the EC recognise these needs in planning for change. The current CAP reform measures do not give sufficient recognition to these needs."

Some of the main problems identified by the Forum were:

- "(a) Until very recently there was a lack of recognition by both ecologists and policy-makers of:
- The ecological, nature conservation and cultural importance of these extensive agro-pastoral systems.
 - The fragility of the farming systems and that changes to the nature conservation or social fabric of these systems are irreversible (or would require extremely long recovery periods).
 - The fact that abandonment of these systems is just as detrimental to their nature conservation value as intensification of the farming practices.

There is a growing awareness of these points but it is occurring amongst a limited number of people and at too slow a rate to allow the threats to these systems to be quickly and effectively combated.

- (b) EC-wide policy measures (e.g. the CAP and projects supported from the structural funds) are contributing to the erosion of the regional diversity of these systems and their nature conservation value."

The document concluded with ten recommendations.

Number 2 was effectively a challenge to the members of the Forum itself:

"All the remaining areas of extensive agro-pastoral systems must be identified, and procedures to monitor threats and changes to these systems put in place."

A good deal of collaborative work of some of the partners since then has been directed to this objective. This is presented in Session I of this conference: the extent, distribution and dynamics of extensive farming systems. This also relates to the first objective of the conference: to assess the extent, distribution and dynamics of these systems, launch the report and hold the press conference.

Recommendation 3 stated:

"In order to focus the attention of the European Commission on the importance of these systems, a full ecological, social and economic case study should be carried out for at least one major system - the migratory (transhumance) system of the northern Spanish province of Navarra is suggested."

This has been taken up by members of the Forum.

We also may claim a small measure of progress towards Recommendation 9:

"European environmental organisations should:

Develop EC-wide co-operation in order to recognise and respond quickly to any threat to its extensive agro-pastoral systems.

Raise public awareness of the nature conservation importance of these systems and seek to ensure that their efforts are seen to be complementary to related initiatives."

Here the co-operative work of the partners in the Forum noted above and later in this meeting is a small start, as indeed is the newsletter of the Forum, *La Cañada*, which has been widely commended. But these are only small starts and a great deal more needs to be done.

The remaining seven Recommendations were largely to the European Community and its member states. It is difficult to claim that major progress in these areas has been made.

3. WHAT SHOULD WE DO NEXT?

In order to consider what we should do next, it is worth recalling what we are:

The Forum is a network bringing together expertise in ecology, nature conservation and extensive agriculture and working with partners to sustain vulnerable cultural landscapes, their biodiversity and social fabric.

If we are to carry this forward, we need to (a) know how farming systems relate to nature conservation, (b) know how to influence the policies affecting these, and (c) ensure the maintenance of the Forum to continue this work.

We shall be addressing (a) as the second objective of the conference: relating nature conservation value to farming systems and the methodological problems in relation to this. This constitutes Sessions II and IV of the conference.

Item (b) takes up the difficulties highlighted in the preceding section regarding the adoption of the Forum's conclusions by policy-makers. It relates to the fourth objective of the conference: what the Forum is trying to do and how to carry it forward. This includes the implications of livestock policy reforms; the future enlargement of the European Union (EU); land-abandonment and rural change linked with this and other rural policies. This is addressed in Session V of the conference programme: policy update and debating specific policy issues to take to a 'Brussels Seminar'.

With regard to item (c) above, we need to work together to ensure that the Forum is able to continue. It is now achieving a very effective role in exchanging information, bringing partners together to identify future needs, and

taking forward some of these needs as we have outlined, and as we shall be seeing during this meeting.

Since its founding in 1988, the Forum and its predecessors have been supported by a good deal of resourcing from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and its predecessor, the Nature Conservancy Council. In recent years, further support has come from World Wide Fund for Nature and the Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries. These existing partners intend to continue contributing towards the costs of maintaining the Forum, *La Cañada* and the other activities. However, to ensure the secure base of activities into the future, it is necessary to bring in as many partners as possible so that the cost to any one is not too high. This has been discussed between some of the organisations involved before this meeting and discussions will continue during the meeting. I hope to return to this topic at the end of the meeting, as the initiatives we have developed are too important to be lost now.

4. WHY DO WE HAVE SO MUCH DIFFICULTY IN GETTING THE MESSAGE OVER ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF EXTENSIVE AGRICULTURE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION?

We referred at the start of this talk to the difficulty in getting people to recognise the importance of these extensive agricultural systems. Perhaps people need to experience them to do so. I recall that one of the early pieces of research I commissioned when working for the Nature Conservancy Council was to examine why so many of the vulnerable bird species listed on Annex 1 of the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds occurred on the Scottish island of Islay. The answer was closely related to the extensive agricultural practices still in operation there. The same is true of many of the other aspects of wildlife and scenery that people appreciate - although they do not often link them with traditional agricultural practices.

Many people appreciate the natural beauty and wildlife of, for example, the fields of Fermanagh and Donegal in Ireland, the Biebrza marshes of Poland and the high pastures of the Pyrenees. But neither the tourist viewing the scene nor the birdwatcher or other naturalist spotting the wildlife necessarily associate these with the farming practices. Last summer, I was walking in central France. It was interesting to see the focus on a transhumance system and the traditional farming in the excellent Ecomusée du Mont Lozère. However, as the museum made clear, here most of this system had now been lost. We need to move away from a situation where we recognise the importance of these systems only after they are lost from the area.

Here, in Spain, still exist some of the best examples of such systems. There are also similarities to systems elsewhere. For example, it is very appropriate in this region of the *dehesas* to include Session III of this

conference on European wood pastures, which also include the Portuguese montados, and some of the Hungarian systems, as well as the north European examples described in a paper at the previous meeting of the Forum. This brings us to the third conference objective: drawing attention to European wood pastures.

With Spanish examples to the fore, I therefore have great pleasure in handing you over to Carlos Martin-Novella to highlight some of these main features and to continue this joint presentation.

The Biodiversity Convention has three main objectives:

- The conservation of biological diversity.
- The sustainable use of biological resources.
- The equitable sharing of benefits.

Article 7 of the Convention relates to the *in situ* conservation as the primary approach to biodiversity conservation. This in-situ conservation requires initiatives on:

- Protected areas.
- Sustainable land-use.
- Management of the wider environment.
- Species management.
- Restoration of habitats and reintroduction of species.

The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism offers the opportunity to get together governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations across Europe to share experiences and try to identify ways to explain to the general public and decision-makers why pastoral systems are among the top priorities for the conservation of the biodiversity in Europe.

There is a need to develop land-use policies to ensure the sustainability of these pastoral systems. Priorities at national level have to be identified within global and regional criteria. As the need of conservation of the biological diversity is widely accepted, it is now necessary to explain the methodologies required to achieve our goal.

Birdlife European Programme

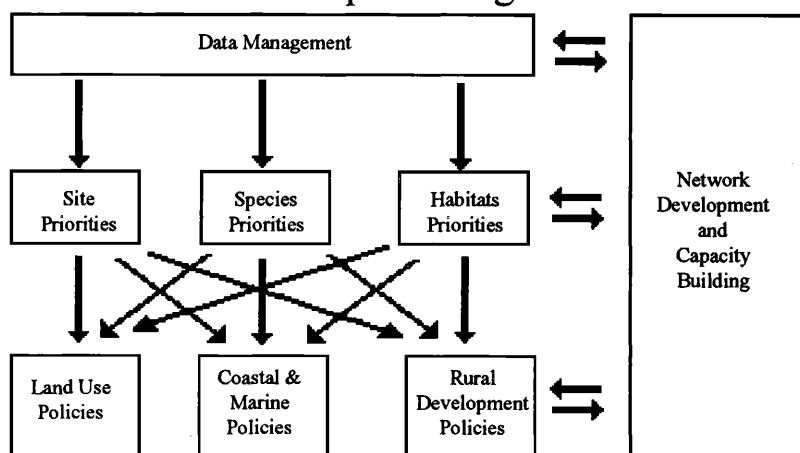


Figure 1. The BirdLife European Programme.

5. THE LINKED ISSUE OF IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES AND INFLUENCING POLICIES

Maximising efforts is a first priority for the conservation of biodiversity. A first approach can be to identify the minimum area to guarantee the conservation of a maximum number of species in the world. A recent study by Bibby *et al.* (1992) shows how 20% of the world bird species are restricted to just 2% of the world surface. In Europe there are three of these Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs), situated in Russia, Turkey, Georgia, Cyprus, Spain and Portugal. The occurrence of many EBAs elsewhere stresses the importance of making sure that the European Union's farming trade and international development aid policies are made more beneficial to these areas.

We need also to identify priorities for the conservation of the biodiversity in Europe. As an example, the BirdLife

European Programme identifies priorities for the conservation of the avian diversity that illustrate the importance of pastoral systems and promotes the development of land-use policies in benefit of these priorities. The structure of this programmes is illustrated in Figure 1.

Analysis of the data contained in BirdLife's World Bird Database allows the identification of priorities on species, sites and habitats. Analysis of these results allow the development of Land-Use, Coastal and Marine and Rural Development policies. This exercise of prioritising allows an efficient use of the scarce resources for conservation. Each one of these elements illustrates the importance of pastoral systems.

Identifying Species of European Conservation Concern (SPECs)

The forthcoming publication of Birds in Europe; their conservation status (Tucker *et al.* 1994) will provide information on numbers, distribution and trends, country by country of all the bird species occurring in Europe. This analysis shows that over 40% of the species are declining and that the major cause of this decline is agricultural intensification. This information allows the setting of priorities for the conservation of species, the sites where they occur and their habitats in Europe.

The conservation of globally threatened species is a top priority. Out of 1,111 bird species globally threatened, 22 occur in Europe (Collar, Crosby & Stattersfield 1994):

- Nine species in a single country only.
- Six species in 2-9 countries.
- Six species in 9-36 countries.
- One species not breeding in Europe.

Obviously the conservation of Spanish Imperial Eagle *Aquila adalberti* (in the Spanish dehesas and Portuguese montados), Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* (in Spanish, Greek and Turkish mediterranean forests), Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* (in mediterranean steppes), Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* (in north European wetlands), and Corncrake *Crex crex* (in meadows across the continent) are global priorities for the conservation of biodiversity. Therefore, BirdLife International, with the collaboration of the European Commission and the Bern and Bonn Conventions, is drafting action plans defining the initiatives required to recover the populations of these species in Europe (Heredia in prep.).

Identifying important sites for SPECs with standardised criteria

The inventory of Important Bird Areas (IBAs: Grimmett & Jones 1989) identified some 2,444 areas whose conservation is essential to ensure the maintenance of the numbers and distribution of a number of SPECs. With the new information available, BirdLife International is now updating this IBA inventory. The analysis of the land-use characteristics of these sites shows the importance of pastoralism practices in conserving their conservation value.

Appraising the protected area network and rectifying deficiencies

This concerns the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). The analysis of habitat requirements of the SPECs and land-uses in the existing network of protected areas shows a strong bias in the designation of areas. Agriculture habitats remain largely unprotected. The implementation of the EU agri-environment regulations and the Birds and Habitats Directives should be developed to avoid this bias in the countries of the European Union.

Identifying conservation zones for priority species of conservation concern outside protected areas

This requires:

- The identification of priority habitats.
- The identification of priority SPECs.
- The mapping of priority SPECs distribution.

This analysis shows the importance of lowland farmland habitats, wetlands and woodlands for the conservation of SPECs (Tucker 1994).

Developing habitat management prescriptions within identified zones, establishing habitat requirements and threats

Identified priorities on species, sites and habitats have to guide the development of land-use programmes integrating community participation, sustainable land-use (agriculture, forestry, natural produce), water and soil conservation, awareness and education, training, protected area management and wildlife management.

These land-use programmes have to ensure habitat conservation through regulations including pollution control, land-use practices, quotas for resource use, environmental impact assessment, land-use planning and tenure agreements; and through financial instruments including direct grants, subsidies linked to environmental objectives, taxes on environmentally damaging practices, the polluter-pays principle and consumer choice/eco-labelling.

Habitat management plans of this sort for priority species are currently being implemented for pilot cases in several European countries (e.g. Spain: Naveso & Groves-Raines 1993). The forthcoming publication of action plans for the management of all the priority habitats for bird conservation in Europe (Tucker in prep.) will enrich the information available until now in Europe.

All these analyses converge in two main considerations:

1. It is necessary to maintain extensive pastoral systems for biodiversity conservation in Europe wherever they remain and especially in top priority countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Russia and Spain).
2. It is necessary to reverse intensive agriculture practices to more extensive ones in countries (mostly in central and western Europe) where habitats have been seriously damaged due to this agricultural intensification.

The strategy to achieve these objectives should include:

- Definition of policy actions for SPECs.
- Integration of environmental objectives into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- Seeking reforms to the CAP.

- Development of environmental aspects of policies on EU enlargement and trade.
- Promotion of policies on pesticides and fertilisers.
- Development of policies to protect environmentally valuable agricultural land.
- Seeking integration of agricultural and environmental policies in central and eastern Europe.
- Co-ordination of national biodiversity strategies.
- Ensuring that agricultural development does not damage priority sites for SPECs.
- Ensuring integration between development programmes and sectoral policies.
- Ensuring that development programmes use high quality environmental assessment.
- Promotion of types of economic development that support conservation priorities.
- Use of conservation as a measure of success in development programmes.

Similar approaches need developing for other taxa, and integrating across natural interests. This fourth European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism will help in this progress of this strategy.

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La Cañada

The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism publishes a biannual newsletter called *La Cañada*. As well as summary reports of the Forum's meetings, the newsletter contains a wide variety of informative articles concerning European low-intensity agriculture, the socio-economic systems that maintain these farmlands and prospects for their future conservation.

Copies of *La Cañada* are available to interested WSG members as part of the co-ordination arrangements between the Forum and WSG. If you wish to receive a copy, please contact the WSG *Bulletin* editor in the first instance.

The Forum soon intended to establish *La Cañada* on a subscription basis. Details will be published in the *Bulletin* in due course.

David Stroud