

2130 *Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes")

Management of Natura 2000 habitats. Summary



*Calcareous fixed dunes on Sefton Coast, northwest England.
Photo: John Houston*

Fixed and semi-fixed dunes occupy a zone between the mobile dunes and the dune scrub and woodland habitats of coastal dune systems. The habitat is a main component of the extensive dune systems along the exposed Atlantic coasts of Portugal and France and also from north France to Denmark and much of the southern Baltic Sea. Grey dunes are found in almost all dune systems in the Atlantic region.

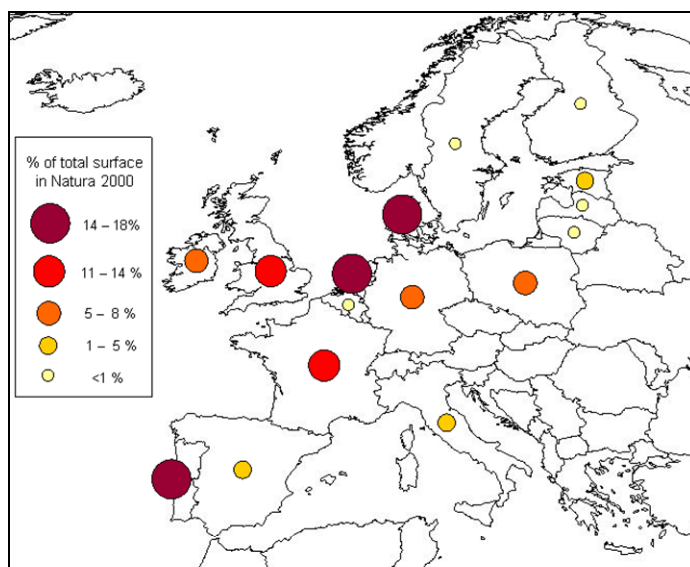
The open nature of the habitat is maintained by extensive grazing, by native herbivores, rabbits and domestic livestock. The grazing of fixed dunes has a long history in northwest Europe but overgrazing, particularly in the Middle Ages, led to widespread sand-drift in many areas.

The threats to the habitat come from over-stabilisation (through techniques to prevent sand-drift), a lack of appropriate grazing levels, growth of native and non-native (introduced) scrub, afforestation and alien species. The most significant concern across the range of sites is the impact of atmospheric nutrient deposition. This is most acute on the more acid sites from the Netherlands eastwards.

The options for managing fixed dune habitats are guided by type. Some dunes are 'stable' (and perhaps have been for many decades or centuries) and sustained levels of management are required to maintain dune grasslands, whereas others are 'dynamic' and can maintain an equilibrium between cyclical mobility and stability. Recurring management activity includes grazing (with considerable experience across Europe), burning, mowing, sod-cutting and scrub cutting. In all these activities the aim is to reduce nutrient levels to maintain high numbers of species.

In terms of restoration work the most significant activity, reported from several countries, is the removal of conifer plantations to restore open dune conditions.

Although the habitat is described as 'fixed' in many cases its conservation depends on it being part of the dynamic processes that operate in dune systems. In countering the problems of high nutrient levels the reworking of sand, either through cultivation or through encouraging sand-drift, may ultimately help to conserve the habitat in the 'dynamic' dune type.



Percentage distribution of the total surface of grey dunes in Natura 2000

The complete text of the document is available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/best_practice_en.htm

Management of Natura 2000 habitats is a project launched by the European Commission in January 2007 aimed at defining best practices for management of habitat types included in Annex I of the Habitat Directive (92/43/EEC) that need active recurring management. Twenty six habitat types that are representative of different bio-geographical regions have been considered.

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