

6210 Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (*important orchid sites)

Management of Natura 2000 habitats. Summary



The habitat in the Alto Garda Bresciano Regional Park (Italy) Photo: ERSAF

Festuco-Brometalia grasslands, present in almost the entire European continent, are among the most species-rich plant communities in Europe and contain a large number of rare and endangered species. This habitat includes dry to semi-dry grasslands and scrubland, occurring from the planar to the mountain level on calcareous to neutral substrates. Calcareous grasslands play a major, but not always well-recognised or understood role for society (production, employment), the environment and biodiversity. The grasslands are key habitats for many species: herbs, grazing animals, butterflies and reptiles, and many birds.

Birds of prey such as *Falco biarmicus* (lanner falcon), *Pernis apivorus* (honey buzzard), *Circaetus gallicus* (short-toed eagle) and *Circus pygargus* (Montagu's harrier) use these grasslands as hunting areas during the breeding season; many passerines, such as *Emberiza hortulana* (ortolan bunting), *Sylvia nisoria* (barred warbler), *Lullula arborea* (woodlark) and *Lanius collurio* (red-backed shrike) use this environment for nesting and roosting, while other birds breed in these grasslands - *Burhinus oedicephalus* (stone curlew), for example. The invertebrate fauna, particularly butterflies, associated with this habitat is also noteworthy.

Pressure on grassland habitats is steadily increasing, mainly due to abandonment or change in use. The total area of grassland in the EU fell by an average of 12% between 1975 and 1998, with increases in only a few areas. In the areas where the habitat is still present, the lack of management results in a continuing decrease in range of the many species that depend on it.

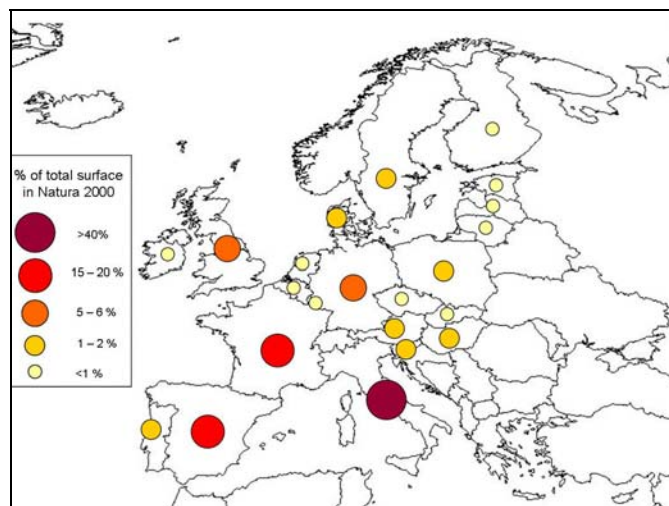
Active management of the habitat includes grazing, cutting or a combination of both. In rural areas, grazing is important both to the local economy and to maintain the aesthetic value of grassland sites for the benefit of the local community.

Grassland management objectives will vary from site to site and within one site different goals may be set for different areas; a balanced approach is to see the primary goal as maintenance of the main plant communities, along with the main features of importance to animals, such as areas of bare soil, scattered bushes and scrub margins.

Since the habitat features, conservation values and context (history and development) differ considerably between the various countries and biogeographical regions, it is important, when planning the management for the habitat, to take into account the following general aspects which will allow sensible management decisions to be taken:

- Site-specific objectives and targets as regards the conservation status of species;

- Local/regional land use and livestock husbandry traditions, practices and techniques – today's conservation values are often the result of the land use and grazing regimes of the past.



Percentage distribution of the total surface of dry grasslands 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.