

6230 *Species-rich *Nardus* grasslands

Management of Natura 2000 habitats. Summary



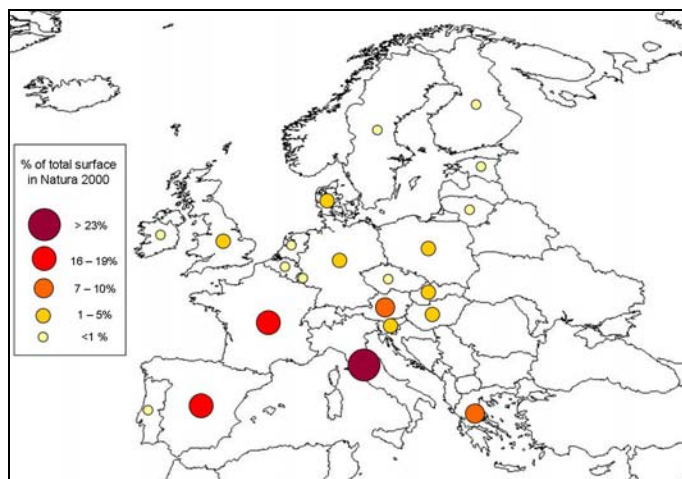
Species-rich *Nardus* grassland in Western Carpathians – Velka Raca.
Photo: J. Seffer.

Species-rich *Nardus* grasslands are some of the most widespread habitats in the EU, occurring in 24 Member States and 6 different bioregions. They include a huge variety of sub-types, which may be found in very different ecological situations. It is generally an oligotrophic habitat, typical found mostly on species-poor soils throughout Europe. In spite of the fact that some types of *Nardus* grasslands can be considered as climax vegetation which do not require active ongoing management, the long-term existence of the habitat is in general closely with pastoral traditions and with extensive agriculture. The area of the habitat in Europe has declined in the last decades because of the intensification of agricultural practices on the one hand and land abandonment and too low an intensity of the use on the other. Mountain types are also threatened by tourism and skiing activities.

Grazing and mowing are the most frequent recommendations for the management of the habitat. 'Appropriateness' as regards grazing intensity and organisation varies considerably in different European regions and countries. The habitat in general requires extensive grazing which prevents invasion by trees and scrub, but which is not so intensive as to cause the eutrophication of the habitat. Mowing is also feasible technique which is applied mostly on the lower altitude sites. In some regions there is also usual to combine both grazing and mowing. Additional fertilization is usually prohibited on the habitat or is very restricted, because it can cause the eutrophication of the habitat and may induce a change towards mesic grasslands. Other measures like cutting and chopping of biomass with a flail or rotary mower, or burning can be also used for the maintenance of the habitat, but their regular application is not recommended.

If necessary, several restoration measures may be applied together and their application is generally much more complicated than regular management. The most frequently-employed measure is the removal of the trees and shrubs by the machines or by hand. If the habitat was totally destroyed and afforested, restoration is still possible, but relatively costly. Restoration in such conditions has been carried out in some areas, e.g. in Belgium, where sod cutting techniques were used. Where the habitat is seriously damaged also by skiing activities, turf transplantation and the application of hay or mulch from species-rich grasslands may be used to restore the habitat.

Probably the best way to finance the positive ongoing management on the habitat is the use of the funds from European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Restoration measures are usually much more costly, so they are usually not eligible for EAFRD funds and may be financed for instance through LIFE+ projects.



Percentage distribution of the total surface of *Nardus* 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.