Welcome to the August 2018 edition of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process Newsletter, which includes information on major upcoming events, including the next Natura 2000 seminars and selected networking events, short reports on some recent workshops as well as information on the ongoing work on updating of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process Website.

In our last edition of the newsletter we introduced ourselves as the new consortium team overseeing the Biogeographical Process and we are now busy preparing three seminars which will be held in the next few months: The Macaronesian seminar (the Canary Islands, Madeira, Azores) in September, the Continental, Pannonian, Steppic and Black Sea seminar in Strasbourg in October, and the Marine seminar in Mallorca in November. This newsletter provides the latest information on these events.

Over the past few months, we have also helped organise or host sessions in various networking events on different habitat types and conservation topics including grassland habitats and sand dune management. And finally, we have been assessing the selected proposals for upcoming networking events based on our call for proposals from last month.

This issue finishes off with an interview with one of our consortium team and a new feature on a specific Natura 2000 project. As we recently visited a sand dune management workshop in Dunkirk, you will find that there is a sand dune habitat theme to this edition. If you have any comments,
We are still busy planning the three Biogeographical Seminars, which will be held in 2018. These seminars involve a lot of preparations including formal meetings with the Steering Committees; preparing agendas for the seminars; consulting stakeholders; inviting nominated participants, and assisting the host organisations in arranging the conference facilities and field excursions. Below you will find the latest information about these seminars.

Up to date information on seminars events can be found here.

**Upcoming Seminar – Macaronesian (24-27 September 2018)**

The Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition (MITECO) and the Governo Regional da Madeira, with support from the European Commission, are preparing the first Natura 2000 seminar for the Macaronesian biogeographical region. The Macaronesian biogeographical region includes the Azores, the Canary Islands and Madeira and hosts many endemic habitats and species. It will take place from 24-27 September 2018 in Funchal (Madeira, Portugal).

Topics to be discussed at the seminar include habitat definitions and the harmonisation of definitions for the various islands, favourable reference values for forest, coastal and marine habitats and working group sessions on connectivity and conservation measures across the network of protected areas. Tragsatec, a Spanish public body, is in charge of the organisation of this event with the Madeiran regional government, while our Consortium team is organising the knowledge market.

Up to date information can be found here.

**Upcoming Seminar – Continental, Pannonian, Steppic and the Black Sea (16-18 October 2018)**

This seminar will be held in Strasbourg and is hosted by the Region Grand Est, France. The main
Topics of discussion include site-level management objectives; conservation priorities and Favourable Reference Values; habitat type definitions; and involving land managers in integrated site management.

We are currently finalising the list of invited participants and preparing the background documentation. The Parc naturel régional des Vosges du Nord is organising the site excursions during this seminar. One excursion will visit forest habitats of the Alsace, focussing inter alia on forest management, financing systems in relation to N2000, as well as the Lynx LIFE project. Another excursion will investigate river restoration measures and water quality aspects. A third excursion will focus on grasslands and agricultural habitats, typology of habitats, and agri-environmental measures.

Up to date information including the seminar program will be posted here.

If you would like to know more about these seminars, please contact mailto:natura2000platform@wur.nl?subject=Query%20about%20the%20Continental%2C%20Pannonian%2C%20Steppic%20and%20the%20Black%20Sea%20Seminar or mailto:VVassilev@rec.org?subject=Query%20about%20the%20Continental%2C%20Pannonian%2C%20Steppic%20and%20the%20Black%20Sea%20Seminar for further details.

Upcoming Seminar – Marine (13-15 November 2018)

The marine Natura 2000 seminar will be held in Palma de Mallorca (Spain) and will be hosted by the Fundación Biodiversidad of the Spanish Ministry for Ecological Transition and the Government of the Balearic Islands. The marine Natura 2000 seminar is being jointly organised with the MedPAN workshop for ‘Mediterranean challenges for Marine Protected Areas and Small-Scale Fisheries’ with a joint plenary session and meal planned for the event.

The main topics of discussion include: Setting conservation objectives at site, national and regional levels; Setting favourable reference values; and developing conservation measures to achieve conservation objectives. There will also be focus groups on species and habitats from each of the marine regions. The field excursion will be hosted by the Government of the Balearic Islands and will include an excursion to Cabrera Archipelago Maritime-Terrestrial National Park and the Cabrera Visitor Centre in Colònia San Jordi.

We are still finalising the preparations for the conference, including the preparation of background documents.

Up to date information including the seminar program will be posted here.
Networking events differ from seminars and are generally for a smaller group of participants and experts. They tackle more specific subjects in relation to conservation and management issues related to habitat types, species and management themes of the Natura 2000 network.

Up to date information on upcoming networking events can be found here.

Findings of - Cooperation for Grassland Conservation, Sulmona, Italy (4-8 June 2018)

As part of the 15th Eurasian Grassland Conference (organised by the Eurasian Dry Grassland Group (EDGG) together with the Sapienza University of Rome and the Majella National Park) a networking was held, which was a spinoff of the last Mediterranean Biogeographic Process Seminar (Cyprus, 2017) and four topics were the focus of discussion:

- Habitat definition and interpretation
- Favourable reference values
- Integration of grassland conservation in EU funding and cohesion policy
- Action plans for habitat conservation at level
Discussions about habitat definitions focussed on the high variability of Annex I habitat types across different countries and how this makes interpretation challenging, along with the dynamism of habitats based on a changing environment and the decline of traditional management practices. Possible solutions to these challenges were appraised and recommendations made by the group included utilising the EVA dataset used to create the EUNIS typology and translation keys as developed in Czech Republic.

The focus of discussion regarding Favourable Reference Values included the challenge of defining meaningful thresholds that encapsulate all elements of ecosystem functioning, which is difficult where data or knowledge gaps exist, and further complicated when aggregating such values to use at different scales of assessment. Recommendations included further research to establish baseline conditions, the identification of reference sites and organising multidisciplinary meetings to design habitat-specific monitoring protocols.

Grasslands conservation across the Mediterranean was discussed and their main threats and possible ways to improve the situation for these habitat types. Land abandonment was identified as a major threat, which is caused by a loss of profitability for farmers in maintaining their activities. Suggestions to improve this situation included adapting EU funding towards more environmentally sustainable farming and invigorating a market for supporting farmers who are farming sustainably.

The need for conservation action plans at biogeographic level was also discussed and how these large-scale action plans are generally lacking in most regions. Suggestions to start work on these action plans included the development of transnational action plans for Habitats of Community Interest and how the LIFE programme could support the development of these plans.
The full report from this networking event will be made available at this link when it is finalised.

Findings of - International Workshop on the Management of Coastal Dunes and Sandy Beaches, Dunkirk (12-14 June 2018)

As part of this international workshop where a range of interesting research and conservation projects focussed on the conservation and management of coastal dunes and sandy beaches were presented, a session was held on the Atlantic Dune Roadmap. The aim of the Roadmap is to facilitate the implementation of the Biogeographic Process for coastal dunes and is a ‘living document’ that develops new ideas to resolve conservation challenges and identifies issues that can be further discussed.

Topics discussed included a need for further national and cross-border networking and the fostering of a better understanding by the general public of the dynamic nature of dunes and associated field projects. It was also considered important to integrate evidence-based conservation and cultural landscape heritage further into conservation plans for dunes.

The full report from this networking event will be made available at this link when it is finalised.

Dedicated Invitation for Networking Event Proposals 2018
In the previous edition of the newsletter, we invited you to submit ideas and proposals for networking events in the second half of 2018. Eight proposals were received including two proposals for 2019. We used specially designed scoring criteria to assess each proposal against the core objectives of the Biogeographical Process. We have a restricted budget to support such events, but some proposals only required support with communicating information about events or presentations by one of our consortium team members and/or a presence by us at a knowledge market event.

The proposals we have identified as a priority for supporting this year include: a HELCOM MPA workshop (Sweden, Marine BGR); a species and habitats conservation workshop (Romania, Steppic BGR); a freshwater catchment field excursion (Finland, Boreal BGR); a Grassland management workshop (Sweden, Boreal BGR); and a livestock farming and vultures workshop (Spain, Mediterranean, Alpine and Atlantic BGR).

Further details on these networking events are presented below:

**Agenda events**

- 13 September: Setting conservation objectives and targets for Natura 2000 MPAs (HELCOM, Norrköping, Sweden)
- 17-18 September: Promoting the values of species and habitats of the steppe region in biodiversity conservation (Northern Dobrogea Plateau, Romania)
- 3-4 October: Boreal freshwater-catchment field trip (Southern Finland)

Follow our [website](#) as well as our [Twitter](#) for further announcements regarding these events!

Due to the success of this first invitation for proposals, we will launch another invitation for proposals for 2019 in November.
Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process Website update

Thanks to those who provided us with comments on their experience of navigating and using the Biogeographical Process website. We have now factored the comments received into our redesign.

The new website is under development and we have developed a new structure for the website pages which allows relevant information to be found quickly. A website testing environment has been created by the European Commission’s website support team and we are now in the process of drafting the new website text. We anticipate that the new website will be online in September 2018.

Follow us on Twitter

Since we launched our Twitter account in April the number of followers has been gradually increasing. We use it to promote events, which are supported by the Biogeographical Process, such as the networking events discussed above, but we also use it to send interesting findings from related projects (such as LIFE+ projects or the work of organisations working towards Natura 2000 objectives). We also post pictures and updates from Biogeographical Process networking events and field excursions.

So, to stay up to date and follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com)!
Nature Project Profile – LIFEREDUNE – Restoration of dune habitats in Natura 2000 sites of the Veneto coast (Italy)

One of the many interesting projects presented at the recent International Workshop on the Management of Coastal Dunes and Sandy Beaches included this large-scale project, which aims to restore and maintain the ecological integrity of five dune habitat types and *Stipa veneta* populations in four Natura 2000 sites present along the Adriatic coast.

Specifically, this work includes the restoration of 91 ha of dune habitats; the reduction of human impacts across all of the identified Natura 2000 sites; encouraging stakeholders to have a responsible attitude towards the dune ecosystem; and the transfer and replication of methods and skills to similar ecosystems across the Mediterranean.

The project has so far erected 10 km of fencing and 1 km of boardwalks to reduce tourist pressure on the sand dune systems and a series of dune management guidelines are in development including: guidelines on the *Oenothera stucchii* containment; guidelines on the use of drones to monitor beaches; guidelines on tour operator involvement in the protection of dune habitats; and guidelines for the long-term participatory management of the beaches by stakeholders.

For further information about this project, please visit: [http://www.liferedune.it](http://www.liferedune.it)
We asked Thomas Haynes of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process Consortium team some questions about his involvement in the project and some of his favourite nature sites.

*Please tell us about your role on the Biogeographical Process Consortium team*

I am responsible for overseeing the events related to the marine biogeographic regions including this year’s Marine Natura 2000 Seminar in Palma De Mallorca. I support the European Commission marine project team in finding hosts for the seminars and drafting the agenda and topics for discussion. This year’s marine seminar is the second such seminar (the first was held in 2015), so it is important that I review all previous reports and ensure that the topics under discussion are relevant and will lead to meeting the objectives of the Habitats Directive and the Biogeographical Process. I am also ensuring that there is synergy between ongoing work on wildlife-related topics under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and those working on the marine elements of Habitats Directive and Birds Directive.

I am also working on awareness raising and communications for the Biogeographical Process, which includes the creation of the new edition of the newsletter and the Biogeographical Process website. Furthermore, I am a member of the overarching management team of the Biogeographical Process consortium.

*What interesting projects have you worked on in the past?*
I managed the Saltmarsh Survey of Scotland from 2009-2014 (on behalf of Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency) and had the opportunity to visit most of Scotland’s coastal Natura 2000 sites. I also appraised the condition of saltmarsh habitat both at a site level and as a national resource, so I have spent many years pondering appropriate saltmarsh management and the threats that the habitat faces in the future.

I was also part of the management team that oversaw the European Red List of Habitats, a ground-breaking study that collected the first European assessment of all terrestrial and marine habitats. I was primarily involved in overseeing the assessment of the marine habitat assessments and also gathered UK data for coastal habitat types.

I also support the biodiversity elements of the secretariat supporting the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which gives me an interesting insight into how horizontal actions on protecting marine wildlife are progressing.

**What is your favourite Natura 2000 site and why?**

Culbin Sands near Nairn in North East Scotland is both an SPA and SAC and formerly part of the largest sand dune system in Scotland (and possibly Britain) until it was afforested in the 1920s-1930s. None the less, this a dynamic and diverse site with a large shingle bar (the largest in Scotland) that acts as a barrier island to the saltmarsh and sand dunes found on the coastline. I was lucky enough to spend four days mapping out the saltmarshes on this site and I didn’t see another person in all of that time. It is also a memorable site for me as I found a free-living form of a seaweed in the saltmarshes (*Pelvetia canaliculata*).

**What do you think are the key challenges for the Biogeographical Process community to investigate this year?**

I think sharing knowledge of Favourable Reference Values (FRV) for various habitats and species is an important part of this year’s work across most regions, but equally, it is important to ensure that the momentum gained in the various seminars and workshops is maintained by continuing discussions and working on challenges between the main events.

**Which upcoming event are you most looking forward to?**

Having recently visited the facilities and field excursion sites for the marine Natura 2000 workshop in Palma de Mallorca, which will be jointly organised with MedPAN, I think this will be an
excellent seminar and will provide some really interesting context into the practicalities of conserving marine habitats and species across the Balearic Islands.