



**Integrating hunting
practices with nature
conservation planning**



About Eurosite's 'Sustainable Wildlife Management' workshop

Co-organisers: Natural England, Hunting Federation of Macedonia & Thrace (Greece) and Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services



Contributing organisations:

Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation, Belgium
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Introduction

The European Union has given considerable time and study to the role of hunting in nature conservation through projects such as the Sustainable Hunting Initiative¹, which was launched in 2001 and is still the basis for several ongoing LIFE projects. In 2012, a Biodiversity Manifesto², created by the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation (FACE), was approved at a meeting of European Hunting Federations in Athens. The 34 points of the manifesto address a host of EU biodiversity priority areas and promote cooperation with other sectors and stakeholders, such as farmers, landowners, conservation NGOs, and public authorities.

As these initiatives show, there is a strong need for hunters and hunting organisations to exchange knowledge and experience with protected area managers. Whether the concern is about controlling large carnivore populations in hunting areas, shooting wildfowl or other game for sport, pest control or species management; hunting is a topic that many site managers are likely to encounter at some point. Cooperation between hunting organisations and site managers also has the potential to benefit both parties, as hunting can contribute to conservation efforts, whilst effective nature conservation can help to increase the availability of game species. For this reason, Eurosite and Natural England, in collaboration with the Hunting Federation of Macedonia & Thrace (Greece) and Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services, decided to organise a workshop on ‘Sustainable Wildlife Management: integrating hunting practices with nature conservation planning’.

The workshop was held in Ashford, United Kingdom from 28-30 October 2014. In total 31 people from 7 countries (Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Netherlands, and UK) representing 15 organisations, attended. The workshop provided an opportunity for site managers, hunters and hunting organisations to come together in order to share knowledge, experiences and best practice case studies. The workshop programme included a series of presentations³, a field trip to Elmley National Nature Reserve and a discussion session.

The workshop discussions contributed to the development of this Advice Paper, which gathers together key recommendations and practical steps for the integration of hunting practices with the management of Natura 2000 sites and other natural areas. This Advice Paper will be a useful introduction to the topic and will give site managers the confidence to work together with hunters and hunting organisations.

1 http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/hunting/index_en.htm

2 http://www.face.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/bdm_en_0.pdf

3 To view the presentation slides see: <http://eurosite.org/en-UK/content/wildlife-management>

Regulation of hunting in Natura 2000 and other natural areas

Regulation of hunting varies across Europe. While in some countries hunting is not allowed in Natura 2000 areas, in others it is not regulated and only a hunting licence is required to hunt. Moreover, the differences among countries regarding land ownership makes creating a common framework to regulate hunting even more difficult. For example, in the UK most of the land is privately owned, and for this reason management is private. On the other hand, in Mediterranean countries such as Cyprus or Greece, most of the land is public and hunters have the right to hunt on these public lands.

- **Greece:** Laws regarding hunting are made by the central government. The Forestry administration, a department of the Ministry of Environment, implements the laws. Hunting associations make proposals, fund and facilitate implementation, and undertake actions like habitat improvement, operation of a game-warden body, and monitoring of the annual hunting harvest. Every hunter with an official licence can hunt wherever hunting is permitted. Game species do not belong to the landowner but are public natural resources. In principle a landowner cannot stop you from hunting if there is no fenced area.
- **Georgia:** Hunting is managed by the Ministry of Environment, which deals with law enforcement, by means of environmental inspectors. However, the Ministry of Environment deals with a much wider range of environment related issues, not just hunting. Landowners also play a role in hunting management as they have the right to stop people from hunting on their land.
- **Finland:** Laws regarding hunting are made by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Law enforcement is then implemented by the Finnish Wildlife Agency, on behalf of the Ministry. The local hunting associations are regulated by the law and undertake monitoring and management tasks. Each hunter is automatically registered to the relevant hunting association for his or her hunting grounds. Land ownership regulates hunting rights in Finland.
- **Cyprus:** Hunting in Natura 2000 designated areas is not regulated. If you are a hunter, you can hunt in any of the designated hunting areas independently of the area's Natura 2000 status and you do not have to belong to a hunting club.

How could regulation be improved?

- **Increase adaptability of the laws:** As different protected areas have different needs, each area should have a different hunting management plan. Some of the 'Sustainable Wildlife Management' workshop attendees stated that hunting must be allowed in Natura 2000 areas that were designated because of values not affected by hunting, like flora or geology, or in places where the game species are a threat to biodiversity. For example, hunting of geese is not allowed in areas where geese are a threat to biodiversity, but hunting them would improve the management of biodiversity.
- **Increase communication between countries:** An increased transference of knowledge between countries on how to involve hunters in nature conservation would improve cooperation between hunters and site managers.
- **Lead shot:** Starting a cartridge exchange scheme, where lead cartridges are collected and returned for a small amount of money, might help to solve the problem of lead shot.

Funding hunting management in Natura 2000 sites and other natural areas

- **Across Europe:** In general hunters fund hunting management, and in most cases management is carried out voluntarily by hunters.
- **At EU level:** Currently CAP agri-environment schemes have a role in funding management when an area is eligible to be included in the framework of agri-environmental schemes.
- **Greece:** Money for hunting management comes mainly from the hunting licences, which also fund a body of rangers who carry out law enforcement.
- **UK:** As hunting is carried out on private land, the hunters pay for the creation and implementation of management. In some cases, the hunters themselves implement the management plans.
- **Finland:** On private land, the landowner funds all game management. On state owned land, there is no funding for game management *per se* in protected areas. Predator control can be funded to a small extent by projects. In state owned areas where hunting is permitted, game management is funded through income from selling hunting permits.
- **Cyprus:** There is a Game Fund that regulates hunting and is funded by hunters.

Are these funding sources sustainable and what future sources might there be?

There are public funding tools available, such as the LIFE programme or CAP sources, but they are not necessarily sustainable sources of funds. Alternative funding is needed, for example charging the public to visit sites or ecotourism. However, some of the ‘Sustainable Wildlife Management’ workshop attendees stated that hunters do not always like having outsiders hunting on their land.

Key stakeholders

The key stakeholders to consider when integrating hunting and nature conservation are:

- Animal rights groups
- Local authorities
- Environmental agencies
- General public
- Publicly owned land – hunters or hunting groups are the key stakeholders
- Privately owned land – landowners and farmers are the key stakeholders
- Non-hunting organisations – conservation groups that are against or are not interested in hunting
- Hunters
- Gun traders
- Private estate managers

During the ‘Sustainable Wildlife Management’ workshop the attendees identified animal rights groups, local authorities and environmental agencies as being the most difficult stakeholders to engage. However, stakeholders respond differently to different groups of people. For this reason, compiling a team of individuals and organisations with different affiliations is helpful; hunters, nature conservationists and government representatives should meet collectively with stakeholders.

Integrating hunting with the management of Natura 2000 sites and other natural areas: key factors

The following are key factors to take into account when integrating hunting with the management of Natura 2000 sites and other natural areas:

- Help the general public understand that hunters have a role to play in nature conservation
- Conservationists must engage with hunting groups
- Hunters must increase the feeling of ownership among the hunting community regarding conservation actions
- Build trust between hunters and nature conservationists
- Use evidence-based advice to draw balanced judgments and conclusions
- Keep the process open – do not work behind closed doors
- Monitor and review the management plan; ask for feedback from all stakeholders regarding the implementation of the management plan
- Use Adaptive Management – this will allow for flexibility
- Hunting must be sustainable in the long term
- Show the wider benefits of wildlife management for the site but also for the general public
- Avoid paperwork or derogations, otherwise hunters will lose trust in site managers and the government
- Natura 2000 must integrate the social and cultural needs of the stakeholders
- Motivation, involvement and engagement of all the stakeholders
- Establish clear objectives, and the roles and tasks of each stakeholder, with appropriate time scales
- Make decisions clear for all stakeholders – be transparent
- Be efficient
- Find people with the right skills to engage hunters
- Secure sustainable funding – even small amounts can make a difference if they are sustainable



Three-step plan to integrate hunting into the management of Natura 2000

1. **Planning process:** The planning process must be open and must include hearings and stakeholder meetings. Everybody must understand how the planning process will work and the various steps in the process must be clear to all the participants. The roles and tasks of all the stakeholders must also be clearly stated. This process will build trust and increase engagement.
2. **Implementation:** If the first step has not been carried out properly, there will be a lack of trust and stakeholders will hinder the implementation process.
3. **Review:** Natural and social situations change fast and the management plan needs to adapt to this change. Every five years, or sooner if needed, the management plan must be reviewed using an open process like the one used during the planning stage.



Recommendations for future project development

Game population assessment is needed

In many countries there is a lack of knowledge about how game populations function. If game numbers and dynamics and the effects of hunting on nature were correctly assessed it would produce better management plans and a consistent approach throughout the protected areas and regions.

Hunters are keen to receive this information. Indeed, examples were given during our ‘Sustainable Wildlife Management’ workshop of hunters funding scientific research. For example, Andrew Hoodless (The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, United Kingdom) delivered a presentation about a scientific study of woodcock populations that was funded by hunters⁴.

It is better to be proactive than reactive

It is better to inform hunters about the law before illegal behaviour takes place, then actions like stakeholder meetings or information campaigns will produce better results. Establishing codes of conduct or hunting ethics to compliment laws will also produce more engagement, as hunters will feel that they are not just following the law but that they are upholding their own code of ethics. One of the attendees at our ‘Sustainable Wildlife Management’ workshop provided the example of talking to hunters about the use of guns with only three shots. Rather than telling the hunters that they can only use guns with three shots because it is the law, they told hunters that if they have not shot a bird in three shots, they don’t deserve the catch. This instils a sense of hunter ethics, rather than hunters following the law because they feel obliged to.

How to approach conservationists and anti-hunting organisations:

- **Improve the image of hunters:** The difference between hunting and illegal killing must be clearly highlighted. Illegal trappers and poachers create a bad impression of the hunting community.
- **Emphasise common ground:** Hunters want nature to be used sustainably, in common with other users of nature, such as hikers, birdwatchers, and nature photographers. Furthermore, maintaining traditional agricultural practices that produce smaller fields with hedgerows is beneficial for both hunting and biodiversity conservation.
- **Emphasise the role of hunters in benefitting biodiversity:** In some cases, if humans do not intervene and manage certain species, ecosystems will disappear. Hence hunting and the techniques used by hunters can also be useful tools for nature management.
- **Stimulate communication:** Encourage pro- and anti-hunting groups to engage in dialogues. It might be useful to have an independent, unbiased group acting as a mediator.

How to approach other stakeholders and the general public:

- Promote hunting as an additional use for nature that can prevent rural areas from being abandoned.
- Engage young people in hunting – this is common practice in Finland.
- When creating management plans, involve all the potential stakeholders. Taking part in the process will increase the stakeholders’ feeling of ownership.

⁴ http://eurosite.org/files/The_Role_of_Science_in_Guiding_Hunting_Practices_Woodcock_Shooting_as_an_Example_-_Andrew_Hoodless.pdf

Hunting as part of nature management: a case study

Elmley National Nature Reserve (NNR) in North Kent was originally part of a highly managed agricultural landscape called the North Kent marshes system. Now, it is a less intensively farmed landscape where cattle are bred in relatively low numbers.

Water is managed to keep the water levels suitable for birds and cattle by means of a simple and inexpensive system of ditches and pipes. The pipes allow for the drainage of water during rainy winters and the ditches keep water levels high during dry summers. Cattle numbers are kept to around 800, which means the cattle can be easily moved to avoid harming the birds and their habitats. Water and cattle management produces a mosaic of pastures, salty marshes and reed beds that provide habitats for a wide range of wildlife, including birds of prey, brown hares, water voles, seals, grass snakes and marsh frogs, as well as grasses and wildflowers seldom seen elsewhere in the UK. The owners of Elmley NNR are now implementing conservation measures to increase numbers of Lapwings, a flagship species indicator of a healthy habitat.



Management techniques implemented at Elmley include:

Predator fences: The managers came up with a new way of fencing the site that is cheaper and very effective. The fences are now positioned in the middle of the water drainage channels. Foxes are able to jump or cross most of the fences positioned on land and they can swim through the water channels, but the combination of a channel with a fence is very difficult for the foxes to cross. Moreover, the fences inside the channels are lower than the fences on land, which reduces the visual impact. The fences are permanent since areas that are not fenced are full of foxes, which eat the Lapwing chicks.

Crow traps: To control crow populations, which prey on Lapwing chicks and eggs, the managers use Larsen traps⁵.

Fox control: As well as the fencing, sport shooters also control fox numbers through hunting. At the moment, due to this agreement, fox management is free for the owner.

Flexible grazing: Thanks to the low numbers of cattle, the cattle can be moved based on the needs of the nesting birds.

Improved micro-topography: Micro-topography (small basins and mounds) is being created to allow a more heterogeneous landscape (a mix of land and water) that is an ideal habitat for certain types of birds, such as Lapwings.

The management required to maintain the right conditions for birds is very intense and there are two people working full-time at the site all year around. Foxes and crows feed in the cities, and on waste sites and carrion on the roads, causing their numbers to increase. These increasing populations then affect protected areas, in this case eating the Lapwing chicks. Due to this situation, the predator control techniques used at Elmley will have to be implemented for an indeterminate amount of time.

The estate's income derives mainly from tourism (there are three custom made, luxury Shepherds Huts on the site), and visitors paying to visit the site, as well as a marginal income from the cattle. The owners also get subsidies from the CAP agri-environmental schemes (they are paid for managing the land in an environmentally friendly way), but the goal of the managers is to be as independent as possible from the CAP subsidies in case the subsidies are stopped.

⁵ For more information see: http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjournature/discoverandlearn/birdguide/name/m/magpie/legal_control_methods.aspx

Concluding remarks



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Hunting is a traditional land use in Europe and is an integral part of most cultures. Hunting depends on healthy ecosystems because healthy ecosystems lead to an abundance of catches. In fact, hunters have been managing nature for centuries to improve game numbers. The involvement of hunters in nature conservation is therefore a logical next step, but it is one that is not always apparent to hunters or other stakeholders.

Eurosite's 'Sustainable Wildlife Management' workshop provided the participants with a European perspective on how hunters can be and are currently involved in nature management. Whether they are funding a body of wardens, controlling invasive species, managing land or funding research on the ecology of game species; hunters are taking an active role in nature conservation across Europe.

The workshop also highlighted the fact that despite local variations in hunting, the basic requirements for engaging hunters in nature conservation are the same across Europe: properly prepared management plans, game population assessments and the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders. Only when these requirements are met can nature conservationists and hunters fully realise the mutual benefits of working together – and the benefits for Europe's nature.

Publications and resources

- [Sustainable Hunting Initiative](#)
- [LIFE and human coexistence with large carnivores](#)
- [Sustainable Hunting and Nature 2000](#)
- [Guide to Sustainable Hunting under the Birds Directive](#)
- [AGREEMENT between BirdLife International and FACE on Directive 79/409/EEC](#)
- [Natural England's approach to assessing and responding to wildfowling notices on Sites of Special Scientific Interest \(SSSIs\) and European sites](#)
- [The Biodiversity Manifesto](#)
- [Code of Practice on Deer Management](#)
- [Deer Management on the National Forest Estate](#)
- [The DMG Benchmark](#)
- ['HUNTING for Sustainability' – A summary of research findings from the Scottish case study](#)
- [Code of Good Shooting Practice](#)
- [Wildlife Estates \(WE\) Label](#)
- [Lead Poisoning in Waterbirds Through the Ingestion of Spent Lead Shot](#)
- [World Symposium of the Ecologic and Economic Benefits of Hunting](#)
- [The Return of the Grey Partridge \(video\)](#)



Eurosite is working to create a Europe where nature is cared for, protected, restored and valued by all

We do this by providing practitioners with opportunities to network and exchange experience on practical nature management. We are a network of site managers, non-governmental and governmental organisations, and individuals and organisations committed to our vision. Our members are based across Europe – from the Atlantic islands to the Black Sea; and from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean.

Nature knows no boundaries: we believe the future protection and conservation of Europe's nature will only be achieved through international cooperation.

Interested in what we do? Take a look at our website to find out more and consider becoming a member.

Together we can make a difference.

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