

## Greece: Mitigating the conflicts between fishermen and monk seals

The monk seal is one of the six most threatened mammals in the world. About 90% of the European population lives in Greece. Although this is the largest group globally, it numbers only about 200 to 250 individuals.

Greece has been working for 15 years to conserve the monk seal, but conflict between the mammals and the interests of local fishing communities remains a key problem. The seals are believed to compete for fish and damage equipment. Lack of knowledge hampers cooperation.

Thus, fishermen may resort to killing the mammals deliberately, or at least failing to assist them when they are at risk. The outcome is a major threat to the monk seal's survival.

Coordinated by the Hellenic Society for the Study and Protection of the Monk Seal (MOM), the project covers the entire Greek seacoast – 15,000 km of coastline and 3,000 islands – and addresses the interests of both sides in this conflict. Interviews with fishermen in seven 'hot spot' areas will identify the problems more

closely, and an awareness campaign will increase co-operation with local stakeholders. At the same time, the project will test the use of acoustic devices to keep the seals away from fishing gear and study their feeding preferences.

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Red kite (*Milvus milvus*)  
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In the south of Italy lies an important area for the conservation of a number of different species of birds of prey, or raptors. This project aims to improve their conservation status in two Natura 2000 sites: Gravine di Matera, part of a regional archaeological park, and Lago San Giuliano e Timmari, a 1,000-hectare nature reserve along the banks of an artificial lake.

These sites are hunting grounds for the most important Italian population of the lesser kestrel. Around 500 pairs

## Italy: Safeguarding birds of prey in Matera Province

– 3% of the estimated total in Europe – live in the remarkable and unique urban fabric of Matera (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and Montescaglioso. Three other bird species at risk of extinction in Italy also make their homes in these sites: the Lanner falcon, the Egyptian vulture and the red kite.

The project aims to safeguard these birds, in harmony with the local residents, as well as working on a wider strategy for their preservation across Europe.

Sassi di Matera © P. Laureano/Ipogea



## Hungary: Saving the unique Pannonian grasslands

Hungary's Pannonian grasslands and steppes are unique, formed through centuries of extensive grazing, and include a number of the priority habitats protected by EU legislation.

However, EU membership and funding from the Common Agricultural Policy has encouraged Hungarian farmers either to intensify their use, with ploughing and fertilisers, or to abandon them completely, allowing them to revert to forests. This is threatening the very existence of the Pannonian grasslands.

The project, coordinated by the NGO BirdLife Hungary, will examine the best way to manage six of these characteristic habitats. It will restore and conserve 720 hectares, through techniques such as grazing, mowing and clearing of overgrowth, and will develop sustainable management plans for each of them. Information on best practices will be provided to land managers, farmers and the public, and this advisory function will continue after the end of the project.

## Germany: Restoring the Upper Hotzenwald

In the Black Forest, near the southern German border, lies the mountain area of the Hotzenwald: 2,105 hectares of forests, meadows, fens and streams situated 1,000 metres above sea level. The Upper Hotzenwald is a significant biodiversity 'hotspot', containing 21 of the endangered habitats listed by the EU Habitats Directive. However, this exceptional landscape and its wildlife are at risk.

The project will undertake a range of activities to promote the area's conservation. These will

include clearing conifers and overgrowth, restoring grazing lands, encouraging native wildlife such as capercaillie and hazel grouse, and removing drainage systems to restore raised bogs and bog woodland.

It will work in close collaboration with local authorities, farmers and landowners, as well as setting up a forum for involving local stakeholders, and carrying out educational activities focusing on Natura 2000.

### Further information

LIFE-Nature projects 2005 brochure  
[www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/infoproducts/lifenatcompilation\\_05\\_highres.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/life/infoproducts/lifenatcompilation_05_highres.pdf)

LIFE programme  
[www.europa.eu.int/life](http://www.europa.eu.int/life)

Natura 2000, EU Nature conservation and biodiversity  
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/nature/home.htm>