



# United Nations Environment Programme

برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة · 联合国环境规划署  
PROGRAMME DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ENVIRONNEMENT · PROGRAMA DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA EL MEDIO AMBIENTE  
ПРОГРАММА ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ ПО ОКРУЖАЮЩЕЙ СРЕДЕ

## PRESS BACKGROUNDER

### Saving Europe's ecological wealth

*"What you cannot measure, you cannot manage" – Peter Drucker*

Geneva, 17 February 2006 – Africa has its lions and the Serengeti. Latin America boasts multi-colored parrots and the Amazonian rain forest. But Europe too has its natural riches – from storks and warblers, to hedgerows and alpine meadows, to bears and lynx and forests. This under-appreciated ecological wealth continues to erode and needs urgent protection.

It is of course true that Europe's heritage of plants, animals and ecosystems – its biological diversity – has suffered massive losses over the centuries and millennia. But this does not mean that there is no nature here. What's more, since there is indeed less of it, what remains is that much more precious.

Much of Europe's most valuable biodiversity resides in what we now call landscape. Created by a mix of human intervention and nature, the quality and diversity of the European landscape excites the eye and soothes the soul. This landscape hosts birds, butterflies and other wild plants and animals that have adapted to an environment shaped by man. It also provides food, flood control, clean air and many other priceless "ecosystem services".

Even the wildest parts of the continent, such as the mountainous Carpathians in Eastern Europe, owe their appearance in part to humanity's handiwork. Efforts to protect these wilder places are essential. But managed ecosystems consisting of farms and forests also need to be conserved. Abandoned farms, for example, become less attractive to migrating birds and will be replaced by housing estates or impoverished brush rather than by primeval forest.

It is not enough today to mourn the losses caused by 2,000 years of dense settlement while passively enjoying what remains. The rural landscape everywhere is under threat from development and pollution. Human memory offers anecdotal evidence that shopping centers are replacing trees and fields. But the scale of the challenge requires a more rigorous approach. We need to know, with confidence, just how much is being lost. How much is left, and where is it? Most importantly, are specific policies and actions making things better, or allowing them to worsen?

While biological diversity is famously difficult to measure and quantify – global estimates of living species range anywhere from 5 to 100 million – the world's Governments have agreed that targets and indicators can propel action. At a conference in Croatia organized by UNEP, the Council of Europe and the Pan

European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, European governments will assess efforts to meet their agreed goal of halting the loss of biological diversity by the year 2010. They will report the region's results to the global community at a meeting in Brazil next month on the Convention on Biological Diversity.

To measure progress towards the 2010 goal, Europe has adopted specific targets for nine key issues. Some of these issues show progress. For example, protected areas have increased significantly in Europe in the past decade – some 17% of the EU, for example, has now been given over to 18,000 nature sites. Efforts to reduce harmful species introduced from other continents have advanced as more and more governments adopt the European Strategy on Alien Invasive Species.

Other indicators suggest that additional and stronger efforts are needed to maintain the biodiversity of agricultural lands and forests. A key barrier here is institutional: unlike parks, the lead responsibility for forests and farms does not lie with environmental managers. Convincing farmers, foresters and other stakeholders to incorporate biodiversity concerns into their work will require educating people and building partnerships.

Partnerships amongst national governments are also vital. As more countries join the EU, and their economies expand, they can benefit from the experiences others have gained defending their landscapes against unmanaged development. At the global level, Europe needs to continue providing financial and technical support and, most importantly, to demonstrate leadership. After all, if the wealthy nations of Europe do not conserve their natural environment, how can we expect the poorer countries of Africa and Asia to rescue the natural wonders of their regions?