Society for Conservation Biology
A global community of conservation professionals

Europe Section

Budapest, December 5th 2012

Addressed to the European Union through:

- *Commissioner Ciolos*
  (Agriculture and Rural Development)
- *Commissioner Potocnik*
  (Environment)
- *Commissioner Hedegaard*
  (Climate Action)
- *Scientific advisor to President Barroso*
- *Mr Goughian Quinn*
  (Science commissioner)
  Member of the European Parliament
- *Mr De Castro*
  (Chair of the Agricultural Committee)
- *His excellence, the Cypriot minister for Agriculture (chair of the European council of ministers responsible for agriculture)*

Dear Madam, Sir,

European conservation biologists, restoration ecologists and biodiversity experts from both research and practice met in Glasgow in August 2012, at the third meeting of the European Congress of Conservation Biology (ECCB12). That meeting included a number of well-attended symposia on issues related to farmland biodiversity and the need to develop effective solutions to redress biodiversity declines in agricultural landscapes, which are evident across every Member State of the EU. This clearly demonstrates that addressing farmland biodiversity declines is a major concern to conservation and restoration experts throughout Europe as a whole.

European farmland biodiversity is tightly linked to the maintenance of landscapes, which genuinely combine and integrate natural and semi-natural elements and thereby provide appropriate conditions for the persistence of biodiversity and associated ecosystem services. The preservation and restoration of such unique landscapes is a duty of the EU, its Member States and related countries.

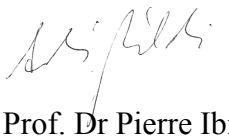
The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a major driver of land management decisions across Europe. Depending how the ongoing reforms are implemented, all aspects of the reformed CAP have the potential to either help or hinder efforts to enhance biodiversity

across Europe. We therefore believe that it is essential that biodiversity concerns are integrated fully into all aspects of the CAP reform process and implementation, with coherence sought with the ongoing design of Green Infrastructure across Europe.

We, the European community of biodiversity specialists, have drawn up a resolution focused on the delivery of efficient biodiversity-friendly Agri-Environment Schemes and the maintenance of species-rich grasslands. We hope that the numerous suggestions in this document will assist you in ensuring that the multi-functional, biodiversity-rich agro-ecosystems that Europe needs can be provided in the future.

On behalf of the Europe Section of the Society of Conservation Biology (SCB-Europe) and of the symposia organizers:

Dr Andras Baldi
(president SCB-Europe):

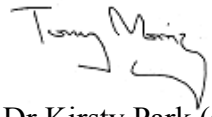


Prof. Dr Pierre Ibisch
(chair of the Policy committee, SCB-Europe):

Prof. Dr Raphaël Arlettaz
(board member, SCB-Europe, and symposium convener):

Dr David Buckingham (symposium convener):

Dr Tony Morris (symposium convener):



Dr Kirsty Park (symposium convener):

Society for Conservation Biology
A global community of conservation professionals

Europe Section

Resolution, addressed to:

- *Commissioner Ciolos (Agriculture and Rural Development)*
- *Commissioner Potocnik (Environment)*
- *Commissioner Hedegaard (Climate Action)*
- *Scientific advisor to President Barroso*
- *Mr Goughian Quinn (Science commissioner), Member of the European Parliament*
- *Mr De Castro (Chair of the Agricultural Committee)*
- *His excellence, the Cypriot minister for Agriculture (currently holding the chair of the European council of ministers responsible for agriculture)*

From August 27th to September 2nd 2012, circa 800 scientists and professionals in the field of biodiversity conservation, management and restoration came together in Glasgow at the 3rd European Congress of Conservation Biology (ECCB12). Among the issues addressed by several symposia and discussed in depth in plenum debates was (1) the importance of agri-environment schemes and the attributes that deliver successful biodiversity conservation and ecosystem service outcomes from local to national scales, and (2) the preservation and restoration of extensive grassland systems as a critical component of a rich biodiversity in agroecosystems.

The conveners to the symposia on agri-environment policies and grasslands management, backed by the organizers of ECCB12 and the Board of Directors of the Europe Section of the Society for Conservation Biology agreed upon writing a statement to the entities in charge of developing the new Common Agricultural Policy in Europe (CAP). All call for a future CAP that integrates the new findings of European agro-ecological research, by better framing policies, seeking coherence with the developing Green Infrastructure, and increasing the efficiency of subsidies so that biodiversity is better supported and ecosystem services, including climate regulation, are enhanced.

1) Agri-environment schemes

The long-term resilience of both our ecological and agricultural systems depend heavily on habitat heterogeneity within the landscape and diversity within the systems; for instance pest control and pollination services are enhanced in agro-ecosystems with greater landscape and habitat heterogeneity.

Agri-environment schemes delivered through CAP Rural Development Programmes are the critical tool if the EU is to deliver this long-term resilience and achieve its Biodiversity Strategy target 3A to “maximise areas under agriculture across grasslands, arable land and permanent crops that are covered by biodiversity-related measures under the CAP so as to ensure the conservation of biodiversity and to bring about a measurable improvement in the conservation status of species and habitats that depend on or are affected by agriculture”.

Achieving this target will itself be crucial to making the EU's contribution to Aichi Biodiversity Target 3 that "By 2020, incentives, including subsidies, harmful to biodiversity, are eliminated, phased out or reformed in order to minimise or avoid negative impacts, and positive incentives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are developed and applied…" and Target 7 that "By 2020, areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably ensuring conservation of biodiversity."

Evidence presented at ECCB2012 shows that agri-environment schemes can be spectacularly successful at increasing biodiversity at local and regional scales as case studies of little bustard *Tetrax tetrax*, corn bunting *Emberiza calandra*, brown hare *Lepus europaeus* and hamster *Cricetus cricetus*, and moths demonstrated. However, the studies and reviews presented showed that the following attributes are critical components of successful agri-environment management that will translate into reversals of biodiversity loss at the national scale:

- schemes and management options within schemes are targeted towards the biodiversity outcomes indicated as of highest priority by EU or national policy,

- deployment of management that is demonstrably successful at local scales is implemented on a sufficient scale (i.e. targeting a high enough proportion of the national population of the target species) to reverse declines nationally,

- on-the-ground management is well-targeted at field, farm and landscape scales and backed by high quality advisory support to enable land managers to make management choices well informed by biodiversity conservation needs,

- schemes are sufficiently flexible in their administration to allow deployment to be a good 'fit' to its wider landscape and regional context (thus we endorse EU Biodiversity Strategy Action 9a to integrate quantified biodiversity targets into Rural Development programmes, and tailor action to regional needs),

- schemes include mechanisms to encourage collaboration amongst land managers to realise the benefits of continuity of management across large spatial scales (thus, we endorse EU Biodiversity Strategy Action 9b to facilitate this collaboration), and

- schemes that are spatially designed (e.g. targeted toward specific landscapes) are often particularly successful in delivering their purpose.

We note that well designed monitoring schemes throughout the EU are still relatively rare. Monitoring the outcome of agri-environment management is critical if they are to be an efficient use of resources and to enable improvement in schemes over time.

We also note that CAP spend on agri-environment schemes is limited in relation to the size of the biodiversity conservation challenge, if 2020 targets are to be met. We therefore endorse EU Biodiversity Strategy action 8a to propose that CAP direct payments should reward delivery of environmental goods and services substantially beyond cross-compliance measures.

2) Grasslands

Albeit they often count among the most efficient agri-environmental measures, extensive, biodiversity-rich European grasslands are being lost at alarming rates through both abandonment of traditional farming practices, agricultural intensification and conversion for alternative land use[1]. Thereby we are putting at risk some of the most important biodiversity and ecosystem services that have been so characteristic of European cultural landscapes.

We feel it is our duty as scientists and professionals working in the field to inform you of some of the important outcomes of the symposia on grasslands that can guide the implementation of the upcoming Common Agricultural Policy and associated environmental policy, especially in the context of the developing Green Infrastructure.

Across Europe, extensively managed and semi-natural, biodiversity-rich grasslands have been shown to sequester or contain much higher carbon stocks and have better soil structures than more intensively managed grasslands[2]. Extensive grasslands have been shown to support a wide range of biodiversity, much of which has underpinned other ecosystem services, such as pollination, that are needed in other economic sectors such as agriculture. Without extensively managed grasslands many critically endangered species of flora and fauna would be lost[3].

There are important links between extensive grassland systems and the cultural values that people have lived with and experienced over hundreds of years. There is a continued loss of extensive grasslands and the cultural and social systems, biodiversity and ecosystem services associated with these. On the one hand, biodiversity-rich grasslands are converted into industrial and residential estates, or they lose biodiversity through agricultural intensification or abandonment of traditional farming practices. The latter occurs mostly because the economic viability of these systems within the current policy framework is limited or negative.

---

[1] Between 1990 and 2006 more than 4,300 km^2 of pastures and natural grasslands were lost to intensive agriculture, to urban residential sprawl and economic sites and to natural afforestation due to farmland abandonment (*The European Environment: State and Outlook 2010. Biodiversity*. European Environment Agency)

[2] A fact highlighted at the Congress.

[3] See for example *High Nature Value Farming in Europe: experiences and perspectives.* Verlag Regionalskulture

Grasslands and their characteristics are very diverse throughout Europe. This difference is not taken fully into account within current policy, which is often framed in terms that are either too general or simplistic, being furthermore often simply not adapted to local conditions. This leads to contradictory outcomes: some measures beneficial in some parts of the continent have been proven detrimental in others. Thus, there is an urgent need to steer policy in a way that considers local conditions and production modes, while being coherent with larger scale strategies, in order to prevent further conversion or abandonment detrimental to biodiversity and ecosystem services. Measures currently under discussion for protecting permanent pastures fail to capture the additional value provided by extensive grassland systems and do not support the management needed to perpetuate them.

With the great loss of grasslands, grassland management systems and the biodiversity and ecosystems linked to these low intensity grassland systems, we believe there is a need to address this issue urgently. In many cases policy plays, or has the potential to play a crucial role in stopping the loss of grasslands and the biodiversity and ecological and environmental services that they provide.

Considering the vast areas covered by farmland in Europe, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy is THE opportunity to halt and reverse this continuing decline of grassland extent and ecological quality in Europe. By ensuring that the diversity of grassland management systems across Europe receives the support required, you can make the change to protect these extensive and highly biodiverse grasslands while also improving the ecological value, and long term sustainability, of more intensively managed grassland.

Based upon the research presented and many discussions held during the EECB12 Congress, we would like to convey the following recommendations to the Commission, the Parliament and the Council decision makers that are influencing the implementation of the European Common Agricultural Policy:

- An overly prescriptive definition of grassland types across too wide a geographic scale should be avoided. An improved definition of grasslands is required in order to recognize the great diversity of grasslands throughout the EU and adapt management prescriptions to local contexts.
- New policies should be developed within the coming CAP that protect, and hence prevent both the conversion and the deterioration of the most valuable grasslands throughout Europe, if not convert back intensified, biodiversity-poor grasslands into more biodiversity-friendly grasslands.
- There is a need to prevent incentives that can trigger actions that hamper biodiversity, such as combining adjacent plots into single larger units or removing certain types of vegetation, as such actions will have a negative impact on biodiversity associated with grasslands with adverse ecological consequences.
- The European Commission should take steps to ensure that Member States take into account the great importance of grasslands for the European society and its environment and prohibit Member States from ignoring these important facts in the implementation of

the CAP by providing protection of the most environmentally valuable grasslands and pastures at farm level.

- The European Commission should support Member States in developing regionally optimal agri-environment schemes that recognise unique local characteristics of grassland biodiversity and management methods that have sustained these up to now, while considering the target to sustain biodiversity at the continental scale.
- All Member States should ensure that they develop schemes that effectively deliver for biodiversity and ecosystems. There is a bulk of scientific evidence how to apply appropriate measures and SCB-EU is ready to provide support for developing the most efficient schemes across Europe. Schemes that deliver real biodiversity outcomes are well accepted by farmers and land-managers. They will perceive a real added-value in implementing them and will be proud to participate because these schemes contribute to ameliorate their own professional environment and quality of life.
- All Member States should take into account the difficult economic situation that is driving many of the grassland systems into extinction or into deterioration, bringing more resources to the research and innovation that can sustain these systems and develop viable economic and social solutions that are also good for the environment.
- In the absence of other solutions, all Member States should wisely allocate funding in a way that preserves extensive grassland systems so as to ensure they are not being irreversibly lost;
- All Member States should enable longer term subsidy schemes and measures, as schemes are unlikely to provide real benefits to biodiversity if they are unstable over time. A longer-term dimension that is inherent in the grassland system and more widely the whole ecological system is thus currently lacking in current subsidies;

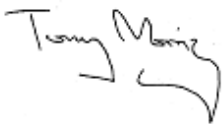
We are ready to inform and help out policy makers when dealing with the diversity and complexity of both agricultural landscapes and the multitude of stakeholders involved. Given the ongoing loss of biodiversity and the risks to fail the biodiversity targets for 2020, and given additional economic challenges recently arising, we wish to ensure that discussions on the CAP utilize the available scientific evidence and integrate it into policy and implementation that genuinely reverse the current status of European grasslands. As conveners of the symposia on agri-environment schemes and grasslands, we hope you will take into account the above aspects and we are welcoming further discussions in an open science-policy dialogue.

With our best regards, the symposium conveners:

Prof. Dr Raphaël Arlettaz

Dr David Buckingham

Dr Tony Morris



Dr Kirsty Park

Additional information: web links to the two above mentioned symposia:

Applying conservation biology knowledge across the temperate agricultural grasslands
Conveners: David Buckingham and Raphaël Arlettaz
Wednesday 29 August, 10h30-12h30 and 14h-16h
http://www.eccb2012.org/wednesday-programme.asp

European Agri-environment schemes: updating the knowledge base
Conveners: Tony Morris and Kirsty Park
Saturday 1st September, 10h30-12h30 and 14h-16h
http://www.eccb2012.org/saturday-programme.asp