

ECNC's
contribution
to a beautiful
Europe



european centre for nature conservation

Highlights of activities in **2013**



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Message from ECNC's President and Executive Director

ECNC constantly seeks to build on its strengths and to innovate in order to carry out its mission more effectively. This requires an open mind, a good overview of mainstream developments, but, most of all, a strong, united team of people. ECNC is fortunate to have such a team of staff, working on a daily basis, and supported by its dedicated Network of ambassadors and ECNC's Board.

At the end of 2013, Sir Brian Unwin, President of ECNC for 13 years, stood down. Sir Brian's great experience and excellence in the role have been truly remarkable: as President, his dedication and wisdom have contributed markedly to ECNC's development.

ECNC celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2013 and organized a photo competition – 'For a beautiful Europe' – together with Wikimedia Netherlands. The winners were announced during the Second conference of the European Learning Network for Regions and Biodiversity in November. Some of the entries can be found in this report.

ECNC continued to promote and demonstrate new ways of thinking, geared to people's and nature's needs and the carrying capacity of the planet. One example of this is [Healthy Seas – a Journey from Waste to Wear](#), which combines biodiversity conservation with recycling and the production of high-quality raw materials and sustainable products. This initiative enables ECNC and the ECNC Land & Sea Group to reach new stakeholders and the wider public, extending our work with diverse businesses, while promoting important principles for a circular economy.

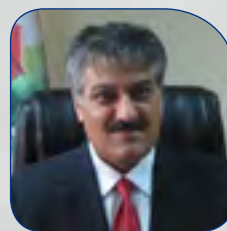
Other highlights from the past year include: the launch of the [QualityDestination](#) programme, aimed at greening tourism destinations; the Second conference of the [European Learning Network for Regions and Biodiversity](#), focusing on the contribution of citizens to local biodiversity; and the completion of the [SEEBAP](#) project in the Western Balkans, during which ECNC and local partners successfully 'greened' 18 municipalities.

Within our portfolio of projects and programmes, positive developments include the extension of ECNC's support for Natura 2000, the vital ecological network that is the backbone of nature in the EU. ECNC is proud to lead two contracts supporting the implementation of the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process for the European Commission.

ECNC received the EU NGO grant in 2013 for the second time. This allowed ECNC to step up its support for implementation of the EU's Biodiversity Strategy and wider sustainability policies. It also helped ECNC to further mobilize its potential as coordinator of large European networks of stakeholders.

None of this could have been achieved without the commitment and hard work of ECNC and ECNC Land & Sea Group staff, combined with the continuing support of respective Board members. We are very grateful that we are able to work with such a wonderful group of people.

We sincerely thank our supporters, funders and partners, and everyone who believes in a better planet for people and nature.



Prof. Dr Mustafa Kemal Yalınkılıç
President ECNC and
Vice-President ECNC Land & Sea Group



Rob Wolters
Executive Director ECNC and
Chief Executive ECNC Land & Sea Group

ECNC – working for a beautiful Europe



Mission

ECNC is dedicated to a beautiful Europe based on a rich biodiversity, healthy ecosystems and sustainable development. ECNC promotes integrated approaches for both land and sea and actively stimulates the interaction between science, society and policy.

ECNC is an independent European expertise centre for biodiversity and sustainable development. Since its establishment in 1993, ECNC has worked in over 60 European and Central Asian countries, and supported various global pro-biodiversity processes. ECNC continues to be at the forefront of developments in nature conservation, delivering innovative projects, characterized by tailor-made approaches. Since 2009, ECNC has been part of the [ECNC Land & Sea Group](#), one of Europe's largest groupings of expertise and experience for nature, biodiversity, and coastal and marine issues.

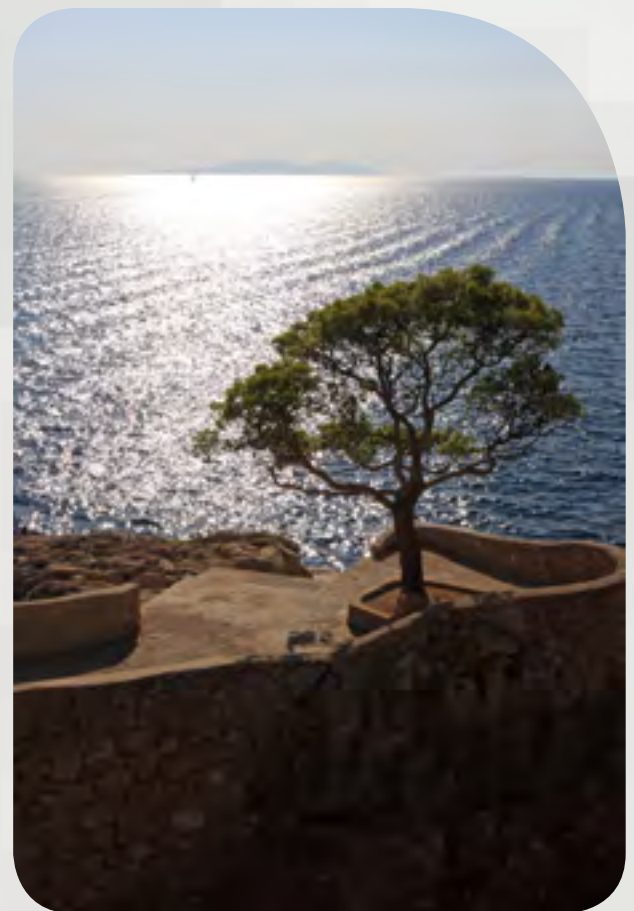
An essential feature underpinning all ECNC's activities is the involvement of and cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders. One of ECNC's main strengths is the ability to combine international and European levels of experience and expertise, covering all areas of biodiversity policy and practices, together with stakeholder interests at regional, national and local levels. ECNC provides a bridge between policy, science and society on the one hand, and ecology and economy on the other, thus contributing to greener and greater resource-efficient, nature-focused, stakeholder-centred economies.

ECNC continues to be involved in the drafting of major European biodiversity policy strategies and is a leading player in key European biodiversity conferences, assisting governments and NGOs in preparing for effective discussions and informed decision-making.

ECNC works extensively with, among others, the European Union and its Commission, all 28 Member States, the European Environment Agency, the Council of Europe and the European office of the United Nations Environment Programme. Services provided include: knowledge-based facilitation; capacity building and training programmes; project development, coordination and implementation; biodiversity for business and rural and urban development; support and policy analysis and expert advice.

In addition, as a leading member of several European networks, such as the [European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity](#), the [ALTER-Net](#) (A Long-Term Biodiversity, Ecosystem and Awareness Research Network), the EU Coordination Group for Biodiversity and Nature, the Commission's Expert Group on Management of Natura 2000 and the European Habitats Forum, ECNC possesses and shares unique experience across a range of current issues, emerging policies and the latest research.

Visit the [ECNC website](#) for a complete list of [projects carried out in 2013](#).



Pine Tree in Sveta Nedjelja, Croatia © Srdjan Marincic.

Nature and society

Aims

To increase understanding of the social and cultural context of conservation, through effective communication, capacity-building and facilitation activities, including tailor-made training services.
To improve the practical skills of stakeholders, at all levels of society, for nature.

Main achievements in 2013

ECNC continued to contribute to the implementation of major nature and biodiversity policies through effective communication, organization and facilitation of stakeholder consultation processes. This was combined with expert training to build practical skills for nature management and protection at all levels of government, as well as within NGOs and civil society organizations.

The project [Local Biodiversity Action Planning Network in the Western Balkans \(SEEBAP\)](#), which came to an end in 2013, is a good example of how a participatory approach can enable the development of a local community vision to which all stakeholders can contribute. SEEBAP provided training to municipalities in South-East Europe to develop Local Biodiversity Action Plans: the project guided them through the entire process, from planning to implementation. The eight municipalities participating were located in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Learning-by-doing was an important part of the activities, and the project included a study tour in the Netherlands and a training workshop in Montenegro. New levels of communication between stakeholders resulted, which improved understanding of processes and increased ownership of the actions

to be further developed. At the closing conference in Albania, representatives shared experiences, explored new opportunities for collaboration and discussed ways to integrate their biodiversity actions into existing regional networks. ECNC produced high-quality [training materials](#) for the project, including a manual on running a training workshop to prepare a local biodiversity action plan. Also, two [videos about SEEBAP](#) were produced in 2013.

The ECNC Land & Sea Group started two new initiatives to promote sustainable tourism: [Bojanatour](#) and [QualityDestination](#). Bojanatour promotes local economic development through diversification of recreational activities and products based on nature. The focus is on civil society involvement to build a common vision that contributes to good governance in coastal areas. The QualityDestination award programme aims to promote socially responsible tourism in defined places, while improving the destinations and the life quality of local people.

Key meetings and conferences

- Meeting of the [Dinaric Arc Initiative](#); Vienna, Austria, 18 April 2013 (chaired by ECNC's Executive Director)
- [SEEBAP 2: 'Biodiversity goes local'](#); Durres, Albania, 25 & 26 September 2013
- [Eurosite](#) annual meeting; Międzyzdroje, Poland, 25 & 26 September 2013
- [Second conference of the European Learning Network for Regions and Biodiversity: 'Local action for biodiversity – the role of regions'](#); Brussels, Belgium, 19 & 20 November 2013



Conservation practitioners at work
© D. Župan.

Green infrastructure and Natura 2000

Aims

To support and prioritize the identification, protection and restoration of green infrastructure across Europe.

Main achievements in 2013

ECNC has extensive experience in designing and promoting the importance of ecological networks together with approaches that ensure dialogue with key stakeholders. Activities in 2013 included laying the basis for a functional [ecological network in the Balkans](#), and organizing [workshops on management plans and stakeholder involvement](#) for protected areas in Ukraine and Moldova.

The European Commission's Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy was promoted through the organization of training workshops on GI in [Croatia](#) and [Hungary](#), and the publication of a [brochure](#) aimed at policymakers and key stakeholders on the benefits of developing GI projects. ECNC also participated in a number of European-related policy-oriented expert committees.

The Natura 2000 network of protected sites is also a network of nature conservation experts, practitioners and diverse stakeholders: therefore, vitally, Natura 2000 is a network of people, as well as a unique network of biodiversity-rich sites. Strengthening the implementation of Natura 2000 as a cohesive ecological network is central to achieving the targets of the EU's 2020 Biodiversity Strategy.

To promote cooperation and interactive collaboration between stakeholders, the European Commission

launched the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process. ECNC is the lead contractor supporting its implementation. The Process provides Member States and expert stakeholders with a practical framework to exchange knowledge, experience and best practices to improve nature conservation management know-how. The Process involves a series of seminars, one for each biogeographical region. The Alpine Seminar (the third biogeographical region in the series) took place in November 2013. Outcomes included a list of practical actions to help address key management issues and stimulate collaboration and networking. Networking is being promoted through follow-up meetings, as well as the [Natura 2000 Platform](#). Launched in 2013, the Platform provides information about events, as well as documents and reports and a forum for discussion.

As a continuing process, several follow-up networking events took place in 2013, including: a knowledge-sharing workshop in the UK on the impacts of nitrogen deposition on the conservation status of Natura sites; a workshop in Bulgaria on threats, challenges and solutions to Natura 2000 management, with a focus on forest and grassland habitats in the Alpine biogeographical region; and a study visit on the restoration of raised bogs, fens and other mire habitats, held in Estonia.

Key meetings and conferences

- Second scientific & mid-term [GreenNet conference](#); Vienna, Austria, 19 & 20 February 2013
- [Alpine Natura 2000 Preparatory Workshop](#); Graz, Austria, 12–14 June 2013; linked to a LIFE projects platform meeting; Alpine Seminar, 25-26 November 2013
- [Workshop 'Redesigning the landscape, connecting ecosystems and benefiting from their services through Green Infrastructure'](#); Budapest, Hungary, 7 October 2013
- [Workshop 'Green Infrastructure \(GI\): a policy instrument for providing ecological, economic and social benefits through natural solutions – Current situation and existing opportunities for sectors in Croatia'](#); Zagreb, Croatia, 27 November 2013
- Atlantic biogeographical region; Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) workshop '[Nitrogen Deposition and the Nature Directives](#)'; Peterborough, UK, 2–4 December 2013
- Four meetings of the EC Coordination Group for Biodiversity and Nature (CGBN) and the Expert Group on Management of Natura 2000

Assessment and integrated management of biodiversity

Aims

To contribute to the development of tools to monitor the status and trends of biodiversity and ecosystem services. To manage species and their ecosystems.

Main achievements in 2013

The [OpenNESS](#) project provides a clear example of how ECNC translates science and knowledge on ecosystem services for stakeholders and policymakers. ECNC leads the work package on communication. At an international workshop, participants discussed ways to apply theory, concepts and models on ecosystem services and natural capital in real situations. Discussions also covered the development of an online knowledge exchange platform (together with the OPERAs project), how to involve stakeholders in the process, and how best to communicate to target groups.

The [BiodiversityKnowledge](#) project is a knowledge network to inform policymaking and economic sectors on biodiversity and ecosystem services. At the second BiodiversityKnowledge conference, ECNC contributed its experience in managing processes such as stakeholder participation, communication, and presenting science for non-expert audiences.

ECNC is coordinator or partner in a number of European networks, including [ALTER-Net](#), [OpenNESS](#), the [European Learning Network on Functional AgroBiodiversity](#), the [European Learning Network for Regions](#)

and [Biodiversity](#), and the [Large Herbivore Network](#).

In addition, ECNC continued its work for the [European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity](#), reviewing trends in relation to environmental change and its impact on biodiversity, and co-organizing two capacity-building workshops on biodiversity indicators for stakeholders.

[ALTER-Net](#), of which ECNC has been a partner since 2004, is a leading European research network. ALTER-Net and the European Commission organized a conference on how to implement the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy. [Six final recommendations](#) (one for each European target) were drawn up.

ECNC presented the results of a review study on ecosystem assessment and mapping projects in the Western Balkans at a workshop on ecosystem mapping. The workshop provided recommendations on how to map ecosystems and their services and ensure consistency between assessments of ecosystem status across the EU. ECNC also contributed to an EC project to develop guidance on restoring ecosystems and their services.

Key meetings and conferences

- [Workshop 'Mapping of ecosystems and their services in the EU and its Member States'](#); Brussels, Belgium, 19 & 20 March 2013
- Sixth Intergovernmental Conference 'Biodiversity in Europe'; Batumi, Georgia, 15–18 April 2013
- Pan-European stakeholder consultation conference of the [Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services \(IPBES\)](#); Leipzig, Germany, 16–18 July 2013
- [IUCN conference on invasive alien species in Europe's urban areas](#); Gland, Switzerland, 5 September 2013 (ECNC is a member of IUCN)
- [Second BiodiversityKnowledge conference 'Towards a future Network of Knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services in Europe'](#); Berlin, Germany, 24 September 2013
- [International workshop](#) of the OpenNESS project; Kinross, Scotland, 22–24 October 2013
- [Biodiversity and Habitats symposium](#); Noord-Brabant, the Netherlands, 6 December 2013
- Plenary meeting of the IPBES; Antalya, Turkey, 9–14 December 2013
- Pan-European Biodiversity Platform; Antalya, Turkey, 15 December 2013

Business and biodiversity

Aims

To promote the integration of biodiversity issues within economic sectors and to facilitate investment in biodiversity-related business.

Main achievements in 2013

ECNC has a strong focus on cooperation with businesses and business sectors, maintaining an almost constant dialogue with various business partners on opportunities to cooperate and provide input on biodiversity and sustainability issues.

The [European Learning Network on Functional Agro-Biodiversity \(ELN-FAB\)](#) accumulates and shares knowledge on how biodiversity can be mobilized to the benefit of sustainable agriculture; it is an excellent example of a targeted knowledge transfer platform at European level. In 2013, ELN-FAB was invited to talk about knowledge transfer at a workshop on natural pest control organized by the BiodiversityKnowledge project. At the annual ELN-FAB seminar, participants exchanged experience about practical FAB solutions.

The [Healthy Seas](#) initiative developed substantially in 2013. ECNC, as part of the [ECNC Land & Sea Group](#), is a founding partner. The initiative recovers waste fishing nets, which are recycled for use in high-quality textile products such as socks, swimwear and carpets. ECNC coordinates the initiative and the promotion and awareness-raising campaign to demonstrate the benefits for marine biodiversity. The initiative has attracted

the interest of a wide range of businesses, including from the fishing industry and related enterprises, the retail sector, the clothing industry and carpet manufacturers. This has resulted in a number of partnerships with commercial organizations. (A full list of all partners is included at the end of this report.)

Awareness-raising activities on biodiversity were carried out among SMEs in the Netherlands. ECNC also provided training sessions on biodiversity for several Dutch companies. In addition, ECNC organized the regional business seminar '[Heart of Brabant, Green Growth](#)'. Representatives from a range of sectors discussed green investments and the greening of commercial and industrial estates. The participating companies agreed on the need for them to undertake green initiatives.

ECNC also assisted in coordinating the activities of the [Noord-Brabant Platform on Biodiversity and Society](#), including organizing two meetings and participating in regional-level events.

Key meetings and conferences

- [Business seminar 'Heart of Brabant, Green Growth'](#); Tilburg, the Netherlands, 7 November 2013
- [Second conference of the European Learning Network for Regions and Biodiversity 'Local action for biodiversity – the role of regions'](#); Brussels, Belgium, 18 November 2013
- [ELN-FAB annual seminar 'Functional agrobiodiversity in North-West Europe: What does the future hold?'](#); Brussels, Belgium, 11 December 2013
- [Healthy Seas Initiative](#); kick off event in Slovenia, 4-5 October 2013



Pollination © Vladimir Dobretic.

Highlights of activities carried out with LIFE+ funding

Funding from the LIFE+ programme through the EU NGO grant scheme enabled ECNC to work on themes and activities that directly support EU policy implementation and biodiversity objectives, and bring together a wide range of stakeholders. Fully integrated with ECNC's operational programmes, the following provide several examples of what was achieved in 2013.

ECNC promoted awareness of Europe's biodiversity and conservation among the general public through a [photo competition](#) and the creation of an [image library](#) on Wikimedia Commons.

The [European Learning Network for Regions and Biodiversity](#) was further developed in 2013 as a leading platform for exchange on biodiversity activities between Europe's regions. A European seminar on the role of regions and municipalities in biodiversity was held in November.

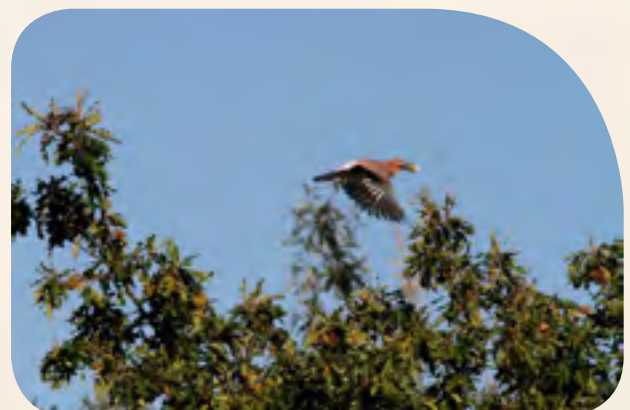
The [QualityDestination](#) programme, launched in 2013, encourages local action for biodiversity and sustainability across Europe. A self-assessment package was developed and tested in 10 municipalities. Targeted communication tools were developed, leading to increased local awareness of the importance of biodiversity.



First prize: *Revitalization of wet meadows in Obedska bara Special Nature Reserves*
© Vladimir Dobretic.



Second prize: *Radio-tracking a lynx in the Carpathians*
© George Bouros.



Third prize: *Jay carrying an acorn* © Otars Opermanis.

The [European Learning Network on Functional AgroBiodiversity](#) promoted knowledge exchange in support of biodiversity-based farming practices and sustainable agriculture through its annual seminar, as well as its website and newsletter (see page 6).

A training package on biodiversity was made available to SMEs. ECNC coordinated the Noord-Brabant Platform on Biodiversity and Society, held a regional green economy seminar and a regional conference on biodiversity and habitats in Noord-Brabant (see page 6). The opening of the [Green Welcome Centre](#) in the cross-border area of the Netherlands and Germany in 2013 contributes to the promotion of the relevance of biodiversity and ecosystem services in that region.

The [Healthy Seas](#) initiative encouraged direct cooperation between businesses across Europe to support the removal of waste fishing nets from the sea and recycling them into textile products.

ECNC supported the elaboration of EU policies on Green Infrastructure, restoration and no net loss. ECNC coordinated the European Habitats Forum working group on Green Infrastructure. ECNC's participation in the Coordination Group for Biodiversity and Nature, and other relevant EC expert groups was also made possible with LIFE+ funding. ECNC communicated the outcomes of these meetings to relevant target groups.

The concept of Green Infrastructure was promoted at a [workshop](#) organized by ECNC and CEEweb for Biodiversity in Hungary (7 October 2013). The workshop's outcome fed into the Second conference of the European Learning Network for Regions and Biodiversity (Belgium, 19 & 20 November 2013). The results were also incorporated in a booklet for policymakers and practitioners on the benefits of establishing functional ecological networks at pan-European level: [Enriching our society through natural solutions: Why and how to make Green Infrastructure projects a sustainable answer for ecological, social and economic problems?](#)

Together with CEEweb for Biodiversity and the Croatian State Institute for Nature Protection, ECNC organized a [workshop on Green Infrastructure in Croatia](#) (27 November 2013). The participants identified key elements of GI in Croatia, and reviewed case studies and potential funding opportunities.

ECNC's activities for the [ALTER-Net](#) biodiversity, ecosystem and awareness research network were also funded under the NGO grant (see page 5).

Participation in conferences, training courses and field visits also helped ECNC to increase its capacity, develop staff know-how and to effectively contribute to the development and implementation of EU biodiversity policy.



The Green Welcome Centre in Kleve, Germany © ECNC.

ECNC's financial partners

In 2013 ECNC's projects were financially supported by various organizations and institutions, without whom ECNC would not have been able to carry out its work.

Council of Europe Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF)

Elsevier Science

European Commission, Directorate-General for the Environment

European Commission, Directorate-General for the Environment: LIFE+ NGO Grant

European Commission, Directorate-General Environment and Climate Action

European Commission, Directorate-General for Research, Seventh Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration

European Commission, External Aid Thematic Programme for Environment and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources, including energy (ENRTP)

European Environment Agency

European Environment Agency, European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity

Flemish Land Agency (VLM), Belgium

Healthy Seas Initiative

Founding partners: ECNC Land & Sea Group, Aquafil and Star Sock;

Associate Partner Members: DESSO, Interface and Kaufland;

Associate Partner Donors: FONDA, NoFir and VERTER

Other Partners (who volunteer and share time and knowledge): ADESSIUM, the European Commission, Pan Salvage Inc., GHOST FISHING, SDVO, WASTE FREE OCEANS, koru swimwear, World Animal Protection, eco duikers, Duikteam Zeester, MEDASSET, gemeente Hollands Kroon, C.I.V. Den Oever U.R., ASN Bank, Waste is a Resource, Los Angeles Underwater Explorers

MAVA Foundation

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Province of Noord-Brabant, the Netherlands

World Bank, via the Ministry of Physical Planning, Civil Engineering and Ecology of the Republic of Srpska and the Federal Ministry of Environment and Tourism in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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