

# 'Mind the gap!' How well does Natura 2000 cover species of European interest?

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This is *Erygium alpinum* (Queen of the Alps), one of the many species found in Natura's protection. Credit: Dr. Doug Evans

The designation of Natura 2000 sites has been based on species and habitats listed in the [Annexes of the Habitats and Birds Directive](#). The effectiveness of the selection process and the resulting [Natura 2000](#) network has often been questioned as each country made its designations largely independently and in most cases without considering the theories of optimal reserve site selection.

Although there have been a series of meetings between the European Commission, the countries and others (including some NGOs), the effectiveness of the [selection process](#) and the resulting Natura 2000 network has never been explicitly analysed at the European scale by an independent group.

"Here we present such an analysis, focusing on the representation of different species in the sites, selected for the network. Our results show that it is mostly effective in covering target species and minimizing the number of [gap](#) species (i.e. species not represented in a single site of the Natura 2000 network)" said Prof. Klaus Henle, from the [Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research](#) – UFZ in Leipzig, Germany and member of the research team. Their article was published in the [Open Access](#), peer-reviewed scientific journal [Nature Conservation](#).

The authors, however, also demonstrate that the representation is uneven among species. Some species are overrepresented while others are only represented in a low number of sites. "This is mainly due to differing patterns in species ranges, as wide-spread species are inevitably represented in many sites, but narrow ranged species are often covered only by a small number of sites in a particular area" Prof Henle adds.

The team also proposes a representation index, that would detect species that are underrepresented and could be used to direct future [conservation efforts](#) – and not only in Europe. "Systematic approaches in planning reserve networks have been intensively developed in the past, to guide efficient reserve site selection. However, on a global scale, no concerted action plan exists to nominate conservation areas, despite repeated calls for international coordination" concludes Prof Henle.

**More information:** Gruber B, Evans D, Henle K, Bauch B, Schmeller DS, Dziock F, Henry P-Y, Szabolcs L, Margules C, Dormann CF (2012) "Mind the gap!" – How well does Natura 2000 cover species of European interest?. *Nature Conservation* 3: 45. [doi: 10.3897/natureconservation.3.3732](#)

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