



Workshop Report

Natura 2000 Networking Programme: International Workshop Wildlife & Live Firing Natura 2000 on Military Training Areas

7 – 8 November 2007, Vienna (AT)



Natura 2000 Networking Programme
on behalf of the European Commission



Austrian
Armed
Forces

umweltbundesamt[®]

Austrian Federal
Environment
Agency



ELO
European Landowners' Organisation

Natura 2000 Networking Programme managed in
partnership by project partners EUROPARC Federation,
Eurosita and European Landowners Organization (ELO)

Introduction / Background

This workshop was funded by the Natura 2000 Networking Programme (NNP) of the European Commission and supported by the Austrian Ministry of Defence and the Austrian Federal Environment Agency. The EUROPARC Federation – the umbrella organisation of Nature and National Parks in Europe – as well as Eurosite and the European Landowners Organization (ELO) are managing the NNP, which specifies an integrated approach, recognising the essential contributions of different stakeholders responsible for and interacting with Europe's rich diversity of Natura 2000 sites and surrounding areas. Focusing on communication, capacity building and the value of working in partnership to achieve nature conservation objectives, the NNP is creating a series of training events, themed workshops and practical tools to promote Natura 2000, good practice in site management and the benefits of networking, across Europe.

The workshop was held in VIENNA at Hotel MODUL, the field visit lead participants to the MTA TÜPI ALLENTSTEIG, about 80 km northwest from VIENNA. The interest in this workshop including excursion was much higher than expected. About 30 participants were anticipated, 90 individuals had registered, and finally 73 guests and 12 speakers, i.e. altogether 85 participants came to the event!

The format used for the workshop: the first day involved presentations followed by question and answer sessions, and a plenary discussion with the former German Minister of Defence; on the second day a field visit was organised.

The target audience included the responsible Commandants of training estates from 11 different European armies (see "List of Participants"), representatives of different Ministries of Defence (MoDs), environmental experts of the armies, nature scientists and representatives from NGOs; participants came from 12 different European countries. All together 85 participants attended the workshop in Vienna, 58 persons took part in the field visit.

Purpose of Workshop & Expected Outcomes

The aim of the workshop in Vienna was the exchange of experience regarding the implementation of the Natura 2000 network in Europe as well as nature conservation management measures on military training areas.

The main task was to exchange experiences between responsables from different MoDs / armies and NGOs building up a special network and raising awareness for Natura 2000.

The intention of this workshop was to highlight the sustainable use of training areas by the armies, to consider the fact that military training and nature conservation are (mostly) harmonized, to demonstrate that the reduction of military training will reduce biodiversity, and – last but not least – to give the responsible Environment protection unit at the Austrian MoD a special support from outside in general and the responsible commandants in Austria (dealing with Natura 2000 on their training areas) in particular.

Results – key points arising

One of the beneficial results of the workshop was a fruitful dialogue between representatives of the military forces on the one hand and nature conservationists on the other hand. The German Ex-Minister of Defence, Volker Rühle, pleaded for the continuation of this dialogue and stressed the importance of future joint activities for an even better protection of nature in European military training areas.

It was further stated by the participants of the workshop that sustainable use of training areas by the armies is finally creating an immensely high richness in biodiversity as well as large non-intervention areas, which can only be found in similar size in European national parks.

Military training areas are characterised by special features:

1. Large, unfragmented area
2. State property
3. Hardly touched
4. Poor soil (no fertilizer)
5. High diversity of species
6. High diversity of habitats
7. Habitats are arranged in a mosaic of managed and non-managed habitats typical for a military training area

3. to 7.: Features develop through military use, are dependent on military use

Military use disturbs monotonous structures = creation of new habitats, e.g. ponds ('disturbance ecology')

Typical habitats on military training areas:

- Meadows/pastures often humid
- Reed areas
- Wood areas
- Hedges
- Open land
- Water courses, ponds
- Ruins of former villages

It was also highlighted that military training can even be favourable for the creation of new biotopes for rare and endemic species – a circumstance that wouldn't be expected at first sight. Nature conservation on military training areas is recognised as an additional benefit, but the representatives of the armed forces clearly stated that military training activities must have priority in these areas. Especially in case troops have to be prepared for action conservation tasks are less important than the security of the troops.

A specific issue addressed in the workshop was the problem of forestry on military training areas (MTAs), which seems to be alike in many countries. Very interesting in this sense was the statement of the former German Minister of Defence Volker RÜHE. He presented his approach of establishing a national park on an abandoned military training area, the Hainich National Park. Compensation for the German Federal Forests ("Bundesforste") belonging to the Ministry for Finances was not an

issue. He rather made an "indecent proposal" to the Minister for Finances – an offer the Minister for Finances could not refuse due to political reasons.

The excursion to and on the MTA TÜPI ALLENTSTEIG was well prepared and well organised by the HQ of the MTA. One of the findings of the excursion was that regular forestry in some cases is not only an obstacle for military training (especially for mechanised troops and artillery), but can sometimes also be counterproductive for nature conservation tasks. Monotonous spruce plantations can create an economic benefit. However, one does not need to mention that the economic benefit cannot be more important than nature conservation and even military training on sites which were originally designated for this special purpose. Chain saws or industrial harvesters are rarely helpful to reach the aims of nature conservation! In Austria, examples of best practice for harmonising nature conservation and forestry are shown e.g. in the Austrian National Parks "Donau Auen" (Danube

Wetlands) and O.ö. Kalkalpen (Upper Austrian limestone Alps) .

A series of examples of good practice management for Natura 2000 sites was shown during the field visit, for which the life firing exercises of all troops on the Training Area and some shooting ranges had been stopped.

Conclusions & further action

One main issue emerging from the workshop was the problem of harmonising military training and nature conservation activities. It sometimes seems as if scientists had an 'allergy' against uniforms, and as if the military had an 'allergy' against science. Scepticism and prejudices can only be overcome by communication. Thus, as a suggestion for further promotion of Natura 2000 on MTAs the following activities would be beneficial:

- Awareness raising measures for the responsible key players within the MoDs
- Collation of best practise examples of integrated management plans for military training areas comprising both military use and nature conservation issues.

As follow-up to the NNP workshop, there was a meeting in the Austrian MoD on 27 November as a first step towards an INTERREG 4c project as a framework for further co-operation on European level besides activities of the NATO. This should be an umbrella project for LIFE + nature projects, one in Austria and it is planned to start similar projects in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The next meeting will take place in Vienna in the mid January 2008. Hopefully some more partners will become interested in the project.

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International Workshop "Wildlife and Life Firing - Natura 2000 on Military Training Areas"

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Relevant background papers

An information folder was handed out to all workshop participants. All speakers' presentations have been collected and can be provided as a hard copy upon request.

Thank you very much **to all** who supported the idea, the preparation and the follow up of this workshop, especially to Claudia Klampfl from EUROPARC Federation and to Sophie Gesta from Eurosite !!!

More information about the NNP and its organisations can be found under:

www.natura.org

www.euoparc.org

www.eurosite.org

www.elo.org

www.bundesheer.at

www.umweltbundesamt.at

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