

La Cañada



Newsletter of the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism

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Photo: Burrenlife

EFNCP Network at the Burren Winterage School, October 2015

Energising the EFNCP Network

After three years of silence on the drovers' road (this is what *La Cañada* means in Spanish) a fresh issue of our newsletter is out again.

In many of the world's pastoral lands, seasonal or erratic rain episodes trigger the growth of latent vegetation, boosting many other interrelated life forms and, of course, sustaining pastoral livelihoods. With the rain, ecosystem functions and networks are reactivated, as well as the use of drovers' roads (or –more frequently nowadays– trucks) to graze animals on fresh pastures.

Similarly, generous "rain" from the European Commission's (DG Envi) Life-NGO support programme made it possible for the network of organisations constituting EFNCP to blossom again in 2015, with numerous activities developed in partnership with the Forum. If you did not take part in them, you must have read or heard of them on our updated news, website and online social networks.

With this *La Cañada* issue we want to celebrate the successful completion of our work programme in 2015 by giving the voice to our member organisations. Not only because reinforcing our network has been one of our main objectives this year, but because their work on the ground is very inspiring, and should be better known Europe-wide.

For this issue we have contributions from Ireland, Spain, Sweden, Croatia, Germany and Romania. We hope they constitute good pasture for your pastoralist thoughts.

As EFNCP has not been awarded the Life-NGO grant this year, the dry season is starting again, but it will not last too long. New rain is forecast for the spring 2016, with the kick-off of the Horizon 2020 HNV-LINK project, which extends over ten countries and will foster innovations for a better future for High Nature Value farming in Europe.

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La Cañada 30

Contents

- 2 The mountain didn't get that way without work
- 4 The Landcare approach to restoring and maintaining cultural landscapes in Germany
- 6 Nurturing communities and enhancing their role in landscape conservation
- 8 Re-writing history to fit new policies?
- 9 Closing the representation gap – the need for a European Pastoral Farmers Organisation
- 12 Innovation in shepherding in the Basque Country
- 14 Defending HNV from the dangers of single species approach: a Romanian case study
- 16 After a long decline a little bit of hope – the story of common grasslands in Croatia

The mountain didn't get that way without work

Communicating the Blackstairs Farming Group's HNV message to farmers and funders

The Blackstairs Mountains are located in the south east of Ireland. An inland mountain range, they form the boundary between counties Carlow and Wexford. The highest peaks are Mount Leinster (796 m), Blackstairs (734 m) and Slievebawn (527 m). The climate is drier and sunnier than the west of Ireland and so the principal habitat is Dry Heath, though Blanket Bog and Wet Heath occur along with Acid Grassland as vegetation mosaics.

The upper slopes of the mountain range are unenclosed and are farmed as commonage. Typically sheep, mostly Cheviot, are put up between April and June when the lambs are strong enough. They are brought down in autumn and the lambs sold on as store lambs. A small number of farmers graze the commonage year round. This usually depends on how much green lowland fields farmers have to support stock in the winter. A small number of farmers have cows (sucklers) and horses on the commonage but the vast majority use sheep.

The Blackstairs mountain range covers circa 70 km² of which 50.5 km², corresponding to the unenclosed land, is designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Dry and Wet Heath exist outside the SAC on enclosed land along with good examples of Semi-natural Grassland and Woodland, and the area qualifies as being of High Nature Value due to the presence and quality of its peatland habitats.

The mountains also have value as a cultural landscape containing archaeological sites dating back 5000 years, including cursus monuments, summit cairns, a portal tomb and a cluster of rock art sites from the Neolithic period. The field systems adjacent to the commonage contain some particularly large granite drystone walls, up to 2.5 m high and 4 m wide in places and artefacts linked to traditional farming practices.

"You have to be born into hill farming and have a genuine interest into it"

The economic viability of farming in The Blackstairs has been in decline for decades. It became clear that the future of hill farming and hill farming communities was precarious and a small group of people began to ask what could be done.

In April 2014, funding for pilot 'locally-led' projects using a similar approach to the Burren LIFE project was included in the Irish Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. Contact was made with Dr Brendan Dunford (Burren LIFE) and Dr James Moran (IT Sligo) and on their advice the Blackstairs Farming Group (BFG) was formed.

A diverse group, there were many motivations for involvement, the predominant one being a desire for farming and farming communities in the Blackstairs to move from slow incessant decline to a more sustainable footing. There was also a shared connection to the land, to the Blackstairs and a desire

for the skills and knowledge acquired by Blackstairs farmers over generations to be recognised, valued and sustained.

"You don't learn anything about hill farming in agricultural college"

Over the next year the Group attended events including the Burren Winterage School and the 'Who Cares for the Uplands' conference organised by the Irish Uplands Forum.

We learned about 'HNV Farming', 'Locally-Led Agri-Environment Projects', 'Ecosystem Services' and 'Public Goods' and understood that our farmers produced goods which were valued by society but which could not be sold at the mart. That the farming system in the Blackstairs was responsible for the rich biodiversity and beauty of our landscape, providing high quality water supplies to surrounding towns and villages and storing carbon in upland peats.

During this period we encountered the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP). In March 2015 the EFNCP employed Colin Gallagher as the Forum's HNV Ireland Officer and offered technical support to our group to help us develop a locally led project. We were delighted but there was an obstacle. We needed to raise funds to assemble the baseline environmental data required.

The composition of our committee was crucial in getting the funding we needed. It contained farmers, both lowland and hill farmers; a local architect who could place funding applications in policy context and who had knowledge of and confidence in community-led design processes; two local councillors (elected representatives to local government) who were able to guide us through local administration and direct our funding request to decision makers and a retired environmental science lecturer with experience and contacts in the field of environmental management.

In June 2015 the BFG secured the funding required from sources including The Heritage Council and Carlow and Wexford Local Authorities. We then began to plan how to develop from being a small working group to a more representative group spanning two counties. Positive engagement between the BFG committee, the project team and the local farming community was prioritised and included in the brief for the selection of the ecology team. The

Aerial View of the Blackstairs



EFNCP also recognised that communication and engagement were important and funded the role of local coordinator to liaise with farmers, stakeholders and funding bodies and to manage the project locally.

The project team were in place by mid-June 2015 and comprised Colin Gallagher (EFNCP HNV Ireland Officer), Dr Mary Tubridy (Ecology Team) and Helena Fitzgerald (Local Coordinator and BFG Committee Member). The first project team meeting developed the methodology for the research phase of the project and included a plan for community engagement. This plan was then discussed and agreed by the BFG Committee.

The research work involved gathering information on farming practices and changes to farming in the Blackstairs through face to face interview with and completion of a questionnaire by Blackstairs hill farmers. The habitat mapping involved field work to establish the extent and condition of habitats within the study area and included a series of farm walks around the mountain range attended by hill farmers and other stakeholders.

The BFG committee contributed to the project planning phase suggesting who the project team could make contact with and advising on practical issues like suitable access routes to the mountain. In addition the BFG agreed a communications plan which included placing regular project updates on social media (@BlackstairsFarm on Twitter and Blackstairs Farming Group on Facebook) and in local print media such as parish newsletters and newspapers.

There was still concern that isolated farmers would not hear about the project so the project coordinator and BFG Committee Members contacted many farmers by phone and SMS to share information on the project and to encourage attendance at meetings and events. In some cases communication by land line was the only way of making contact with these farmers. In addition the project coordinator identified and contacted other stakeholders including Teagasc, Coillte and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

A particular challenge at this stage of the project was the absence of specific detail on what the project would mean for farmers. It was explained that the process was farmer-led and would reflect the issues farmers themselves iden-



Photo: Helena Fitzgerald

tified as being important. However this approach was not a familiar one and for a period there were concerns that the project had an extremist environmental agenda to remove farmers from the mountain and re-wild.

The work of Colin Gallagher was particularly skilful in making it clear that the project had a farming focus and in time concerns abated. A turning point came when hill farmers themselves explained to the concerned farmers that the wildlife and habitats on the hill were there because the hill was farmed and that the project was working to identify how hill farming could be supported and optimised for the environment and for the farmer.

“How can hill farming become more attractive for the young farmer”

By September 2015 the information gathering phase of the project was complete and it was decided to hold an information meeting to present the research findings to Blackstairs farmers. At the meeting held in Rathanna on the 9th October and attended by *circa* 70 hill farmers and other stakeholders, it was unanimously agreed to proceed to the next stage of development of the locally led project.

Colin Gallagher presented his analysis of data from the Irish Central Statistics Office which indicated a 50% drop since 1991 in the number of farms in the Blackstairs where the main holder was under 44, with a 50% reduction in sheep numbers over the same period. At the meeting representative farmers from around the mountain joined the BFG committee to participate in a series of workshops to further develop the project.

Gathering at the Ballyglisheen Farm Walk

“I would love to be farming full time or even to make it profitable enough to hand on to the next generation”

The project report 'A Case For a Locally Led Agri Environment Scheme For The Blackstairs, Preliminary Proposal' will be ready in early 2016. This report will shape our submission to Ireland's Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine for RDP 2014-2020 funding under the 'locally-led' measure.

The engagement with Blackstairs farmers over the last 9 months, involving over 800 hours of voluntary input by Blackstairs hill farmers has indicated that in addition to the locally-led project there is interest in developing other business areas to support the hill farming enterprise including potentially forming a lamb producer group, developing sustainable tourism products and farm based businesses associated with the management of the mountain.

It has also become clear that Blackstairs farmers who have come to project meetings to listen, learn and contribute, are keen to innovate and are outward looking; characteristics hill farmers are not usually credited with. The legacy of our project with the EFNCP is a sense of momentum which we would like to build on as we work towards more sustainable and resilient farming communities in the Blackstairs. Given the rate of decline and the age profile of our farmers, the question is: are we too late?

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The Landcare approach to restoring and maintaining cultural landscapes in Germany

Landcare Germany (DVL) is the umbrella organisation of 155 local independent Landcare Associations (Landschaftspflegeverband, LCA), found all over the country.

The main focus of LCAs and DVL are German cultural landscapes, which have been shaped over the centuries by regional land use systems, host much biodiversity, and are an important part of the German heritage. They work in close cooperation with local municipalities/authorities, farmer organisations and nature conservationists to strengthen local communities, protect biodiversity and create benefits for man and nature.

Cultural landscapes in Germany face big challenges. For example a lot of grassland has fallen fallow in recent years because traditional—and mostly sustainable—land use is too laborious and expensive. Although technical development offers new options, grasslands on slopes still have to be cut and harvested by hand. Crop cultivation is concentrated on cost effective fields in the lowlands, which causes an unsustainable intensification of those fields and the abandonment of extensive meadows and pastures in the mountains.

The traditional way of life, which formed the typical landscape in many parts of Germany, is also in the process of being lost. Being a farmer and the hard work involved is no longer attractive. In southern Germany “the number of farmers decreased, and even those who continue to operate farms have difficulty in turning a profit from farm products alone” (Matsuhima & Ichikawa, 2010).

In this context, LCAs were founded to moderate the processes of decline and to provide a stimulus to such activities in their region. They are committed to promoting sustainable development and conservation of the cultural landscape. LCAs work together with about 10,000 farmers and 1,200 NGOs for nature conservation to preserve the cultural landscapes and are active in around half of Germany’s communities.

One of the biggest challenges nowadays is to stop the loss of traditional land use carried out by small agricultural holdings and private persons. Therefore LCAs work with all stakeholders to find cooperative ways of sustainable development.

A characteristic of all LCAs is that all their decision-making management boards are made up of an equal number of representatives from municipal authorities, nature conservation organisations and farmers’ organisations. The work is thus based on cooperation among these often opposing parties to find common ways and solutions, creating an atmosphere of trust.

Landcare methods

First of all LCA experts talk to land users and owners to find out about the situation on farms or the common land. It is important to get an in-depth view of the area to be able to focus on those things which could be improved. The specific goals and focus areas also take into account regional and local development plans, nature regulations and biodiversity strategies.

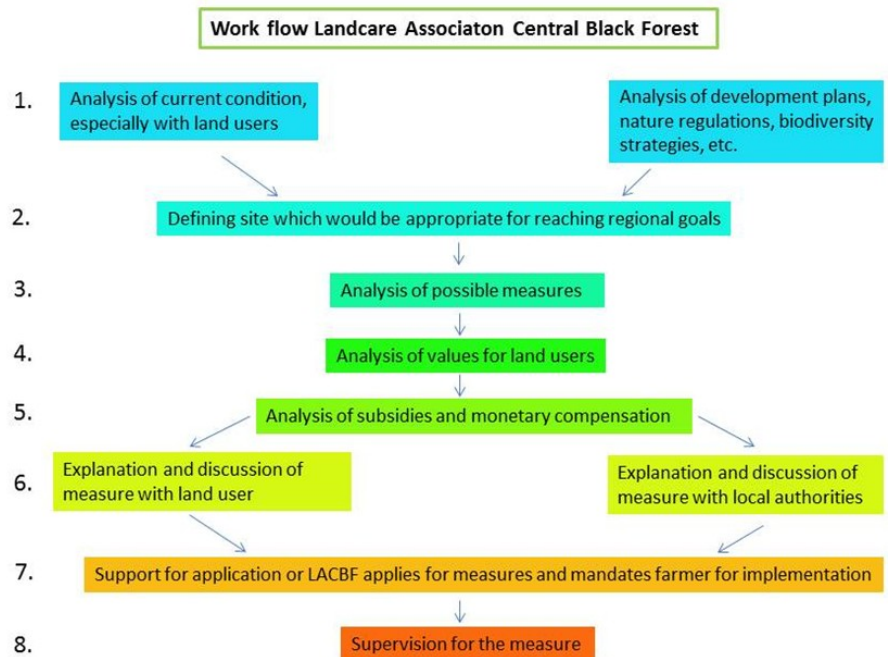
After this assessment is made, experts look at possible measures which

could be implemented. It is important to keep in mind that these measures also have to provide some value for land users (e.g., soil conservation or actual payments for services). Very few farmers can engage in voluntary measures because they need income from farms; LCA staff investigate the availability of subsidies and other monetary compensation mechanisms.

As soon as an action which could benefit both nature and landowner/manager is found, experts explain it to the landowner/manager. They are not forced to carry out measures; rather, they are shown the options and the possible (often long-lasting) benefits. If the land user/owner initiates the measure voluntarily, LCA workers help with the application for funding and in communication with the local nature authority. Also during the implementation process permanent staff assist landowners and managers with any problems or questions which may arise.

Subsidies often come from the German federal state or the European Union, and are mostly paid directly to farmers. Sometimes (i.e., on common land) LCAs apply for funding for measures themselves, and then contract local farmers for the implementation of measures. In 2013, for instance, 75% of EAFRD subsidies that LCAs applied for were used to pay the farmers to do the work. A typical measure implemented in this manner is the cutting of hedgerows in the landscape.

An important factor for its success is the independence of the LCA and its



Cultural landscape in the Black Forest



non-governmental status. Thus the partners do not fear any restrictions, regulations or penalties. Through its network the LCAs try to create win-win situations and to set up stakeholder discussions to find common solutions.

LCAs work on a number of fields: two of them are presented below as meaningful examples.

A) Landcare measures and pasture management. For pasture land which has been restored (e.g., by clearing encroaching shrubs) or is in danger of falling fallow, the LCAs act as middle men between farmers to try to ensure that the land is used. The LCAs try to either find a farmer who can use the abandoned fields or tries to support farmers to set up new herds of cows, sheep, or goats.

B) Regional products and added value in the region. LCAs search for alternative ways of using the land, like the restoration of orchards, which shows the connection between land use, biodiversity, the prevention of soil erosion and adding value within the region. Local juice initiatives can improve income, benefit nature conservation and also develop a regional food identity linked to high quality and sustainability. People buy this local product and generate an added value chain in the region. The LCA supports the exchange of network contacts and experiences and lends a hand during the development of the marketing strategy and offers advice on sustainable land use.

Overall it is the general task of the LCAs to moderate processes and bring

stakeholders together, to discover the fears and challenges and look for common solutions. The organisations' aim is to find a cooperative way to support regional sustainable development in the landscape without losing that landscape's functions for people, food and nature. LCAs are recognised as a good model by the European Commission for their work to benefit man and nature; they are also one of the case studies in the Guidance Handbook "Farming for Nature 2000" (European Commission, 2014).

Key factors

The Landcare approach is based on some key factors. **Key factor 1** is that the institution is driven from the bottom up and that the local people support its vision. It is crucial that *"all stakeholders need to understand and accept the general logic, legitimacy and justification for a course of action, and to be aware of the risks and uncertainties associated with it. Building and maintaining such a consensus is a fundamental goal of landscape approach"* (Sayer et al., 2013).

Key factor 2 is the establishment of a durable trust-based network in the region. Without this key factor the LCA staff could not do their beneficial work – they need to be in possession of all the relevant facts so that they can make the best possible proposals for good management and so that they can avoid or resolve conflicts.

In Germany 92% of all Landcare Associations employ experts, 64% of which work full-time. This gives farmers, conservationists, municipalities and other interested persons a reliable point

of contact where they can get advice and assistance. This constitutes **Key Factor 3**, since local experts have a healthy partnership with all stakeholders and they can also give feedback to the authorities locally.

Many measures and land management activities are funded by regional or national (most of them EU co-financed) programmes. But even the implementation of well-intentioned and well-planned measures can throw up problems on the ground.

LCAs are in the best position to give feedback and propose appropriate changes, since they not only see the problem at first hand but recognise that it is *"a key challenge in traditional farming landscapes to develop policies that foster socioeconomic development but also safeguarding biodiversity"* (Fischer, 2012).

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Nurturing communities and enhancing their role in landscape conservation

Lessons from the Burren, west of Ireland

Landscape, environment and people all go together and more often than not, are inseparable – yet these relationships are not always harmonious. Adapting our attitudes and behaviours to ensure better landscape management can be a daunting task and not something that is naturally bestowed upon us. However, understanding both the complexities and marvels within one's landscape, while also working together and learning from one another can render this achievable.

Burrenbeo Trust, a landscape charity situated in the west of Ireland aim to do just that, by working closely with the local community to share a common goal and vision for the Burren landscape. The Trust believes that connecting people to their place, learning from their experiences and encouraging them to engage more with their landscape in a sustainable manner, can help everyone envisage a brighter future for the area, while also ensuring its survival.

The Burren, an iconic Irish landscape steeped in unique heritage, culture, geology and botany – a true tourist desti-

nation - warrants a desperate need for conservation. Yet, it has multiple different conservation needs which are not always addressable with one fixed solution or approach.

Identifying this as an important issue, Burrenbeo Trust since its conception, has strived to contribute to the sustaining of this beautiful natural resource in every way. Through developing and delivering programmes which encapsulate the importance of conservation, education and community within this context – it is firmly believed that success in landscape management comes from listening, learning and working with those on the ground. Perpetuating the knowledge attained at a local, national and international level strengthens and consolidates it further.

Look to the future!

When thinking about the future, it is important to look to the future generation – the youth. By providing them with the knowledge, expertise and passion for their local landscape, it is thought that progress and management

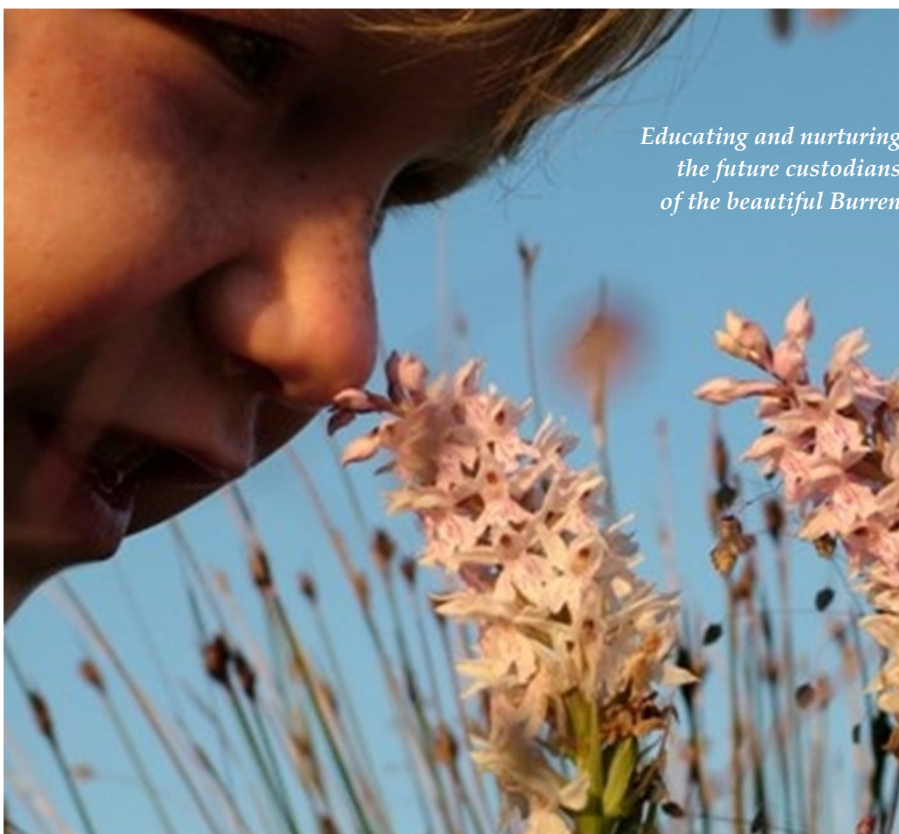
will have a greater lasting legacy. Burrenbeo aim to engage youth through various programmes all year around, but two of their most well-known efforts are Ecobeo and Áitbeo. Through Ecobeo -a 10 week programme- children in primary schools in the Burren learn about their place – experiencing the wonders within and building a bank of knowledge to share with their elders.

In the past 10 years, over 1200 children have graduated as 'Young Burren Experts' with Burrenbeo Trust. This not only instils a sense of pride within the child, but it has been known to rekindle their parent's awareness and observations about their impacts and power locally as a knock-on effect. Farmers, whom are part of the *Burren Farming for Conservation Programme* otherwise ran by the local organisation BurrenLife, have -with delight- shared their experiences of family learning and interest in the land from their children.

Working in a similar way, Áitbeo's target audience are young teenagers at second level education. The course encourages students to be aware, be proud of and have a connection to their surrounding landscape – opening up their eyes to all the uniqueness and rarities the Burren has to offer. Capturing the imagination and nurturing the ideas of our youth can have an immediate and lasting future impact on how we conserve special landscapes. Making landscape relevant, fun and communicating its huge significance navigates its management and development towards a much brighter future.

Conservation, conservation, conservation!

We all know that working in teams can get the job done much faster – well, this is definitely the case when it comes to scrub clearing, stone wall building, archaeological digs, invasive species mapping, clean coast initiatives... the list goes on. Working as a collective, building a bank of active volunteers and collaborating with other local organisations who share the same vision as Burrenbeo Trust, has proven to be half the



Educating and nurturing the future custodians of the beautiful Burren

battle towards making positive changes locally in the Burren.

The Burrenbeo Trust Conservation Volunteers (BCVs) were established in 2010 and to date have over 239 active members. Born out of the need for more hands-on conservation practice in the Burren and a desire to protect this unique landscape, the aim of the group is twofold. Firstly, to be active and keep up to date with conservation and heritage protection needs within the Burren, and secondly to create an inclusive environment for people to come together, share their passion for conservation and be part of a growing, energetic and welcoming community.

Building on Burrenbeo's vision to educate and encourage engagement - the BCVs are unique in their approach. Every session/event coordinated, is led by an expert in the field. Each volunteer learns about the importance of their work and the impact it will have on the local landscape and ecosystem. Invaluable skills are developed through training courses and workshops which are there to encourage learning, build confidence and ensure safety at all times.

The group is open, welcoming and tirelessly attempts to engage with wider communities and enlist a broad spectrum of experts - driving home the importance of conservation. Much of BCV's work is echoed and supported by local organisations such as BurrenLife, who work off the same premise - it takes time and hard work to make a positive impact on the ground but during this time, local knowledge should be harvested and appreciated.

Investing in communities

We all know that landscapes serve multiple functions, however it is important to acknowledge the time and consideration that goes into preserving a unique, yet functioning landscape like the Burren. BurrenLife - experts in *High Nature Value Farming* - have managed to capture this endeavour beautifully. Passionate about the Burren and all it has to offer agriculturally, BurrenLife work with farmers to devise yearly farm management plans - providing them with guidance, targets and support for best practice.

Farms are monitored by a scoring system, which incentivises farmers to work towards reaching goals and in turn receive a higher payment for doing

*Community Stewardship at its best!
Burrenbeo Conservation Volunteers
protecting this unique landscape*



so. This programme provides an investment in the local farming community, rewarding them for their achievements, rather than penalising them for their errors - a method which has had a hugely significant impact on the local landscape to date.

One of the most significant farming traditions, which is unique to the Burren, is Winterage. During the winter months, farmers drive their cattle up the mountains. The limestone is rich with vegetation and shelter - offering yet another natural method for conservation through grazing, while also enhancing the local ecosystem. Each year, Burrenbeo Trust coordinate a festival (*Burren Winterage Weekend*) showcasing the Burren, celebrating Winterage - but most importantly celebrating the community, for without whom, best conservation practices within the Burren would not be possible.

Lessons from the field

The Burren is so precious, but it is important to acknowledge that is a functioning landscape also. People live here, people work here - tourists visit here. Understanding the impact that we can all make is not an easy feat. However, working against people and not taking time to listen can have a detrimental impact on the future existence of natural environments and landscapes.

What is hugely important is that we value the people on the ground who belong here - who know the space -

who love the space. Making them reignite their passion and pride can truly generate massive ripple effects. By highlighting the positives, educating, supporting and building connections, Burrenbeo Trust and BurrenLife have endeavoured to create a community of communities nested within this unique and truly special landscape. Without the support of the people - these organisations or the 'future' conservation plans for the Burren would not exist.

We all have a part to play - we just need to identify it. The power of local communities is a transferable skill which can be experienced the world over. Ironically, conservation may not always be the main goal, but will inevitably be the by-product of enabling people to open their eyes to the place which surrounds them. Evoke pride and the rest will follow.

Lessons from the Burren offer us the realisation and experience that - we cannot treat landscape, environment and people as separate things, they work together as a unit and it is our communities who can offer the balance.

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burrenbeotrust | 
open your eyes to the living burren

Re-writing history to fit new policies?

Reflections from Swedish transhumant farmers

There is a millennia-old grazing regime in Scandinavia, known, respected and recognised in its locality by many who remember their own family members carrying it out and who see that it is still carried out by some, namely, seasonal transhumant movements between winter and summer pastures.

Norway has about a thousand summer transhumants left, while 200-300 remain in the Swedish forest and mountainous regions. For all of them this is where their important culture heritage and traditions stem from, be it food, music or seasonal festivities. Is it possible for others not to see it, or do they choose to ignore the facts for reasons hidden in prejudices, politics, ideologies or economical agendas? Or could it merely be a gender question? Because in Scandinavia bringing the cows, goats and sheep to their summer pastures and herding them there over the whole grazing season from May to October was and still is mainly an activity for women.

The traditional Swedish boreal and mountainous small-scale farming was carried out from farmsteads situated in villages clustered in groups along lakes and rivers, surrounded by their arable land. To graze the cattle further away in

the wooden pastures of the forests or in the hills or mountains was the obvious way for these often small agricultural businesses to develop and optimise their use of the landscape.

As this culture grew, the more organised and specialised the different tasks became. It created a tradition of men taking care of the agriculture at home. Bringing and herding the cattle to the rich 'rough' grazings (or the 'outfield') over the summer months, milking and making products that could more easily be transported and stored for the cold and harsh winter ahead, became the responsibility of groups of young women with an older woman as their leader and teacher. No task was seen less valuable and consequently men and women had a traditional equal right to inherit.

The heritable assets divided amongst all the siblings. Assets like animals, tools and timber houses were easy to share and shift. Land was split into so many equal portions that it ended up being cultivated in various share cropping or other shared asset systems. This made it impossible to sell on as it was all entangled in family ownership. It became a strong link to your heritage and the community. If you chose to leave to look for a paid job or such, you

could not cash it in. It was always a place for you on your return. Or for your children or grandchildren. This does not suit a modern administration and was seen as requiring reform!

Since the start of the agricultural revolution, Swedish government policy has encouraged abandonment of the 'old fashioned', tried-and-tested grazing regimes in favour of more industrialised methods for both agriculture and forestry. They used threats and lies about the damage caused by these practices, despite science showing large environmental benefits and services, and that it was the best farming practice in terms of delivering the highest total energy return. For many farmers and small scale landowners it is still the best option they have to make a living with low input and good enough outcome in less favourable areas. Indeed, that is why, despite the forces working against, the transhumance system has been kept going by a considerable number of families.

Wooded pastures as well as mountain pastures are greatly underestimated, almost obliterated in modern state statistics. Our Swedish government has not considered the use of the historically vast forest pastures as at all significant to the increasing need of



Farmers, tourist magnets, future safari guides or endangered species?

Photo: Lars Dahlström

sustainable food production or as a provider of ecosystem services.

In contrast, Norway has since its independence taken the opposite standpoint, safeguarding the local communities, local food production and the cultures of the summer farms.

Although our two countries share the historic land use and the comprehensive historic grazing regimes by pastoralists in the forest and mountain regions, Sweden does not show any interest in implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity articles 8j and 10c by including and recognising any local society in government policies. No list of intangible knowledge is intended to be made. The Swedish wood pastures (Fennoscandian wood pastures EU Di-

rective Habitats Code 9070) are only recognised as reindeer grazing although there still is a considerable number of summer grazed livestock in the same areas.

Has the fact that Sweden has one of the highest urbanisation rates in the world together with the country's large land area led to a lack of understanding that there are living, working communities in what is seen as a vast wilderness? What will happen to the millennia-old culture of free grazing on the summer farms? Some issues that will give an indication of the possible direction of change are currently up for debate in the Parliament. It is suggested that all livestock should be fenced in behind "predator proof" fences, regardless of

costs and not considering on who's account, but those farmers who fail to do so could be prosecuted for neglect under animal welfare measures.

How then is this newly "created" wilderness going to be managed to safeguard biodiversity and cultures? Will it be for forest production and mining industries? Unrestricted public access for recreation? Wildlife management? We, as a working farmers' organisation, are trying to stand our ground to ensure our common future in the midst of these significant challenges.

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Closing the representation gap – the need for a European Pastoral Farmers Organisation

This article attempts to illustrate why we need a European Pastoral Farmers Organisation and reports on recent steps towards the creation of such an organisation.

A. The crisis in the sheep sector

About 60 million ewes are kept on holdings in Europe [1]. The sheep sector is one of the most diverse, whether with regard to geographical context, production methods or farm structure [2].

While the sector provides only 1.3% of the agricultural output of the European Union [3], it is of far greater importance for the conservation of nature [4]. In 2008 the European Parliament (EP) acknowledged that sheep and goats play a key role in the upkeep of less fertile areas, sensitive ecosystems as well as many landscapes and have done so for centuries [5].

Nevertheless, the sheep sector has been in clear decline for the last decade, with the number of ewes decreasing in the UK and Spain by 33%, in Germany by 25% and in France by 18% between 2005 and 2014 [1]. A study prepared for the European Parliament warned in 2008 that the sector was approaching a critical state and called for urgent policy action to stop this development [2].

It is however unclear whether there is a natural stopping point for this decline, or if sheep farming tends to fully

disappear in many areas in Europe.

A.1. The decoupling of the Common Agricultural Policy direct payments

A multitude of socioeconomic trends have played a role in the deterioration of the sector. A major contributing change in the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union (CAP) was the decoupling from 2005 onward by Regulation (EC) 1782/2003. The effect of the switch away from production-based support on the sheep sector was immediate and severe [2].

While the legislation contained some oversights with regards to pastoral farming, it also provided options to soften the impact of decoupling, such as limited coupled support (Art. 91) or support for environmental-beneficial farming (Art. 69). But the national implementation of these measures varied widely. Although these options remained after the Health Check of 2008 in Regulation (EC) 73/2009, they were mostly abandoned by the Member States [6].

A.2. Electronic identification (EID) for sheep and goats

As it happened, the decoupling of the CAP coincided with the decision to implement a system of compulsory electronic identification for sheep and goats (EID), with Regulation (EC) 21/2004 coming into full effect in 2008. It was

designed to limit pandemics by an improved monitoring of animal movements, but the legislation imposed a uniform system on the sector, without taking account of its economic situation or the diversity of farming systems and risk associated.

Most of the considerable financial burden was placed on the farmer's shoulders. It was expected that the system would provide sufficient on-farm benefits to offset its costs, if used as a management tool. The cost assessment calculated the break-even for ear-tags at 500 readings per year [7]. But it did not account for an above average loss rates of ear tags in extensive systems [8], veterinary cost from injuries due to the loss of tags or infection after insertion [9].

EID also became a part of cross-compliance, resulting in an increased risk for sanctions. For pastoral sheep farmers this threat was existential – they had both a high dependency on CAP payments [10] and a high loss-rate of tags in their extensive conditions. The European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP) warned in 2008 that this issue could be the "bureaucratic last straw" breaking the back of many pastoral farms [4].

A.3. A greener CAP and no improvements?

Over the last decades green issues became of increasing importance in

many policy areas. Today the public sees the conservation of nature as “mankind’s responsibility” [11] and is strongly in favour of support to environmental-beneficial farming [12]. Meanwhile Europe suffers from a continued failure to halt the ongoing decline in its biodiversity [13] and in High Nature Value farming specifically.

The CAP of 2014-2020 was intended as a major step towards halting these developments and towards a greener agriculture. While it made some progress, it also ended up overly dependent on national implementation. In some Member States, we already know that pasture eligibility for direct payments has been drastically reduced on an incoherent basis like the presence of woody vegetation. However it is still too early to assess the new CAPs full impact on pastoral farming, especially due to the delays in completing Rural Development Programmes in a number of Member States.

Taking a broad overview, it can be said that the situation of pastoral sheep farmers has not much improved since the call to action by the European Parliament in 2008. The policy examples indicate that the interests of pastoral sheep farmers are often not properly

reflected in European legislation or its national implementation. Consequently, a lack of interest representation can be assumed as one contributing reason for the ongoing stagnation.

B. The problem of representation

Representation of their interests is a general problem for pastoral farmers. The causes are possibly linked to the socioeconomic characteristics of High Nature Value farming systems [14].

The political perception of pastoral farming is still often dominated by its marginal direct economic output, with insufficient regard for its contributions to the public goods of nature and culture. As a consequence, pastoral interests generally play a fringe role in politics.

The national lobbies of pastoral farmers are often fragmented, resource-poor and volunteer driven. On the European level they are not formally organised. This limits the ability of pastoral farmers to influence policy.

B.1. Lobbying in the European arena

Lobbying in the European arena today is competitive and professionalised. An extraordinary example was the in-

tense policy cycle for the CAP of 2014-2020. During first reading in parliament over 8,000 amendments were tabled to the draft report [15]. This is also indicative of the intensifying conflict between agribusiness and conservationist interests and of the Parliament’s increased power since the Lisbon Treaty.

Lobbying is an essential part of the democratic process in the issue-complex and multi-level political system of the European Union. It can be described as exchange between the institutions and interest groups, where influence is traded for information, citizen support and power [16].

Due to their limited resources, the institutions at least claim to depend on the input of a representative “quantity and quality of information” to design legitimate and effective policy [17]. Trust and credibility play a relevant role in the resulting exchange-relationships. [18].

Consequently, lobbying the European institutions requires constant participation in the political process by consistent, persistent, competent and trustworthy actors who represent legitimate as well as unique interests and deliver credible contributions to solutions for European issues.



United action: pastoralists and conservationists in dialogue with Ministers for Agriculture, Cottbus 2014

B.2. The representation gap

Pastoral farmers have a unique portfolio of political interests and a shared cultural identity that is based on their dual role as traditional farmers and caretakers of nature. This role conforms to the current political and public paradigm of green agriculture. Their position on the spectrum of political interest between the opposing poles of agribusiness and nature conservation varies on an issue by issue basis; consequently, they are fully represented by neither lobby group.

On the one side the conservationist lobby is a major supporter of pastoralism on shared issues. Yet its priority is nature and it represents a wide clientele. On the other side the agribusiness lobby rarely directly represents the interests of pastoral farmers. Some of its policy work benefits pastoralists by default. But other stakeholder interests usually take precedence due to their greater economic and/or social influence [2].

The limited representation of pastoral interests by organisations on the spectrum between agribusiness and conservation constitutes a real representation gap for extensive livestock farmers.

C. Organising pastoral interests

In 2010 European shepherds tried to close this gap for the first time. With a week-long transhumance to Brussels they raised awareness for their profession and issues. During the following years the movement continued informally as the European Shepherds Network (ESN).



The largest meeting of the ESN so far took place in 2015 in Koblenz, with support from the FAO as part of the Pastoralist Knowledge Hub project. Pastoral farmers from 17 European countries came together and published a declaration on pastoralism in Europe: They emphasised their shared identity and

traditions, their contributions to economy, society and culture, the ongoing crisis and the urgent need for political action [19]. The continued championing of pastoral issues by the EFNCP laid important foundations for this development.

C.1. A European Pastoral Farmers Organisation

During the Koblenz meeting it became evident that the representation gap could best be closed by a European Pastoral Farmers Organisation representing their unique identity and interests.

As a European association, it would have increased legitimacy at the EU level when compared to individual organisations and thus hope to have improved access to the corridors of power. It would observe the policy process, identify issues, develop strategy, and aggregate national interests into credible policy proposals. By doing so it would build trusting relationships and alliances. It would facilitate exchange among its members, support coordinated actions and empower them to lobby for European issues at home.

C.2. The road ahead

In the aftermath of Koblenz, the ESN decided to move forward with the creation of a European Pastoral Farmers Organisation. It is planned for the anniversary of Koblenz in June 2016, just in time for a Fitness Check of the CAP in 2017.

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Innovation in shepherding in the Basque Country

From the perspective which seems to be most respected nowadays -the economic- farming is little more than the primitive basis on which civilisations were originally built and sustained.

From a socio-cultural point of view, many of the value systems of contemporary society can be shown to have agricultural roots. Amongst these values is the rational use of nature's finite resources, today often referred to as sustainability, a concept to which livestock farming has a lot to contribute.

We find ourselves in a seemingly paradoxical situation these days. On the one hand shepherding, in the urban collective imagination at least, is stuck in the bucolic past, appealing to nostalgic romantics pursuing an unattainable utopia. On the other, and despite this rather negative image, shepherding is gaining new prominence in highly developed contemporary society, without having actively looked for it.

Urban pressures, work-related stress, global technification, environmental pollution, aggressive competition, industrial diets and so forth have led to an urgent search for re-humanisation, which has found in shepherding the imagined promise of a new happy Arcadia.

This huge but unexpected opportunity has come upon shepherding at a time when it is frankly rather lost in its own thoughts and busy trying to work out how to make ends meet by begging authorities for crumbs. Although some individual initiatives are springing up to take advantage, a solid common strategy is missing but sorely needed if we are to place shepherding on a sound footing to face the brave new world of the 21st century.

It was to respond to this need that an innovation initiative was born in the Basque Country in 2011. Ambitioning a new management model that would safeguard the future of this age-old occupation, a group of professionals from

the fields of farming, training, research and marketing got together with a series of concrete objectives:

1. Involvement of professionals from the sector in the design of the new management model for shepherding.

2. Awareness-raising of the general public on the need to preserve the biodiversity related to shepherding and the shepherds themselves.

3. Experimentation with new forms of interaction to promote the integration of shepherding in the 21st century world.

The programme of actions was developed along three lines: new products, research and innovation and, finally, the *Latxakluba* supporters' club.

The initiative was the brainchild of a group of diverse professionals. The funds raised thanks to the *Ardilatxa* merchandising products—the widespread registered trademark image of the Basque native *latxa* sheep breed—kick-started the development of the programme outlined above.

New Products

A series of new products was designed, related to shepherding as well as to the image of the *latxa* sheep. The launch of these new products had two aims, the first being diversification of the production and the second, obtaining funds for the innovation project. Some of the new products were part of the main theme, food, while others belonged to a new supplementary line of work.

The food theme was developed with the collaboration of the research department of the Gastronomic Sciences Faculty of Mondragon University and the Leartiker Institute for Food Research and Technology. These partners contributed to the design and testing of a new type of *latxa* sheep cheese with characteristics distinct from the widespread *Idiazabal* cheese, and to the development of new food products, such as creams, sweets, ice-creams, pickles,

stuffed foods, ready meals...

The supplementary theme was based on the *Latxatour* programme of tourist visits to sheep farms. During the tour, visitors could not only get acquainted with the lifestyle and production methods of shepherds, but could also experience some elements of it through interactive games, ancient shepherding techniques and so forth. On top of that, visitors could acquire a wide range of products made by shepherds and their neighbours, at a dedicated shop in each farm. All the farms involved in these visits were also part of a micro-museum network.

As far as the trademark was concerned, the original image was redesigned to strengthen its local identity and a new range of merchandising materials was made by local artisans and firms. T-shirts created by the local clothing firm Ternua were made of *latxa* wool microfibres, and complied with the GOTS regulations (Global Organic Textile Standard), which guarantees that at all stages of production ecological and social standards are met.

Also in collaboration with local craftspeople and artists a very original advertising device was created: *Latxiñe*, the biggest sheep in the world. *Latxiñe* is a huge toy *latxa* sheep onto which kids can climb. They go in through the sheep's mouth, down a sledge and out the rear. Together with this sheep, a whole range of imagined and real characters was created in order to colour the pastoral universe, wolf and all. Tales and dances were acted out to present the shepherd's life and praise its ethos.

This troupe of characters led to the organisation of *Latxaldia*, a great *latxa* sheep festival in which 28 different activities took place during four days in Bilbao in 2012. These included a parade, which took the giant sheep from one school to another, allowing kids to enjoy plays, take part in games and work on a learning unit on shepherding.

During the festival a market of shepherd's products was put up, authorities and the press were received, famous chefs cooked shepherd menus, documentary and fiction films were shown, conferences and roundtables were held, a think-tank was created, singing sup-



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pers took place, dance groups and choirs performed, a shepherd's fashion show was put on, there were cheese, shepherd cuisine and rock and roll contests, exhibitions of shepherd sports, and so on. This festival was a total success in terms of participation of the public.

Research & Development & Innovation in shepherding

The funds raised and the atmosphere created with the actions above made it possible to launch an innovative research programme designed to conceive and experiment a new management model that was named "bio-shepherding".

For the conception of this model, collaboration agreements were signed with various scientific institutions and a series of experts took part in the programme. Some of them came from the academic world (universities, technology centres, etc.), whilst others came from potentially cross-cutting sectors, with the intention that they would supply new perspectives to shepherding innovation. In addition, veteran shepherds and alumni of the Shepherds' School got involved in the programme, as well as consumers' representatives. All in all, a group of 50 people got together to create a think-tank, working first remotely and then gathering for an intensive 4-hour session during the *Latxaldia*.

This shepherding think-tank's mission was to obtain and analyse the most relevant data related to the sector, to

diagnose its future potential and to design a cooperative strategy that would place the sector in a new competitive position in 21st century society and markets.

From those meetings and the consensus which emerged, a strategy arose and an operating programme was agreed upon for the following three years. The operating programme set out with the creation of a group linking together 19 innovation laboratories and offering a series of specialised training courses on production diversification in shepherding, framed by the new management model, with scope for internationalisation.

Latxakluba

Progress achieved on both lines of work, new products and research, made the public's interest grow. Curiosity to get to know who was behind the initiative built up, as well as the will to contribute to this new bio-shepherding cause. To address the growing demand, the *Latxakluba* Supporters' Club was created, where new friends of the *latxa* sheep could participate, chipping in according to their wishes, and gaining privileges in return. Basically, through the acquisition of any one product from the catalogue the customer was invited to join the club, just by giving their e-mail or mobile number.

Latxakluba proposed playful activities linked to the world of shepherding and social networks, in order to make the project more popular. For instance, a jumping contest was celebrated in

which participants had to wear their GOTS T-shirts, jump at an emblematic setting of their choice, take a picture of their jump and upload it so that it could be published at the Club's website. Prizes were shepherd's products packs and a weekend stay at a farm, helping a shepherd out.

Conclusions

For two years the project ran successfully, with considerable participation from professionals and the general public. It was economically self-sustainable thanks to all the *Ardilatxa* merchandising sales. Unfortunately, personal circumstances of members of the core team slowed down its full implementation thereafter.

However, some positive conclusions may be drawn from the experience:

- There is scope for innovation in shepherding and there is public interest in it, who are likely consumers at the same time.
- Innovating initiatives may stem from a small group of independent entrepreneurs.
- Innovation does not necessarily require a big budget.
- An innovating programme may be self-sustainable through the development of its own trademark.

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Defending HNV from the dangers of single species approach: a Romanian case study

In the period 2007-13, Romania had a broad and successful HNV grassland agri-environment scheme. It was not perfect, of course. Eligible areas were defined as grasslands in communes with more the 50% permanent pasture. There were errors but for a large scheme, with over 1.2 million hectares entering the scheme out of the over 2 million potentially eligible hectares of grassland, it was necessary to simplify design.

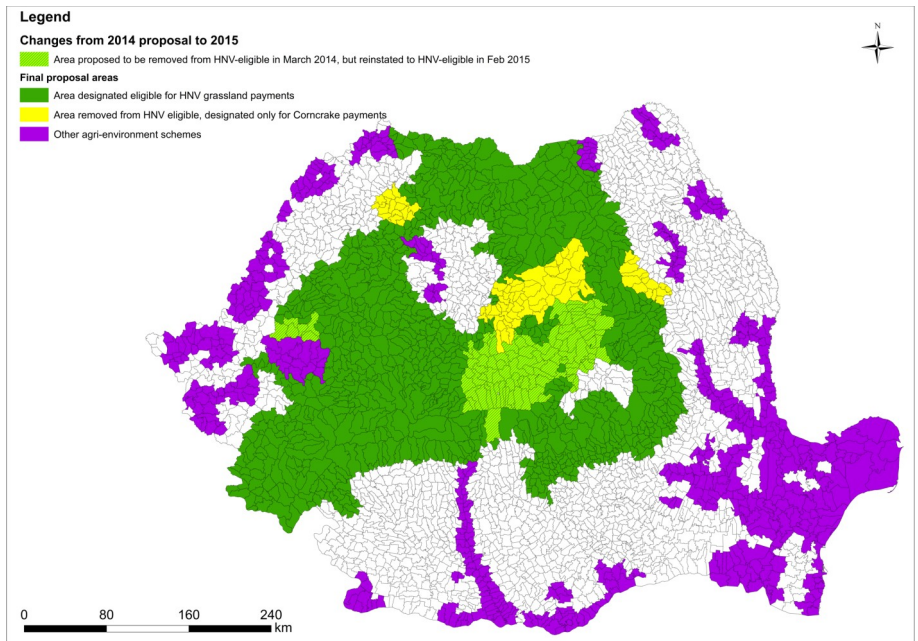
Payment rate was initially the same for pasture as for hay meadow, which created a perverse incentive to convert meadow to pasture, since pasture has lower management costs: but we worked with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) to give a higher payments for hay meadows, from 2012 onwards.

HNV-friendly agri-environment measures have now suffered a major setback. During the final drafting of Romania's new RDP in 2014, the Romanian BirdLife NGO worked with the MARD to increase species-targeted measures, without consultation with other conservation NGOs. As a result, 160,000 ha of HNV grassland have been removed from eligibility for HNV payments: they are now eligible only for a Corncrake measure which is a threat to HNV farming systems and associated species including the corncrake, as we shall explain below. It is ironic that this was instigated and supported by a conservation NGO.

The historic situation

Romania is a hotspot for corncrake in Europe. For hundreds of years, there have been no controlled mowing dates, but sporadic mowing all summer, beginning in late May and continuing until September, linked to small-scale ownership and low mechanisation. From 2007 onwards, HNV grassland payments supported mowing from 15 June under 600 m, and from 1 July above 600 m. These dates are not as late as the corncrake's theoretical requirements, but there is no evidence of falling corncrake numbers.

Evidence suggests that current man-



Proposed and final changes to agri-environment payments in Romania. The yellow and light green areas were all originally proposed for the destructive Corncrake measure: 500,000 ha. This was reduced on lobbying to 160,000 ha (yellow area).

agement is not a threat to the corncrake. The threat (not only to corncrake, but to a whole suite of species associated with the HNV grasslands of the area) will come from *changes* in current management such as more mechanised mowing, earlier mowing and silage making, draining of wet meadows. To prevent these changes we should aim at supporting the survival of small-scale farming communities and associated mosaic management.

Policy-making in 2014

In the final stages of the drafting of Romania's new RDP, the Romanian BirdLife NGO proposed that 500,000 ha of HNV grassland lose eligibility for the HNV package, and be eligible only for a Corncrake package. This area was reduced as a result of lobbying, but it still covers 160,000 ha of HNV grassland, threatening traditional management, Habitats Directive hay meadows and associated species.

When we started to lobby against the proposed Corncrake measure, the MADR made it clear that expert opinion would only be taken into account if supported by published scientific re-

search. This was not so easy to find, compared to the species-based studies cited by the BirdLife partner.

We mention here two recent papers that proved useful. The first was *Resilience-Based Perspectives to Guiding High Nature Value Farmland through Socio-economic Change* (Plieninger & Bieling, 2013). This paper quotes a number of studies which demonstrate that the land-cover mosaics and diverse habitats generated by HNV are beneficial to many birds and invertebrates; and that in consequence, much of Europe's biodiversity, including species of global conservation concern such as the corncrake, is found on such farmland.

The second paper worth special mention was *Impact of land cover homogenization on corncrake in traditional farmland* (Dorresteijn et al., 2015). The paper describes studies in Transylvanian HNV farmland, and reaches interesting conclusions including:

a) Importance of maintaining mosaic landscapes; homogeneity is the enemy of biodiversity.

b) Delayed mowing regimes can be counter-productive, because they may result in the synchronisation of manage-

ment and thus homogenisation of vegetation height, which has negatively affected corncrakes elsewhere.

c) Traditional heterogeneous farmland has high conservation value for the corncrake, which were found to occur most frequently in arable land (36 calling males in the study), marginal elements (31), hay meadows (25), fallow land (13) and pastures (9). Arable land is therefore an important part of the corncrake-friendly mosaic.

d) To protect the corncrake in traditional farmland, policy measures should encourage continuation of mixed farming practices to maintain a diversity of land covers. Without such measures, homogenisation of the landscape will have negative effects on biodiversity in general, and on already threatened species such as the corncrake in particular.

e) Agri-environment measures in Romania pose a threat to the corncrake if they inadvertently encourage the conversion of hay meadows to pastures.

These conclusions are all very much in line with HNV-oriented ecosystems approach to conservation.

The Corncrake measure: a threat even to corncrake

The Corncrake measure represents a threat to the corncrake itself as well as to other Habitats Directive species and habitats. It is also entirely unsympathetic to traditional farming communities.

The HNV grassland package offers payments for grazing at under 1 Live-stock Unit (LU) per hectare; and higher payments for mowing by hand or light machine, after 15 June under 600 m, and after 1 July above 600 m. Because of small-scale ownership and lack of mechanisation, these first mowing dates do not trigger an intensive mowing campaign; mowing is carried out in small patches, staggered in space and time.

The Corncrake package, however, offers very high payments for hand mowing, in a pattern from inside to out, after 1 August, leaving 20% as an unmown field margin until after 1 September.

These exaggerated conditions threaten the future of the hay-based traditional farming system which has proved consistent with healthy corncrake populations; the low feed value of the hay will discourage continued hay production and will undermine economic viability of hay-based livestock systems.

To make matters worse, the same high payment is offered for grazing, at maximum 0.7 LU/ha (well above the maximum 0.3 LU/ha stipulated in the EU Corncrake action plan). This represents a major perverse incentive for destruction of hay meadows: many farmers will take the large payments, and manage their former meadows as pastures, rather than make late and low

-quality hay.

Early figures for uptake of the Corncrake package in 2015 in one Romanian Nature 2000 site, nominated partly for its high corncrake populations, confirm these concerns. Applications for pasture management were 2,545 ha. Applications for hay meadow management were ZERO ha. So this package has either made farmers convert meadow to pasture, or has left meadows without any mowing date controls since the conditions are unacceptable.

In a further obvious failure of design, the package is being applied across a mosaic landscape in which maximum 10% is potential corncrake habitat. The measure, at landscape scale, will severely distort historic management; this will threaten the survival of the mosaic landscape, from which many Habitats Directive species benefit including the corncrake.

To summarise: the package is unsuitable and destructive of biodiversity across 90% of the eligible area, which is not corncrake habitat. And even in the small area covered by the package in which corncrake actually or potentially breeds, the measure threatens the Corncrake and its habitat owing to faulty design.

Lessons

The fact that our lobbying to reverse this policy was only partially successful has taught us some lessons. First, the



HNV farmed landscapes in Transylvania are a European Corncrake hotspot. They are as likely to be heard calling in arable as in grassland.

Photo: Amanda Patton

need for more organised access to science-based arguments, which are not so easy to find in support of the extensive HNV landscapes of Eastern Europe.

Second, the need to identify clearly the targets of our information campaigns and lobbying. If we had enjoyed the support of the Romanian BirdLife partner, the MARD would not have continued with this proposal. It is clear in retrospect that our efforts at convincing the MARD, based on strong arguments, were rendered ineffective by the lobbying of the BirdLife partner in support of the package. It was they, not the MARD, whom we needed to convince in the first instance.

Based on this experience, we suggest the following key points:

1- HNV-oriented organisations work more closely with the BirdLife and other bird conservation NGOs so that they understand and support the inclusive, ecosystem approach offered by HNV.

2- Where species-specific packages are planned, they should be limited to identified habitats. In the context of Romania's biodiverse HNV farmlands, species-specific measures should be used very sparingly and only for individually identified parcels.

3- A Corncrake measure imposed at landscape scale, to exclusion of other HNV support measures, cannot be supported technically.

4- Maintain higher payments for hay meadows than for pastures.

HNV farming systems and farming communities have harboured an exceptionally wide range of species until now. We must convince a wider audience, especially conservation NGOs, of the ability of these farming systems to protect species and habitats including the corncrake.

If farming communities are driven by exaggerated species-based agri-environment requirements to abandon

their traditional land management, we will lose the biodiverse landscape including target species. How ironic it would be if this occurred as the result of the work of conservation NGOs. This is what is happening in Romania.

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After a long decline a little bit of hope - the story of common grasslands in Croatia

Few common grasslands have survived in Croatia, any more than in many other countries of South-East Europe. This happened mostly due to unfavourable historical circumstances and the omnipresent control of the State. Where they did survive, it was due to isolation or conditions which made them unattractive for intensive agriculture or other development.

The few examples which remain are themselves at risk of disappearing over the next few years, victims to economic and social pressures and the inability of national administrations to provide the needed support.

After the abolishment of the bondservant relations of the feudal times (in Croatia before the end of 18th century), parts of nobleman territories that were used as common grounds were segregated and organised as property or Land Communities (LCs). Based on their historic background, LCs were organised and named differently.

Most of them functioned as a voluntary community with individuals or families which could exercise certain rights on the common land – the right to graze on pastures, collect wood for heating and construction, acorn grazing

in woods, etc.

LCs had assemblies and management boards, members paid certain fees and participated in common works, etc. All involved had so-called “participation rights” and commitments which were mostly transferred by inheritance. In the later stage “participation rights” could be bought by outsiders, but at a high (discouraging) price.

Nationalisation was a key feature of post-war socialism/communism and in many countries in the region this was also extended to the land. In Yugoslavia, all lands belonging to pre-war common LCs were proclaimed “common”, in the sense of “the land of general public”, now owned formally by the State.

The nationalisation was conducted without compensation, and thousands of hectares became state-owned land. The best land was subjected to agricultural intensification or forestation, but in some areas this was not possible, so the communities continued to exercise their common rights *de facto*, sometimes to this day, in spite of the unfavourable circumstances. However, there is no future unless things change drastically.

Common grasslands in Croatia have been an unsolved problem for every administration since the country proclaimed its independence in the 1990s, remaining so even up to and after EU accession in 2013. Common usage could not be adapted to a system designed for individual owners: for instance, no claims in the Land Parcel Identification System were possible.

One of the positive steps forward was the proposed introduction of a participatory management model, following legal changes and the introduction of so-called “Pasturing communities” (Amendments to the Agricultural Land Act, 2011).

Pasturing communities were designed as a participatory mechanism in form of a cooperative designed to allow livestock graziers on protected pastures on common land to organise themselves locally and influence management decisions on their pasture.

It was a big step forward but the recognised weakness of the concept was the demanding administrative procedure, which involved several ministries, public bodies and institutions. Indeed, after the formal framework was passed in 2011, only one

community managed to fulfil all the administrative requirements.

The Agricultural Land Act changed again in March 2013, and pasturing communities were kicked out silently between two parliamentary readings due to political pressure exerted by individual grazers. The secondary legislation, the Ordinance on Conditions for Submitting Requirements and Criteria for the Lease of Communal Pastures, has never seen the light of the day, despite the fact that it should have been in place six months following the entry into force of the Act at the latest.

For readers unable to pave the way through the legal jungle, let's summarise the fate of common grasslands in Croatia at the end of 2015. They were not in the Land Parcel Identification System, so they were never eligible for CAP subsidies, but they weren't even eligible for national subsidies before Croatia entered the EU.

The few remaining extensive farmers are declining rapidly and it is questionable how many of them will live to see a positive end to this sorry tale. The traditional knowledge of extensive grazing regimes and

conditions is disappearing since there is no transfer of knowledge to the younger generations. Livestock herding carries a social stigma, being linked to the poorest members of society. Valuable habitats in which grazing is a key ecological process are left for succession and overgrown with shrubs and in many cases invasive plant species.

The 2013 Agricultural Land Act - in an unusually awkward solution - claimed that legal persons can be eligible for the lease of the common pastures only if they own the livestock. In that way it discriminated against pasturing communities (cooperatives), since they do not actually own the animals but only organise livestock owners.

After a long struggle, the newest Amendments to the Agricultural Land Act in 2015 finally accepted both options - individual users can claim their share in the common pasture according to the percentage of the total livestock he or she owns. And pasturing communities/cooperatives can claim the whole pasture and then regulate the relationship and division of subsidies with their internal rules.

After years of stall, there has finally been some progress in 2015. Approximately 4,000 ha of common grasslands have been inscribed in LPIS for the first time and the Common Pastures Registry is in the making. Since this is the first year for Croatia to fully implement EU rules for the subsidies the whole system will soon be tested on the field, and especially the controlling procedure and the implementation of cross-compliance.

There is a new Government in place from January 2016 and the Law revisions have been announced, including the Agricultural Land Act.

Meetings between livestock farmers, their organisations, municipalities and the Ministry of Agriculture, the Paying Agency and the Agricultural Land Agency show that there are many unresolved issues. Although apparently many challenges lie before us, we may conclude that for common pastures in Croatia, a new legal framework offers a little bit of hope after a long decline.

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Pasturing community members evacuating their cattle before the incoming flood

Photo: Šimo Beneš

The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism brings together ecologists, nature conservationists, farmers and policymakers.

This non-profit-making network exists to increase understanding of the high nature-conservation and cultural value of certain farming systems and to inform work on their maintenance.

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