

**PRESENTATION OF THE EECONET MANUAL
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**SPEECH OF DR A. MACHADO
President of ECNC**

Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor and indeed a pleasure for me to be able to say a few words today about the contribution the European Centre for Nature Conservation is making towards Europe's natural heritage by preparing a manual on design of ecological networks.

This manual and the idea of ecological networks are closely related to the theme of the European Nature Conservation Year: conservation outside protected areas.

In many ways, this theme reflects a radical change of thinking about nature conservation in Europe. Over the past decade, more and more people involved in nature conservation began to realize that conservation efforts were isolated. There were almost exclusively rooted in ecology; very much dedicated to protecting individual sites and species, and on not very friendly terms with the social and economic sectors.

Facts and figures supported the idea that something was not quite right. Many initiatives have been taken to safeguard the natural environment. However, Europe's nature was still in decline; habitats were being lost, species threatened. What was left of Europe's natural heritage, was scattered over the continent like green "spots". National parks and nature reserves were isolated in agricultural, urban or industrial surroundings.

Also, legislation and policy in Europe were insular, focusing on national or regional interests, with only a few elements holding everything together.

In today's scenario, two new words appear which indicate a broader perspective on conservation efforts. These words are biodiversity and sustainability.

Biodiversity is the term we use to indicate variability among living organisms: variety within species, but also between species and between ecosystems as a whole.

Biodiversity is less species-oriented, less site-oriented, and takes into account the entire complexity of the natural world.

The use of the word "sustainability" reflects the growing awareness that the natural environment is an integral part of our society. Natural resources contribute to prosperity in Europe - through economic sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism and forestry. If we want to continue to reap the benefits of natural resources, the natural environment has to be treated sensibly by **all** economic sectors. They too must take an active part in the conservation of nature. In other words - we realise that conservation is too important to be left only to the conservationists.

The new orientation for nature conservation has produced more than just new fashionable words. Initiatives are being taken to put the new ideas into practice. Minister Van Aertsen already mentioned some of these in his speech:

- First, the European Union issued its Habitats Directive, to conserve fauna, flora and natural habitats of EU importance. The purpose of this directive, is to establish a network of protected areas throughout the Community, and to maintain the distribution and the abundance of threatened species and habitats. This network of Special Areas of Conservation is called Natura 2000.
- In November 1993, an international conference 'Conserving Europe's natural heritage' was held in Maastricht during which the idea of creating a pan-european ecological network took better shape. If the green "spots" within Europe could be connected by ecological corridors - such as strips of woodland and river floodplains - **and** protected by buffer zones - like recreational parks and extensive agriculture, - the natural environment of Europe would be considerably enhanced and much more resilient.
- Next, the Council of Europe took the initiative to develop a Pan European Strategy for Biological and Landscape Diversity. It attempts to set common goals for nature conservation in Europe. It especially focuses on a *coordinated* European response to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity, and on integrating biodiversity considerations into policy and practice of the economic sectors. In this way industry, agriculture, tourism, forestry and fisheries are actively involved in preserving the natural resources *and*

the natural environment.

- Lastly, the European Environment Agency established a Topic Centre for Nature Conservation. The topic centre will provide the data and the scientific background to help the European Union develop a coherent policy for nature conservation.

In 1993 a new organisation which is closely involved with many of these initiatives was born....the European Centre for Nature Conservation, of which I have the pleasure of being the President.

ECNC is a Europe-wide network of organisations involved in research, policy development or policy analysis in agriculture, planning, social sciences, economy, forestry and ecology. Its main interests are (a) policy analysis and support to policy development, and (b) research into the socio-economic context of nature conservation. We aim to translate research into policy. Ethics without action is pure aesthetics.

It is no coincidence that the headquarters of ECNC are located on the campus of Tilburg University. The Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries, the province of Noord Brabant, the city of Tilburg and the University made it possible to establish the ECNC.

Although still a young organization ECNC has already been involved in many of the previously referred to initiatives:

- ECNC was asked by the Council of Europe to develop the Strategy for Biological and Landscape Diversity, and is helping prepare the way for acceptance of the Strategy at the Conference of European Environment Ministers that will be held in Sofia next month.
- ECNC is a major partner of the European Union's Topic Centre for Nature Conservation.
- Ever since the idea of the ecological network was first presented, ECNC has been involved in the preparations for establishing such a network both at the European level and at the national level.

Constructing the coherent ecological network for Europe is a step by step process. It will not, and cannot be done by creating one colossal, pan-European project that would be coordinated by a central body issuing commands and directives. Such a project would collapse in chaos and confusion and very little would be achieved.

In many European countries initiatives are being undertaken to establish

ecological networks on a national or local level. The way forward is to link these projects together, to share the same principles and goals.

Many member organizations within ECNC are actively involved in plans to set up ecological networks in their own countries. Some have done the preparatory research. Others are closely involved in ensuring the cooperation of regional authorities, local communities and landowners. Some give initial advice to networks in such matters as changes in river management and replanting woodlands. Others monitor the effects of the network on the natural environment.

I am happy to announce that before the European Nature Conservation Year is over, ECNC will have published a manual on designing ecological networks. This manual will make our expertise in ECNC's network available to national and regional policy makers throughout Europe.

It is our philosophy that in Europe we should benefit from each other's experiences, and that good science is only useful if it is translated into good policy. Therefore the Manual will contain examples of activities in different parts of Europe it will give a scientific analysis of the concepts of ecological networks and will show the way in which existing policies and conventions can be used to their full potential.

We hope that this manual will provide a coordinating framework for ongoing national and regional initiatives and will stimulate new projects so that in twenty year time, migrating wildlife, too, will have the benefits of a unified Europe without frontiers.

The Manual will be published in December 1995, as the European Nature Conservation Year draws to a close. Still, I hope and trust, that the Manual will maintain the creativity and enthusiasm created for nature conservation in 1995 and will help carry it into the next century.

Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your attention.

Ik dank u voor uw aandacht .