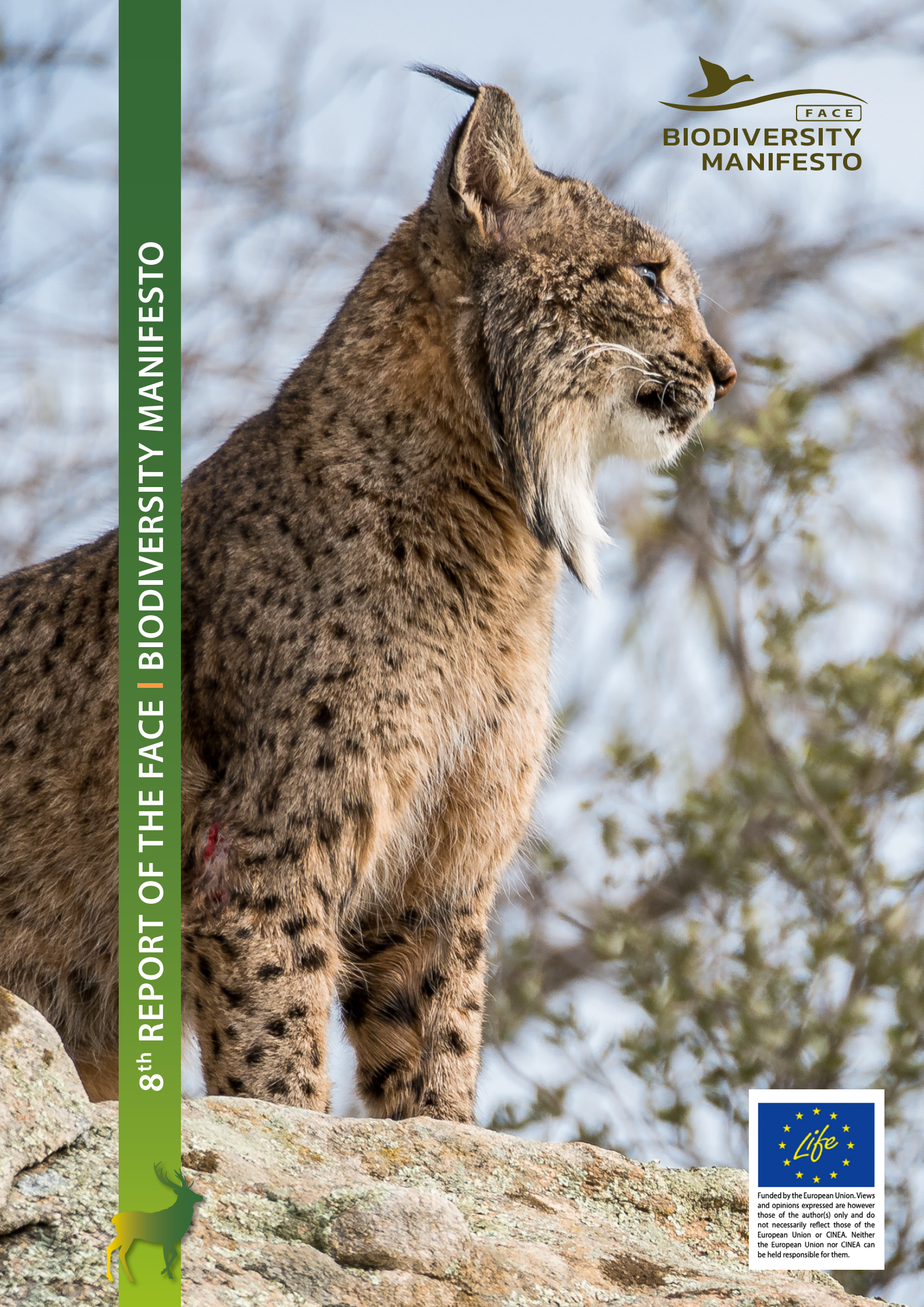

FACE

# BIODIVERSITY MANIFESTO

8th REPORT OF THE FACE | BIODIVERSITY MANIFESTO

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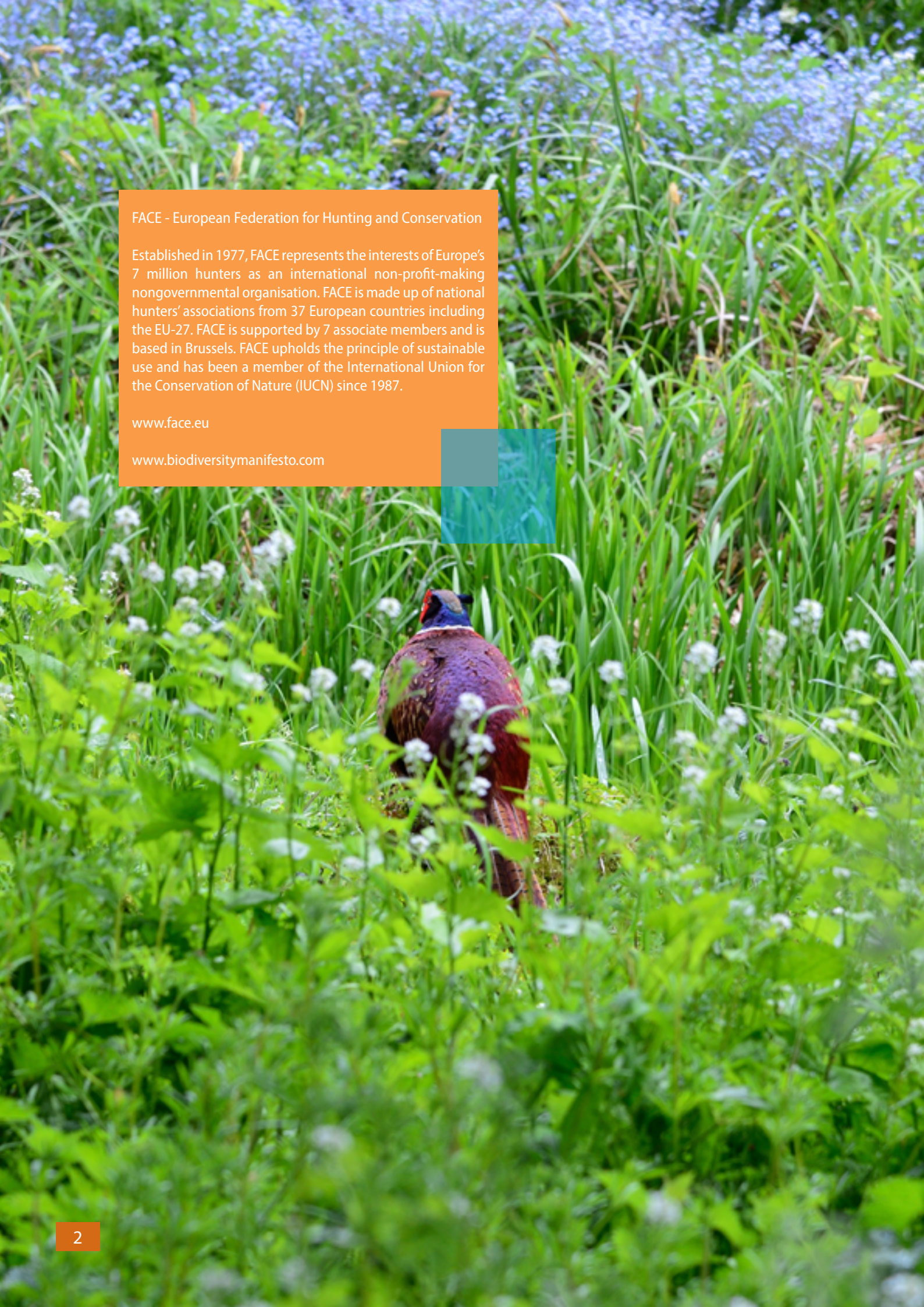

FACE - European Federation for Hunting and Conservation

Established in 1977, FACE represents the interests of Europe's 7 million hunters as an international non-profit-making nongovernmental organisation. FACE is made up of national hunters' associations from 37 European countries including the EU-27. FACE is supported by 7 associate members and is based in Brussels. FACE upholds the principle of sustainable use and has been a member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 1987.

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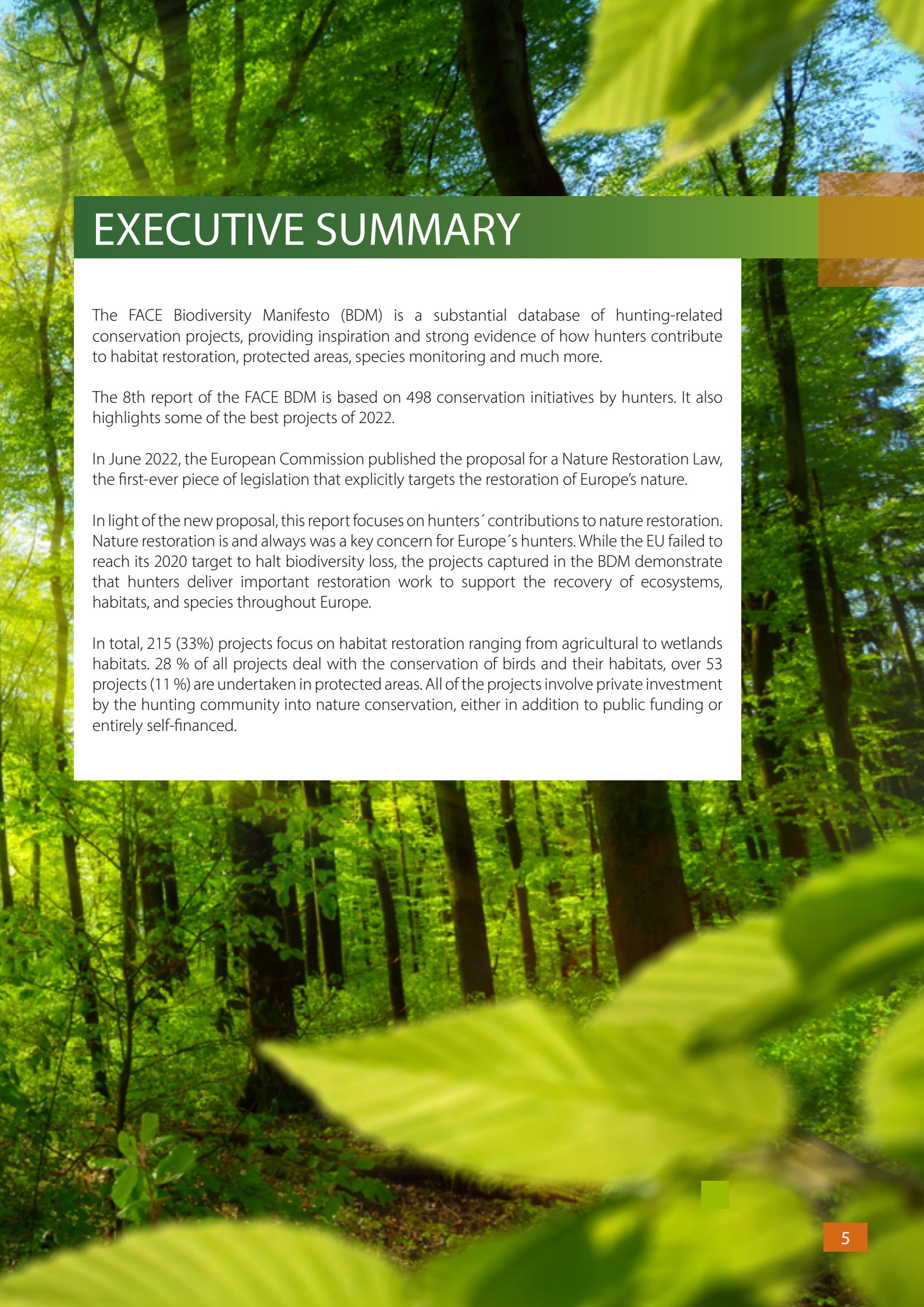
# HUNTING AND CONSERVATION

8th REPORT OF THE FACE BIODIVERSITY MANIFESTO

Published in 2022



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The FACE Biodiversity Manifesto (BDM) is a substantial database of hunting-related conservation projects, providing inspiration and strong evidence of how hunters contribute to habitat restoration, protected areas, species monitoring and much more.

The 8th report of the FACE BDM is based on 498 conservation initiatives by hunters. It also highlights some of the best projects of 2022.

In June 2022, the European Commission published the proposal for a Nature Restoration Law, the first-ever piece of legislation that explicitly targets the restoration of Europe's nature.

In light of the new proposal, this report focuses on hunters´ contributions to nature restoration. Nature restoration is and always was a key concern for Europe´s hunters. While the EU failed to reach its 2020 target to halt biodiversity loss, the projects captured in the BDM demonstrate that hunters deliver important restoration work to support the recovery of ecosystems, habitats, and species throughout Europe.

In total, 215 (33%) projects focus on habitat restoration ranging from agricultural to wetlands habitats. 28 % of all projects deal with the conservation of birds and their habitats, over 53 projects (11 %) are undertaken in protected areas. All of the projects involve private investment by the hunting community into nature conservation, either in addition to public funding or entirely self-financed.

# INTRODUCTION

To showcase how the hunting community helps to deliver conservation targets, FACE and its Members adopted the BDM in 2010, which reflects the active commitment made by European hunters to biodiversity conservation, helping to ensure the sustainability of hunting for future generations.

After its failure to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010 and again in 2020, the EU adopted its Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 with the nature restoration law at its centre.

The current proposal, which takes the form of a draft regulation, defines a series of concepts and sets legally binding targets for nature restoration. This means that Member States will have to draft their own National Restoration Plans and carry out the work needed to identify the necessary restoration measures to meet the targets and obligations. The law will scale up existing experiences of nature restoration measures and should build on the good work undertaken by Europe's hunters as outlined in the FACE BDM.

FACE has long advocated for habitat restoration as the most effective way to bring significant benefits to biodiversity, including for huntable species, which have been heavily affected by climate and land use change in Europe.

This report shows how rural actors, and more specifically hunters, will contribute to the implementation of the EU nature restoration law and other targets and actions set in the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030. The BDM offers a relevant framework for such an assessment as it is directly related to a number of key commitments of Europe's restoration agenda.

In order to provide an overview of hunters' contribution to the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030, 498 case studies (projects and initiatives) have been assessed. By mapping these case studies against the actions of the BDM and other indicators (such as the collaborations that occurred or the type of funds used), trends have been identified and are highlighted in this report.

It is important to point out that the 498 case studies used for presenting this overview cannot be considered as an exhaustive list of what is actually happening on the ground. In the coming years, more examples will be gathered thereby improving our understanding of the scale of conservation work by European hunters.

# HIGHLIGHTS

The following graph provides an overview of the initiatives undertaken by European hunters for biodiversity conservation. It shows the quantity and diversity of BDM-related actions that hunters implement. Most hunters' initiatives focus on habitat restoration, ensuring thereby the conservation of many animal and plant species while guaranteeing their sustainable use. This demonstrates hunters' commitment to conservation and their contribution to European nature policy goals, which ambitiously aim to prevent biodiversity loss by 2030. These initiatives include managing priority habitats and species, both within and outside Natura 2000 sites, combatting IAS, promoting farmers' uptake in suitable agri-environmental schemes under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and tackling illegal killing of birds.

## Proportion of case studies contributing to the categories of the BDM

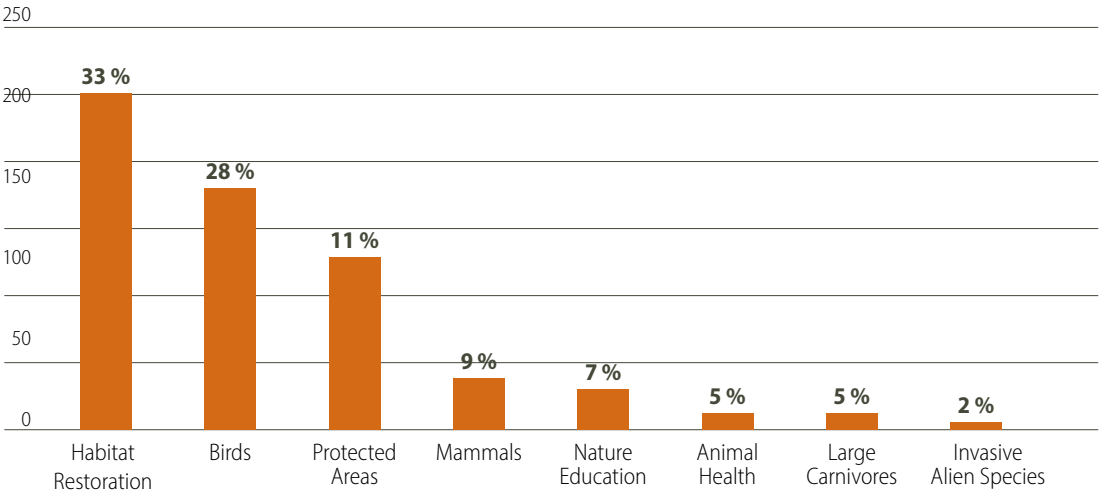



*Figure 1. Summary of the 498 initiatives undertaken by hunters for nature conservation.*

The actions conducted by hunters are diverse. They range from planting trees and hedges to educating children about living in harmony with nature. The following graph gives a summary of the main actions undertaken by hunters in the BDM projects.

## Main actions conducted by hunters

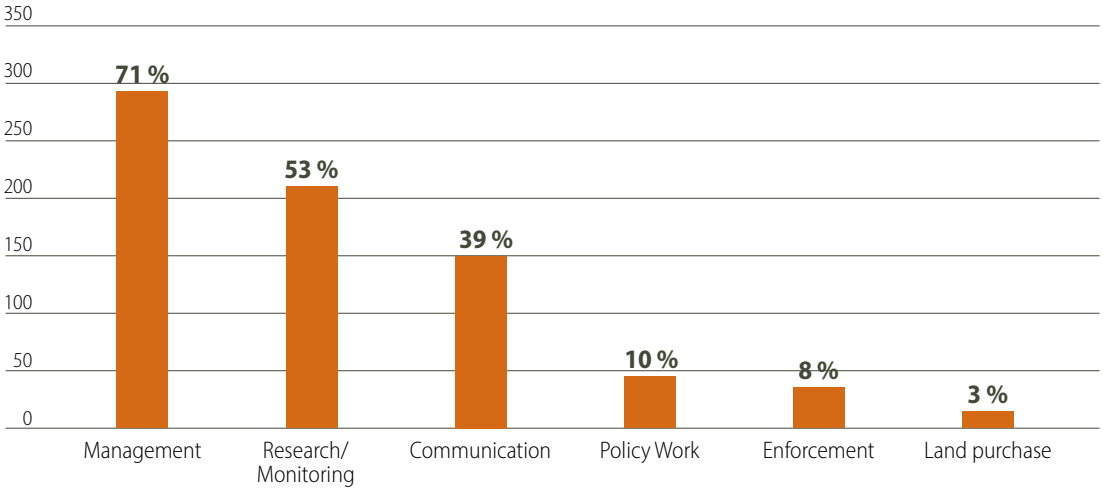



*Figure 2. Summary of the main actions undertaken by hunters*

In general, management (e.g. conservation and restoration) of habitats/species and research/ monitoring are the most common actions. These actions help to halt the deterioration of species' protection status and habitats covered by European nature legislation.

The 498 hunters' initiatives distributed across Europe are in many cases contributing to the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030. There is a need to stress that most of the actions conducted by hunters are undertaken on a voluntary basis and that hunters are investing a huge amount of their personal time into nature conservation. Some national studies have attempted to quantify this investment in monetary terms. For example, in the UK, nearly £250 million (*circa* €295 million) is spent on conservation activities by shooting providers each year.

# 1. HABITAT RESTORATION

Hunters have undertaken actions aiming to restore, improve or maintain habitats in 215 case studies

*"Protecting habitats is a fundamental means to conserve wild flora and fauna, thereby maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services. Ultimately is it through individual actions at grassroots level that a difference can be made."*

*FACE Biodiversity Manifesto*

This BDM category covers actions contributing to the key element "Restoring degraded ecosystems" of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 through the maintenance and improvement of habitats as well as the inclusion of sustainable agriculture and forestry principles.

**Types of habitats involved in habitat restoration projects by hunters**

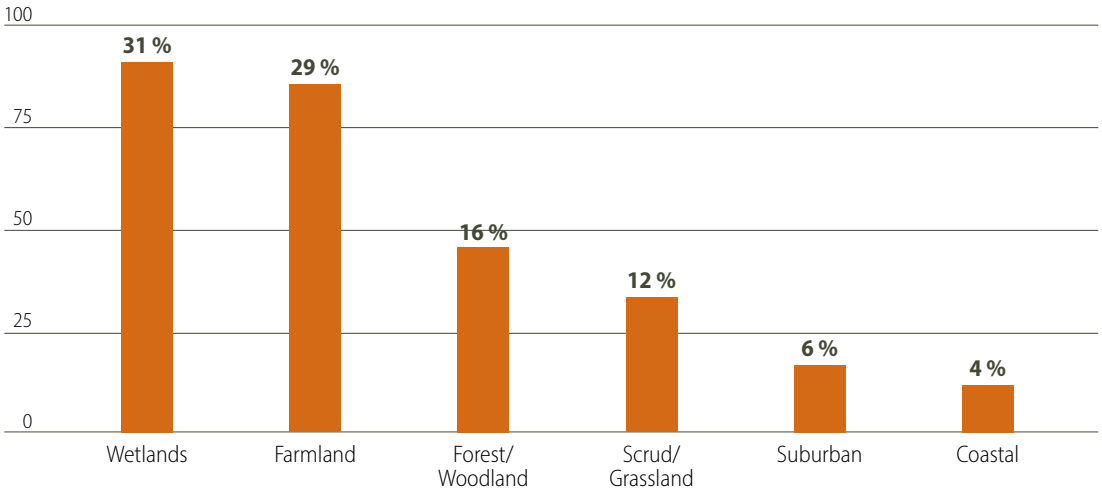



*Figure 3. Types of habitats conserved/managed in BDM projects listed under the category "Habitat restoration".*

In total, 33% of the 498 case studies are dedicated to habitat restoration with wetland and farmland habitats respectively resulting in 31% and 29% of all habitat types restored. This reflects the important value of biodiverse wetlands for hunters and their long-lasting involvement in conserving them. Moreover, hunters are often the very first group to notice the decrease of small game populations on Europe's farmlands, mostly due to intensification of agriculture. Therefore, hunters are also the ones to initiate actions against farmland biodiversity loss.

The projects focussing on wetlands typically relate to waterbird conservation actions such as the maintenance of open water sites and the creation of new wetlands for ducks, geese and waders. Although the EU is failing to restore degraded ecosystems, hunters all around Europe have been helping in the restoration of habitats.

The actions undertaken by hunters on farmlands mainly target three species: the Grey Partridge (*Perdix perdix*), the European Hare (*Lepus europaeus*) and the Red Grouse (*Lagopus lagopus scotica*). To combat the decrease of partridges and hares, numerous actions are undertaken such as convincing farmers to leave space for wild plants and flowers, creating and managing 'biodiversity' areas, providing food and water in difficult periods and managing generalist predators.

The majority of the BDM projects in the 'mountain' habitat type category related to the conservation of grouse species, typically Red Grouse in the UK and Ireland. For example, many Red Grouse projects in Ireland carry out habitat management (e.g. diversifying Ling heather), population monitoring, predator control as well as engaging with all interested stakeholders to ensure the long-term success of these projects.

Many projects also engaged with more than one habitat type. For example, it is typical for BDM projects that focus on the conservation of small game to work on both farmland habitats and woodland edges.

The following graph enables us to get a broader view of the range and frequency of habitat types in which hunters are engaged across all projects of the Biodiversity Manifesto.

### Types of habitats involved on hunters' project

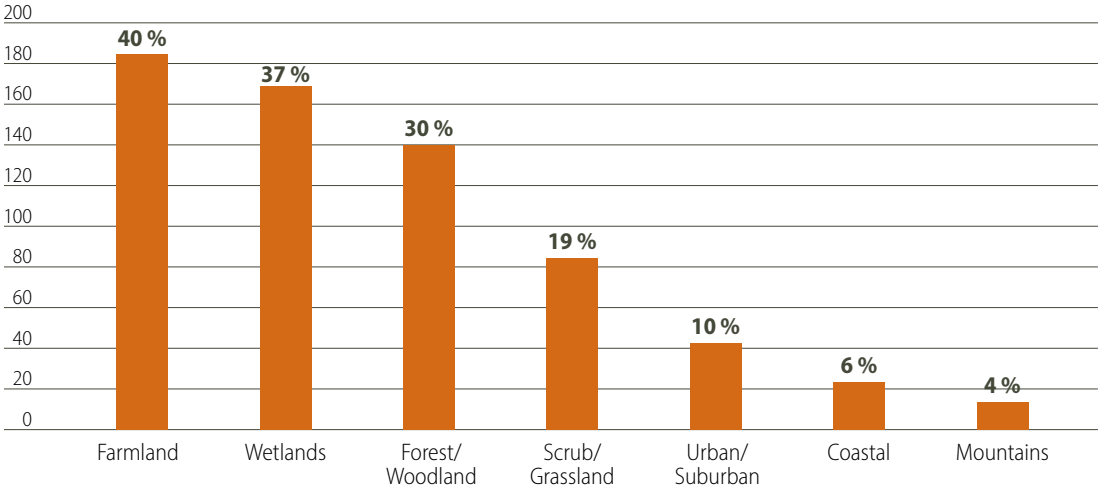



*Figure 4. Types of habitats involved in hunters' projects across the entire database.*

Across the database, farmlands and wetlands also are the two habitat types benefitting most from hunters' actions with as at least 40% and 37% of projects directed at those habitats respectively. Importantly, nearly 20% of projects focus on grasslands, a key habitat for many bird species, which is under pressure, mainly from agriculture intensification.

# **CASE STUDY** HABITAT RESTORATION

## Hunters' strong commitment to habitat restoration in South Tyrol, Italy

Habitat loss and deterioration is one of the main causes of many animal and plant species' decline. The most sensitive wild species, including many galliformes, are particularly affected. In the Alpine regions, habitat loss is mainly due to abandonment of pastures and reduced management of open areas resulting in reforestation.

For many years, South Tyrolean hunters have been implementing measures to preserve and improve natural habitats in their hunting grounds. With their commitment, South Tyrolean hunters make a valuable contribution to the long-term preservation of these species.

Some environmental improvement measures are carried out in cooperation with the relevant authorities. Since 2016, the Landscape Fund of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano has supported more than 25 project areas. The hunting community has contributed around 10,625 hours of voluntary work, of which 2,500 hours in 2019 alone, distributed across 40 projects.

In addition to the initiatives supported by the Landscape Fund, many hunting reserves initiated environmental improvement projects on their own initiative and implement them independently and without subsidies. The long-spent hours on these measures are not systematically recorded. In any case, the hunters are contributing to the conservation of important habitats and wildlife species.

# 2. SPECIES

Hunters have undertaken actions aiming to improve knowledge and manage species of interest in 279 case studies

*"As hunters, we will continue to work with positive incentives to conserve not only huntable species but all species."*

*FACE Biodiversity Manifesto*

Healthy and resilient ecosystems depend on all their components, both the species and natural conditions. The continued intensification of agriculture makes the need to conserve species and their habitats more urgent than ever. The new EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 aims to promote the maintenance and improvement of habitats as well as the inclusion of sustainable agriculture and forestry principles.

**Groups of species concerned by hunter's actions**

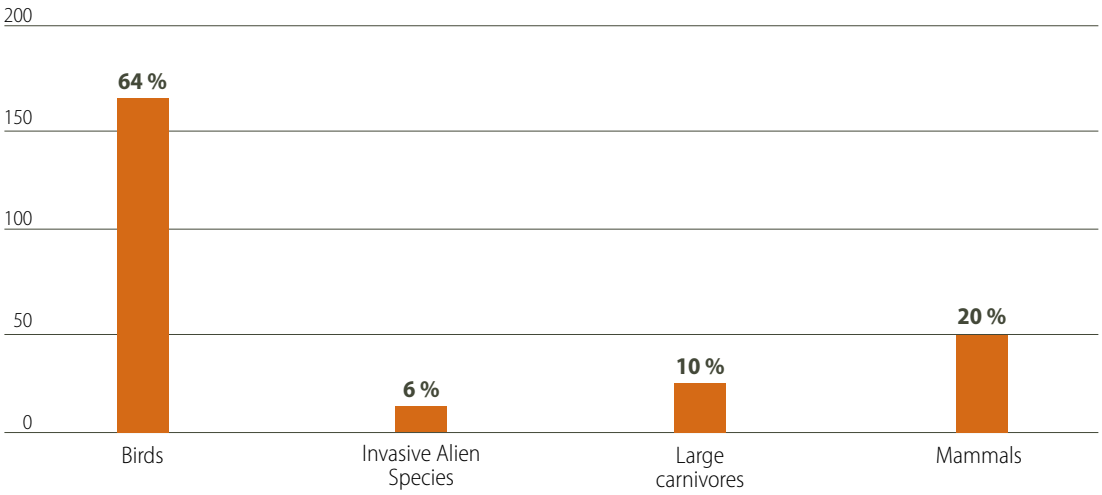



*Figure 5. Types of species engaged within BDM projects.*

Of the 498 BDM projects, 58% are focused on species conservation with the breakdown set in Figure 5. This high percentage is understandable as hunters are actively involved in conserving and managing a variety of species – typically referred to as 'wildlife management'.

Overall, most of the projects are focussing on bird species (64%), then mammals (20%) and large carnivores (10%), followed by hunter's work on managing Invasive Alien Species (6%).

# 2.1 Birds

These management projects can involve various approaches to bird conservation that range from re-establishing or managing species, such as the Grey Partridge *(Perdix perdix*), and habitat management, to tackling illegal killing of birds or controlling generalist predators like the Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) where required.

Indeed, many BDM projects that are focused on the conservation of ground-nesting birds also involve predator management. Similarly, most species conservation/management projects involve some form of monitoring, whether it involves documenting the number of breeding pairs during spring (before breeding) or monitoring in autumn to assess the levels of productivity to ensure a sustainable harvest over the hunting season.

As research is crucially needed to perform science-based management, some of the projects on species show ongoing research projects. For example, see below the case study on the Black-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus colchicus*).

## Hunters saving Greece's native Pheasant

While once distributed more widely in Greece and Bulgaria the last indigenous population of the Black-necked Pheasant (Phasianus colchicus colchicus), remains in Greece, at the Nestos River Delta. This population has not been genetically impacted by released pheasants and, accordingly, the practice is prohibited in the area (Paralikidis et al., 1997). Declines are thought to have started since the 1960s due to a loss of habitat (GWCT, 2017), until twenty years ago, when the population was estimated at 120 birds (GWTC, 2022) and during the 2003-2012 period, the population was estimated at 100 – 250 birds (Sokos & Birtsas, 2014).

Despite a prohibition of hunting dating from 1923 (Sokos & Birtsas, 2014), saving this population from extinction has been one of the missions of the Hunting Federation of Macedonia & Thrace (KOMATH) since many years. In this context, they established a 6-year partnership in 2016 with the World Pheasant Association (WPA) and the UK-based Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT). The project aimed at increasing and stabilising the population in the Nestos Delta, through increased public awareness, better understanding of predation and habitat management. Thanks to their hard work, it now appears they managed to stabilise the population at around 250 individuals.

To monitor the population, the KOMATH is carrying out counts in spring. Doing so, they built an unbroken dataset since 2003 and last year, 87 male territories were identified which is up 40% since 2003. This expansion of territories probably is a result of the applied habitat improvement measures.

Indeed, because the main driver of the species' population decline is the loss of habitat, largely due to the agriculture intensification, KOMATH has been active on the ground to improve habitat quality. Most of the work focuses on woodland improvement, as the agriculture is extensive and small scale in the area, with a mosaic of crops that suits the Black-necked Pheasants. Therefore, they work on managing areas of scrubby growth for the broods to forage for insects, creating gaps in the forest canopy and enhancing the woodland edge.

Game wardens of Greek Hunting Federation participating in the habitat management of the Nestos Delta for the native pheasant population. In addition to habitat loss, various pressures are affecting this population, including predation which takes a considerable toll on the birds as good populations of predators are found in the Delta such as the Wildcat (*Felis silvestris*), the Beech Marten (*Martes foina*) and the Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*). Raptors and sheep dogs are also considered as a threat (Sokos & Birtsas, 2014). Moreover, Wild Boars (*Sus scrofa*), corvids and gulls also predate pheasant nests (Paralikidis 2005). To improve knowledge on predation of the population, camera traps were set on fake nests and the footage revealed that none of the nests survived 25 days and that the main predators of eggs and chicks are the Wildcat, feral cats, Wild Boar and Golden Jackal. Managing these predators in the area remains a crucial challenge in the conservation of the Black-necked Pheasant population.

As the evidence suggests the greatest limiting factor on population growth is predation, the biggest threat to the long-term survival of the subspecies may end up being the reluctance of policymakers to grant licences for the control of predators.

In July 2022, the Greek Ministry of Environment provided KOMATH with an official licence to continue the study of the Black-necked Pheasant and its predation in the Nestos area, and in other areas in Northern Greece as the next step would be trying to build resilience into the population by establishing colonies in other suitable areas, once the population size allows it. As a population collapse could mean the extinction of the last indigenous population of Black-necked Pheasant in Europe, the longstanding and dedicated work carried out by the Hunting Federation of Macedonia & Thrace (KOMATH), which is a member of Hellenic Hunters Confederation, is of paramount importance and already delivered great results for the conservation of the species.

Each site is about 500 hectares with terrain ranging from arid mountains to low-lying farmland. In the hills, work parties are restoring the scrubland favoured by the birds and in lowland areas farmers have been encouraged to create habitat in field margins such as new hedgerows, grass strips and beetle banks. Fundación Artemisan together with some regional governments finds funding for these measures through agri-environment grants and helping landowners with the application process.

## 2.2 Large Carnivores

Hunters have been and always will be key players in the conservation and management of large carnivores in Europe. FACE promotes the importance of hunters in the conservation, management and monitoring of large carnivore populations across Europe, thereby contributing to the important collection of data on reproduction, distribution and density of large carnivores at regional and local levels. This facilitates their conservation, enhances coexistence and guarantees that hunting of large carnivores is sustainable. Many FACE members are engaged in the management and monitoring of large carnivores and their habitats in the field as demonstrated by the case study below.

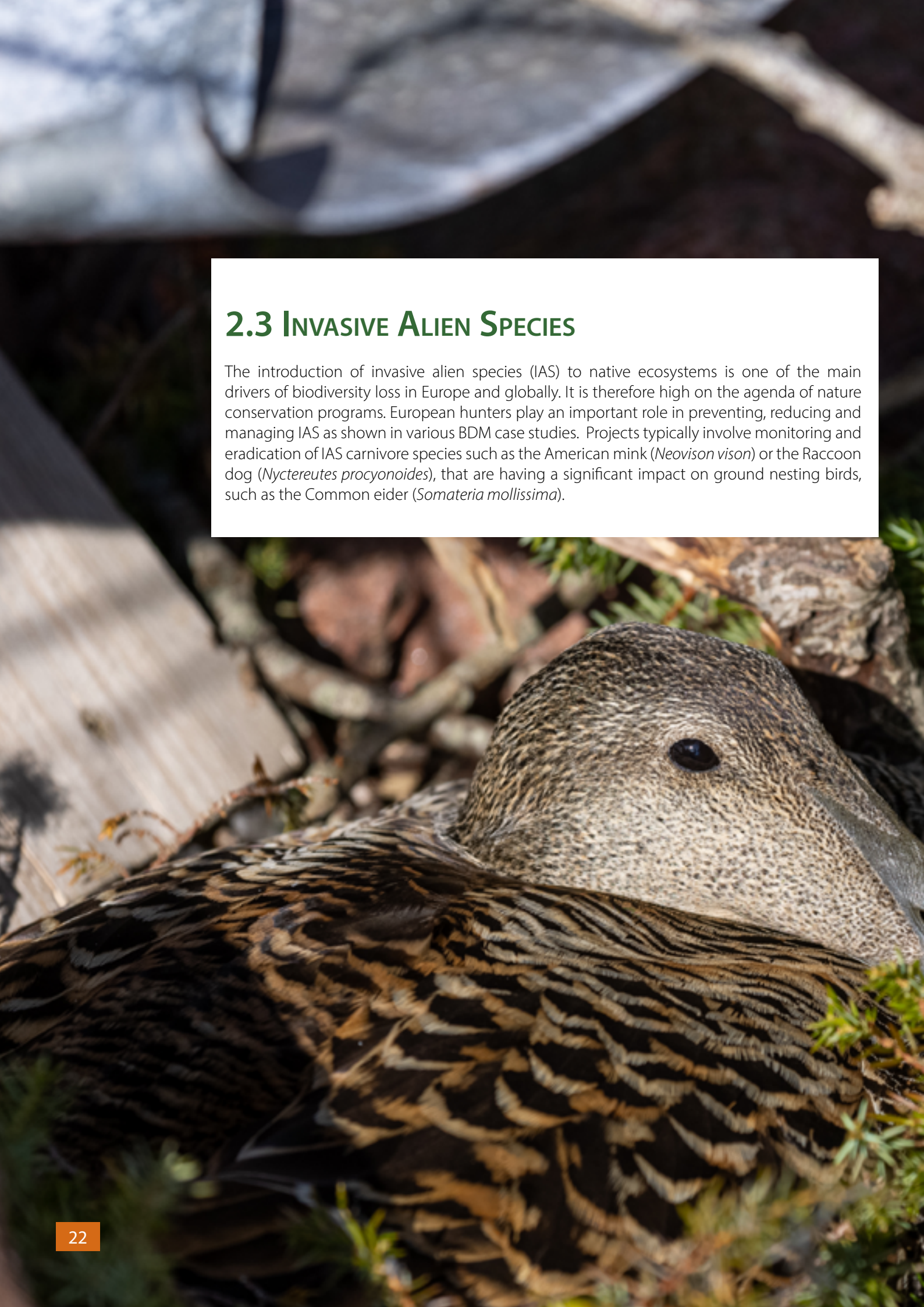
## Hunters support Iberian lynx recovery in Spain

Hunters and game managers are key partners in the LIFE LynxConnect project which supports the recovery of the Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) on the Iberian Peninsula. Hunters are contributing to the establishment of Lynx territories on their hunting grounds by managing the habitat of the wild rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) which is the main source of prey for Lynx. Many females choose hunting grounds for breeding, with outstanding anecdotes such as the birth of six kittens in a private land in La Carolina (province of Jaén).

Through the Fundación Artemisan, a non-profit association aiming to promote wildlife conservation and sustainable hunting through research, communication actions involving public awareness raising targeting hunters and game managers are being developed. The aim is to strengthen hunters´ involvement in the recovery of Lynx, but also to show the value and conservation efforts conducted by them.

Artemisan produces media content with informative, educational and positive messages, aiming to make Lynx welcome on the hunting grounds. Face-to-face talks and informative sessions with hunters, ground managers and landowners are taking place in several regions. In this communication strategy, it is highlighted that Lynx reduce the presence of mesocarnivores (such as Red fox and Egyptian mongoose), which results in more rabbits, partridges and non-game species that may be predated by foxes, mongoose and others.

Many hunters and managers are calling the Lynx, the "gamekeeper" thereby appreciating and recognizing the Lynx´ role as an apex predator in Iberia´s native ecosystems.



## 2.3 Invasive Alien Species

The introduction of invasive alien species (IAS) to native ecosystems is one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss in Europe and globally. It is therefore high on the agenda of nature conservation programs. European hunters play an important role in preventing, reducing and managing IAS as shown in various BDM case studies. Projects typically involve monitoring and eradication of IAS carnivore species such as the American mink (*Neovison vison*) or the Raccoon dog (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*), that are having a significant impact on ground nesting birds, such as the Common eider (*Somateria mollissima*).

## Friends of the Eider: Conservation project for the Common Eider in Finland

Friends of the Eider is a conservation project for the Common eider in their breeding grounds in the Åland archipelago. The project started as a result of the heavy decline in the population during the last decades. It is run and administrated voluntarily by local hunters. These methods are a mix of traditional management efforts combined with latest research on variables that drive the Eider population decline. Based on thousands of voluntary hours, the project ensured 24/7 surveillance to avoid predation on nesting females and ducklings and the making of around 500 Eider shelters. The rigorous management of IAS such as the Raccoon dog and the American mink is also essential to protect the species.

The results show great success as the Eider's breeding success increased from 31 nests where brooding succeed for the breeding season 2020 to 113 nests for the breeding season 2021.

# 3. PROTECTED AREAS

Hunters undertake actions related to management and awareness raising about protected areas in 259 case studies

*"The importance of Protected Areas for nature and biodiversity cannot be overstated; in particular, the Natura 2000 network provides an excellent basis for nature conservation in the EU. This Network also benefits from the fact that it is based on the principles of conservation and sustainable use, ensuring lasting coexistence with human activities and biodiversity conservation."*

*FACE Biodiversity Manifesto*

One key element of the new Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is the improving and widening of Europe's network of protected areas. This BDM section highlights the important conservation actions undertaken by hunters in protected areas and more specifically in the Natura 2000 Network. As already stated in the "Guide to Sustainable Hunting under the Birds Directive" (EC, 2007), there is no general presumption against hunting in Natura 2000 sites.

In the Biodiversity Manifesto, many projects from all case studies across the different categories are taking place in protected areas.

Hunters undertake actions related to management and awareness raising about protected areas in 259 case studies.

**Status of areas where hunter's projects takes place**

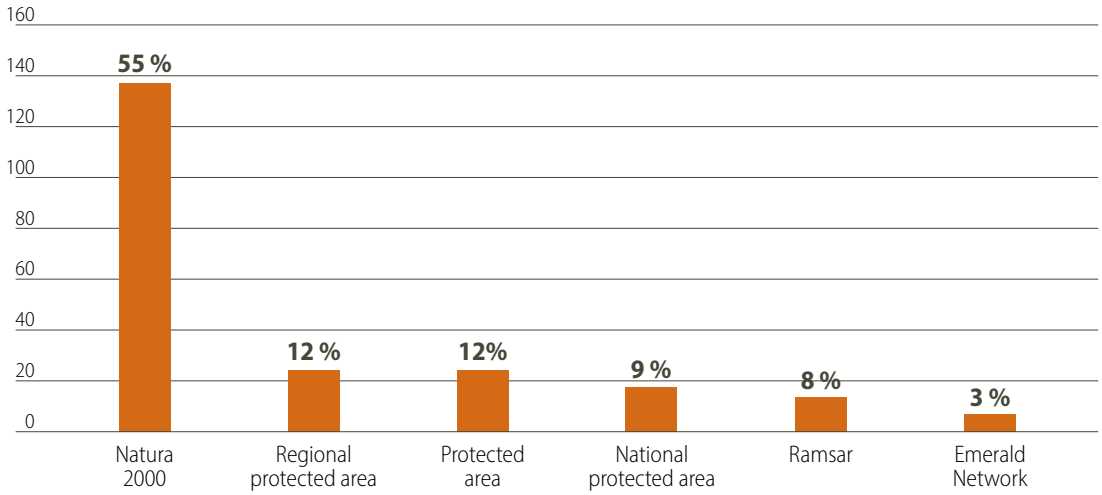
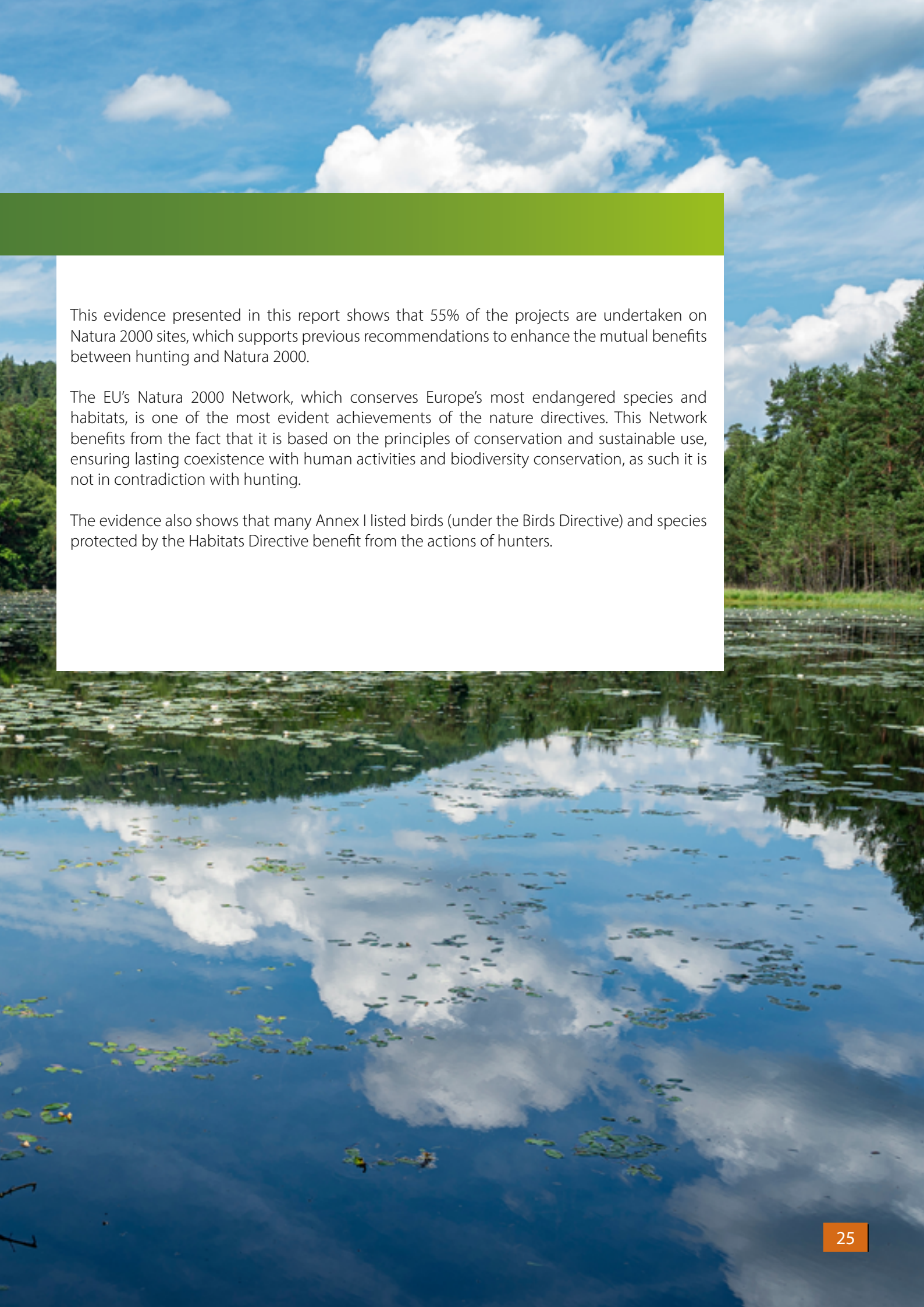



*Figure 6. Status of areas where BDM projects are undertaken.*



This evidence presented in this report shows that 55% of the projects are undertaken on Natura 2000 sites, which supports previous recommendations to enhance the mutual benefits between hunting and Natura 2000.

The EU's Natura 2000 Network, which conserves Europe's most endangered species and habitats, is one of the most evident achievements of the nature directives. This Network benefits from the fact that it is based on the principles of conservation and sustainable use, ensuring lasting coexistence with human activities and biodiversity conservation, as such it is not in contradiction with hunting.

The evidence also shows that many Annex I listed birds (under the Birds Directive) and species protected by the Habitats Directive benefit from the actions of hunters.

# CASE STUDY

## Irish hunters maintain critical mountain area for Red Grouse in protected area

The Mountain of Sliabh Beagh:
Sliabh Beagh is an important mountainous area shared between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The mountain covers over 3000ha and contains a number of protected area designations: Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), Ramsar wetland of international importance, National Nature Reserve (NNR) and Natural Heritage Area (NHA), in recognition of its importance for biodiversity.

Species Conservation:
For over 50 years, local hunters have helped to conserve the Red grouse population on the site. In general, the management is aimed at improving the ecological conditions for Red grouse, but a number of other species benefit. These management strategies typically include maintaining the distribution and diversity of heather quality, predator control, disturbance control, population monitoring, providing grit, removal of self-seeding conifers, conservation grazing with traditional Irish breed cattle and improving public awareness.

# CONCLUSION

The 8th Report of the FACE Biodiversity Manifesto shows the diversity of work undertaken by hunters to benefit nature restoration. The initiatives differ in terms of their size, target, location, type of action and duration but each of them shows that hunters are actively engaged in biodiversity conservation in Europe.

This report shows that hunters, in conjunction with a large group of stakeholders (public authorities, environmental NGOs, research bodies, landowners, farmers, foresters, institutions), are active in the nature restoration and conservation of a wide range of habitats and species in Europe. Most of the 498 case studies include actions engaging wetland and farmland habitats. These results are unsurprising given the decline of species due to the intensification of agriculture linked to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). All the projects captured in the BDM demonstrate hunters' commitment to contribute to EU nature policy goals, which ambitiously aim to prevent biodiversity loss by 2030.

**Contributing to nature restoration:**
The evidence presented in this report shows that 215 projects contribute to habitat restoration. Habitat restoration measures are important tools to fight biodiversity loss, climate change and further ecosystem degradation. Rural stakeholders such as hunters hold a lot of knowledge about local flora, fauna and ecosystems to guide and support restoration practices as demonstrated by the case studies in this report. Hunters input will be key in the development and implementation of national Restoration Plans.

## FACE's recommendations for the new EU Nature Restoration Law in light of the evidence presented in this report:

- FACE stresses that a strategic framework for the restoration of habitats and ecosystems requires priorities at sub-national level and the involvement of regional and local authorities as well as key stakeholders from an early stage in the planning process.
- As restoration requires a landscape-level approach, the role of stakeholders, including farmers, land managers and hunters, is key to develop workable and lasting conservation measures.
- As much restoration will take place on private land, the right incentives to promote community-based conservation must be provided to increase local acceptance and support by relevant stakeholders to make sure that restoration projects become success stories.
- To ensure that the EU Restoration Law can translate into successful local initiatives on the ground, it is important to recognise the contribution of hunters to the conservation of nature, including the restoration of habitats (e.g. creation and maintenance of wetlands and other natural features in the wider landscape).
- Enabling transformative change requires doing things differently. FACE requests the European Commission to give greater priority to tackling the major drivers of biodiversity loss and land degradation in a way that incentivises key stakeholders.

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Visit the FACE Biodiversity Manifesto website to have access at the 498 hunters' initiatives and many other documents:

**www.biodiversitymanifesto.com**

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**CONTACT DETAILS**

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