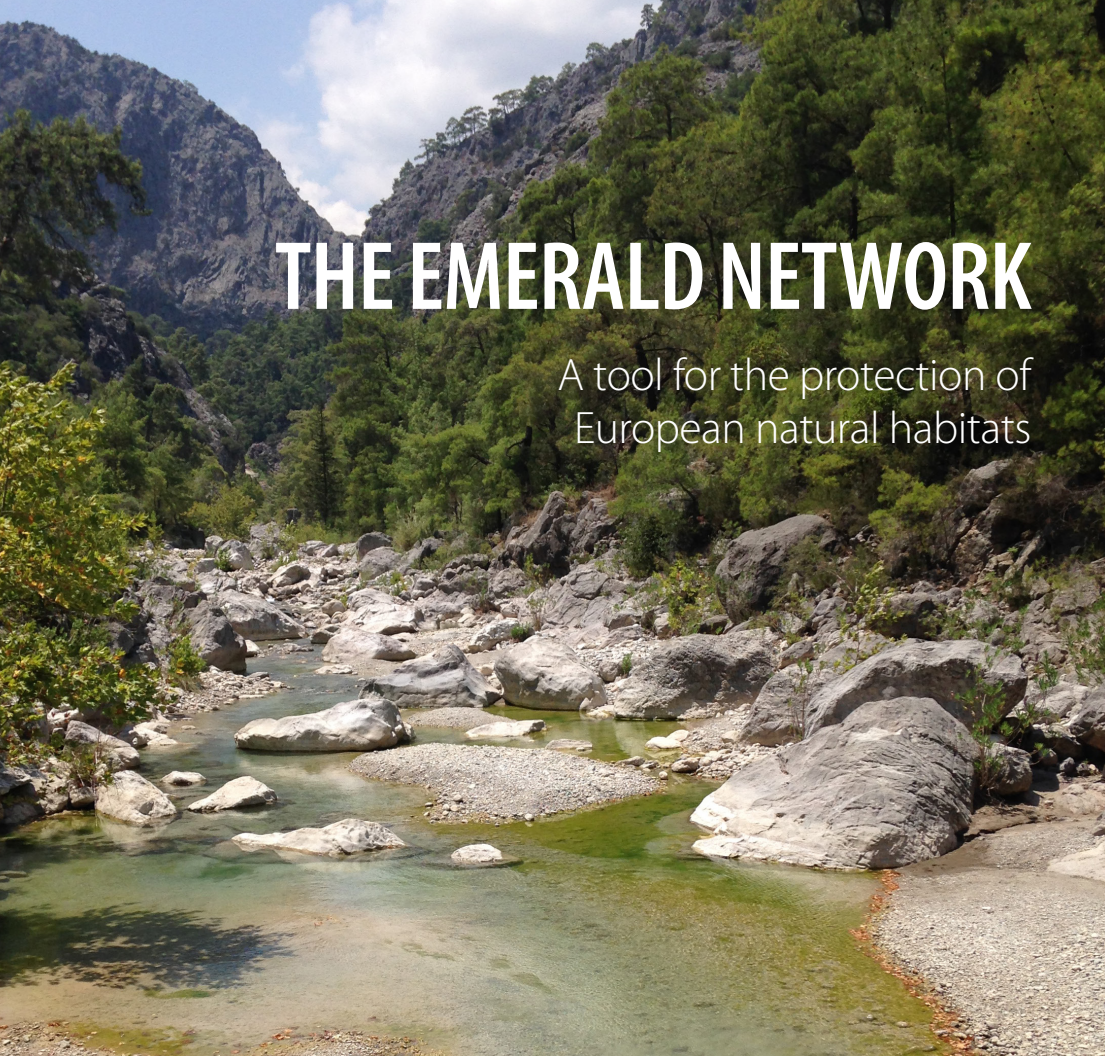


# THE EMERALD NETWORK

A tool for the protection of  
European natural habitats



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Funded  
by the European Union



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Implemented  
by the Council of Europe

# Why protect natural habitats?

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The pace of biodiversity decline is accelerating in Europe and worldwide. It is estimated that the current species extinction rate is between 100 and 1 000 times higher than the natural rate and much greater than the rate at which new species are discovered.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, 15% of mammals, 13% of birds, 37% of freshwater fish and 23% of amphibians in Europe are threatened with extinction.

Biodiversity constitutes a natural heritage that needs to be preserved and handed on to future generations, especially in view of its intrinsic value and the ecosystem services that it provides (for example, provision of food, maintenance of air quality, water purification, pollination or recreation).

Habitat break-up, pollution, overuse of natural areas and creation of artificial landscapes are among the major causes of biodiversity loss.

The conservation of natural habitats is thus an essential component to counter these phenomena, and therefore to protect wild flora and fauna.





## WHAT TOOLS FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATURAL HABITATS HAVE BEEN SET UP BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE?

— The Council of Europe has set up two general tools for the protection of European natural habitats:

- ▶ in 1965, the European diploma for protected areas, which is an international award granted to adequately protected natural or semi-natural areas of exceptional European interest and which are managed in an exemplary way;
- ▶ in 1979, the Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats, better known as “the Bern Convention”. The convention is a binding international legal instrument aiming to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats, as well as to promote interstate co-operation in this field.

— In 1989, contracting parties to the Bern Convention launched the creation of a special tool for the protection of European natural habitats: the Emerald Network.

### THE EMERALD NETWORK IN THREE FIGURES

**In 2015, the network covers:**

- ▶ **nearly 3 000 candidate or fully certified Emerald Network sites in 16 countries;**
- ▶ **almost 500 000 km<sup>2</sup>;**
- ▶ **an average of 11-12% of the national territories of the countries involved.**



## WHAT IS THE EMERALD NETWORK?

■ The Emerald Network is an ecological network made up of areas of special conservation interest (ASCIs).

### AN ECOLOGICAL NETWORK

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■ As an ecological network, the Emerald Network is a system of coherent interconnected areas that are subject to management, monitoring and reporting measures. Being developed within the framework of the Bern Convention, its objective is to ensure the long-term survival of the species and habitats of this treaty that require specific site protection measures (for example, the peregrine falcon or shifting coastal dunes).

### A NETWORK MADE UP OF AREAS OF SPECIAL CONSERVATION INTEREST

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■ The Emerald Network is made up of areas of special conservation interest (ASCIs).

■ These are areas of intrinsic value that have the potential to contribute to maintaining or restoring species and habitats to a favourable conservation status, especially:

- ▶ species which are threatened, endemic, migratory and strictly protected under the Bern Convention;
- ▶ threatened and exemplary habitat types as well as mosaics of different habitat types;
- ▶ migratory species which are a shared heritage of European countries.

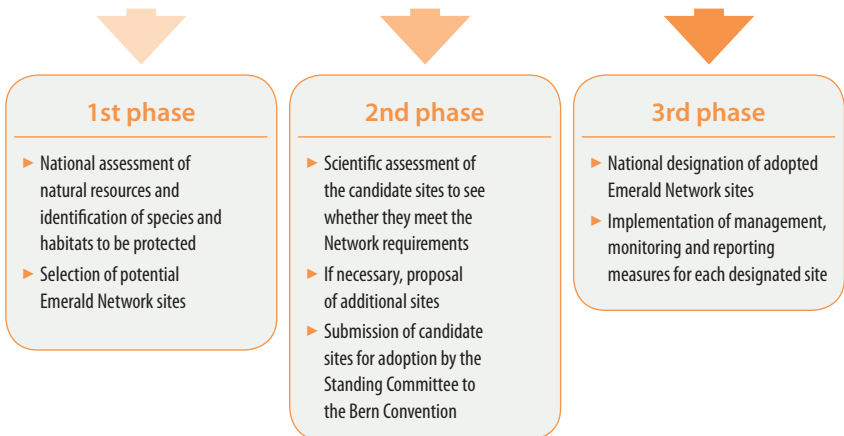
■ Designated by the countries which are contracting parties to the Bern Convention, the ASCIs are areas that are scientifically evaluated as meeting the species and habitats conservation objective criteria. This is the case when:

- ▶ species and habitats are represented well enough in terms of distribution range, diversity and specific conservation needs within these areas;
- ▶ the areas include significant proportions of habitat area and species populations compared with the overall national resources.

## HOW DOES THE EMERALD NETWORK WORK IN PRACTICE?

### PHASES OF THE CONSTITUTION PROCESS

— The constitution of the Emerald Network is a complex and time-consuming process. It is divided into three phases:



— The constitution of the Emerald Network, although divided into three phases, is a rather repetitive process. For example, insufficiency of lists of proposed sites, improvement of scientific knowledge or changes in nature could result in the need for new proposals and thus a return to the beginning of the process.

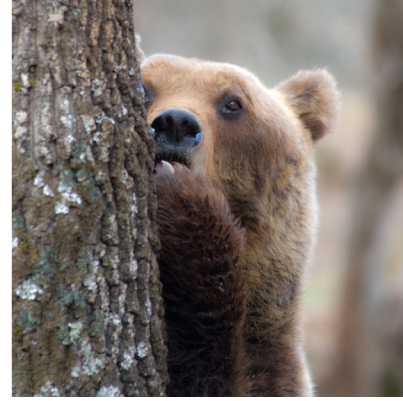
### EMERALD NETWORK IMPLEMENTATION CALENDAR

— In 2010, the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention adopted an ambitious calendar for the implementation of the Emerald Network. This calendar sets milestones and deadlines for the finalisation of the different phases of the network constitution process for each country.

— The overall objective is an operational launch of the Emerald Network by 2020.

## WHERE IS THE EMERALD NETWORK BEING SET UP?

— The Emerald Network is being set up in contracting parties and observer states to the Bern Convention. In 2015, these include the European Union (EU) and its 28 member states, 19 other European countries and four African states.



## THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MEMBER STATES

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■ The EU and its member states cover their obligations towards the convention and its Emerald Network through their own ecological network – the Natura 2000 Network.

■ For contracting parties that are member states of the EU, Emerald Network sites are those of Natura 2000 – these two networks being fully compatible with each other.

## EUROPEAN STATES NOT MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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■ The Emerald Network is being set up in Bern Convention contracting parties and observer states in the neighbouring areas of the EU.

■ The Emerald Network extends the European nature conservation standards outside the EU borders. Furthermore, its setting up supports candidate states for accession to the EU in preparing them for the implementation of Natura 2000 and therefore for joining the EU.

■ Today, 16 contracting parties and observer states to the Bern Convention are actively working on the Emerald Network's constitution. In Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus seven countries are targeted by an EU/Council of Europe joint programme which provides financial support to the setting up of the Emerald Network. This programme covers the period 2012-2016 and concerns Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

## AFRICAN STATES

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■ The extension of the Emerald Network to Africa is important for the conservation of migratory species. It can in particular contribute to reversing the negative trend in the conservation status of migratory species of European importance. It can also promote concerted actions to protect the genetic diversity of these species and their habitats.

■ The Kingdom of Morocco is one of the countries active in the setting up of the Emerald Network.

## CONTACT

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

The European Union (EU) is a unique economic and political partnership between 28 democratic European countries. Its aims are peace, prosperity and freedom for its 500 million citizens – in a fairer, safer world. To make things happen, EU countries set up bodies to run the EU and adopt its legislation. The main ones are the European Parliament (representing the people of Europe), the Council of the European Union (representing national governments) and the European Commission (representing the common EU interest).

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