

SEH News

Union gives strength: joint efforts of SEH and other NGOs for promoting biodiversity conservation in the framework of EU Directives and local actions

The main objectives of the European herpetological society “SEH – Societas Europaea Herpetologica” are to support scientific research and nature conservation in the field of herpetology, and the close collaboration among herpetologists, especially those of Europe (Statutes of SEH, §2.1). Among strategies to reach its objectives in matter of conservation, it became obvious that SEH should play a role at EU level in promoting biodiversity conservation within the framework of its directives. However, both the size of the Society and its specific focus in herpetology would make unrealistic calls for broad scale changes. Although directly focused to protect species or habitat or integrating some conservation components, the EU Directives remain imperfect in terms of nature conservation, often jeopardized by short-term economic objectives and even as inadequate responses to the climatic and emerging disease contexts. As a consequence, over the last three years, SEH, either directly or through its conservation committee, repeatedly joined several other NGOs as co-signatories in open letters addressed to the European Parliament:

- The Water Framework Directive (WFD): “Europe’s biodiversity depends on healthy freshwater ecosystems: Save the Water Framework Directive” on 6 December 2019.
- The Common Agriculture Policy (CAP): “Reform the CAP: harmful agriculture is destroying nature” on 5 November 2019.
- The European Habitat Forum and the Farm to Fork Strategy: “EHF open letter on the importance and urgency of adopting an

ambitious EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and Farm to Fork Strategy to guide the post-Covid 19 recovery process” on 29 April 2020.

- The Hydropower Manifesto, calling to stop supporting the construction of new hydropower plant on 26 October 2020.
- The EU Nature Restoration Law (NRL), planning the restoration of 15% of the EU land and sea areas on 14 December 2021.

Some open letters were co-signed by a few NGOs whereas the last campaign to promote the ambitious EU Nature Restoration Law, was co-signed by more than 150 NGOs. Close collaboration was particularly done with the support of IUCN, WWF and BirdLife International. Associating with numerous scientific societies gives a much better support and representativeness than acting independently. The open letter for the WFD already received an ear as it supported its persistence and improvement although the path is still very long and difficult. The actions were relayed by various medias (e.g., the Guardian) and linked with associated publications. In addition to these calls, SEH also supported local NGOs for specific actions in favour of the conservation of amphibians and reptiles (e.g., for legislative improvements on herpetofauna in France on 22 November 2019).

For future actions, SEH aims to give more weight to amphibians and reptiles in these calls and hope small size essential habitats for biodiversity such as ponds would also get more priorities. This could be made possible through more in-depth collaborations with other European NGOs but also through ways to become a stronger herpetological society. Large and broad membership is indeed a key in the visibility of societies and therefore for their success in defending targeted measures for herpetofauna. A more officialized collaboration

between national and regional herp societies, as part of the European Board of Herpetological Societies project initiated by SEH, is therefore a key to success for global action at EU level and stronger support to local actions. The first societies are currently joining the board, hoping most will do in a near future for a complete representativeness of European herpetologists.

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