

## Report

# Workshop at the 15<sup>th</sup> Carpathian Convention Biodiversity Working Group Meeting

Vienna, 18 June 2024, 11.15-12.45

Purpose: to introduce the participants to the current activities of NaturaConnect and gain their feedback on the Connectivity Guidelines, on Systematic Conservation Planning and the methodology for the integration of blue and green infrastructure in the Danube-Carpathian region.

### Agenda:

Abbreviations: NC – NaturaConnect, TEN-N – Trans-European Nature Network, WG – Working Group.

Time	What	Who
10 min	Update on NaturaConnect developments	Hildegard Meyer, WWF-CEE hmeyer@wwfcee.org
40 min	Connectivity Guidelines	Ana Ceia-Hasse, CIBIO, Portugal ana.ceia.hasse@cibio.up.pt
15 min	The Concept of Systematic Conservation Planning (SCP)	Jutta Beher, IIASA, Austria beher@iiasa.ac.at
15 min	Toward a map of integrated Blue and Green Infrastructure in the Danube-Carpathian region	Georg Gruber, BOKU, Austria georg.gruber@boku.ac.at
10 min	Moderated discussion & Mentimeter questions - did not take place	Hildegard Meyer, WWF-CEE
5 min	Conclusions & findings & next steps	Hildegard Meyer, WWF-CEE

### Update on NaturaConnect developments – [link to presentation](#)

**Hildegard Meyer**, WWF-CEE, Austria, opened the meeting and briefly presented the NaturaConnect project. Current activities cover the development of the Review and Synthesis of Best Practice Examples in Governance and Land-use Policies to Implement TEN-N (the WG on Biodiversity and its observers contributed in various ways, workshops, interviews and surveys), the ongoing work on the [NaturaConnect Learning Platform](#) that has recently been launched and will be equipped with more content as the project evolves, and the [Competence Assessment for Building TEN-N](#) for authorities involved in green infrastructure planning and protected area managers to identify which competences they lack. The NC Consortium invites interested persons to run through the Competence Assessment and explore the modules at the NaturaConnect Learning Platform. Results of the Competence Assessment will be considered for the development of further training modules, also beyond the NC project.

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### Connectivity Guidelines – [link to presentation](#)

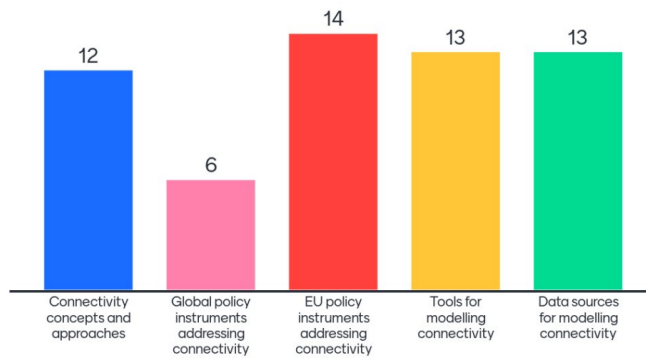
**Ana Ceia-Hasse**, CIBIO, Portugal, presented the current version of the [Connectivity Guidelines](#) which are to be simplified for connectivity planners and merged into a training module at the NaturaConnect Learning Platform. The Guidelines address practitioners and scientists designing and managing nature conservation and restoration projects, public administrations, planners and managers within and outside protected areas, private initiatives, foundations, etc. interested in connectivity planning.

The Guidelines comprise (1) connectivity concepts and approaches, (2) global and EU policy instruments, (3) a survey of connectivity projects, (4) knowledge gaps and needs, (5) tools and data sources, and (6) a 5-step framework for connectivity planning.

The NaturaConnect (NC) team gathered important input from participants using two sets of Mentimeter questions.

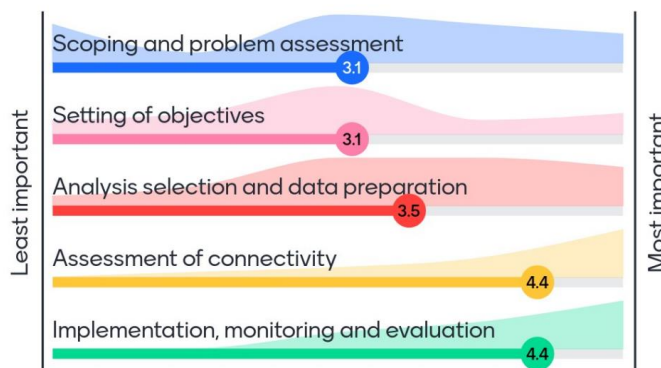
The first set of questions related to what is needed for the practical guidelines for practitioners. The participants selected the chapters of the current Guidelines which would be important to include in practical guidelines. The global and EU policy instruments received less support, while all other chapters appear equally important.

NATURACONNECT CONNECTIVITY GUIDELINES  
**Which topics do you find important to be included in practical guidelines? (multiple choice possible)**



The second question related to the 5-step approach for connectivity planning. Results show that the NC Team should emphasise the topics of Assessment of connectivity and the Implementation, monitoring and evaluation steps.

NATURACONNECT CONNECTIVITY GUIDELINES  
**Which steps of the 5-step approach should be highlighted in the practical guidelines? Rank by importance.**



The participants would like practical items to be integrated, rather than information on desk work. Czechia was mentioned as the country that formally recognized ecological corridors, inspecting them on the spot and defining the main problems. It was also said that the focus should be on the practice, defining hotspots with what happens in a real situation. Monitoring structures were mentioned, e.g. data sets of roadkill could be a valuable asset.

Finally, the participants were asked to indicate any other topics that were important for connectivity planning and implementation.

NATURACONNECT CONNECTIVITY GUIDELINES

### Which other topics do you find important to be included in practical guidelines?

Good practice example	Awareness raising (between conflictive stakeholders, ministries, etc)	socio-economic parameters	How to start the project
The measures applied to the corridors	I would insist on having common concepts to be sure that all stakeholders are on the same page. Maybe missing: discussion on enabling factors for connectivity	Clear explanations on the ecological connectivity targeting stakeholders, if it wasn't already done.	how data will updated
A very basic "orientation" and step-step-guide that supports local and regions decision makers from other sectors. Eg. a decision-making guide - How to get started-whom to involve-capacity manage	Different species, but also longmigrated species, freshwater habitats and fish species	A bit more Do-How, not only Know-how	Relevant contact on stakeholders (or list of them) in case we need to confirm/find out/ask something
Longitudinal, lateral and vertical connectivity - specific proposals	Effectivity of applied measures to ensure connectivity	costs assesment (if infrastructure measures are needed)	Inspection of the corridors in special spots (bottle necks)Define roadkill hotspots & cumulative impacts assessment needsHighlight the need of art 10 of Hab DirUse Spatial Planning maps

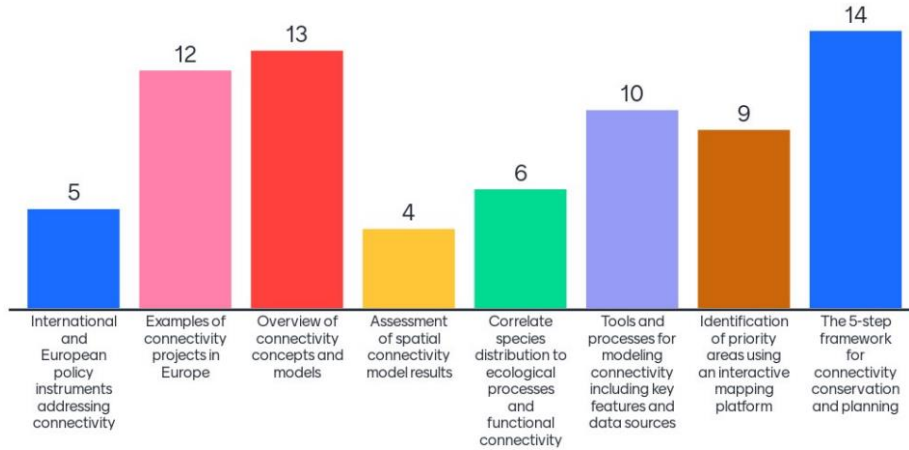
Participants expressed the concern that connectivity planning focuses too much on large carnivores and should be extended to other animals. For example, less mobile insects would need another type of connectivity (steppingstones). Recommendations and approaches would be welcome on how to combine such different species groups for one network.

The next set of questions related to the module to be developed for the **NaturaConnect Learning Platform**. The module will go online in December 2024; the project team will organise a launching webinar. The invitation will be circulated.

Participants were asked to give ideas about what topics around ecological connectivity planning need to be included in a training module. Most important for the participants was the 5-step framework that was introduced in the presentation, the overview of relevant concepts and approaches, and examples of connectivity projects in Europe.

NATURA CONNECT LEARNING PLATFORM

## What would you like to see included in the NaturaConnect Learning Platform?



Finally, the participants were asked to indicate what else would be important to include in the module.

NATURACONNECT CONNECTIVITY GUIDELINES

## What else would you like to see included in the NaturaConnect Learning Platform?

17 responses



The consultation's results will be considered when developing the practical version of the Guidelines and building the training module at the NC Learning Platform.

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### **Systematic Conservation Planning – [link to presentation](#)**

**Jutta Beher**, IIASA, Austria, presented an introduction to the planning framework of Systematic Conservation Planning, and core ecological concepts that should be considered to achieve ecological meaningful outcomes (CARE principles). She provided information on different strategies for planning at the national level and the EU level and emphasised that planning across a larger region commonly achieves larger benefits for biodiversity than separate multiple planning processes at smaller scales. In a brief exercise to illustrate the concept of efficiency and complementarity, which can be counterintuitive to the popular concept of prioritising biodiversity hotspots the participants were asked to select two sites out of 7 options, each with different species occurrences. The acronym CARE stands for comprehensive (all biodiversity aspects (most often species, habitats or ecosystems) that need protection should be included together in one planning process), adequate (providing enough space for a species/habitat/population to persist into the future), resilient (providing enough space in extent and number of protected areas that allow to withstand and/or recover from disturbance), and effective (meaning to maximise the gained benefit for biodiversity within the budget or other constraints). Examples of preliminary results, such as priority maps or statistics on the gained benefits for different species groups in these potential new protected areas were shown, including a close-up of the map for the Carpathian region. If individual member states of the Carpathian Convention, or the whole consortium, would be interested in exploring tailor-made analysis based on the presented concepts, Jutta would be more than happy to receive mail via her or the project's email address to discuss options for collaboration. Unfortunately, due to the general delay in the event program and the resulting necessary cuts in the presentation time, it was not possible to run prepared Mentimeter questions.

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### **Toward a map of integrated Blue and Green Infrastructure in the Danube-Carpathian region – [link to presentation](#)**

**Georg Gruber**, BOKU, Austria, introduced the audience to the ecological prioritisation approach for river and habitat continuity restoration and presented a map where restoration of longitudinal river connectivity and barriers with high priority for reconnection are indicated, based on an easily understandable scoring approach. The scoring approach was agreed with the Hydro-morphological Task Group of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River. BOKU is extending this approach from the longitudinal scope to the lateral areas covering riparian zones and further to the terrestrial realm. Georg Gruber presented various data sources used in developing this approach and highlighted the issue of data gaps in the Danube-Carpathian region. Data about species and habitats listed under Article 12 of the Birds and Article 17 of the Habitats Directive as well as datasets from the WISE database are only available for EU countries. While datasets like CORINE landcover and Copernicus riparian zones are available for all countries except Moldavia and the Ukraine. Also, datasets from the Biodiversity Information System integrated from the Carpathian Countries that hold data that were collected/generated in projects like ConnectGREEN or SaveGREEN, as well as data from the ICPDR database were collected. Georg touched upon the pressures for wetlands and freshwater habitats and displayed a map with the first results. He highlighted data gaps, especially for Ukraine (land cover & riparian zones) and species data for non-EU countries.

Question: Last spring, the Environment Agency Austria presented their work on Corine land cover data generation for the Ukrainian Carpathians. NaturaConnect would appreciate getting them for their modelling work. What is the status? Harald Egerer confirms this process for 2/3 of the Carpathian oblasts in Ukraine.

### **Wrap up & closure**

The NaturaConnect Team is happy to have interesting inputs from the audience's side and insights to develop the Connectivity Guidelines. The project plans webinars to discuss and build capacity on the methodologies, but can also develop maps with areas for potential additional protected areas and ecological corridors for the entire region. IIASA is available to organise workshops on country or region-specific planning and engage face-to-face with interested persons/institutions. Please reach out to [naturaconnect@iiasa.ac.at](mailto:naturaconnect@iiasa.ac.at). The [policy/science brief on Systematic Conservation Planning](#) was

distributed. The brief provides a more detailed overview of the spatial planning method applied in NaturaConnect.

**Links to project-relevant websites:**

- [NaturaConnect Learning Platform](#)
- [Competence Assessment for Building TEN-N](#)
- [Stakeholder Community Platform](#)
- [NaturaConnect homepage](#)
- [Policy/science brief on Systematic Conservation Planning](#)



## Annex – Description of the Sessions

The **Connectivity Guidelines** provide spatial and land use planners with tools for planning ecological connectivity. The document is very comprehensive. Based on the current Guidelines, the NaturaConnect Team will develop hands-on Guidelines for practical use and at the same time, a module on ecological connectivity at the NaturaConnect Learning Platform. The NC Team is interested in the Carpathian Convention Stakeholders' opinions, which will be integrated into the practical Guidelines and the NaturaConnect Learning Platform Module on ecological connectivity for capacity building.

A [survey](#) for improvement of the [Guidelines](#) was sent to the Carpathian Convention community to prepare for this event. We kindly ask you to get familiar with the document to answer the following questions:

1. What are the topics of the current Guidelines you find important to be included in practical Guidelines?
2. What would you like to see included in the NaturaConnect Learning Platform Module?

Led by Ana Ceia Hasse, CIBIO – Research Centre in Biodiversity and Genetic Resources, Portugal

The **concept of Systematic Conservation Planning (SCP)**, its advantages and applications.

SCP is a scientific method to find areas of conservation needs based on the integrated analysis of multiple datasets, including spatial explicit information on biodiversity, climate, land use or socio-economic aspects into one planning process. The integrated analysis allows us to find spatial solutions that achieve multiple conservation objectives, helps to explore uncertainties in the results and to understand existing trade-offs between the different objectives (for example, comparing the benefits for biodiversity and the loss of land for other uses across different network designs). Together with the audience, IIASA will explore the SCP's applicability in the Carpathian ecoregion.

Led by Jutta Beher, IIASA – International Institute for Applied System Analysis, Austria

## Map of integrated green and blue infrastructure for the Danube-Carpathian region

BOKU is working on a map that will include green and blue infrastructure in the Danube-Carpathian region which is one of the NaturaConnect case studies. BOKU collected data available for the region as the basis for integrating blue and green infrastructure, made a first assessment and started developing the methodology for assessing stressors and identifying ecologically valuable freshwater and wetland habitats. BOKU will present the concept and first results.

Led by Georg Gruber, BOKU – University for Natural Resource and Life Sciences, Austria