

Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats



Standing Committee

Recommendation No. 96 (2002) on conservation of natural habitats and wildlife, specially birds, in afforestation of lowland in Iceland

(adopted by the Standing Committee on 5 December 2002)

The Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the convention,

Having regard to the aims of the convention to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats;

Recognising the efforts of the government of Iceland to recover a part of the former forest cover of the island and welcoming the beneficial effects that afforestation will have for the biological diversity of the state and the control of erosion ;

Noting however that some of the afforestation projects may negatively affect areas of importance of bird species protected by Appendix II of the convention;

Noting that wetlands have become threatened ecosystems at the world level and that some of the areas likely to be affected by afforestation are wetlands or drained wetlands;

Wishing to avoid further loss of biological diversity and the disappearance of rare habitats in the European continent;

Recalling that the convention provides that Parties are to give particular emphasis in their conservation efforts to endangered species, especially endemic ones;

Wishing that the protection of areas of importance for birds be integrated in a perspective of sustainable development for the island that include forestry;

Conscious of the need to review present physical planning regulations so as to adapt them to a better protection and enhancement of the natural values of Iceland;

Referring to the expertise carried out by Professor Michael Usher [doc. T-PVS/Files (2002) 3];

Recommends that government of Iceland:

1. carry out an overall environmental impact assessment of afforestation policy so as to be able to evaluate how present and future afforestation of lowlands may affect habitats and species protected under the convention;
2. map, as a matter of urgency, areas of high biological value in Iceland so that such information may be used both for guidance to the planning process and to identify "Areas of Special Conservation Interest" referred to in Recommendation No. 16 (1989) of the Standing Committee;
3. support and encourage afforestation giving priority to areas known to have reduced biodiversity value, such as eroded areas or heavily used farmland, avoiding as much as possible areas of bird interest or partially drained wetlands which might be easily restored to their former condition;

4. introduce as a matter of urgency a system of statutory consultation between the Forest, Nature and Planning Agencies for new afforestation schemes up to 200 ha, promoting co-ordination and synergy among the different departments concerned; involve the local authorities and the civil societies in the consultation process in the most appropriate manner; and establish in that framework an appeal mechanism to solve discrepancies;
5. consider establishing a networking of environmental data that would be suitable for Icelandic data providers and users;
6. draft and implement a National Strategy for biological diversity in Iceland; and
7. designate areas for inclusion in the Convention's Emerald Network of Areas of Special Conservation Interest.