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Europe is rapidly losing its biodiversity and wildlife habitats

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Wildlife is rapidly dying out across Europe, as biodiverse habitats are invaded by urban sprawl, intensive agriculture, alien species and commercial forestry.

This is according to the European Commission's forthcoming report assessing Europe's biodiversity, expected to be published later this week. The report is a mid-term review of progress towards the EU's Biodiversity Strategy, [launched in 2012](#). The strategy has the overall target of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2020, and where possible restoring biodiversity that's already been lost.



Populations plummeting (Image: [ElementalImaging/Getty](#))

It seems that, at the moment, biodiversity is still in decline. "We're losing and fragmenting natural areas," says Frank Wugt Larsen of the [European Environment Agency](#).

Larsen revealed that 77 per cent of Europe's most biodiverse habitats were judged to be in an "unfavourable conservation status" between 2007 and 2013. The position was equally bleak for species diversity, with 60 per cent of assessed species not in a favourable position.

Pollination threat

Butterflies, bees and birds are all in decline. The report reveals, for example, that populations of grassland butterflies halved between 1990 and 2011 and 24 per cent of European bumblebee species are now threatened by extinction.

The report also warns that the decline in pollinator insects could affect agriculture, seeing as 84 per cent of Europe's crops have at least some dependence on insect pollination. Between 2000 and 2010, the capacity of insects to pollinate crops decreased by around 5 per cent because of their dwindling numbers.

"The value of insect pollination is estimated at €14 billion per year, but we get it for free," says Larsen. "We depend on nature to deliver these goods and services."

Small success

The same bleak picture is painted for Europe's fish stocks and marine habitats. Only 7 per cent of species and 9 per cent of habitats in the marine environment were rated as "in favourable conservation status".

Larsen says that many fish stocks are still fished above their maximum sustainable yield.

Europe's common bird populations are doing no better. Numbers have declined by 12 per cent since 1990. The declines have affected the 39 species of farmland birds most severely, their populations collectively declining by 20 per cent.

On a more positive front, large carnivores, including the brown bear, the lynx and the wolf, are recovering.

Also, the Europe-wide [Natura 2000 network of protected areas](#) has been growing and now covers 18 per cent of the EU. "It's an area twice the size of Spain," says Larsen.