

## **Council of Europe - Action on IAS and priorities for future European action**

The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern 1979) is the main Council of Europe instrument in the field of conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Because Article 11 of the Bern Convention requires Contracting Parties “to strictly control the introduction of non native species” the Council of Europe has been promoting European action on invasive species since 1984 through the creation of a special working group (in 1993) and the adoption of a number of recommendations, and other policy documents.

The main texts adopted have been the following:

- Recommendation No. R(84)14 of the Committee of Ministers concerning the introduction of non-native species
- Recommendation No. 57 (1997) of the Standing Committee of the Convention on the introduction of organisms belonging to non-native species into the environment
- The European Strategy on Invasive Alien Species (P. Genovesi and C. Shine) adopted by the Bern Convention as Recommendation No. 99 (2003)

The Strategy and the other policy papers provide precise guidance to European governments on awareness and information on IAS issues, strengthening national and regional capacities to deal with IAS issues, preventing introduction of new IAS and support rapid remedial responses, reducing adverse impacts of IAS, recovering species and natural habitats affected and specially identifying priorities and key actions. National strategies have been drafted and implemented following the priorities set in the European Strategy.

The group of experts has focused its action in identifying European priorities for action, promoting precautionary measures and eradication of special problem species, elaborating guidelines and codes of conduct on IAS, promoting public awareness, and has become a major forum to follow the progress on implementation by governments of international obligations on this field and launch new ideas and initiatives.

Particular attention has been devoted to identifying species for eradication and providing special guidance and even eradication plans on a number of species of special concern (e.g. introduced crayfish, the American squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*, the alga *Caulerpa taxifolia*, the Ruddy duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*, the American cotton-rabbit *Sylvilagus sp* and 28 vascular plants identified in collaboration with EPPO, including the water jacinth and other species whose spread is suspected to be linked to climate change)

The Convention has been carrying this work in good synergy with other European and world institutions, in particular the European Commission, the European Environment Agency (EEA), the European Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Global Invasive Species Programme (GISP) and other partners. As the Bern Convention plays an active role in the implementation, at the regional level, of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention has become a powerful instrument to apply in Europe the Guiding Principles on IAS adopted at world level by CBD.

Latest work has been focused on prevention, mainly on pathways, particularly trade, for which restriction measures concerning many species were recommended by the Bern Convention Standing Committee in 2007 and on voluntary codes of conduct (the first on horticulture and invasive alien plants). The Convention has also been supporting the elaboration of national strategies.

As for the future, at the Council of Europe we feel it is vital that the numerous initiatives that have sprung in the last five years in European institutions and national governments (after so many years of inaction) are followed and reinforced by stronger instruments and more compliance of international commitments. The news of the finalisation of a EU strategy on IAS is excellent, and we hope it will be followed by appropriate regulations, particularly on trade of IAS, where the competence of the Union is uncontested. The fact that species as dangerous as the grey squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* can be still legally imported and sold as pet in some of the countries of the Union shows that implementation of legal obligations is still many years behind and should be urgently reinforced. The lack of commitment of some governments to control the introduction and the spread of IAS is still a problem and work on this field will remind a priority for Council of Europe action, together with an effort to convince other partners (the horticultural industry, the pet and aquaria trade, hunters and anglers, the forest community, etc) to adopt voluntary codes that may limit the introduction of new alien species or the spread of species known to be invasive. We also think that governments and scientists should pay more attention to examine the possible effect of ecosystems of alien species becoming more invasive because of climate change, so that possible prevention measures may be implemented. The success of European programmes on IAS, both on the information front and on eradication and control measures, needs also to be complemented by advances in capacity building and, especially harmonisation in legislation. Islands and evolutionarily isolated ecosystems, as well as protected areas, need to receive also proper attention.