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## Conserving European biodiversity across realms

Sylvaine Giakoumi, Virgilio Hermoso, Silvia Carvalho, Vasiliki Markantonatou, Mindaugas Dagys, Takuya Iwamura, Wolfgang N Probst, Robert J Smith, Katherine L Yates, Vasiliki Almpandou, et al.

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1 **Title:** Conserving European biodiversity across realms

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3 **Authors:** Sylvaine Giakoumi<sup>1,2</sup>, Virgilio Hermoso<sup>3</sup>, Silvia Carvalho<sup>4</sup>, Vasiliki Markantonatou<sup>5</sup>,  
4 Mindaugas Dagys<sup>6</sup>, Takuya Iwamura<sup>7</sup>, Wolfgang N. Probst<sup>8</sup>, Robert J. Smith<sup>9</sup>, Katherine L.  
5 Yates<sup>2,10</sup>, Vasiliki Almpnidou<sup>11</sup>, Tihana Novak<sup>12</sup>, Noam Ben-Moshe<sup>7</sup>, Stelios Katsanevakis<sup>5</sup>,  
6 Joachim Claudet<sup>13,14</sup>, Marta Coll<sup>15</sup>, Alan Deidun<sup>16</sup>, Franz Essl<sup>17</sup>, José A. Garcia-Charton<sup>18</sup>,  
7 Carlos Jimenez<sup>19,20</sup>, Salit Kark<sup>21</sup>, Milica Mandić<sup>22</sup>, Antonios D. Mazaris<sup>11</sup>, Wolfgang  
8 Rabitsch<sup>23</sup>, Vanessa Stelzenmüller<sup>8</sup>, Elena Tricarico<sup>24</sup>, Ioannis N. Vogiatzakis<sup>25</sup>

9 <sup>1</sup>Université Côte d'Azur, CNRS, FRE 3729 ECOMERS, Parc Valrose, 28 Avenue Valrose,  
10 06108 Nice, France;

11 <sup>2</sup>ARC Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions, School of Biological Sciences, The  
12 University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

13 <sup>3</sup>Centre Tecnològic Forestal de Catalunya (CEMFOR - CTFC), Crta. Sant Llorenç, de  
14 Morunys, Km 2, 25280, Solsona, Lleida, Spain

15 <sup>4</sup>CIBIO/InBIO, Centro de Investigação em Biodiversidade e Recursos Genéticos da  
16 Universidade do Porto, R. Padre Armando Quintas, 4485-661 Vairão Portugal

17 <sup>5</sup>University of the Aegean, Department of Marine Sciences, University Hill, 81100 Mytilene,  
18 Greece

19 <sup>6</sup>Nature Research Centre, Akademijos 2, Vilnius LT-08412, Lithuania

20 <sup>7</sup>School of Zoology, Faculty of Life Sciences, Tel Aviv University, 6997801 Tel Aviv, Israel

21 <sup>8</sup>Thünen-Institute of Sea Fisheries, Palmallee 9, 22767 Hamburg, Germany

22 <sup>9</sup>Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), School of Anthropology and  
23 Conservation, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NR, United Kingdom

24 <sup>10</sup>School of Environment and Life Sciences, University of Salford, Manchester, M5 4WT, UK

25 <sup>11</sup> Department of Ecology, School of Biology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 54124  
26 Thessaloniki, Greece

27 <sup>12</sup>Institut Ruder Boskovic, Bijenicka cesta 54, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia

28 <sup>13</sup> National Center for Scientific Research, PSL Research University, CRIOBE, USR 3278  
29 CNRS-EPHE-UPVD, 66860 Perpignan, France

30 <sup>14</sup>Laboratoire d'Excellence CORAIL, France.

31 <sup>15</sup> Institut de Ciències del Mar (CMIMA-CSIC), P. Marítim de la Barceloneta, 37-49, 08003  
32 Barcelona, Spain

33 <sup>16</sup>Department of Geosciences, University of Malta campus, Msida, MSD 2080 Malta

34 <sup>17</sup> Division of Conservation, Vegetation and Landscape Ecology, University Vienna,  
35 Rennweg 14, 1030 Vienna, Austria

36 <sup>18</sup> Departamento de Ecología e Hidrología, Universidad de Murcia, Campus de Espinardo,  
37 30100 Murcia, Spain

38 <sup>19</sup> Enalia Physis Environmental Research Centre (ENALIA), Acropoleos 2, Aglantzia 2101,  
39 Nicosia, Cyprus

40 <sup>20</sup>Energy, Environment and Water Research Center (EEWRC) of The Cyprus Institute,  
41 Konstantinou Kavafi 20, 2121 Aglantzia, Nicosia, Cyprus

42 <sup>21</sup> The Biodiversity Research Group, The School of Biological Sciences, ARC Centre of  
43 Excellence for Environmental Decisions and NESP Threatened Species hub,  
44 Centre for Biodiversity & Conservation Science, The University of Queensland, Brisbane,  
45 QLD, 4072 Australia

46 <sup>22</sup> University of Montenegro, Institute of marine biology (UNIME-IBMK), Dobrota bb., 85330,  
47 Kotor, Montenegro

48 <sup>23</sup> Environment Agency Austria, Spittelauer Lände 5, 1090 Wien, Austria

49 <sup>24</sup>Department of Biology, University of Florence, via Romana 17, 50125 Florence, Italy

50 <sup>25</sup>School of Pure and Applied Sciences, Open University of Cyprus, PO Box 12794, 2252,  
51 Nicosia, Cyprus

52

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65 **Corresponding author:** Sylvaine Giakoumi, Université Côte d'Azur, CNRS, FRE 3729

66 ECOMERS, Parc Valrose, 28 Avenue Valrose, 06108 Nice, France; tel. +33 (0) 492076848;

67 sylvaine.giakoumi1@gmail.com

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72 **Abstract**

73 Terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems are connected via multiple biophysical and  
74 ecological processes. Identifying and quantifying links among ecosystems is necessary for  
75 the uptake of integrated conservation actions across realms. Such actions are particularly  
76 important for species using habitats in more than one realm during their daily or life cycle.  
77 We reviewed information on the habitats of 2,408 species of European conservation concern  
78 and found that 30% of the species use habitats in multiple realms. Transportation and  
79 service corridors, which fragment species habitats, were identified as the most important  
80 threat impacting ~70% of the species. We examined information on 1,567 European Union  
81 (EU) conservation projects, funded over the past 25 years, to assess the adequacy of efforts  
82 towards the conservation of "multi-realm" species at a continental scale. We discovered that  
83 less than a third of "multi-realm" species benefited from projects that included conservation  
84 actions across multiple realms. To achieve the EU's conservation target of halting  
85 biodiversity loss by 2020 and effectively protect multi-realm species, integrated conservation  
86 efforts across realms should be reinforced by: 1) recognizing the need for integrated  
87 management at a policy level, 2) revising conservation funding priorities across realms, and  
88 3) implementing integrated land-freshwater-sea conservation planning and management.

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96 **Introduction**

97 Recent research has highlighted the importance of identifying and quantifying links among  
98 the terrestrial, freshwater, and marine realms when planning for conservation and managing  
99 ecosystems (e.g. Álvarez-Romero *et al.* 2011; Saunders *et al.* 2017). Multiple biophysical  
100 and ecological processes connect realms, allowing for the movement of species and the  
101 transfer of energy and matter across them (Beger *et al.* 2010). Concurrently, there are  
102 numerous cross-realm threats to ecosystems, such as agricultural effluents impacting  
103 freshwater and marine ecosystems (Álvarez Romero *et al.* 2011). Thus, the persistence of  
104 species in one realm can be jeopardized by human activities occurring in another (Stoms *et*  
105 *al.* 2005). To avert such risks, threat management and prioritization of conservation actions  
106 require an integrated approach spanning all realms (Tallis *et al.* 2008, Adams *et al.* 2014,  
107 Saunders *et al.* 2017).

108 The need for integrated conservation efforts is further pronounced when dealing with  
109 organisms that use habitats in more than one realm during their daily activities or life cycle  
110 (hereafter referred to as multi-realm species). For example, diadromous fishes that migrate  
111 between freshwater and marine ecosystems, and dragonflies that move daily between  
112 freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems. Identifying connections between ecosystems within  
113 different realms is critical for the persistence of multi-realm species. For migratory animals,  
114 such as several shorebird species, these connections can extend over broad spatial scales  
115 and cross borders (Iwamura *et al.* 2013), making international collaboration necessary to  
116 ensure cross-boundary species conservation (Kark *et al.* 2015).

117 Despite this, connections among realms have been broadly ignored when managing  
118 ecosystems and conservation efforts have mainly focused on one particular realm (Álvarez-  
119 Romero *et al.* 2011; 2015a). This is partly because collaboration between the various  
120 governmental and non-governmental organizations that are responsible for the  
121 implementation of management actions in different realms is poor (Álvarez-Romero *et al.*

122 2015a; Reuter *et al.* 2016). Consequently, some threatened multi-realm species have only  
123 been protected in one realm that is associated with one stage of their life or daily cycle. For  
124 example, most conservation efforts targeting sea turtles have primarily focused on protecting  
125 nesting sites on land (Mazor *et al.* 2016). Although such conservation initiatives have been  
126 successful, the current decrease of some sea turtle populations (e.g. Eastern and Western  
127 Pacific leatherbacks) may be associated with the challenge of protecting these species  
128 across their habitats (Mazaris *et al.* 2017a, Klein *et al.* 2017). Likewise, conservation efforts  
129 for wetland-breeding amphibians that focused on wetlands without considering adjacent  
130 terrestrial habitats have been ineffective (Dodd & Cane 1998).

131 Moreover, the lack of coordinated conservation actions across political boundaries has often  
132 been an obstacle in conserving effectively threatened species including multi-realm species  
133 (Dallimer & Strange 2015, Runge *et al.* 2015). Barriers to international collaboration can be  
134 removed when countries coordinate their conservation efforts through intergovernmental  
135 institutions, such as the European Union (EU), which funds and supports trans-national  
136 conservation initiatives across Europe. The EU has set policy targets to halt and reverse the  
137 loss of biodiversity by 2020 (EC, 2011). Although the EU's 2020 Biodiversity Strategy is  
138 explicitly linked to fisheries, agricultural, and forestry policies, the integration of these policies  
139 and thus the explicit consideration of connections among realms is still lacking. Key steps  
140 towards the effective conservation of multi-realm species, in Europe and elsewhere, include:  
141 the identification of multi-realm species, the assessment of their threats, and the evaluation  
142 of funding dedicated to cross-realm conservation actions as a measure of adequacy at  
143 covering the special needs of the species.

144

#### 145 **Identifying multi-realm species of European conservation concern and their threats**

146 We reviewed information on the habitats of 1,124 threatened species in Europe, i.e. species  
147 classified in the European Red List (up to April 2016) with one of the following categories:  
148 Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) or Vulnerable (VU), to identify multi-realm

149 species (see Appendix S1 and Table S1 in Supporting Information). Funded by the EU since  
150 2006, the European Red List is compiled by the IUCN's Global Species Programme, in  
151 collaboration with experts. The list identifies those species that are threatened with extinction  
152 at the European level, so that appropriate conservation action can be taken to improve their  
153 status. Additionally, we reviewed information on the habitats of 1,284 non-threatened  
154 species that are listed in the EU Habitats (92/43/EEC) and Birds (2009/147/EC) Directives.  
155 Threatened species listed in the Directives are also included in the European Red List, thus,  
156 information on these species had already been reviewed. The two directives are the  
157 cornerstones of Europe's nature conservation policy and guide the designation of the EU  
158 wide Natura 2000 network of protected areas. Species listed in their annexes should receive  
159 protection or be maintained in a favourable conservation status. Major threats for each multi-  
160 realm species were identified by accessing the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species  
161 database.

162 Nearly a third (n=778) of the species of European conservation concern assessed were  
163 multi-realm species, belonging to three plant and 15 animal taxonomic groups (Appendix  
164 S1). Species living in ecosystems at the intersection of multiple realms, e.g. vascular plant  
165 species in estuaries, were also identified as multi-realm species. The largest group of multi-  
166 realm species were birds (37%; n=289), with the vast majority of them (89%) being identified  
167 as migratory birds. Freshwater molluscs were the second largest group (n=171) followed by  
168 vascular plants (n=98). More than half of the multi-realm species (62%) depend on terrestrial  
169 and freshwater habitats (n=481), 10% depend on terrestrial and marine habitats (n=79), and  
170 8% require freshwater and marine habitats (n=65). About 20% of the species (n=153)  
171 depend on habitats across all three realms.

172 A large number of multi-realm species were subject to common threats. Roads and other  
173 "transportation and service corridors" impacted approximately 70% of the species (Table  
174 S2). Other major threats were "energy production and mining" (affecting 56% of the species),



175 “agriculture and aquaculture” (56%), and “invasive and other problematic species, genes and  
176 diseases” (47%).

### 177 **Assessing European investment in multi-realm species conservation**

178 Several funding sources are available to support biodiversity conservation in the EU, (e.g.  
179 the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Fisheries Fund)  
180 but only the LIFE Program earmarks funds for actions directly related to the implementation  
181 of biodiversity conservation (Kettunen *et al.* 2009, 2017). Consequently, LIFE has become  
182 the main financial tool for the implementation of conservation projects in Europe (Hermoso *et*  
183 *al.* 2017). Here, we used data from LIFE-Nature projects to estimate the extent of the  
184 investment made for the conservation of multi-realm species at a continental scale.

185 Information on each of the 1,567 LIFE-Nature projects that were funded during the period  
186 1992-2016 was sourced from <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/>. We identified all the  
187 projects with at least one multi-realm species a beneficiary. Projects were further analysed  
188 only when they included explicit conservation actions in multiple realms or interface habitats,  
189 i.e. habitats in the intersection of realms (Table S1), because we considered that these  
190 projects are more likely to conserve effectively the species in the highly human-dominated  
191 EU environment. Acknowledging that some multi-realm species may face threats in a single  
192 realm, we repeated the analysis with all projects targeting multi-realm species, including  
193 projects whose actions were confined to a single realm.

194 Less than one third (n=537) of the LIFE-Nature projects covered multiple realms and  
195 incorporated any of the 778 multi-realm species we identified. Moreover, within those 537  
196 projects less than 30% of these species (n=229) were covered. Certain groups of multi-  
197 realm species, e.g. beetles, were relatively well covered whereas others, such as mammals  
198 and marine fishes, were among the least funded groups (Fig. 1). In particular, multi-realm  
199 species belonging to the groups of marine molluscs, bees, grasshoppers, and medicinal  
200 plants were not covered by any LIFE-Nature project. The vast majority (91%) of the species

201 funded under LIFE-Nature were listed in the annexes of the Habitats or Birds Directives. The  
202 species that received the largest budget for protection (~56 million €) was the Eurasian  
203 bittern (*Botaurus stellaris* Linnaeus, 1758; Fig. 2). This species was funded almost twice as  
204 much as the second most funded species, the Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar* Linnaeus, 1758).  
205 The Eurasian bittern is listed as a priority species for funding under the LIFE program but  
206 has an IUCN conservation status of “Least Concern (LC)”.

207 In fact, more than half of the LIFE-Nature projects' budget (61%) was allocated to species  
208 classified as “LC” (Fig. 3a). Although the average budget allocated to threatened species  
209 belonging to the categories “EN” and “VU” was higher than the one allocated to non-  
210 threatened species (Fig. 3b), the vast majority of projects targeted very few “CR” multi-realm  
211 species and focused on “LC” species (Fig. S2). Only 7% of multi-realm “CR” species  
212 received funding, whereas funds were allocated for the conservation of 41% of the “LC”  
213 species. About 65% of the projects benefiting a single species (n=115) targeted non-  
214 threatened species.

215 Species that depend on terrestrial and freshwater habitats, representing 61% of the multi-  
216 realm species assessed herein, received about 80% of the total budget (Fig. 3c). On  
217 average, the 118 funded species belonging to this realm combination received ~3.9 million  
218 €. Species requiring freshwater and marine habitats (n=18) on average received larger  
219 budgets in comparison to species related to other realm combinations (Fig. 3d). However,  
220 more than half the budget (57%) was dedicated to only two fishes, *S. salar* and *Alosa fallax*  
221 (Lacepède, 1803). Species depending on terrestrial and marine habitats (n=21) received on  
222 average the smallest budget, equivalent to ~2.2 million €. Nearly one third of the total budget  
223 for this realm combination was allocated to the loggerhead sea turtle *Caretta caretta*  
224 (Linnaeus, 1758), which is a priority species for funding under the LIFE program.

225 Even when considering all projects targeting multi-realm species (n=753), including those  
226 projects whose actions were confined to a single realm, the percentage of multi-realm

227 species covered increased only slightly (34%). The total investment in multi-realm species  
228 conservation increased from around 800 million to 1.2 billion Euros. The patterns of  
229 investment revealed were similar to those found when only considering projects that  
230 incorporated multiple realms, with more than half the projects' budget (57%) was allocated to  
231 species classified as “LC” (Fig. S1). Species that depend on terrestrial and freshwater  
232 habitats still received the highest proportion of the total budget (51%; Fig. S1).

233 The allocation of LIFE-Nature funds for the conservation of multi-realm species across EU  
234 member states and across realm combinations varied greatly among countries (Fig. 4). In  
235 Croatia and Lithuania, more than 80% of the total LIFE funds were allocated to projects that  
236 targeted multi-realm species whereas in Cyprus, France, the Czech Republic, Italy and the  
237 UK, the respective proportion was less than 15%. In Spain, LIFE funds dedicated to the  
238 conservation of multi-realm species for all dual realm combinations (freshwater-terrestrial,  
239 marine-terrestrial, marine-freshwater) were greater than in other member state. Species  
240 depending on habitats in all three realms received the most coverage in Sweden. Similar  
241 patterns were revealed when funds were adjusted using country-level purchasing power  
242 parity (PPP) as in Lung *et al.* (2014) (Appendix S1; Fig S3). The most remarkable difference  
243 being the substantial funds devoted in the combination of freshwater and marine ecosystems  
244 in the UK.

245 Overall, our findings demonstrate that 1) LIFE-Nature projects have been covering a small  
246 proportion of multi-realm species of conservation interest, 2) conservation effort is skewed  
247 towards specific taxonomic groups, and 3) species that are most in need of conservation  
248 effort receive disproportionately less funding.

### 249 **Reinforcing EU's integrated conservation efforts**

250 While the scientific recognition of the need for integrated conservation across realms gains  
251 ground, the practical implementation of integrated conservation actions lags. To date, more  
252 than 800 million Euros have been invested in LIFE-Nature projects targeting multi-realm

253 species and including conservation actions across realms. Although this is a substantial  
254 contribution towards integrated conservation efforts, only 30-34% of multi-realm species of  
255 conservation concern (i.e. multi-realm species listed in the European Red List and/or in the  
256 Habitats and Birds Directives) have benefitted to date from LIFE-Nature funds. Whilst  
257 acknowledging that other sources of funding exist and may benefit multi-realm species, the  
258 LIFE-Nature programme remains the main financial instrument for biodiversity conservation  
259 in the EU. Species action plans and funds from national sources of member states that could  
260 contribute substantially to the conservation of multi-realm species have not been captured  
261 here. Yet, species action plans often present taxonomic bias (Sitas et al. 2009), and  
262 nationally or locally funded actions often miss coordination at larger spatial scales, even  
263 though this is critical for ensuring the persistence of multi-realm species across national  
264 borders. The EU provides a platform to coordinate conservation efforts across borders and  
265 identifies priorities for conservation at a continental level. To reinforce integrated  
266 conservation efforts across Europe we provide the following recommendations.

267 ***Policy recognition for the need of integrated conservation***

268 The EU, as a Party to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), developed a biodiversity  
269 strategy to meet its international commitments. The EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy is directly  
270 linked to the Common Agricultural Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy, the Water  
271 Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD;  
272 2008/56/EC). Yet, in none of these policies are connections of species populations and  
273 human activities across realms explicitly considered. To date, most EU policy documents,  
274 such as the MSFD, refer to activities and management measures that are confined to a  
275 single realm. An exception is the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the  
276 Council for integrated coastal zone management (2002/413/EC). In this policy document the  
277 connections among the terrestrial and marine realms are explicitly stated as well as the need  
278 for integrated management to ensure the sustainability of coastal ecosystems and their  
279 services. Furthermore, with the EU Marine Spatial Planning Directive (2014/89/EU), a

280 framework for marine spatial planning and integrated coastal management was established  
281 which considers the interaction between land- and sea-based activities. This is an important  
282 step towards integrated conservation but coastal ecosystems are not the only systems that  
283 can benefit from integrated management and planning across realms. Adams *et al.* (2014)  
284 highlighted numerous benefits of applying integrated conservation planning and actions  
285 across terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. Therefore, we recommend that policy-makers  
286 consider a broader array of ecosystems and their connections when formulating integrated  
287 management policies and strategies.

### 288 ***Recurrent revision of conservation funding priorities***

289 The first target of the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy is to fully implement the Habitats and  
290 Birds Directives. More specifically it is stated that: “These two Directives are the  
291 cornerstones of the EU’s biodiversity policy, enabling all 27 EU Member States to work  
292 together, within the same legal framework, to conserve Europe’s most endangered and  
293 valuable species and habitats across their entire natural range within the EU”. Yet, our  
294 findings, in accordance with evidence from previous studies (e.g. Maiorano *et al.* 2015,  
295 Hermoso *et al.* 2017, Jeanmougin *et al.* 2017), demonstrate that even the full  
296 implementation of the two directives would not benefit the most endangered species. The  
297 allocation of LIFE-Nature funds has been mainly driven by the Habitats and Birds Directives  
298 but most of the species benefitting from these funds are “Least Concern” species. When  
299 considering only the species listed in the two directives, we found that funds were not  
300 allocated in respect to the species conservation status and the urgency of their conservation  
301 needs. Moreover, many threatened species included in the European Red List (as CR, EN,  
302 or VU) are missing from the directives' annexes. Therefore, we join the voices of our  
303 colleagues and call for an adaptive revision of the conservation priorities set by the two  
304 directives and their harmonization with the European Red List. Revisions should be  
305 conducted periodically to capture the effectiveness of the actions financed by LIFE-Nature  
306 projects and other conservation funding initiatives (Hochkirch *et al.* 2013). Effective

307 conservation actions may drive changes of species' status. Moreover, these periodic  
308 assessments will allow the increase or decrease of threats to biodiversity to be reflected.  
309 These changes should be taken into account when revising conservation priorities and  
310 allocating the scarce conservation resources. Funds should be prioritized but not exclusively  
311 dedicated to the conservation of threatened species as some non-threatened species play  
312 important ecological roles in ecosystem functioning and the provision of ecosystem services.

### 313 ***Implementation of integrated conservation planning and management***

314 The EU's network of protected areas, Natura 2000, aims to ensure the long-term survival of  
315 Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats, listed under the Habitats and  
316 Birds Directives. Besides the urgent need for the revision of the species listed in the two  
317 directives, we suggest that an integrative approach is adopted when designating new Natura  
318 2000 sites across realms. Currently, the vast majority of Natura 2000 sites that include a  
319 marine area are either extensions of terrestrial sites into the sea or cross-realm sites whose  
320 coverage is highly biased towards land (Mazaris *et al.* 2017b). The selection of these sites  
321 has often been driven by terrestrial rather than marine conservation needs (Giakoumi *et al.*  
322 2012). Similarly, the conservation of freshwater ecosystems has been peripheral to  
323 conservation goals developed for terrestrial ecosystems (Hermoso *et al.* 2016). Integrated  
324 conservation planning allows to meet conservation needs in multiple realms in a more  
325 balanced fashion and explicitly considers the trade-offs among alternative plans (e.g.  
326 Álvarez-Romero *et al.* 2015b). To effectively implement integrated conservation planning,  
327 species ranges across realms should be considered. Moreover, adopting cross-realm  
328 management actions could benefit the conservation of multi-realm species and even species  
329 whose activities are confined to one realm but face threats originating from multiple realms.  
330 Our results show that many multi-realm species face common threats, thus, mitigating the  
331 impacts of these threats may have positive conservation outcomes for many species  
332 simultaneously.

333

334 In conclusion, the EU has invested substantial financial resources on conservation projects  
335 for species that use multiple realms during their daily or life cycle. However, EU conservation  
336 efforts should be reinforced and prioritized to conserve more species that need protection  
337 across realms and that are most threatened. To do so, recognition of the need for integrated  
338 policies across realms is needed as well as the implementation of integrated conservation  
339 planning for multi-realm species.

340

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348

### 349 **Supporting Information**

350

351 Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the  
352 publisher's web site:

### 353 **Appendix S1**

354 Methods.

### 355 **Table S1**

356 Habitat classification.

### 357 **Table S2**

358 Threats to multi-realm species.

### 359 **Figure S1**

360 LIFE-Nature investment (including single realm projects) per IUCN category and realm  
361 combination.

362 **Figure S2**

363 Species benefitting from increasing number of projects.

364 **Figure S3**

365 Distribution of LIFE-Nature investment across EU member states adjusted using PPPs.

366

367

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476 **Figure Legends**

477 **Figure 1.** Proportion of multi-realm species within each taxonomic group targeted for  
 478 conservation by at least one LIFE-Nature project in the period 1992-2016. Blue bar sections  
 479 correspond to the proportion of species that have received funding from LIFE-Nature  
 480 projects (dark blue: proportion of species included in the Annexes of the Birds and Habitats  
 481 Directives, light blue: threatened species not included in the Annexes). Red bar sections  
 482 show proportions of species that have not received LIFE-Nature funding (dark red:  
 483 proportion of species included in the Annexes of the Birds and Habitats Directives, light red:  
 484 threatened species not included in the Annexes). The last column refers to the total number  
 485 of species identified as multi-realm species of European conservation concern. Numbers on  
 486 top of the bars refer to the total number of these species in each group.

487 **Figure 2.** Multi-realm species that received the most LIFE-Nature funds per realm  
 488 combination. The overall estimated budget allocated for the conservation of: (A) the  
 489 Eurasian bittern (*Botaurus stellaris* Linnaeus, 1758), a bird species using terrestrial &  
 490 freshwater habitats, was 56,363,932 €; (B) the Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar* Linnaeus,  
 491 1758), a marine fish using freshwater & marine habitats, was 30,607,947 €; (C) the common  
 492 kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis* Linnaeus, 1758), a bird using terrestrial & freshwater & marine

493 habitats, was 13,921,416 €; and (D) the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta* Linnaeus, 1758),  
494 a reptile using terrestrial & marine habitats, was 11,405,033 €. Photo credits: (A) Mike Barth  
495 <https://www.mikebarthphotography.com>, (B) Hans-Peter Fjeld, (C) Andreas Trepte, (D)  
496 Konstantinos Papafitsoros.

497 **Figure 3.** Proportion of (A, C) and average (B, D) LIFE-Nature budget of projects spent for  
498 multi-realm species in each IUCN category (A, B) and realm combination (C, D). The  
499 projects included in the analyses are those including actions in more than one realm.

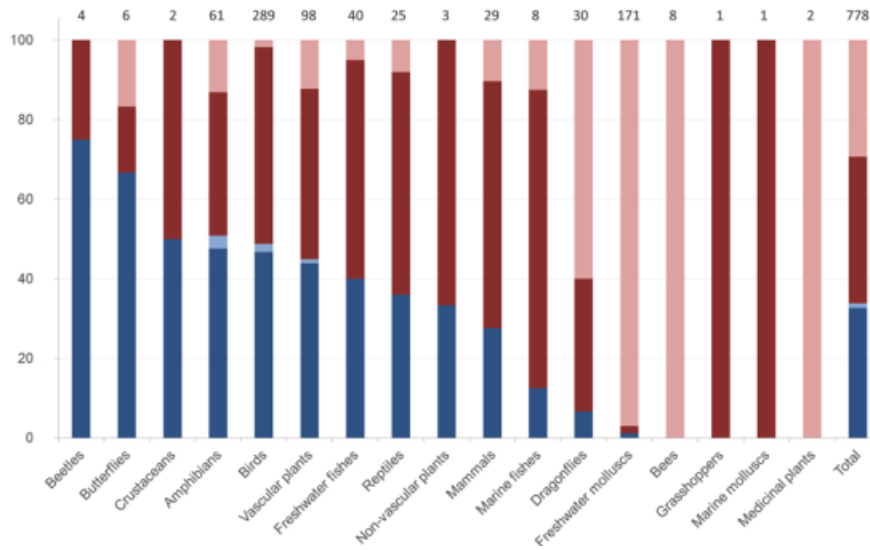
500 **Figure 4.** Distribution of LIFE-Nature investment across EU member states. For each  
501 member state, average investments were calculated by considering total funds received over  
502 the time period the member state was eligible for LIFE projects. Maps show distribution of  
503 (A) LIFE-Nature funds, (B) proportion (%) of LIFE-Nature funds for multi-realm species, and  
504 (C-F) LIFE-Nature funds per realm combinations (C: Terrestrial & Freshwater, D: Terrestrial  
505 & Marine, E: Freshwater & Marine, F: Terrestrial & Freshwater & Marine) across EU member  
506 states for the period 1992-2016. Landlocked countries in the realm combinations including a  
507 marine component are illustrated in light blue.

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### Figures

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 516 not included in the Annexes). Red bar sections show proportions of species that have not received  
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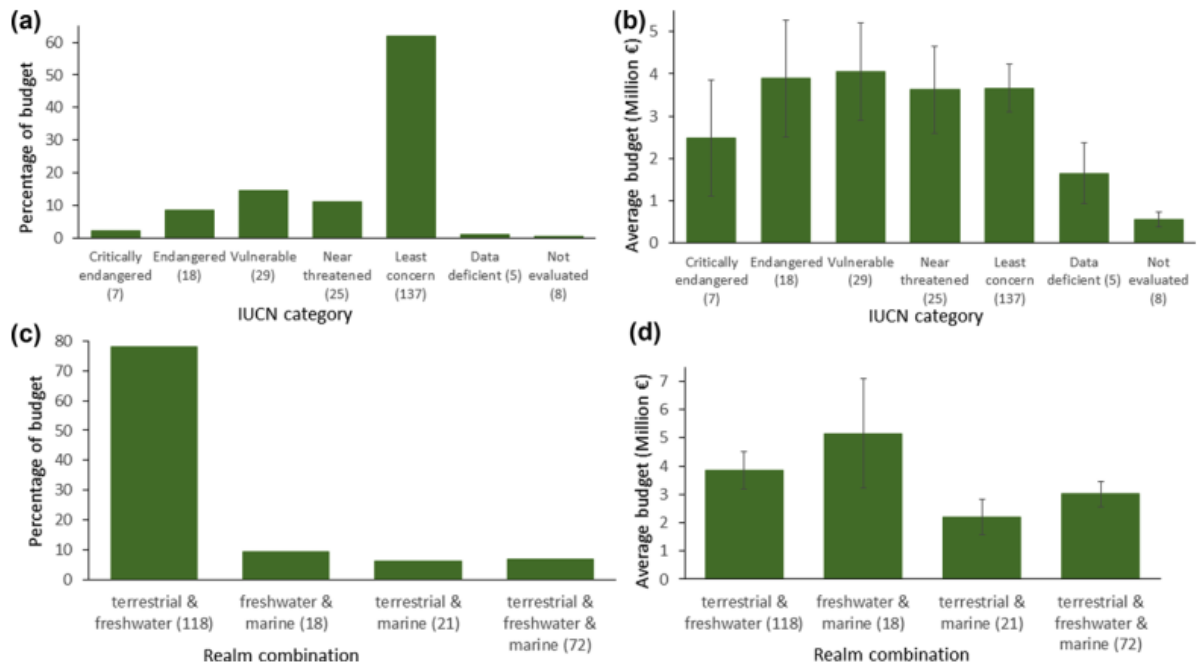
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530 euros. Photo credits: (a) Mike Barth, <https://www.mikebarthphotography.com>, (b) Hans-Peter Fjeld,  
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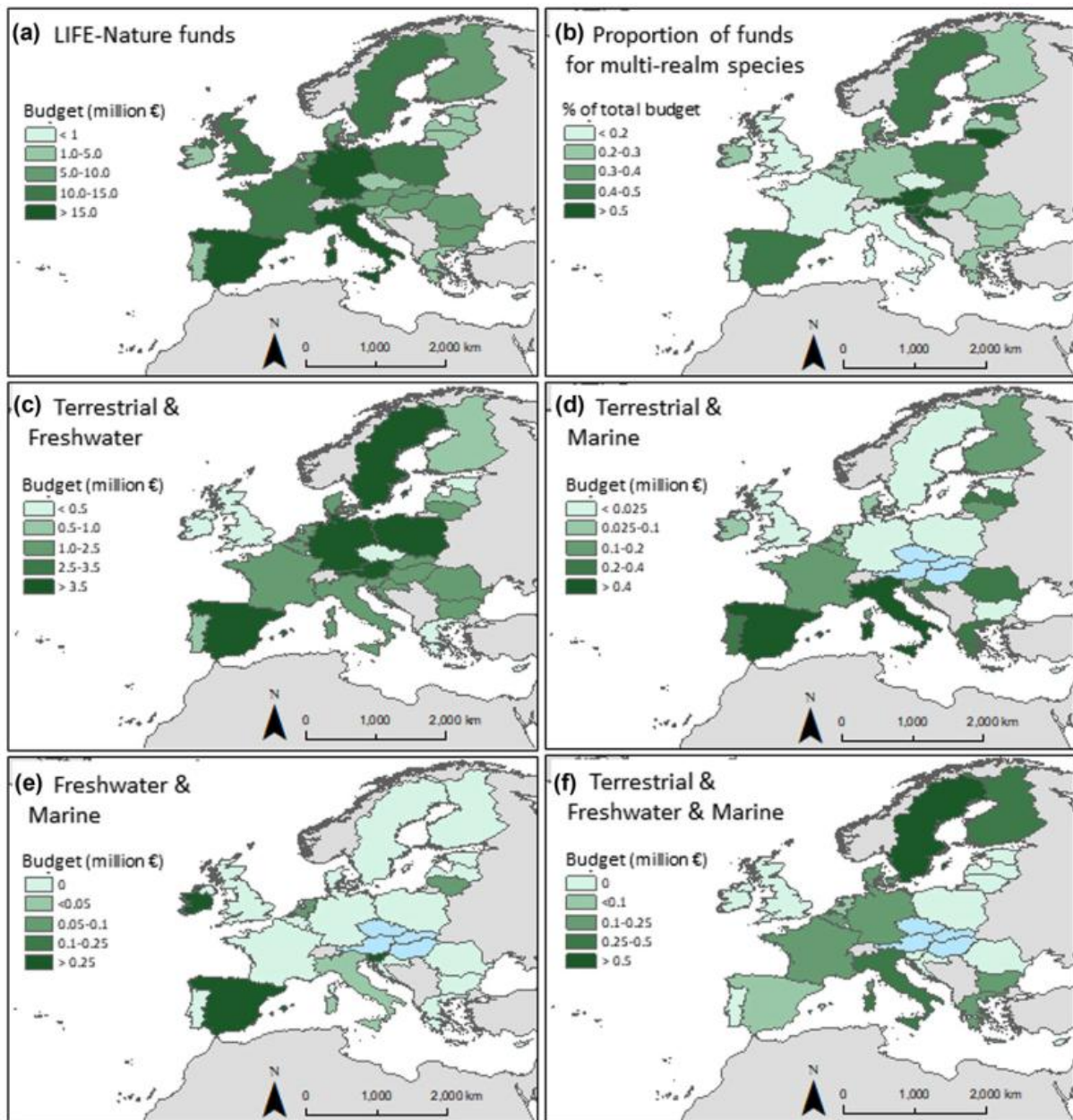


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 542 proportion (%) of LIFE-Nature funds for multi-realm species, and (c–f) LIFE-Nature funds per realm  
 543 combinations (c: Terrestrial & Freshwater, d: Terrestrial & Marine, e: Freshwater & Marine, f:  
 544 Terrestrial & Freshwater & Marine) across EU member states for the period 1992–2016. Landlocked  
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