La Cañada

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Bob Gibbons

Cattle in the high pastures in the Covadonga National Park, Spain.

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Editorial
The HNV debate raises more questions than answers

The theme of the EFNCP conference in June at Wik Castle, Uppsala, was 'Can the market work for nature?' and, although I do not think that anybody was expecting a definitive answer to the question, perhaps the number of new ones raised was a surprise. Some of these are examined in more detail in this issue. On page 6, Xavier Poux analyses why market forces and nature are often in conflict. Other articles on the real and potential impact of the labelling of farm products and EU hygiene regulations do not paint a particularly optimistic picture for really increasing the viability of High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems. However, there were also many positive aspects, and it is perhaps worth emphasising what Gun Rudquist (page 2) points out: that we should not underestimate the importance of getting together key interest groups and individuals to discuss the pressures on wildlife on farmland. Although, having spent a large part of the last 20 years in highlighting such pressures, one would hope that the focus of such discussions can very quickly turn to developing solutions.

Not surprisingly, the question of 'What do we mean by HNV farmland?' was central to many of the discussions at the conference. Gwyn Jones reports on this (page 10), and also on the outcomes of the first of the workshops in Bulgaria and Romania on the definition and identification of HNV farmland in these countries.

Shifting definitions

Looking through back issues of *La Cañada,* it is hard to understand why there continues to be any conceptual difficulty in getting to grips with the simple fact that certain types of farmland and farming systems are more important for nature than others. Over at least the past five years HNV farmland has been central to most of our seminars, workshops, conferences and research projects, but rarely, if ever, has the concept – that low-intensity, low-input farming systems have the highest biodiversity – been challenged. Nor, for that matter, that high-input, intensive and industrialised systems are biologically impoverished. But there are, of course, important changes on the horizon, and as the HNV farmland concept moves closer to having a tangible influence on policy and support payments, perhaps it is not surprising that we see attempts to fit a wide range of existing farmland across Europe into the HNV concept. There is undoubtedly a very real danger of the concept being diluted by the lobbies that want to maintain the status quo. In addition, the forthcoming review of the Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) will inevitably

become linked to HNV farmland debate, since so much of this type of farming falls within the current LFAs.

Proposals under the CAP Health Check to increase the rate of compulsory modulation to 13% in 2013 and to cap farm Single Payments in excess of €100,000 are likely to mean that more money will be available within Pillar Two of the CAP. Since halting the loss of biodiversity through the maintenance of HNV farming is one of the Community's Rural Development strategic objectives, we can expect much more critical attention on the concept. Moreover, this new strategic importance requires that Member States monitor changes in the extent and condition of HNV farmland over the course of their current rural development programmes and assess the impact of policy measures on this resource.

Robin Bignal

HNV farmland on Islay in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland. Making clear the links between farming practice and biological richness is still an important part of the Forums' work.

HNV indicators

In fact, things are already moving apace. In December 2006, DG Agriculture awarded IEEP a contract to conduct a seven-month study of 'High Nature Value' Indicators for Evaluation (Contract Notice 2006 – G4-04). The Forum contributed to this work, together with other subcontractors from across Europe. The research developed indicators for use in monitoring HNV farming, and these have been set out in a Guidance Document* specifically aimed at helping inform Member States how best to meet the obligations for HNV that they should have set out in their Rural Development Plans. The study was completed in July 2007. At the time of writing the report has not yet been published by the Commission, but this is expected some time this winter.

This short study will certainly not be the last word on elaborating the concept. There is no doubt that Member States will want to describe more systematically and map the areas of HNV farmland (the physical aspects) and, one would hope, also describe and classify their HNV farming systems (the functional aspects). Our experience to-date, however, is that the need for the latter is often overtaken by the perceived need to define and quantify in fine detail what can be measured solely from a habitat and species perspective. For example, the recent report by EEA, 'Halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010: proposals for a first set of indicators to monitor progress in Europe', is disappointing in that it perpetuates this approach. The farming system element is sadly missing and nowhere do the authors include anything on how biodiversity is connected with the underlying farming system.

The need for clarity

From the Forum viewpoint, we see a continuing and urgent need to further clarify the HNV concept, especially with regard to the intimate links between the biological aspects and farming systems. It is only through such an approach that new policies can be targeted on the most important areas and those farming systems which are needed to sustain the nature we all value so highly.

Given the increased focus on HNV in policy documents in recent years, one could be forgiven for thinking that the issues facing HNV farming systems, and their associated habitats and species, were on the way to be being solved. This is, however, clearly not the case and now, more than ever, we need to keep the HNV concept alive in the minds of policy-makers, be clear about the farming systems that truly are deserving of greater support, and work hard to ensure that new policies are designed in a way that such support does reach them.

Eric Bignal

*For further information on the study, the indicators and the Guidance Document for Member States, please contact Tamsin Cooper on tcooper@ieep.eu.

Reflections from the EFNCP Conference 2007: 'Can the market work for nature?'

It was early June 2007 and summer had struck Sweden hard. Everything was blooming and nature showed itself at its very best. There were warm winds from the south and sunshine all day long. The sun set as late as 11pm. It could not have been better – perfect conditions for arranging a conference with field trips studying High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems in relation to market forces. So, with this excellent setting, there was nothing or nobody else to blame other than the organisers if the conference did not reach its goals. So let us have a look. What was the outcome of the gathering of over 80 participants from all over Europe at Wik Castle, outside Uppsala, north of Stockholm, in Sweden, during 4th-6th June 2007?

A central plank of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been the decoupling of support payments from production, freeing farmers to respond to the market. Meanwhile, the importance of HNV farmland for maintaining Europe's biodiversity is being given considerable prominence, with support for it becoming a major goal of the EU's Rural Development policies. The co-operation and interaction between policies and the market was the main focus of the conference, which was the tenth of the EFNCP's bi-annual conferences. The reason for focusing on the market was a direct outcome of the 2005 EFNCP conference in Bulgaria, one conclusion of which highlighted the need for a critical look into if and how the market could work for nature.

Concepts of HNV

The conference at Wik started with presentations about the concept of HNV. Even though this has been done before, it is still obvious that the concept is being interpreted differently across Europe and by different interest groups. The speakers discussed HNV both from a scientific and a policy perspective, as well as a market perspective. Given the debate and the questions that followed, it is very clear that

still further clarification and guidance on the local adaptation of the concept of HNV is needed.

Because the event was held in Sweden, the first session took a deeper look at HNV in the Nordic countries. Previously, many Nordic policy-makers have argued that the current understanding of HNV in the EU does not fit the Nordic countries. The reason brought forward has been that HNV in these countries often appears side-by-side with intensive agriculture in a mosaic pattern and rarely, if ever, as vast coherent areas. As a result, most of the agricultural land in the Nordic countries has been claimed to be HNV. Speakers from Finland and Sweden shed further light on this debate.

Market issues

The aim of the conference was to discuss three topics associated with the larger issues of the market – labelling, hygiene rules and the interest and perception of the consumer. All these topics are central if one is to get closer to the core question 'Can the market work for nature?' The topics were explored during the second and third sessions by speakers and, later, during workshops. In brief, the second session stressed that market tools and policy options exist and the key question is national adaptation and the will to address HNV-related issues. For instance, the Commisson representative stressed that the new hygiene rules allow adaptation at a national level to facilitate small-scale foodprocessing. Several speakers from different parts of Europe discussed existing labelling schemes in relation to HNV. To date, few of the existing schemes reach the objectives of HNV. In general, these schemes are not very well known either among consumers or among decision-makers.

Field trips

After one and a half days of indoor sessions and debates, it was time to see some farming and HNV farmland. Three different field trips were arranged. All of these included HNV farmland and farmers who had market-oriented solutions, building on nature values and close consumer contacts. Often, the Swedish Rural Development Programme supported these market solutions. Something common to all three field trips was the importance of strong entrepreneurs who had deep concerns for environmental issues, as well as business. This was a key to success. Another striking thing was the fast-growing interest from consumers, making it possible to have 'farm-gate' stores and cooperatives.

Xavier Poux

Xavier Poux

Xavier Poux

Top **Wik Castle.**
Middle **One of the conference workshops.**
Right **A break during one of the field trips.**

Bridging the gap

The last day of the conference gave the participants time to reflect on the core question 'Can the market work for nature?' in workshops, addressing the question from three different perspectives – labelling, hygiene and policy. I thought the outcome of the workshops was positive, in the sense that the participants were optimistic and believed in the potential power of the market as a tool. But a lot of work still needs to be done regarding bridging the gap in understanding about HNV, increasing the exchange of ideas and experiences, and enhancing the communication between different levels, both nationally and within the EU.

So this brings us back to my original question: was it worthwhile gathering so many participants from all over Europe, enhancing the greenhouse-gas emissions significantly? Being an environmentalist, this is clearly a relevant question. But, if I am permitted to say so (I was, after all, one of the organisers), I think it was definitively worthwhile. The sharing of ideas and experiences makes one realise that, even if we sometimes end up in endless discussions regarding the interpretation of the concept of HNV, there is a general understanding and a strong desire to find ways to preserve farming systems which benefit both nature and man. And, by the way, to support my contented feeling, the conference evaluations from the participants gave the event an overall score of 4 out of 5.

Several of the following articles in this issue address questions raised at the conference, and there is further information at www.efncp.org.

Gun Rudquist, Head of Environment Unit at the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation; e-mail: gun.rudquist@naturskyddsforeningen.se

EU labelling of geographical origin: good, bad or irrelevant for HNV farming?

From an early stage in the conference, some participants were suggesting that the question 'Can the market work for nature?' should in fact be 'HOW can the market work for nature?'

One way is by differentiating the products of HNV farming from 'mainstream' agricultural products, to benefit HNV farmers. If only consumers knew the link to nature and landscape, surely they would prefer to buy HNV products, and would be prepared to pay more for them?

An EU labelling system already exists which aims to differentiate products from certain geographical areas, and from certain production systems. There are four labels, as shown in the box below.

Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) (EU Regulation 510/2006):
- foodstuffs which are produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area using recognised know-how.

Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) (EU Regulation 510/2006):
- the geographical link must occur in at least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation.

Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) (EU Regulation 509/2006):
- does not refer to the origin but highlights traditional character, either in the composition or means of production.

Organic farming (EU Regulation 509/2006):
- avoids the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilisers, growth hormones, antibiotics or gene manipulation.

The conference focused on the first three of these labels, and particularly on the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO). Is this labelling system relevant for HNV farming? Is there any correlation between HNV-farming areas and systems, and food products carrying these labels? In order for a food product to carry one of these EU labels, is the farming system required to follow particular practices, or to be in any way more 'nature-friendly'?

From the outset, it should be made clear that the EU Regulation governing the PDO and PGI labels does not make any explicit links to HNV farming, or to the environmental conditions of farm production. Rather, these labels are telling the consumer that at least some stage in the production process has taken place in a particular geographical area, or, in the case of TSG, that part of the process is somehow 'traditional'.

Links between labelling and environmental quality

The only reference to the environment in the Regulation concerns PDO products: Article 2 of Regulation 510/2006 states that these are products '*the quality or characteristics of which are essentially or exclusively due to a particular geographical environment with its inherent natural and human factors*'.

The Regulation says very little about production conditions for the products carrying the PDO label. The minimal requirement is for '*a description of the method of obtaining the agricultural product or foodstuff and, if appropriate, the authentic and unvarying local methods*'.

Yet, although the EU-labelling system itself makes no claims about environmental quality, there is an implication that the environment from which the product comes is somehow special, and that the production system is more 'traditional', and perhaps more in-tune with the environment. The illustrations and wording used on packaging often imply that these products are in some way linked to attractive landscapes and to nature.

Thus, whereas the labelling system is intended to ensure a certain quality of *product*, in the mind of the consumer and of the marketeer, this product quality tends to be linked with environmental quality.

To examine in more detail the relevance of these labels for HNV farming, several examples of PDO products from France and Spain were presented at the Conference by Xavier Poux and Guy Beaufoy. The examples included olive oil, Iberian ham, and several cheeses made from cows', sheep's and goats' milk.

Main points

These were some of the main points to emerge.

- There is no automatic geographical overlap between PDO and HNV farming. Some PDO areas may coincide with a high incidence of HNV farming, but others may equally well be under predominantly more intensive farming. Some areas of HNV farming are covered by PDO labels, others are not.
- The production requirements of PDO labels generally are more concerned with the quality of the processed product (i.e. what you eat), than with primary, farm-level production. Where requirements for primary production are included, these vary considerably from one label to another.
- In most of the examples presented, the farming-system requirements are minimal and stated in very general terms. This is the case with the PDO Camembert de Normandie, for example, and with the olive examples. Here, the requirements state that 'cultivation practices will be the traditional ones that tend to produce the best quality olive oil'. The Spanish PDO cheese examples require the use of native breeds and 'traditional feeding systems exploiting the natural grazing of the area'. Such requirements *sound* like HNV criteria, but are so vague as to be practically meaningless. Criteria of relevance to nature values, such as grazing regimes and stocking densities, are absent in these examples. In short, we found that several PDO labels give no guarantee that the product comes from a particular farming system, or of a particular respect for environmental standards.

Two different olive oil PDOs: the only requirements concerning farming practices are that they should be 'traditional' and ensure 'quality olive oil'.

- On the other hand, some PDO labels are far more explicit in requiring certain animal feeding systems, addressing areas such as maximum stocking densities, the use of local hay in preference to silage (e.g. 'Comté' cheese in France), and the free-range use of acorns in the case of 'Dehesa de Extremadura' acorn-fed Iberian ham. Thus, from an HNV perspective, some PDO labels have at least *some* link to relevant farming practices. Even then, these are based on considerations of product quality and market management, rather than on nature-conservation criteria.
- This degree of variation in the requirements of labels is a potential source of confusion (obviously such detailed information is not displayed on the label itself), especially for the consumer who is concerned with the environmental aspects of the farming system, and who might assume that a product from an apparently more 'natural' geographical area is produced with particular respect for the nature of the area.
- In some cases, farming systems and nature values may vary considerably within a PDO production area. An example is the Camembert de Normandie PDO. Much of the cheese carrying the label is

Guy Beaufoy

Left **Dehesa grazed by pigs at an ecologically appropriate stocking density.** Below **An example of extreme over-stocking of pigs in dehesa. Under the PDO label Dehesa Extremadura, for 'acorn-fed ham', pig numbers must be within the carrying capacity of the dehesa. There is no such requirement for 'intensively-fed ham' carrying the same PDO label.**

from quite intensive farming systems and landscapes which have lost their nature value. Yet the image of the label and of the product is associated with a more traditional, low-intensity and generally HNV farming system which has survived in one specific area of Normandy – the Pays d'Auge.

- A more detailed look shows that in some cases (e.g. French 'Comté' cheese) a PDO label with more demanding requirements can have an effect in keeping production at less intensive levels than in non-PDO farming, for example lower LU/ha and less use of agro-chemicals; and that floral diversity on PDO grasslands tends to be higher.
- The cheese examples from France also show that some PDO labels have been successful in generating higher prices and demand, and thus keeping farming systems viable that might otherwise have disappeared. But to be competitive, farms will tend to intensify as far as label requirements allow. Sometimes the resulting farming system is still HNV, and sometimes not.
- Finally, participants questioned whether many consumers even distinguish between the different EU labels shown above. There is potential for real confusion. Apart from the organic farming label, the other three have the same colouring and are very similar in appearance. The wording of the labels is potentially confusing. How many consumers would distinguish the different concepts, and their significance in relation to the origin of the products?

A mixed blessing

Given these considerations, some participants felt that the existence of the EU labelling system in its current form is, at best, a mixed blessing for HNV farming. While the labels offer the potential for HNV farming to benefit from market opportunities, the minimal requirements of the EU labelling system mean that the same opportunities are available to more intensive, non-HNV farming.

At present then, the EU system of geographical/traditional labels supports products from certain geographical areas that often have special environmental values, but it does not support the farming systems that conserve these values.

Of course, this does not *prevent* individual PDO and PGI labels from setting more stringent production requirements within the EU framework, as already occurs in some cases referred to above. Also, farmers and farmers' associations are free to establish their own labels for produce that is farmed according to particular conditions. An example of this is the Swedish 'Green Meat' scheme (farms involved in this scheme were visited during the conference).

So what should be the role of EU legislation? Policy-makers might argue that all farming in the EU must comply with minimum legal standards on environmental protection, and that this is further enforced by cross-compliance for products receiving CAP support. Furthermore, if a consumer has particular environmental concerns, aren't these addressed by the organic farming label?

But the reality is that farming can comply with minimum environmental standards and organic standards without meeting the key criteria for HNV farmland: low intensity of production and the presence of significant areas of semi-natural vegetation.

Furthermore, it can be argued that areas under HNV farming harbour particular nature values, and are often environmentally fragile, and that for these reasons we need to maintain and promote the particular farming systems that are best adapted to these conditions. Neither basic environmental standards nor organic-production standards are intended for this.

The EU labelling system for products from particular geographical areas is also not intended for this purpose, but perhaps it should develop in this direction. The current EU regulations are very undemanding, in terms of farming systems, as well as confusing in their mix of 'geographical' and 'traditional' values. The concepts at the heart of the system date from a previous era, when there was less clarity about the environmental effects of different farming systems; PDO was first developed for wine in the 1930s, and later applied to cheese in the 1970s.

Labelling should reflect consumer concerns

It is time for the EU labelling regulations to make a stronger link between geographical areas and the farming systems that maintain the particular nature or landscape values of these areas. This would better reflect the modern concerns of consumers, and our improved knowledge and understanding of the way in which farming systems interact with nature and landscape. For producers and consumers, 'special products' would be linked not only to 'special areas', but also to the 'special values' of these areas.

The EU Regulation should make it obligatory for labels to be linked to a detailed specification of farming systems that maintain nature values. In this way, the EU labelling system could be transformed into a positive measure for HNV farming.

Guy Beaufoy; gbeaufoy@idrisi.net

The EU food hygiene Regulations (852/2004 and 853/2004)

The speaker from DG Health and Consumer Protection (DG Sanco) of the European Commission outlined the provisions of the recently implemented EU food hygiene Regulations as they relate to small or traditional businesses of the type often found in HNV areas.

He said that DG Sanco were particularly pleased to be participating, as this was the first ever such gathering of non-specialists in the hygiene field to which they had been invited, and in particular the first which linked the question to the environment and to HNV farmland.

Regulation provisions

He gave a broad outline of the provisions of the Regulations, specifically focusing on two provisions which are especially applicable to small or traditional producers. These are that:

1) In accordance with Art. 1.2 of 852/2004 and Art. 1.3 of 853/2004, the Regulations do not apply to:

- primary production for private domestic use;
- domestic preparation, handling or storage of food for private domestic use;
- the direct supply, by the producer, of small quantities of primary products to the final consumer or to local retail establishments directly supplying the final consumer.

2) In accordance with Art. 13.4 to 13.7 852/2004, Member States may, having notified the Commission and without compromising the achievement of the overall objectives of the Regulation, adopt national measures adapting the EU-wide requirements with the aim of:

- enabling the continued us of traditional methods, at any of the stages of production, processing or distribution of food, or
- accommodating the needs of food businesses situated in regions that are subject to special geographical conditions.

According to DG Sanco, the provision allowing Member States to apply for derogation had been used less than a dozen times, but in all instances the applications had been approved. It was pointed out that defending a case for derogation implied good cooperation between the producers and their local administration in order to set out a proper argument. It requires both scientific and administrative skill to complete the whole process.

Under-used flexibility

The provisions came as a surprise to many delegates. It seems that many Member States have taken the 'easy' way out and applied all rules equally and without adaptation to all production, wherever it is located and whatever its scale. All too often, the impression had been given to them in their home Member State that new strict rules were without exception 'imposed by Brussels'.

Others thought that a neutral observer might equally question why the Commission enforced *any* changes to current practices if they weren't causing any problems – 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'. A subsequent presentation by Elena di Bella of Torino illustrated how a local authority in Romania had catalysed the cooperation of traditional producers of *mustardela* (a blood sausage) and the erection of new shared premises, at considerable economic expense, in order to comply with the EU Regulation. Yet there was no evidence that the old method of processing in individual premises had led to any hygiene problems!

This Romanian example showed, by way of contrast, that the EC Regulations could be used by the national 'regular developers' to support the mainstream development pattern of modernising investments. The Romanian authorities had not defined 'small quantities' or asked for their exemption, at the time of the conference.

One participant pointed out that DG Sanco has a budget for disseminating information. However, the seminars which it has commissioned seem, judging by its website, to be centrally located and aimed squarely (and understandably, perhaps) at food hygiene authorities.

The realisation that there is considerable under-used flexibility in EU rules and that some parts of the EU are implementing the rules in an innovative and regionally-adapted way inspired some conference participants to see if an experience-sharing project, perhaps in the framework of Interreg, might be possible. The project could also fruitfully encompass the innovative use of Rural Development and/or Structural Funds to help ease small or traditional producers through any changes which might still be necessary. Concept documents are being drawn up at present, and the potential for a project will be discussed at the November conference of Euromontana. Expressions of interest are most welcome.

Gwyn Jones; dgl_jones@yahoo.co.uk

La Nature comme cheval du Troie du Marché ?

En juin 2007 le Forum Européen sur la Conservation de la Nature a axé sa conférence biennale sur le thème : le marché peut il œuvrer pour la Nature ? Plus particulièrement, alors que la réforme de 2003 appelle à 'plus de marché' dans la régulation du développement agricole, les débats de la conférence visaient à éclairer la validité de l'hypothèse fondamentale de la réforme, à savoir qu'elle conduit à une situation 'gagnant-gagnant', permettant de combiner le revenu des exploitants, les finances communautaires et la conservation de la nature.

Pour expliciter davantage les attendus de la conférence, la question était de voir en quoi l'abandon d'une forme de soutien public aux exploitations agricoles conduisant à des stratégies d'échelle et agissant comme un rouleau compresseur favorable à l'intensification (situation pré-2003) était susceptible de faire émerger des initiatives locales (agriculture biologique, éco-tourisme, appellations d'origine contrôlées et géographiques de provenance,…).

En contrepoint de cette théorie d'action économique, la prise en charge de la nature doit se traduire par l'extension des surfaces agricoles à Haute Valeur Naturelle, qui font leur entrée opérationnelle dans le dispositif politique communautaire via leur inscription au rang d'indicateur pour le développement rural dans son ensemble.

Concrètement, la réponse à la question posée par la conférence sera positive si et seulement si les mécanismes de marché conduisent à un accroissement des surfaces à HVN.

Notre propos dans cet article est d'apporter un regard critique, qui mettent en lumière les enseignements et limites de la conférence sous l'angle économique et politique. Pour ce faire, nous sommes amenés à préciser la problématique de la conférence. Que le marché puisse œuvrer pour la nature semble établi. Les exploita-

tions européennes sont soumises aux lois du marché depuis de nombreux siècles et décennies et, s'il y avait une opposition de principe entre les deux termes, il n'y aurait plus de systèmes agricoles à haute valeur naturelle. Les exposés et les visites de terrain organisées dans le cadre de la conférence ont montré des exemples où tel exploitant valorisait économiquement le fait de produire tout en conservant la biodiversité. Nous citerons le cas de ce groupe d'exploitants qui ayant restauré un pâturage extensif sur un marais en voie de fermeture tire une plus-value de la viande issue de ce pâturage grâce à l'information fournie aux consommateurs impliqués dans une « qualité totale » de leur produit - organoleptique et environnementale, voire sociétale. On retrouve dans cet exemple les termes typiques d'un mécanisme de marché : un acte de vente, une information sur un produit qui établit une forme de qualité et une différenciation, une relation de confiance entre un vendeur et un acheteur et la formation d'un prix. On insistera sur le caractère innovant d'une démarche qui adapte les attributs et la mise en valeur d'une marque locale aux réalités du marché local visé.

Mais, dans le même temps, une somme d'exemples n'est pas le marché et, si l'on reprend les dernières décennies, on trouvera une foule de contre exemples où le marché a conduit à la destruction des actifs naturels. À l'échelle européenne, l'intensification et la spécialisation qui ont conduit au recul des exploitations à haute valeur naturelle s'expliquent principalement par des mécanismes de marché. Autre face de la même médaille : les exploitants agricoles qui n'ont pas pu ou voulu intensifier se retrouvent souvent dans des situations économiques et sociales difficiles tant la valorisation de la nature demande de travail, qui rend les exploitations à Haute Valeur Naturelle non compétitives. Autrement dit, le marché a aussi beaucoup œuvré contre la nature et les agriculteurs ménageant cette dernière.

La question de la conférence devient donc : à quelles conditions le marché peut-il œuvrer pour la nature et ce, à l'échelle européenne. Cette dernière question – celle de l'échelle – est centrale et ce, pour deux raisons fondamentales.

La première est liée à l'impératif d'envisager la biodiversité à l'échelle de l'aire géographique européenne. Dans la suite de la conférence de Malahide, l'objectif de 'no net loss' en matière de biodiversité se pose bien à cette échelle ; c'est le bilan global qui est en question, entre les forces positives et négatives. La question n'est plus d'identifier des exemples favorables et des exemples défavorables, mais de faire le point sur ce qui l'emporte des deux. C'est dans cette perspective que doit se

Bob Gibbons

Traditional transhumance sheep farming in south-east France, showing a flock being moved from Provence to the Alps.

comprendre l'entreprise de définition des indicateurs des zones à haute valeur naturelle telle que posée à l'échelle européenne. Dans le cadre d'une réflexion engagée par le Forum, nous rappellerons en outre la place centrale de l'agriculture dans le maintien ou la destruction de la nature. Pour résumer : les marchés agricoles européens et leur organisation déterminent l'avenir de la biodiversité européenne ; ce n'est pas un déterminant parmi d'autres, c'est sans doute le déterminant principal.

La seconde raison, qui découle en partie de la manière dont nous avons posée la précédente, est que c'est précisément l'objet de la politique agricole *commune* que d'envisager la question des marchés à l'échelle européenne. Historiquement, les organisations communes de marchés ont été l'expression centralisée de cette approche : les exploitations s'adaptaient aux signaux donnés au plan communautaire. La réforme de 2003 a inversé l'approche en considérant que le marché devenait la somme des stratégies individuelles, micro-économiques. Dans le cadre d'une conférence européenne, avec la PAC en toile de fond, ce cadrage méritait d'être rappelé.

Ce cadrage de la question de la conférence étant posé, comment analyser les débats et discussions qui ont eu lieu en Suède ? Quels enseignements stratégiques peut-on en tirer ?

Le premier enseignement porte sur la manière de poser la nature par les divers participants. Si tous s'accordaient à reconnaître que la nature pouvait être un attribut à faire valoir pour l'économie de l'exploitation, on pointera le fait que l'acceptation du mot « nature » était particulièrement large. Elle pouvait aller, pour les acteurs économiques, jusqu'à des exploitations « vertes » qui soignent leur image et accueillent des éco-touristes amateurs de randonnées cyclistes (ce que suggèrent les présentations faites par les organisations professionnelles agricoles). Ce n'est pas problématique en soi, mais ce le devient si la préservation de la biodiversité européenne doit reposer sur une approche aussi large et ambiguë de la nature. C'est dans cette faille que s'engouffre d'ailleurs une bonne partie des débats relatifs à la définition des zones ou exploitations HVN. On a eu parfois l'impression que la question de caractérisation fine des espaces semi-naturels (qui fait pas question dans ses caractéristiques d'ensemble pour les gestionnaires de la biodiversité) est posée sur le même plan que celle de : une exploitation en agriculture biologique intensive est-elle HVN par nature ? (ce qui, pour le coup, nous semble franchement mal posé). Faute d'une appropriation suffisante des 'fondamentaux' des HVN, ce concept a pu être utilisé comme équivalent de 'vert' ou 'traditionnel' par les acteurs politiques ou socio-professionnels invités. Du coup : de quelle nature et de quels marchés parle-t-on ? La biodiversité ne risque-t-elle pas d'être oubliée au passage ?

Le deuxième enseignement porte précisément sur la manière d'appréhender les marchés et leur capacité à distinguer les exploitations HVN. Logiquement, l'accent a été mis sur les marchés de produits agricoles : fromages, charcuteries,… avec comme question : comment peuvent-ils 'véhiculer' des attributs biodiversité dans un acte marchand ? Les enjeux relatifs à l'hygiène ont été largement discutés dans cette optique, pour éviter que les normes dans ce domaine n'excluent les produits traditionnels souvent associés au maintien d'exploitations HVN. La problématique centrale est que le prix assure un revenu suffisant au maintien des exploitations

ayant un label HVN, les modalités de définition et de gestion d'un tel label restant à définir. Mais si les difficultés et enjeux de l'entreprise ont été soulignés, la question de la capacité même de cette approche économique de préserver une grande fraction d'exploitations et de zones HVN nous semble avoir été insuffisamment discutée. Que *certains* groupes d'exploitations, au prix d'innovations administratives et professionnelles analysées dans le cours de la conférence, puissent réussir le pari semble établi de manière convaincante au regard des exemples donnés. Que *beaucoup* et suffisamment réussissent à le faire reste un point beaucoup plus ouvert. Autrement dit, le signal prix ne peut pas être considéré d'emblée comme suffisant pour couvrir l'ensemble des situations, et nous défendrons ici la pertinence d'aides publiques ciblées pour 'combler les défaillances du marché', pour reprendre l'expression consacrée (ne serait-ce que parce que les prix de produits marchands ne sont d'emblée pas adaptés à intégrer la préservation de biens communs non échangeables que sont les actifs naturels). On peut aussi considérer que les aides sont une forme de marché, public, qui lie un citoyen à un exploitant agricole et vient compléter le marché privé. Autrement dit, le 'marché' ne se résume pas nécessairement à celui de produits mais aurait pu être compris dans un sens plus large.

Que ce point n'ait été qu'effleuré dans le cadre de la conférence — alors qu'on aurait pu s'attendre à ce qu'il le soit largement dans un cercle où le soutien politique aux exploitations marginales, désavantagées économiquement est une figure centrale — nous laisse quelque peu perplexe.

Le troisième et dernier enseignement, en grande partie lié au précédent, est celui de la manière dont les marchés de qualité fonctionnent. Les exposés relatifs aux labels et appellations d'origine contrôlées ont non seulement montré que les cahiers des charges reflétaient une qualité de produit, mais pratiquement pas les attributs environnementaux (ce qui est logique si l'on considère qu'on achète un jambon et pas un paysage ou des pratiques agricoles). Mais plus fondamentalement, toutes démarche réussie de différenciation d'un produit agricole visant une valeur ajoutée incite à maximiser la production de ce produit pour tirer profit de la 'niche' ainsi dégagée. Le positionnement réussi sur un segment de marché incitera à augmenter l'intensité, ce qui est problématique si l'on considère que les zones HVN sont essentiellement à basse intensité. Sur la base d'une riche expérience française dans ce domaine, on constate qu'il faut beaucoup d'effort et de discipline professionnelle et administrative pour conserver un faible niveau de production à l'hectare. Nous avons plus d'exemples d'AOC qui ont intensifié leur production que l'inverse.

Que, pour vendre les produits, leurs promoteurs mettent en avant des images à forte charge naturelle est de bonne guerre commerciale (et l'on retrouve la définition large de la nature évoquée plus haut). C'est ce constat qui justifie le titre de cet article : la mise en avant de la nature peut être une stratégie marketing efficace pour désarmer une certaine crainte d'un marché trop industriel, trop normalisé. Mais ce ne peut être qu'un affichage qui cache, *in fine*, une destruction de la nature par le marché. Que l'arbre (l'exploitation extensive traditionnelle à bas niveau d'intrants qui figure sur l'étiquette) cache la forêt (la majorité des exploitations productives, pas nécessairement polluantes, mais les exigences de la biodiversité vont au-delà) est la règle. Dès lors, confier naïvement aux acteurs du marché l'essentiel ou l'intégralité de la préservation de la biodiversité, sans garantie et contrôle, c'est prendre le risque de constater trop tard que les exemples réussis et mis en avant ont occulté un mouvement de fond globalement négatif.

En conclusion, nous renvoyons dos-à-dos deux modèles politiques : celui, passé et incarné dans la PAC d'avant 2003, dont nous rappelons ici son caractère globalement destructeur pour la biodiversité ; celui qui consiste à « faire le pari » du marché privé de produits comme moteur unique, en envisageant essentiellement les modalités de son amélioration et optimisation. Alors que cette deuxième vision nous semble avoir été très dominante dans la conférence (finalement, la principale adresse aux pouvoirs publics était : « moins de régulation dans le domaine sanitaire »), nous défendons l'idée d'une troisième voie qui combine mécanismes publics et privés dans l'orientation de l'agriculture, et intervenant à différents niveaux de régulation. Cette question est plus large que celle posée par la conférence, mais elle mérite d'être posée au regard des enjeux qui la sous-tendent: la préservation de la biodiversité en Europe à travers le maintien d'exploitations agricoles.

Xavier Poux;
e-mail: Xavier.poux@asca-net.com

Nature – a Trojan horse for the market?

The EFNCP's 2007 conference theme was 'Can the market work for nature?' In the context of the 2003 CAP reform, which called for 'more market forces' in the regulation of agricultural development, the conference debates aimed at analysing the truth of the fundamental assumption of the reform, i.e. can there be a 'win-win' situation in which farm income, EC financial considerations and nature conservation are all safeguarded at the same time?

To rephrase the aim in a more specific way: the question was to see to what extent the withdrawal of the pre-2003 type of support for farms (which promoted economies of scale and increased the chances of intensification) is likely to promote local initiatives (organic farming, eco-tourism, Protected Denomination of Origin – PDO – and so on).

As a counterpoint to the possible economic benefits, nature conservation gains should be visible through the increase of HNV farmland, now embodied in EU agriculture policy, with its new status as a monitoring indicator. Thus the question addressed by the conference can only be answered in the affirmative if, and only if, the market mechanisms lead to an increase in the area of HNV farmland.

In this article I attempt a critical analysis of the conference findings from an economic point of view. The first step is to narrow the question down somewhat. The fact that the market *might* work for nature is not in question. European farms have been under the influence of the market for centuries and, had there been a fundamental contradiction between market and nature, HNV farming systems would have disappeared long ago. The presentations and field trips organised during the conference highlighted some success stories, where farm-income generation was combined with the conservation and promotion of biodiversity. For instance, the case of farmers in Närke, who sell meat produced on formerly abandoned wetlands and take additional profit from consumers concerned about the 'total quality' – taste, environment and even community aspects – of the sold product. This example is typical of a market approach: a sale transaction, informed by marketing which establishes particular quality attributes that differentiate the product and create a relationship of trust between the seller and the customer, leading to the setting of a price. It was an innovative approach which made and adapted a local brand for a local market.

At the same time, the sum of case-studies and examples does not typify the market as a whole. If we consider recent

decades, one might find numerous counter-examples where the market led to the destruction of natural assets. At the European scale, intensification and specialisation has led to fewer HNV farms, mainly due to market mechanisms. The other side of the same coin is that not all farmers respond rationally to market signals; some systems and farms have survived despite the market, not because of it. Today, those that could not or did not want to intensify are left in an impossible position. Their systems are labour demanding and incomes are low; and the natural assets associated with their farms are not valued highly enough. In other words, the market has largely worked against nature and against those farmers who were managing it sympathetically.

Scale and balance

The question addressed in the conference then turns into: 'Under which conditions can the market work for nature and, in particular, under which conditions at the EU scale?'. This last issue – scale – is critical for two fundamental reasons.

The first is that we need to consider biodiversity at the European scale. The Malahide conference goal of 'no net loss' for biodiversity is properly set at this level. This makes the issue like a balance sheet, with positive and negative drivers. The question is not to identify success and failure stories, but to assess which of the two is dominant. It is from this perspective that one should understand the concept of HNV indicators at the EU level. With regard to the Forum's mantra, agriculture is paramount in the issue of European biodiversity as a whole. European markets and the way they are organised are thus the main driver for the fate of European biodiversity.

The second reason, partially linked to the former one, is the fact that the *Common* Agricultural Policy should envisage the question at a European level. Historically, the Common Market Organisations (CMOs) have enforced the centralised approach: farms had to adapt themselves to the signals given at the Community level. The 2003 reform turned things upside down, so that the market would now become the aggregate of individual, micro-economic strategies.

Definitions

What are the strategic findings of the conference? The first finding concerns the understanding of 'nature' by the various attendees. While everyone recognised that nature could be a potential asset, in fact the word 'nature' has been shown to be understood in a wide range of ways. For economists, it could be 'green' farms, nice-looking and hosting tourists fond of cycling (this was my impression from the speeches of the agricultural organisations). This is not a problem *per se*, but it does turn into one if biodiversity conservation is based on such a vague and ambiguous definition of 'nature'. It is this gulf in understanding which, to a large extent, explains the debates about the definition of HNV farms or areas. One could conclude that fine-tuning discussions about semi-natural vegetation (the general principles of which are not questioned by biodiversity conservationists) is on the same level as 'is an organic farm by definition HNV?' (which to us seems a weak question). So, because of a lack of a minimum common understanding of HNV at a conceptual level, the concept has already, it seems, been diverted from its fundamental meaning. This is confounded with the 'green' or 'traditional' debates introduced by the politicians and farmers' organisations.

Market and 'public goods'

The second finding concerns the question of what the 'markets' might be and their ability to reflect HNV farms. Quite logically, the examples presented concentrated on farm products (cheeses, cooked meats) and their ability to 'convey' some biodiversity attributes in a market transaction. Hygiene issues were extensively discussed from this perspective, in order to avoid a situation where the standards needed for industrial production exclude traditional products frequently associated with HNV farms.

However, the core issue is whether price and product differentiation can yield a farm income sufficient to reward the farming of large areas of HNV farmland. While the practical aspects of such a labelling enterprise were well discussed, the ability of this approach to preserve a large number of farms in HNV areas seems to have been under-discussed. *Some* HNV farms, with some administrative and professional skills analysed during the conference, can undoubtedly benefit. Whether a *majority* of farms can do so seems a much more open question. In other words, the 'price signal' cannot be assumed to cover the whole range of situations, and we would like to defend the need for public support to meet the so-called 'market failures' (notably because product prices are, *per se*, not able to integrate the preservation of *public goods* that are the non-tradable natural assets). In this context, one can regard public supports as a kind of public market contract, bridging the gap between farmer and citizen. It was quite a surprise to see that this issue was only raised *during* the conference, while one might have expected it to have been a central role in a Forum conference where marginal farms and policy supports are normally at the centre of things.

Influence of the market

The third and last finding, which is linked to the second, is about the way markets work in practice. Presentations about labels and PDO have shown that the specifications of such brands hardly ever reflected any environmental attributes but rather attributes of the product itself, which should not surprise anyone, considering that one buys a ham and not a landscape or agricultural practices.

More fundamentally, any marketing approach aims at maximising added value and, thus, the quantity produced. While most HNV farming systems are low-intensity, a successful market story will tend to increase intensity of production. The French experience in this domain shows that maintaining low-intensity farming systems requires a lot of administrative and professional willingness. We have more examples of Appelations d'Origine Contrôlée which have increased their production than the opposite.

It is logical for marketing men to put up images with high nature content (see the ambiguous definition of 'nature' above). This explains the title of the present paper: promoting nature can be a way to reassure consumers concerned with an over-standardised industrial market. But this image may only be a facade, hiding in reality the destruction of natural habitats by the market. The rule is that the tree (the low-input traditional farm shown on the tag) hides the forest – the majority of productive farms (not necessarily heavily polluting, but with little biological value). Thus, putting biodiversity conservation into marketing hands without any control is naïve, since it runs the risk that a few success stories may hide more fundamental negative trends.

As a conclusion, we can criticise equally both policy models: the previous one, embodied in the pre-2003 CAP, whose negative impact on biodiversity has been proved, and the new one, which stands on the 'private market for products' gamble, where policy tries only to improve the functioning of the market. This latest vision was dominant at the conference (and at the end, the main message to the public bodies was 'less rules in the sanitary domain'). We have to defend the idea of a third way, combining private and public mechanisms at different levels of regulation. This question is much larger than the one addressed in the conference, but it is worth reiterating it when we remind ourselves again of the underlying goal: preserving biodiversity in Europe through farming.

Xavier Poux;
e-mail: Xavier.poux@asca-net.com

HNV Farmland in Nordic countries – a personal view

Stanimir Stoychev

Participants at the Wik conference.

'Sweden and Finland are different – the HNV farmland concept doesn't work there'; 'In the Nordic countries, open land is really rare, so *all* farmland is HNV'. Did anyone ever use these exact words? Maybe not, but as someone who has been involved in both the EEA work (see *La Cañada* 19 editorial) and the current work for DG Agriculture on HNV farmland, and has heard the topic being discussed in seminars, advisory groups and the like, it was certainly the message coming across from Swedish and Finnish participants. Unifying ideas were out; difference is in – HNV farmland east of the Öresund is so different, in fact, that separate concepts and standards apply.

With HNV farmland as one of the three targets of Axis 2 of Rural Development policy in 2007-13, it is, of course, essential that Nordic states come to some definition of the concept. So the presentations on this topic at the Wik conference were particularly timely and interesting.

Mapping HNV farmland

In the original work for the EEA, the treatment of Sweden and Finland was undoubtedly not correct. We realised that very quickly once the work was published. No-one is in any doubt about it. What was wrong? Open habitats which are *not* farmed – tundra and bogs – were recorded from map and satellite data as HNV farmland. Simple as that. It resulted in an apparent concentration of HNV farmland in the north, where farming itself, let alone HNV farming, is rare.

Once again, much of the time was spent going over this old ground. The point was made that farmed semi-natural habitats are too small to be 'visible' to satellite-based Corine land-cover mapping. They are 'swamped' by the forest which dominates the region. So much also is clear. HNV farmland is found within farmland, we were told. Who can disagree with that?

But having established these new starting points, what is interesting is where we go next. Is it true that to map HNV farmland (if you really must…) in Finland, say, we only need to map farmed land, as the farming lobby seems to be saying? Is all farmed land equally valuable? Is it really meaningless to make an unfavourable comparison between intensively farmed land in, say, Sweden and similar but extensively farmed land in, say, Russian Karelia?

It was clear from the presentations that some areas are of higher biological value than others – not the same areas for all species or species groups, but nevertheless there is still some hierarchy of interest. What distinguishes them from lower value areas, it seems, are:

- the presence of semi-natural vegetation;
- a lower intensity of use;
- and the presence of a mosaic of land use.

But these are precisely what have been identified as the distinguishing criteria in the rest of Europe!

A common understanding of HNV

This feeling was reinforced by a very interesting issue of the journal *Kungl. Skogs- och Lantbruksakademiens Tidskrift* (no. 5, 2007, various authors, some named below), which was available at the conference. Entitled *Valuable Agricultural Landscapes – the importance of Romania and Scandinavia for Europe*, it is the result of an ongoing scientific co-operation between the two countries. The reasons behind the co-operation are illuminating. Not only, as Lennartson and Helldin say, are the environment and vegetation at high altitudes in the Carpathians *similar* to those in Sweden, with considerable overlap between the pools of flora and fauna species, and with strong populations in Romania of many Swedish red-list species. But also, according to Ihse and Emanuelsson, Romanian traditional methods and land use are similar to those found in earlier times in Scandinavia, as in many western European countries. The picture that emerges is that a common understanding of HNV farmland is not only possible, but more or less self-evident.

Of course, things have changed in most of Sweden, just as they have elsewhere. Meadows which used to be cut once for hay may be abandoned in some areas, but are cut five times for silage in others. Mosaics are being lost as land-use becomes more uniform (Ihse illustrates this with maps in the *Tidskrift* volume), but this is more or less a Europe-wide phenomenon.

I am therefore left scratching my head to explain the urge that Nordic participants seem to have had in several meetings to stress the apartness of the Scandinavian lands. The most obvious explanation is that the Swedes and the Finns are much more aware than anyone else in Western Europe that they are keeping the forest at bay. They value the very openness of landscapes created by farming as well as the more 'human' elements – red barns, cropped fields and the like. 'Common' species associated with farmland are valued – one slide at the conference showed jackdaws and woodpigeons. Maybe the counterpoint to this is that anything which appears to devalue *any* farmland is regarded with suspicion?

To me, though, this undervalues the additional benefits of farmland that is truly HNV. If all HNV farmers are assumed to be intensive, with interesting semi-natural pockets (which can best be managed through parcel-specific agri-environment prescriptions), where does that leave the perhaps very few that truly practise extensive faming? Less Favoured Area status, it was said during the meeting, is overwhelmingly defined by growing season. But what about places with short seasons *and* poor land? What about those struggling with more extensive systems on poor land in areas with longer growing seasons?

In any case, integration of the Nordic countries into the wider European picture is clearly possible. The Swedish Board of Agriculture is starting a HNV farmland identification project. It would be educational for us all if it can find a new path to conceptual integration. Maybe then we can all move our attention away from maps, to where it really belongs – the farm and the farmer.

Gwyn Jones; dgl_jones@yahoo.co.uk

Valuing south-east European landscapes

How suitable is the High Nature Value (HNV) farmland concept to Bulgaria and Romania? Does the fact that it was developed before they joined the EU mean that important facets of this idea have been forgotten? If it does apply, how well understood is it by Government in the region? How well have they accommodated its needs in their Rural Development plans?

Danube-Carpathian Programme

These are the questions at the heart of an ongoing EFNCP and WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme (DCP) project. Funded by the Dutch BBI-Matra fund, the innovative approach of having locally-based workshops tries to increase understanding by looking directly at the problem on the ground. That way, say the organisers, there is at least a chance of going beyond the stereotypes and platitudes that all too often emerge from the ivory towers of capital cities.

The programme of six workshops, three each in Bulgaria and Romania, started in 2007 and will continue into 2008, with a final reporting seminar in Brussels. The choice of areas is different in the two countries. In Bulgaria, they are being held in designated areas – the Strandzha, Rusenski Lom (see report in this issue) and Western Stara Planina. In Romania, they focus on representative counties – Sibiu, Mehedinţi and Galaţi.

Strandzha workshop

The recent Strandzha workshop illustrated some of the problems facing many parts of south-east Europe, and also the opportunities and challenges of the local workshop model. The area has an iconic status in Bulgaria, for both historic and cultural reasons. Heavily forested, the region was formerly a pastoral centre, but it was separated from its hinterland by the new frontiers of the early 20th century.

Post-Communism, the area has suffered massive changes. While much of the farmed land is more or less abandoned, some new farming businesses have nevertheless been created by enterprising individuals. They face difficulties of all sorts – dairy hygiene rules, the cost of labour and of fencing, as well as African Swine Fever. It was difficult as an outsider to judge both whether their level of land-use intensity was ecologically sustainable and whether their system was economically sustainable. Getting a feel for these questions is a challenge which must be addressed in the remaining workshops.

Another question is whether the 'HNV farmland issue' is to do with the land which is farmed *at present* or with all recently and currently farmed land. Understandably, the workshop's hosts in the Strandzha (including local farmers and farm advisors) focused on the land still being farmed, but touring the region after the event illustrated the extent to which formerly farmed land has been abandoned.

A related question is the seemingly ever-present divide between agricultural and environmental administrations. The former focus on farms and farming and the latter on habitats and species and, despite the clear overlaps and cross-overs that we saw in the Strandzha, no-one seemed able or interested in bridging the divide. Our impression is that this is the norm and not the exception in Europe as a whole. This is perhaps the greatest challenge for NGOs, whether representing the interests of conservation or of marginal farmers.

Gwyn Jones; dgl_jones@yahoo.co.uk

The number of bushes on this pasture in the Strandzha region of SE Bulgaria determines whether it can receive CAP payments but also affects the nature value. Completely 'clean' pasture may be of less interest for wildlife.

Gwyn Jones

The Rusenski Lom workshop

Linking the concept of HNV farming to the reality of farming is a major challenge, not least in EU's newest Member States, Bulgaria and Romania. EFNCP is addressing the challenge to find out what HNV farming means at the local scale by organising a series of regional workshops (see *La Cañada* 20, page 14) in partnership with WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme and with funding from the Dutch BBI-Matra programme. One of the workshops took place in Rusenski Lom, in the north-east of Bulgaria.

Rusenski Lom

The Rusenski Lom is an area of farmland of HNV set in a wider landscape of large-scale intensive arable farming. It consists of the shallow limestone canyons of the three Lom rivers (Lomovete), along with the surrounding 'halo' of semi-natural vegetation on the flat lands above. Only a small part of the area of Lomovete falls within the designated Nature Park (3,400ha), but extension of the site to around 10,000ha is under discussion. The area is a pSCI (32,500ha) and a SPA, but the Bulgarian list has not yet been confirmed by the EU.

The vegetation zones in the area of Lomovete reflect the dramatic topography. They are:

1) the flat canyon floors;
2) the canyon walls, ranging from steep slopes to sheer cliffs up to 100m high;

3) the canyon margins on the flat land above.

In the first two areas, in particular, a considerable area of forest and scrub survives. In the designated park area, for example, about 80% is officially classed as forest. Much of this forest is state owned, either centrally or by the local municipalities.

HNV farmland

In terms of HNV farmland, the situation can be divided in a similar way.

1) Arable land This occurs in two completely distinct zones. On the flat land it is in the form of intensively-managed large fields of little nature value. On the canyon floors, however, the small mosaics of cultivation and tree crops next to the villages, while botanically poor, are significant for species such as red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*) and nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*). In terms of the European Environment Agency (EEA) classification, this is classic Type 2 HNV farmland.

2) Meadows of the canyon floors Over the years, many, if not most, of these have lost their floristic diversity through manuring and nutrient inputs from floods. Some important semi-natural grasslands do remain, falling into the Habitats Directive 'Lowland Hay Meadows' biotope. These are Type 1 HNV farmland. However, the main interest of these areas from a purely conservation point of view seems to be for individual species such as corncrake (*Crex crex*), so that some of these areas might be classified as Type 3 HNV farmland.

3) Semi-natural grasslands These occur mainly on the canyon sides and margins. Most widespread are dry semi-natural grasslands, but there are also significant rocky steppes, and grasslands surviving on the flat, black earth soils of the flat lands above the canyons. Lastly, there are significant areas of transitional habitats – bushy grasslands or open woodlands, depending on the point of view. Significant fauna include spur-thighed and Hermann's tortoises (*Testudo graeca iberia* and *T. hermanni*) and the souslik (*Spermophilus citellus*).

One important question to be analysed further after the workshop is the role of these various habitats for bats. The area of Lomovete is of European significance for this group of mammals – 24 species are present. While many of them live in the caves, their foraging requirements in terms of land-cover deserves further clarification and may require an adjustment of the evaluation set out above.

Land use

Agricultural patterns are complex and, sadly, poorly documented, even in the designated area. The vast majority of livestock farmers are small scale and they also own most of livestock in the area. There are some medium- to large-scale cattle and buffalo farms, but sheep and goat farming, in particular, is dominated by small and semi-subsistence farmers.

Land ownership by the state is still significant, with the result that 'official' use of land may be at some variance with actual management practice. Land classed as forest is used by goats, where they are legally banned; communal land is allocated to certain users but used by others. Even on arable land, where rights and use seem at first sight to coincide, the evidence of the field visit suggests that grazing by livestock is not unusual. These discrepancies result in over- or underestimation of stocking densities, and getting a grip on actual use is key to evaluating the present impact and importance of farming, whether for better or worse.

Few livestock farmers in the local municipalities are able to comply with both the Bulgarian requirements for animal premises and those for milk hygiene, but again the performance of farmers who actually manage HNV farmland is, by all accounts, significantly worse than the average. Small farmers lack a voice and capital to enable them to make any significant investments. They are not used to accessing advice, but the Bulgarian state, on its part, has not availed itself of the flexibilities allowed it by EU rules (see the article on EU hygiene rules, page 6).

Overgrazing is reported in some pastures, especially those near to villages – a problem partly related to the prevalent dairy-based livestock systems, which require animals to return daily for milking. The corollary is that distant pastures tend to be undergrazed. Under-use and abandonment of meadows along the rivers are a particular concern. For support to be delivered through CAP payments, the fields need to be registered on the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) which supports the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS). Many are not currently registered because there is little reason for farmers to go through the hassle; this will change as schemes become available. More serious is the fact that many of these parcels are less than 0.1ha – the minimum parcel size for registration in Bulgaria – and cannot receive support in a straightforward manner.

A number of issues were therefore raised. A full assessment of the role of farming in nature conservation is needed, based on *actual* management practices. Engagement with farmers in general by conservationists and of small farmers in particular by the farm advisory service and agricultural administration are both essential if Bulgaria is to deliver on its Natura 2000 obligations in the Rusenski Lom. Issues such as the management of communal land and access to IACS raise interesting questions – are they purely Bulgarian matters, as they seem at first? Or are they in fact reflections of blind spots in the general EU approach, which is geared to a standard agricultural occupier with total control over all his land and whose land is arranged in an economically efficient way?

Gwyn Jones & Koen Derijck;
Koen.derijck@gmail.com

Canyon of Russenski Lom, seen from the edge of the cliff near Orlova Chuka. Meadows along the river and bushy, dry semi-natural grasslands on the canyon margins (left upper corner) are some of the most important HNV farmlands in the area. On the horizon are large, intensively-managed arable lands.

Koen Derijck

Community initatives for grassland conservation in the Lower Wye Valley, UK

George Peterken

View of part of St Briavels, showing the small fields and thickly wooded boundaries.

By the late 1980s, 97% of all the semi-natural grassland that existed in the mid-1930s in lowland Britain had been destroyed, mostly by ploughing for arable and ley grassland, but also through agricultural improvement by drainage, artificial fertilising and herbicide application. In the Lower Wye Valley, however, a somewhat higher proportion survived, for two reasons: (i) the rugged topography prevented cultivation on steep and locally stony ground, but more importantly (ii) dispersed settlements set within tiny fields, formed when the landless peasants colonised commons in the 16th to the early 19th centuries, remained extensive.

These former squatter settlements have gone way up-market now: although a few smallholders remain who can trace their ancestry back to the original settlement, most of the holdings are occupied by 'amateur landowners', who do not derive their standard of living from the land. Today, the small fields are kept as horse-pasture; treated as meadows and pasture for cattle and sheep 'borrowed' from local farmers and smallholders; incorporated as large lawns into expanded gardens; or lie neglected, slowly developing, via bracken and bramble, into scrub woodland. As such, they have largely escaped the impacts of modern farming and many remain as flower-rich meadows and pastures separated by thick hedges and walls containing numerous trees – an idyllic environment in which people tend to stay once they have arrived.

Community projects

This landscape was threatened in 2000 by the effects of BSE, foot-and-mouth disease and burgeoning agricultural bureaucracy, which combined to undermine cattle and sheep husbandry. Some residents felt that the informal arrangements that underpinned it could rapidly break down, leaving a landscape of neglect. In response, some residents of St Briavels and Hewelsfield parishes, on the Gloucestershire side of the Wye valley, called a public meeting, out of which was formed the Parish Grassland Project (PGP). Shortly afterwards, a similar sequence generated the Monmouthshire Meadows Group (MMG) on the Welsh side of the Wye. The aims of both groups were to stimulate interest in, and knowledge of local grasslands, and provide assistance if required for maintaining or restoring them, thereby helping to maintain the grasslands in particular and the landscape in general through moderate usage.

Since their formation the two projects have generated interest by:

- Holding two to three meetings each year on various management and conservation issues, attended by 20-60 members and visitors. Topics have ranged from agricultural grants and managing horse-pastures for flora, to local wildlife in general and bats in particular. The wildlife subjects have proved to be most popular, especially the one on bats, partly because the area has important populations of lesser horseshoe bats (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*).
- Arranging field visits to members' properties, when interests and experiences can be exchanged in a sociable atmosphere.
- Issuing regular newsletters, produced to professional standards by members, as well as regular insertions in the *Village News*.
- Arranging widely-advertised grassland open days, in which six properties were open to visitors, who were given a guided walk.

Both projects have carried out surveys. The MMG has two ecologists on its committee, so it customarily surveys the grassland of new members, writes a report and offers advice on management. This has enabled it to collaborate with the Gwent Wildlife Trust in a project to identify good wildlife sites that are not formally designated, and in turn this has enabled the Trust to develop a Gwent Grassland Initiative. The PGP inspects fields prior to management (see below) and keeps notes of features of special interest, but the only detailed surveys were carried out by the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust some years ago. The PGP has, however, carried out a complete 'phase 1' survey of the parish, so now has a baseline against which changes can be measured.

However, the central point has always been to help with management, and for this the projects offer:

- Advice, when requested, on what is needed and what is practicable, from the few members with farming or ecological backgrounds. This is always non-dogmatic: nobody is told what they should do unless they ask.
- Assistance with entry to the agri-environment 'Stewardship' scheme. This was only available on the Gloucestershire side, the Welsh equivalent schemes being unavailable to small properties.
- A management service.
- Limited help with finding graziers.

Management service

The management service has been our biggest effort. Although many residents had satisfactory arrangements with local farmers and smallholders, or managed through temporary and short-term collaboration to get their grass cut or have some cattle or sheep put on their fields, some were having difficulty keeping their fields in reasonable condition, and others had given up. Moreover, the lanes in the district are so narrow and the turns into gates so restricted that modern farm machinery simply cannot reach some fields. Then again, the fields on the margins especially are so small, irregular, steep and studded with emergent stones that they cannot be cut even if machines could get in.

Accordingly, the two projects applied for grants for machinery designed for use in the most difficult situations, and we were successful in obtaining funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Welsh Sustainability Fund administered by the Wye Valley AONB, and the Forest of Dean

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The Gloucester cattle on one of the Hudnall fields. A farmer 'rented' out the cattle to members who needed their fields grazed.

District Council. This has enabled us to buy an Alpine 70hp Vithnar 4WD articulated tractor and flail, mower, tedder, baler, wrapper, bracken bruiser, brush cutter and post-basher, plus a secondhand Massey Fergusson 135 tractor and a long-wheelbase trailer. This is operated by a local farmer, John Childs, and his associates.

At the time of writing we have had only one and a half sea,sons of operation. Residents have been asked to put in requests for work to a committee member, who acts as operations manager. He then checks the practicalities on the ground, groups the work to minimise travel time, and has often acted as volunteer helper in the actual work. Members are charged according to the time taken and the hay is either taken by the farmer, retained for use by the field owner, or sold on to other users. The projects then charge customers and pay the farmer for his time and costs.

The requests for work in 2005 overwhelmed the supply, so the need was amply demonstrated, but several issues have emerged. Some requests for work in fields that can be easily reached by ordinary machinery have been passed on to other contractors. More problematical has been the expectations of a few residents that an appointment for hay-making can be put in the diary, oblivious of the weather and the farmer's other obligations, and that fields will emerge as tidy as a garden lawn. The charges that have been necessary to cover costs, with a little to spare, have been more than some customers expected, although if work could have been done quickly and cheaply, these fields would not have remained outside commercial farming. Accounting for travel time has been a problem, since the customers are spread over a far wider area than a farm and the nearest and farthest customers from John Childs' farm are many miles apart. Other minor problems have emerged, and every effort will be made to mitigate them, aided no doubt by the withdrawal of those who think they can get the work more cheaply.

Rent-a-cow

Our machinery enables us to restore neglected fields and cut the hay, but it does not provide aftermath grazing. This is solved in several ways. Some residents keep sheep, horses or donkeys; some take in horses from the local horse sanctuary; others make arrangements for local farmers to put some cattle or sheep on their fields through to winter; and some simply leave the field until the next hay cut. However, some aftermath grazing is better than none, so John Childs has come up with his 'rent-a-cow' scheme, by which he would loan out some of his herd of Gloucesters in return for a charge to cover the costs of inspection and veterinary requirements.

This has excited interest, not least by regional TV and newspapers, but the set-up costs failed to attract a grant, and only limited loans have been possible so far. The concept, however, seems admirable: local family farmer, using local-breed cattle, would elicit community support for building his stock, and in the process help to maintain the attractive environment, and ultimately sell the meat to the village shop, itself a community-enterprise partly staffed by volunteers.

Flowers in the Fields

The machinery grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund was only forthcoming on the basis that the general public would see some direct benefit, as well as local field-owners. Accordingly, the HLF provided additional funds, matched by our volunteer contributions, for

i) a few display boards to explain what was afoot;

ii) explanatory leaflets to accompany the Open Days; and

iii) a small book.

The last was put together by myself, professionally designed by another member, Tony Eggar, and included professional-standard wildlife photographs by another member, Andy Purcell. Published recently as 'Flowers in the Fields: a Natural History of the Hudnalls Grasslands'*, this has been praised for its attractive, copiously-illustrated design and the variety of its content.

Future

Will the project endure? It seems fundamentally right that a community should take responsibility for its environment, but realistically most residents have only so much interest in their surroundings, and most field owners have limited aims, such as keeping the field tidy, or having somewhere to put the horses. Although both projects attract up to 60 participants to meetings and in 2005 had a combined membership of 150, both depend on the efforts of committees, and within them on a core of perhaps four or so enthusiasts, and there is no guarantee that the succession of core enthusiasts can be maintained. Moreover, the machinery operation is only possible through the active interest and involvement of one farmer, who could probably be earning more through his workshop and garden maintenance sidelines. And, in the medium term, the machinery operation needs to generate enough profit to build up a capital reserve that at least enables us to match-fund any grant for replacement machinery, and we are far from sure the market will stand this.

Nevertheless, the projects are not subject to the built-in hazards of grazing schemes that depend on fixed-term project-officer posts financed from public sources, and in five years they have generated more local interest than could have been generated by outsiders. The two projects are themselves an interesting comparison, for, whilst the PGP remains within a fairly tight community and can be discussed in the sidelines of parish meetings, local concerts, bowls evenings and trips to the village shop, the MMG operates over a wider area within a less socially-coherent population. The MMG, however, has built momentum by turning meetings into social events, complete with good food, and is reaching out more to the county Wildlife Trust, the Local Authority and local schools. Everything depends on the amount and character of volunteer interest, and only time will show whether one or both of our experiments work. Even if both expire, it has been fun, friendships have been forged, and our efforts will leave a legacy of interest and better-maintained fields.

George Peterken

* Obtainable from Parish Grassland Project, c/o Beechwood House, St Briavels Common, Lydney, Glos GL15 6SL, UK, price £5.80 (UK addresses).

Noticeboard

Fields of Demeter: seasons in the European landscape of culture

This 45-minute DVD highlights how European landscapes have been shaped by the hand of man all through history and how these landscapes have shaped European culture. The film is an output from the *European Cultural Landscape* (ECL) project which was coordinated by the Institute of Biology at the University of Bergen, Norway, in association with partners in Austria, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. The DVD contains the option to listen to the sound-track in either English, Italian, Nowegian, Spanish or Swedish and also features the potential to view subtitles in German or Portuguese. Copies of the DVD are available from Knut Krzywinski (knut.kryzwinski@bio.uib.no) and extra material can be viewed at http://fieldsofdemeter.org. The ECL website (http://ecl.cultland.org) also provides the opportunity to supply feedback, ask questions and learn more about Our Common European Cultural Landscape Heritage. The producers hope that the film will be promoted by cultural institutions and organisations that work to safeguard European natural heritage and that it will help raise awareness, especially among the younger generation, of the intimate relationship between cultural landscapes and traditional farming practices.

Pastoralism in the Mediterranean

A three-day meeting on *Agro-pastoral cultural landscapes in the Mediterranean* took place between 20th and 22nd September 2007 in Lozère, France. The primary focus of the meeting was to discuss the actions and activities necessary to support the proposed designation by France and UNESCO of Les Cévennes et les Grands Causses as World Heritage Cultural landscapes. The meeting was organised by the French Ministère de l'Écologie, du Développement et de l'Aménagement Durables together with AVECC (l'Association pour la Valorisation des Espaces des Causses et des Cévennes).

Pastoralism in the Mediterranean II

Three hundred delegates assembled in Marseilles, France, on 2nd October 2007 to discuss the last three years of work under the auspices of an Interreg IIIC funded programme focused on Mediterranean pastoralism (PASTOMED). The meeting put an emphasis on ways that pastoralism could be developed to help maintain its economic viability, while still producing quality products and maintaining biodiversity. During the meeting, a Memorandum on the issues facing pastoralism in the region was signed by programme partners representing eight European regions. Further information on PASTOMED is available at www.pastomed.org/

Empowering rural actors

The 8th European IFSA (International Farming Systems Association) Symposium will take place in Clermont-Ferrand, France, between 8th and 10th July 2008. This meeting will focus on the following questions related to the sustainable development of rural areas:

- how to strengthen the capacities for initiative and innovation
- how to renew ways of supporting and guiding these initiatives

The draft programme consists of a mixture of oral presentations, discussion sessions, workshops and poster sessions. Field visits also form an integral part of the programme and will be used to illustrate the quality of the products and other services provided by farmers and other rural actors in the area around Clermont-Ferand. Further details of the conference can be found at www.8th-european-ifsa-symposium.org/

Integrating the needs of mountain areas into the CAP

Mountain areas form 40% of the greater European landmass and contain 20% of the population. The farming systems practiced in these areas are essential for the maintenance of many habitats and species considered to be of high nature conservation value. Promoting recognition of the value of mountain communities and economic activities in mountain areas, maintaining land management and agricultural activities (and therefore the local and qualified workforce and population) is particularly important in the context of the rapidly changing environment of the new European Union Member States. In these countries the fast pace of change sometimes tends to overlook and underestimate these areas. Mountain areas need adapted polices and innovative solutions to diversify their economies and yet still be able to take care of their precious environmental and cultural resources. In October 2007, all these issues were considered at a conference in Piatra Neamt, Romania, concerned with *Towards integrated mountain area development and its recognition in the Common Agricultural Policy-Shaping the new European space.* The meeting was organised by Euromontana (the European Association of Mountain Areas), in cooperation with CEFIDEC (Training and Innovation Centre in the Carpathians) and Romontana. Further details of the conference can be found at www. euromontana.org/

Changes in sheep & goat farming systems at the beginning of the 21st century

The 6th International Seminar of the *FAO-CIHEAM Network on Sheep & Goats* was held between 15th and 17th November 2007 in Ponte de Lima, Portugal. The seminar consisted of presentations and discussions under three headings: evaluation of sheep and goat farming systems and indicators of sustainability; the role of sheep and goat production systems in natural protected areas; attractiveness of sheep and goat farming activities and their economic value.

Xavier Poux gave a paper (*Les systèmes ovins et caprins de l'union européenne : implications pour l'environnement*) based on the research project carried out by EFNCP for the European Commission and reported in the previous issue of *La Cañada* (No 20 pages 2-8). This presentation emphasised the environmental, socio-economic and policy issues linked to the development of sheep and goat farming systems. It showed that maintaining the HNV sheep and goat systems essential for meeting some of the stated EU biodiversity goals will not be achieved without policy improvements at several levels.

Seminar delegates enjoyed a field visit to the Peneda-Gerês National Park and a semi-extensive goat farm which has diversified its farming activities.

The meeting was organised by the Portuguese Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development & Fisheries, in association with the Food & Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), Escola Superior Agrária de Ponte de Lima (ESAPL) and Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo (IPVC). Details of the seminar programme are available at www.draedm.min-agricultura.pt/fao-ciheam/

Low-input farming systems: an opportunity to develop sustainable agriculture

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) and Solagro organised a summer school on low-input farming systems (LIFS) between 2nd and 5th July 2007 in Ranco, Italy. The school combined visits to farms in the region, with presentations and discussions focused on three topics: characterisation of LIFS; diversity and sustainability of LIFS in Europe; policy options for safeguarding the economic viability of LIFS. A wide range of invited speakers included Xavier Poux (AScA, France), Philippe Pointereau (Solagro, France), Berien Elbersen (Alterra, Netherlands), Tamás Németh (RISSAC, Hungary) and Otto Schmid (FiBL, Switzerland). Proceedings of the meeting are in preparation and once published are expected to be available from JRC's Institute for Environment & Sustainability website at http://agrienv.jrc.it/publications/

Identifying High Nature Value farmland

Two final reports arising from studies investigating the feasibility of using statistical information and farm practice surveys to identify HNV farmland are available from the Joint Research Centre's website at http://agrienv.jrc.it/publications/ECpubs/:

- Samoy, D, Lambotte, M, Biala, K, Terres, J-M, & Paracchini, M L 2007 *Validation and Improvement of High Nature Value Farmland Identification – National Approach in the Walloon Region in Belgium and in the Czech Republic,* Report EUR 22871 EN
- Pointereau, P, Paracchini, M L, Terres, J-M, Jiguet, F, Bas, Y, & Biala, K 2007 *Identification of High Nature Value farmland in France through statistical information and farm practice surveys,* Report EUR 22786 EN

The world-wide importance of nomadic pastoralism

Almost half the Earth's land above sea level is classified as arid, with temporary rich grazing after prolonged periods of drought. These arid regions are inhabited by 250 million nomad pastoralists who, for centuries, have managed to adapt their lifestyles to the natural resources that these climatic conditions provide, without upsetting the delicate ecological balance of these areas.

Between 24th and 30th September 2007, over 300 delegates from 40 countries met in Segovia, Spain, to exchange information and experiences and to debate different solutions to the problems faced by nomadic and transhumant herders the world over. The main goals of the meeting were to help highlight the important role pastoralists play in preserving the planet's natural resources,

food sovereignty and biological diversity. The meeting also sought to raise awareness of the need to: guarantee the rights of pastoralists to their traditional grazing lands, their customs, their migrations and social structure; provide pastoralists with mobile services that are adapted to their medical, veterinary, training, schooling, commercial and social needs; guarantee pastoralists access to information, as well as participation in governance, development, policies and projects that directly affect them; resolve conflicts with sedentary populations via dialogue and cooperation and the easing of trade and pastoralists' migratory movements, especially in border regions.

Full details of the meeting are available at www.nomadassegovia2007.org/

Planta Europa in Romania

Over 150 plant conservationists from across Europe attended the fifth Planta Europa conference, which took place in Cluj-Napoca in September 2007. The overall focus for the meeting was *'Working together for plants'*, and all the conference workshops dealt with one overarching question: *'How can partnerships facilitate plant conservation in Europe?'* Throughout the conference, participants exchanged experience and best-practice examples on working together with different stakeholders and organisations on governmental and non-governmental levels.

The conference also saw the beginning of the development of a new European Strategy for Plant Conservation (2008-2014), together with a new action plan for the Planta Europa Network. The results of the workshop are being collated and a new strategy is emerging, one that aims to address the many challenges faced by plant conservationists in Europe. Details of the conference programme are available on the conference website at: www.plantaeuropa.trima-events.ro/

Second International Workshop on the Conservation of the Chough

Nearly 20 years ago (November 1988), the first International workshop on the Conservation of the Chough was held in south Wales; that meeting was the catalyst that led two years later to a conference on birds and pastoralism, and eventually to the formation of the EFNCP – as they say, the rest is history.

In mid September 2007, 40 researchers, conservation agency staff and site managers concerned with the conservation of the chough in countries including Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Ireland, Wales, England and Scotland attended the Second International Workshop on the Conservation of the Chough at SAC's Ayr Campus, Scotland. Several of the delegates had been present at the first meeting and were still actively working on the species.

Over half of the European chough population is concentrated in Spain, Greece and Italy, but outside of Spain most populations are small and many are declining and in danger of disappearing. The chough has been designated a species of high European conservation priority and Member States are required to designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in which the habitats used by this species are maintained. The chough feeds on soil invertebrates and, because of this, is almost without exception associated throughout the year with livestock farming and pastoral landscapes. These landscapes, and many of the habitats the chough uses, are dependent on the continued survival of what is now being termed High Nature Value farming systems. However, because of their extreme vulnerability to shifts in agricultural policy, many of these systems have been lost and most that survive are rapidly declining.

The workshop was organised by Davy McCracken (SAC), Eric Bignal (The Scottish Chough Study Group), Guillermo Blanco (Instituto de Investigación en Recursos Cinegéticos, Spain) and Paolo Laiolo (Estación Biológica de Doñana, Spain).

The workshop pack (containing abstracts of many of the presentations, overview of the main conservation needs and potential future research) can be obtained from Davy McCracken at davy.mccracken@sac.ac.uk.

Jane Reid

The workshop brought together, for the first time in 20 years, many of those who have been conducting ground-breaking research on chough in Europe.

Robin Bignal

The chough is a rare species of crow, with striking red legs and curved bill. The very small Scottish population is largely confined to the Hebridean islands of Islay and Colonsay.

The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism brings together ecologists, nature conservationists, farmers and policy-makers. This non-profit-making network exists to increase understanding of the high nature-conservation and cultural value of certain farming systems and to inform work on their maintenance.
www.efncp.org

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Editors of this issue of *La Cañada*: Eric Bignal and Gwyn Jones, Kindrochaid, Gruinart, Bridgend, Islay, Argyll PA44 7PT UK
Telephone & Fax: +44 (0)1496 850330;
e-mail: ericbignal@cali.co.uk