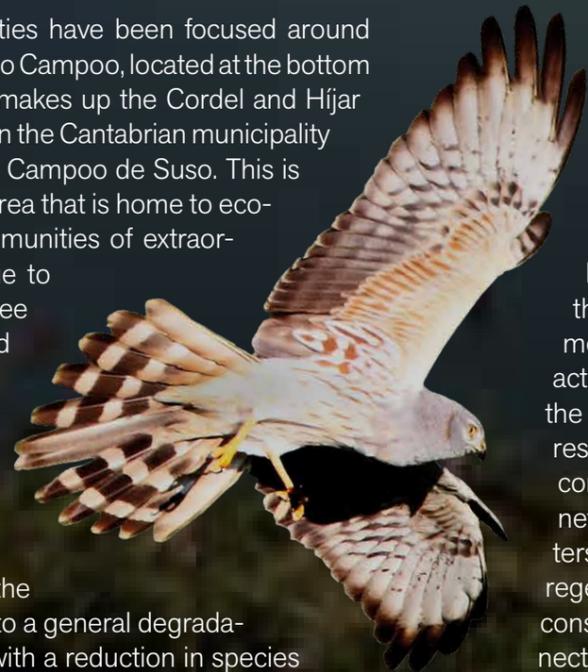


Life+ Econnect

Improving connectivity of Natura 2000 Network in mountain areas

mejora de la conectividad de la Red Natura 2000 en zonas de alta montaña cantábrica (LIFE12 NAT/ES/000766)



grazed, with soil loss and effects on the peatland, while in others there is excessive scrubland, affecting species of the open scrub and mosaic terrain, such as the grey partridge and hen Harrier.

LIFE+ Econnect has sought to solve these exact problems by applying measures involving the restoration, active management, and support of the natural succession. The ecological restoration was aimed at improving the connectivity between the Natura 2000 network areas in the Campoo Valley watershed, predominantly focusing on the regeneration, ecological restoration and conservation of habitats. The LIFE+Econnect project has been developed through 25 actions that included studies and monitoring, vegetation restoration measures, livestock management, peatland protection, environmental volunteering, the promotion of ecotourism, and awareness raising among the local population and ski resort users.

The project activities have been focused around the ski resort of Alto Campoo, located at the bottom of the valley that makes up the Cordel and Híjar mountain ranges in the Cantabrian municipality of Hermandad de Campoo de Suso. This is a high mountain area that is home to ecosystems and communities of extraordinary interest due to their rarity, degree of endemism and vulnerability, values that led to its inclusion in the Natura 2000 network.

The presence of the ski resort has led to a general degradation of the zone, with a reduction in species diversity caused by destruction of the vegetation, compaction and loss of soil, and loss of habitat quality for wildlife due to the fragmentation of the landscape, making it an ecological barrier for the fauna and flora. In addition, the poor distribution of livestock density causes some areas to be over-

Why Life+Econnect?



Innovative model and project

Much of the action has been aimed at improving the ecological permeability of the Alto Campoo ski resort, to enable its integration into the natural environment surrounding it. The experiences of this project will be replicated in a large number of ski resorts and high mountain tourist centres throughout Europe, many of them part of the Natura 2000 network.

Several aspects of the project, such as the plan to promote the biodiversity of the resort, the livestock management plan, and the habitat restoration actions have been disseminated to more than a hundred professionals and ski resort managers, thanks to the two technical seminars organised as part of the project. This will certainly allow these measures to be extended and applied to many other ski resorts and high mountain areas with similar problems.

Similarly, the setting up of a nursery for high mountain plants and pioneering bioengineering and environmental restoration techniques will serve as a model for other similar spaces in the European Union.

Benefits for biodiversity and people

The landscapes, habitats and species present in the Campoo mountains, which have coexisted with livestock for centuries, are the main beneficiaries of the conservation measures adopted as part of the LIFE+Econnect project. This biodiversity, in addition to being an indicator of the high natural value, also constitutes an important resource for tourism and outreach, as it can be observed and enjoyed, in turn contributing to the socioeconomic development of mountain areas.

The grey partridge (*Perdix perdix hispaniensis*) and hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) are two of the species associated with this rich mosaic of habitats and the main beneficiaries of the conservation measures proposed in the project.

In this sense, one of the project's most important objectives was to increase the awareness of the inhabitants of the Campoo valley and the rest of Cantabria of the high natural value of this area, reconciling its inhabitants with this natural wealth by restoring the most affected areas to their former ecological splendour.



Thanks to the conservation measures promoted by the LIFE+Econnect project, a significant improvement in the vegetation cover has been achieved, improving the landscape and habitat around the Alto Campoo ski resort.



The historical development of the ski resort had significantly affected the soil and vegetation that have now been restored thanks to the LIFE+Econnect project.