

Recommendations Conference

Invasive Alien Species: the urban dimension

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Invasive alien species (IAS) pose a significant threat to biodiversity in Europe and globally and this threat is likely to increase in the future unless meaningful action is taken to control the introduction and establishment of these species and address those already introduced. The IUCN conference 'Invasive Alien Species: the Urban Dimension' held on the 5th of September 2013 gathered key stakeholders from across Europe to present and analyse the problem of IAS in European urban areas and to exchange knowledge and best practices that contribute to solutions; this has resulted in the following recommendations:

Urban areas are particularly affected by IAS, because they present important entry pathways that lead to introduction of invasive species (e.g. pets, ornamental plants, accidental arrivals in harbours or airports) and their further spread beyond the urban environment. Cities, local and regional authorities and other urban actors have a critical role to play in fighting biological invasions, by preventing their introduction, implementing control and management measures, and raising awareness with citizens and decision-makers.

The European Commission presented on the 9th of September, a new legislative proposal to curb the impacts of invasive alien species in the EU. This paves the way for more, better and coordinated action in Europe to combat invasive alien species.

The following key recommendations for strengthening awareness and action to control and manage invasive alien species in urban areas have been developed by the IUCN European Union Representative Office in collaboration with the IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group and with contribution of the conference participants.

Preparing the ground for action on IAS

1. Ensure that policies and action on IAS (including any listing process) are based on the most advanced science, making use of information tools such as the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species¹, the Global Invasive Species Database² or the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization List of Invasive Plants³;
2. Integrate urban areas in national biodiversity action plans and strategies, and consider developing dedicated action plans for cities and municipalities to develop and implement measures to combat IAS and/or prevent their introduction;
3. Strengthen interaction and cooperation between unconventional partners, such as nature organisations, landscape planners, anglers or hunters to develop solutions to deal with the IAS problem that are acceptable to all parties involved, and engage with key commercial sectors, such as pets trade, horticulture, fisheries and shipping, to raise awareness for their role in reducing the impact of IAS on biodiversity and by ensuring the implementation of measures to prevent entry and/or spread of IAS;
4. Increase understanding and assessment of the economic costs of IAS to society;
5. Increase coordination and networking at all levels, possibly developing dedicated tools to exchange information and best practices on approaches to combat IAS specifically in urban areas, e.g. by creating a database on past, current and future initiatives relevant to the IAS problem;

Voluntary and legislative instruments to combat IAS

6. Establish lists of regulated invasive species that cover all taxonomic groups and are tailored to take into account the priority actions to be implemented (e.g. trade regulation, mandatory management) for regulating activities which are essential (e.g. import, need to access private land);
7. Ensure that any technical bodies created to support the implementation of the proposed EU regulation will rely on the most advanced expertise, and provide for rapid decision making, based on best science;
8. Although European and national legal instruments are crucially important, they should be complemented by voluntary approaches and instruments, e.g. codes of conduct, aimed at promoting a change in attitude towards the problem of IAS by both concerned sectors and citizens;
9. To work effectively, a voluntary approach to tackle IAS requires incentives for action, flexibility to adapt to local circumstances and increased awareness and understanding from all actors involved;

Communication strategies for IAS

10. Strengthen communication on the problems caused by IAS in cities, where around 4/5 of the European population live, identify potential strategic partners/stakeholders to engage with when developing information campaigns and other outreach activities, targeted at both the regional, national and local level, starting with defining the target audience and the main messages to disseminate, and monitoring the actual impact of the communication activities;

¹ <http://www.iucnredlist.org/initiatives/europe>

² <http://www.issg.org/database/welcome/>

³ http://www.eppo.int/INVASIVE_PLANTS/ias_lists.htm

11. Make use of the opportunities cities offer for raising awareness on IAS with the public, through zoos and aquaria, botanic gardens, natural history museums and educational programmes;
12. Learn from effective communication strategies for IAS from countries outside of Europe, such as New Zealand and Canada;
13. Increase the involvement of citizens, taking into consideration that the issue of IAS is strongly related to people's values, which can lead to conflicting perceptions on the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of nature and IAS;

Financing action on IAS

14. Revise existing financial tools, such as the European Commission's LIFE programme⁴, to improve early warning, rapid response, and ensure effective management of priority IAS as well as proper prevention measures;
15. Promote the development of LIFE project proposals aimed at innovative communication activities related to IAS and other measures for improved governance and capacity building (e.g. for custom authorities);
16. Avoid and eliminate harmful funding policies and initiatives that contradict effective measures to eradicate/control IAS or prevent introduction and further spread of IAS;
17. Mobilise human and financial resources for the implementation of voluntary and legislative measures directed at dealing with IAS issues in urban areas, including the establishment of partnerships with municipalities, environment funding organizations, the business sector and other interested institutions;
18. Compile a list with all available sources for financing action to combat IAS in Europe.

⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/>