



Conference on invasive species in urban areas in Europe, organized by IUCN and its Invasive Species Specialist Group with support from Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU) and the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN)

Background

Invasive Alien Species (IAS) are animals and plants that are introduced accidentally or deliberately into a natural environment where they are not normally found. Invasive alien species (IAS) pose a significant threat to biodiversity in the EU, and this threat is likely to increase in the future unless robust action is taken at all levels to control the introduction and establishment of these species and address those already introduced. IAS cause some € 12.5 billion worth of damage each year in the EU.

Although the challenges posed by IAS are common to many Member States, with the exception of legislation concerning the use of alien and locally absent species in aquaculture there is currently no dedicated, comprehensive EU policy to address them. The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 proposes filling this gap with a dedicated EU legislative instrument which could tackle outstanding challenges relating inter alia to IAS pathways, early detection and response and containment and management of IAS.

Metropolitan areas are particularly vulnerable to invasive alien species, due to the amount of commodities arriving or passing through for trade and commercial activities – which are the key pathways for IAS - and the characteristics of the urbanized landscape, which is highly manipulated and close to several managed and natural ecosystems. Urban areas may also act as a “source” of IAS into other environments, because of citizens being the ultimate recipients of the international wildlife trade of non native plants and animals (e.g. see gardening and pet trade). The consequences of such trade is that non-native animals and plants are either accidentally or intentionally released (or dumped) in the urban environment (e.g. American sliders in fountains and ponds, exotic squirrels in parks, ornamental plants and lawn clippings and weeds in green areas, including diseases and pathogens harmful to both citizens and wildlife in general) from where some species might further spread into other adjacent habitats. Specific problems that invasive species pose in urban areas are allergenic e.g. Ambrosia, impact on monuments e.g. Ailanthus and impact on health e.g. Tiger mosquito, impact on landscape e.g. Red palm weevil.

On the other hand, the urban environment – thanks to the presence of major cultural centers, like museums, universities, zoological and botanic gardens, etc.) - can play a key role in helping to address the risks associated to biological invasions by contributing to raise awareness to citizens and decision makers on the issue.

Recognising the increasingly serious problem of invasive alien species in Europe, the Commission is currently working on a dedicated legislative instrument on Invasive Alien Species which is due to be developed by 2012. This is one of six key objectives of the [EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy adopted in May 2011](#): *By 2020, Invasive Alien Species and their pathways are identified and prioritised, priority species are controlled or eradicated, and pathways are managed to prevent the introduction and establishment of new IAS.*

The EU highlights the following important aspects in relation to invasive alien species:

- Invasive alien species pose a major and fast growing threat to native biodiversity in Europe.
- Plants and animals that find their way into new, unfamiliar habitats, can overwhelm native flora or

fauna and damage the environment. These organisms are known as 'invasive alien species'.

- They also have a social and economic impact, for example on human health, fisheries, agriculture and food production.
- More trade, tourism, and transport of goods across borders have accelerated their spread.
- The costs related to the impact of invasive alien species in the European Union is estimated to be at least €12 billion a year.
- The EU has recently put forward proposals for a Europe-wide strategy to combat invasive species.
- Early detection and rapid response is vital: it is much easier and more cost-effective to tackle incoming species before they become established.
- Raising awareness among the public about invasive species is a condition to win this battle.

More detailed information can be found here:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/info/pubs/docs/brochures/invasive_green.pdf

Existing knowledge, initiatives, action in Europe

- Assessment to support continued development of the EU Strategy to combat invasive alien species. Final Report for the European Commission. Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) – http://www.ieep.eu/assets/759/IEEP_report_EU_IAS_Strategy_components_costs.pdf
- Towards an early warning information system for invasive alien species (IAS) threatening biodiversity in Europe - <http://www.nobanis.org/files/Tech-5-2010-Invasive-alien-species.pdf>
- Taking into account opportunity costs when assessing costs of biodiversity and ecosystem action - http://www.ieep.eu/assets/797/FinalReport_OpportunityCostsBiodiversityAction.pdf
- Nobanis – European Network on Invasive species - <http://www.nobanis.org/>
- DAISIE - <http://www.europe-aliens.org/default.do;jsessionid=CE07DCC18F4FEEA7F5FDE596E9B73F98>
- Handbook of Alien Species in Europe - <http://www.springerlink.com/content/978-1-4020-8280-1#section=126069&page=20&locus=66>
- EEA indicators on invasive alien species (SEBI) - <http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/invasive-alien-species-in-europe/invasive-alien-species-in-europe/>
- IUCN guidelines for the prevention of biodiversity loss caused by invasive alien species - http://www.issg.org/pdf/guidelines_iucn.pdf
- Global Invasive Species Database - <http://www.issg.org/database/welcome/>
- Invertebrates associated with invasive alien organisms - <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/nonnativespecies/news/events.cfm>

Aim of the conference

The main aim of this conference is to bring together European, national and local governmental representatives and experts to raise awareness and exchange knowledge and best practices that contribute to solutions that reduce the risk of invasive species in urban areas.

It will serve to inform the competent authorities in Europe who are responsible for implementing action to reduce the impact of invasive species, with scientific knowledge and expertise as well as guidance and examples.

Considering the diversity of participants to this event, it presents an excellent opportunity to strengthen partnerships to facilitate sharing of lessons-learned, transfer of best practices, raise awareness for and enhance the benefits for local governments and cities for investing in the control, prevention and management of invasive species.

Thematic focus and structure of conference

The conference will offer an interactive forum for discussion, knowledge sharing, networking and action. In a plenary set-up, the following themes will be addressed:

- The occurrence of invasive alien species in urban environments, key pathways and impacts
- European cities and as privileged centers for information campaigns and awareness raising initiatives on IAS issues (impact, costs, management, etc.) targeting the general public, stakeholders, policy and decision makers, etc
- Strategies for preventing the release/escape of invasive alien species in urban environment
- Options for implementing an early warning and rapid response system in Europe
- Establishment of networks encompassing different taxa and countries for monitoring the occurrence and spread of IAS in urban environments
- Best practices to eradicate/control invasive alien species in European cities
- The role of an EU policy framework to combat invasive alien species
- Engagement of civil society in reducing the risk of invasive species in the urban environment

Target audience

Scientists, representatives from governmental entities, non-profit organizations, business and any other person or party involved in biodiversity conservation and natural resource management are invited to participate and share ideas, experience and best practices.

Role of IUCN

The IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG) aims to reduce threats to natural ecosystems and the native species they contain by increasing awareness of invasive alien species, and of ways to prevent, control or eradicate them.

The ISSG promotes and facilitates the exchange of invasive species information and knowledge across the globe and ensures the linkage between knowledge, practice and policy so that decision making is informed. The two core activity areas of the ISSG are policy and technical advice, and, information exchange through our online resources and tools and through networking.