



## **Ecologists become architects planning roads for animals**

Many animal species in the Alps are endangered because human actions prevent them from moving between the different parts of their habitat. However, successful tools and methods exist that can help to overcome barriers such as motorways or regulated rivers. More than 80 international experts from all over Europe accepted the invitation by the ECONNECT project to share and compare their individual experiences of fieldwork and innovative research methods regarding ecological connectivity in Grenoble, France, between the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> of November.

The meeting was aimed at identifying the most successful instruments to restore the connections between separated animal and plant habitats. Discussions also contributed towards defining a common methodology and line of action for the “ECONNECT – Restoring the web of life” project. The conference, organized by the University of Innsbruck, Cemagref Grenoble and the Isère General Council, gathered together several international organisations connected to the Alpine Convention, scientific institutions and local partners.

Ecological corridors are natural spaces allowing free movement, overcoming man-made infrastructural, architectural or political obstacles and guaranteeing the survival of the flora and fauna’s genetic heritage, essential factors for the survival of the species.

New solutions have been presented and reviewed in the frame of field trips in one of the seven ECONNECT “pilot regions”, the Isère department.

Thanks to the cooperation of the AREA Motorway Company, innovative actions have been implemented, including underground paths for amphibians, grass covered bridges allowing animals to cross motorways safely and sensors registering the heat or movement of animals turn on flashing lights making motorists aware of animals crossing.

Additionally, there are stairs helping fish overcome concrete barriers on their way upstream to lay eggs.

This partnership with the Motorway Company is extremely important and a concrete demonstration that it is not just scientists that are interested in ecological corridors, but also local stakeholders and politicians. Investing in this project isn't just a sign of greater attention towards the environment but also towards a safer life for both animals and people by reducing dangerous road accidents. Every year, animals crossing roads cause 1000 accidents; original solutions have been developed to resolve this problem. Amongst the solutions ridges and subways as alternative routes have proven most successful.

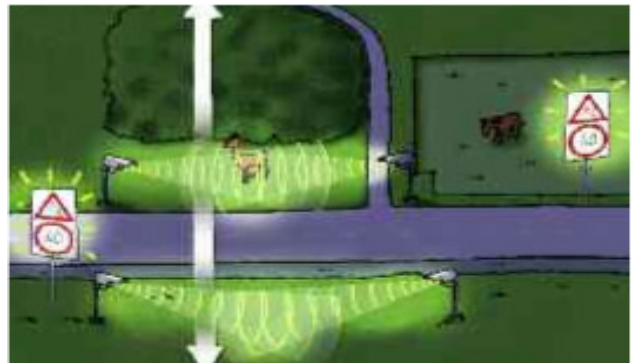
The sixteen partners of the ECONNECT project are committed to establish an Alps wide ecological network. Integrating the expertise provided by representatives from different sectors and countries, the project partners will link high biodiversity areas in order to allow species to adapt to the environmental changes due to climate and land use transformations. Furthermore this stimulates the exchange of information and discussion among the different international and local players.

The next international workshop of ECONNECT will deal with legal instruments to facilitate ecological networks in the Alpine nations. It will be held in Grenoble in March 2010.

Information will be made available on [www.econnectproject.eu](http://www.econnectproject.eu).



Example of fishes climbing steps  
*Riccardo Nigro*



Example of an animal warning device for drivers  
*Conséil d'Isère*

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Partners in the project

University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna (A)

University of Innsbruck-Institute Ecology (A)

Umweltbundesamt GmbH (A)

Gesäuse National Park GmbH (A)

Hohe Tauern National Park(A)

Italian Ministry of Environment (I)

European Academy of Bolzano (I)

WWF Italy (I)

Parco Naturale Alpi Marittime (I)

Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta (I)

Council of Department of Isère (F)

Task Force of Protected Areas (F)

Scientific research centre CEMAGREF (F)

National Park Berchtesgaden (D)

CIPRA International (FL)

Swiss National Park (CH)

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