

Report criticises state of natural protected areas

Report based on data collected on 148 protected areas in 2003 and 2003

ROBERT KIMPLETON

27% of Catalonia's 148 protected areas have seen the extinction of some animal species and half have experienced some decrease in the population of plant or animal life, according to a report issued by the Catalan Institute of Natural History.

The report also says that only a quarter of the natural areas studied had a government body in charge of planning the future management of the area.

The rest of the areas had no management plan or budget designated for their protection.

The report criticises the previous Catalan administration for failing to



Protected areas do not protect animals

provide adequate planning or funds to protect the lands. "The fact that more than 80% of the natural pro-

tected areas still do not have a management plan reflects a low degree of capability or willingness for something the Generalitat has made a lot of noise about", says the report's author Joseph Germain.

Close to 40% of the protected areas have suffered serious or very serious environmental damage in the last few years due to both construction and recreational activities by humans, according to the report.

The report, for which a staff of 126 independent researchers collected data in 2002 and 2003, also criticised the fact that almost two-thirds of the 29 million euros spent on the protected areas was concentrated in only six areas near urban centres.

Rise in Spanish birth rate slow and steady

ALEXLEFF

After jitters across the peninsula about slowed population growth, the Spanish are finally having more babies. According to a study carried out by the National Statistical Institute of Spain (INE), in 2003 there was 1.3 children for every woman, showing a clear rise in the birth rate. The increase is due in large part to a relatively high birth rate among immigrants. The study found that 12 per cent of all babies were born from foreign mothers. The percentage of weddings celebrated by immigrant couples last year was on par with that statistic, also around 12 per cent.

The birth rate, while higher than the year before, has not grown dramatically. In 2002 there were 1.26 children per woman, which means that there were 23,345 more regis-

tered births the following year. A considerable part of that increase is due to a steady growth in the birth rate among immigrants in particular — they gave birth to 22 per cent more times than the previous year. While women from Ecuador and Colombia make up the largest female immigrant populations, the highest rise in reproduction occurred among Moroccans — over 10,500 more births than in 2002. Ecuadorian women are twice as many as Moroccans, but only registered 10,400 newborns.

The INE also points out a minor dip in the rise in the rate of marriages last year. In 2003 over 200,000 marriages were registered, one thousand more than the year before. The majority of weddings occurred in Melilla, followed by Andalucía, Valencia and Cantabria.



The city council will continue its battle to remove graffiti from walls. / O. DURAN

Council to spend 1.4m euros on graffiti busters

RICHARD MCCRANN

Barcelona city council will spend 1,400,000 euros each year to remove graffiti and posters from the walls around the city. Last year the city council cleaned 200,000 square metres of walls of which half were signatures known as tags, 35% was graffiti and the rest publicity material. The city council subcontracts a firm CLD to clean the walls using 12 teams of workers. They use two methods to remove graffiti, a high powered spray containing water, sand and air and a method for re-painting the walls, which serves to protect the wall from future vandalism. Municipal workers report walls defaced by graffiti and they are then photographed so that information can be passed onto the subcontractors. Then the walls are studied to determine the best cleaning technique to remove graffiti. Opinion is divided if graffiti is art or just plain vandalism. "If there were sufficient walls where we could legally paint it

would satisfy the demands of some of these artists and would reduce the graffiti vandalism," says Jero, a young graffiti artist.

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