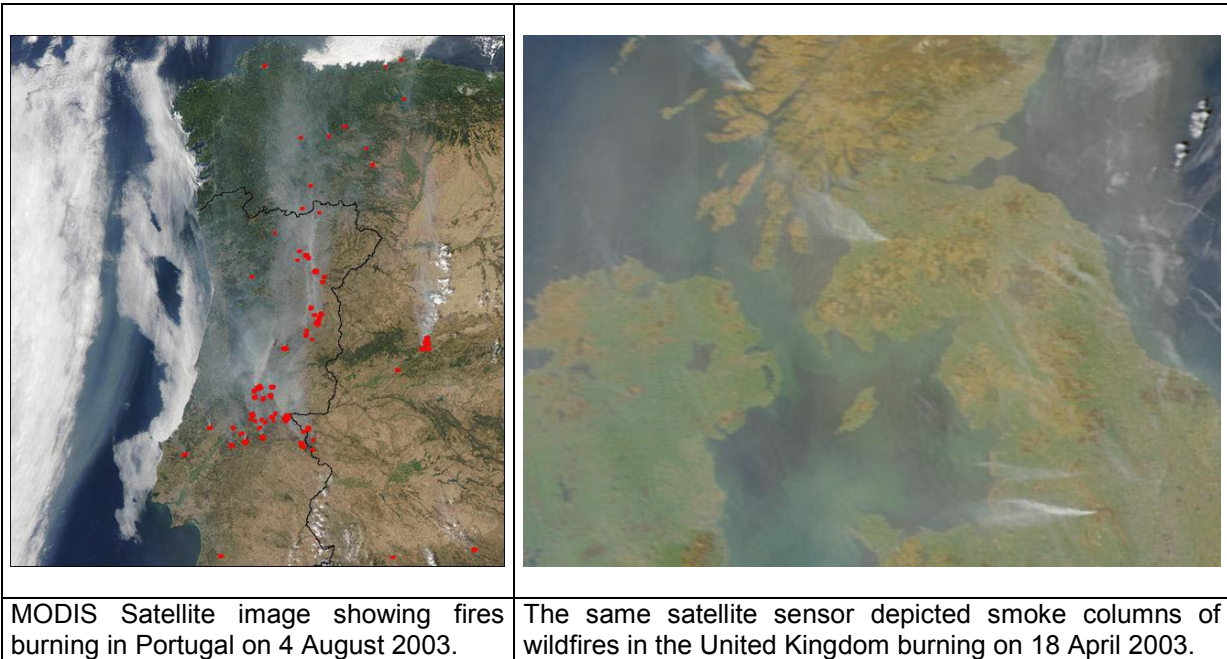




## EDITORIAL

During the summer of 2003 in Europe much attention has been given to the extreme wildfires risk in Europe arising from the extremely hot and dry conditions between the Nordic countries and the Euro-Mediterranean region. Portugal was most severely affected by wildfires. The satellite image (below, left) shows fragments of fires burning in the South of the country in August 2003. At the end of the fire season more than 420,000 ha of Portugal's forest lands had been scarred by wildfires.



The right satellite image shows smoke columns from forest and moorland fires burning in the United Kingdom. The country suffered extreme wildfires during the dry spring of 2003. As a consequence of these fires the formulation of a national strategy was requested by participants of a wildland fire conference convened in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 2004.

That conference also addressed other fires – the use of fire in ecosystem management, especially in the management of Scotland's moorlands (heathland ecosystems). In fact, more and more smoke columns are becoming visible all over Western and Baltic Europe that are arising from an increasing number of research and development projects which are looking at the use of prescribed fire in nature conservation and landscape management.

The focus of this special issue of IFFN is on the use of prescribed fire in the land management of western and Baltic Europe. It may sound ironic to some readers of IFFN that a majority of prescribed burning objectives is focussing on maintaining open vegetation or habitat structures, thus aiming at halting vegetation succession towards forest development. The reason for this include the fact that a large variety of open vegetation types, generated and maintained by hundreds of years of human cultural activities, are hosting valuable biodiversity and representing unique landscape features that are threatened by forest succession.

This special issue is a contribution of the European Fire in Nature Conservation Network (EFNCN) – an activity of the Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC) and the Global Wildland Fire Network.

- EFNCN Website: <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/programmes/natcon/natcon.htm>