



Protection of Cultural Landscapes Extremadura and Mallorca

Annual Report 2010/2011

Extremadura

The Extremadura, a strip of land in south-western Spain, is simultaneously an old cultural landscape and home to numerous wild animal species. Within this unique region, areas called Dehesas are still farmed in traditional ways. In this park-like landscape that is overgrown with cork trees and rocks, scarcely known farm animal species like the white Cacerena cattle, the black Iberian House Pigs and old goat and sheep species can now be found. Wild animals also profit from the sustainable farming practices: Imperial Eagles, Eurasian Black Vultures, Eagle Owls, Lynxes, Genets and Storks are found in large numbers in the Extremadura. Cranes are frequently seen winter guests.

The Fundación Global Nature (FGN) is GNF's partner and has looked after the environmental and natural protection needs of the Extremadura for many years. In 2010, the following activities were carried out.

Environmental Education

Environmental Protection Centre *La Dehesa*

The La Dehesa environmental protection centre is situated in Torrejón el Rubio (Cáceres). Although it was originally used as an office by the FGN, it is used as an information centre, tourist accommodation and environmental education facility for some time now. Here diverse environmental education offers are put into practice by the FGN. Especially important are child and youth programmes, work camps as well as adult education opportunities for the local population. Publications about different projects are also published and lectures as well as interactive environmental education measures are offered to schools. In 2010, tours to the nearby Monfragüe national park as well as international work camps in the context of European exchange programmes for young people took place. The participants work in the landscape and, through this, learn about nature and the problems of environmental protection on site. The centre was renovated and expanded in order to better accommodate vacationers and backpackers. It now offers simple but neat and affordable accommodations.

Fighting Fires

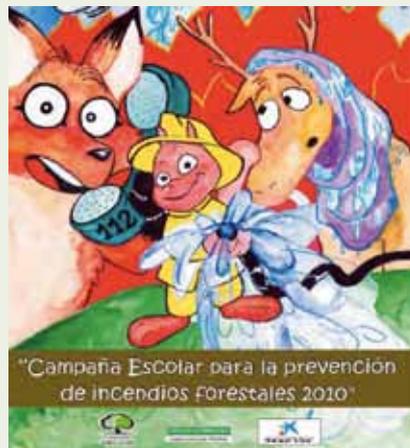
Almost every year, more or less large areas of the Extremadura fall victim to fire. Especially the accidentally caused forest fires could be hindered through appropriate prevention measures. For this purpose FGN began the "Fighting Fire" education programme years ago. Since then, people are informed about what they can do to fight forest fires at schools and other public institutions in the Extremadura almost every year. For this initiative, more than 2,000 comics, 500 board games and 50 posters were produced in 2010. These were used in 300 teaching units about preventing forest fires. Almost 400 students in 10 communities could be reached through this campaign.

Education for Sustainable Development in Gardens

Through the „Education for Sustainable Development in Gardens“ initiative of the EU programme Grundtvig, an exchange programme for adult education was started. Besides FGN, five other institutions from Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland are represented in this learning partnership. The participating institutions find themselves confronted with similar challenges in terms of sustainability and education, which is why the exchange of experiences is not only sensible but also important. The goal of the project is to show adults ways how they can contribute to shaping their environment in an ecological, economic and socially responsible way while taking global aspects into account. Employees and volunteers of the participating organisations will therefore discuss environmental education themes in regular meetings. The first Grundtvig meeting took place in the La Dehesa environmental education centre from 15-19 November 2010.

Extremadura

Campaign poster
"Fighting fire" (left)
and construction of the
compound to protect
wild rabbits (right).



Environment and Species Protection

Talaván Sanctuary

The Cáceres province consists of the Talaván, Hinojal, Santiago del Campo, and Monroy communities. The province comprises an extensive area, bordered in the north and south by the Tajo River and its tributary the Almonte. The project area, the Talavan Reserve, which is also a bird sanctuary, spans more than 7,303 hectares. At the borders of the Talavan reserve are two further very interesting bird sanctuaries. There are wide ranging Dehesas in the Talavan reserve that, with their holm oaks, meadows and ponds create a highly varying and exciting landscape.

These varied habitats must be monitored and protected. Exactly this is what FGN and its highly engaged volunteers take care of. In 2010, 60 people took part in the necessary clean-up and helped to repair the infrastructure of this valuable nature reserve in the Cuatro Lugares region.

Protecting Wild Rabbits

The management of large predators like the lynx or birds of prey also plays a crucial role in ensuring a healthy ecosystem. Therefore the Fundación made it its goal to significantly increase the population of prey animals - in particular of wild rabbits - in the Extremadura. Habitat loss, hunting and infectious diseases caused a significant decrease in the numbers of wild rabbits. Different measures like sowing legumes, building artificial rabbit burrows, and rereleasing animals into the wild were all designed to build up a stable wild rabbit population and have been going on for years now.

In 2010, a 2.5 hectare large piece of land in the heart of Monfragüe (Cáceres) was fenced in so that forage crops and grains could be cultivated. 20 feed and water posts were also constructed and further drinking troughs prepared. In this way it was possible to construct a species-appropriate, man-made rabbit enclosure with rock piles and a vegetation umbrella made of bushes. The work involved in raising the rabbit population is very laborious and must be controlled annually and, if necessary, has to be adjusted.

Nature Conservation on Private Land

In the Extremadura, the FGN Private Nature Reserves network is one of the largest initiatives for the responsible handling of land ownership. The Fundación's approach that nature conservation can come not only from the state but also from the private sector is a great success. More and more private landowners are joining the network and signing voluntary agreements that recommend location specific cultivation along with conservation and management measures for environment and species protection.

As the leading light of this project, the Fundación holds lectures in order to advertise the network and acts as a consultant and supervisor for the affiliated landowners. At this time 29 possessions with more than 6,900 hectares are involved. Many of these are Special Protection Areas (SPA; European Bird Sanctuaries) and (areas of communal importance according to FFH guidelines. Some are of less importance to the Natura2000 network. In 2010, five new private sanctuaries joined the network.

Wetland Protection

Wetlands play a leading role as the ecosystems are home to innumerable animal and plant species. Protective measures and sustainability efforts are supplemented in an important way through the maintenance of existing wetlands as well as the planting of new wetlands in the pastured holm oak groves, or Dehesas. In this way biological corridors and areas of particular diversity are created and the entire Dehesas landscape is used and preserved in a responsible manner. Therefore, FGN established four new small wetlands on private property in Cuarto Lugares-Cáceres in 2010. Additionally, around 10 hectares of corn were cultivated as food for prey animals such as rabbits.

Due to the lack of sensible management plans, the wetlands and especially the ponds in the Dehesas were in bad condition. Most often the vegetation that protects the ground and banks was missing. Measures were taken at 62 small wetlands, of which one was even newly established, in order to restore the fresh water habitats. Two further bodies of water are still being built or rather re-established by replanting vegetation on their banks.

The measures contribute to the development of a social network and to the formation of social environmental consciousness, in particular in the Natura2000 network of the Cuatro Lugares region in the Extremadura area.



FGN staff monitoring landscape changes in the Extremadura.

Environmentally Sound Farming

The Fundación Global Nature has engaged in organic farming in model operations for many years now. The Fundación's fincas (pieces of land) are very labour intensive and are therefore leased to farmers who farm them in environmentally friendly ways. One finca (Santa Clara) was sold in accordance with environmental protection conditions.

Ecological farming makes preserving and improving flora and fauna habitats possible. Especially endangered species profit from this. At the same time, the model operations are important for preserving old domestic breeds and traditional land use techniques.

These two goals often go hand in hand. If no domestic pigs are

driven into the Dehesas to search for acorns, then the trees will not be cared for by the activities of the pigs. Nature and cultural landscapes need not to be contradictory terms but instead can have a relationship based on mutual use. For example, if the holm oaks were no longer used in the traditional manner and through this the Dehesas trimmed, all of the cultural landscapes would become overgrown. Wild animals also profit from harmony between nature and gentle human intervention. The overwintering cranes enjoy the oil rich acorns as much as the domestic pigs do and the large, old trees are favoured perches for birds of prey. The wetlands are breeding grounds for Black Storks. Therefore freshwater holes, nesting features, rabbit pens and special vegetation areas are regularly constructed in all parts of the Extremadura.

In 2010, the Fundación Global Nature organised the third meeting with landowners in the Extremadura. More than 40 people took part and engaged in exchanges about nature and environmental protection topics. A monitoring project conducted in 2010 and 2011 will show if the measures for the responsible use of land have led or are leading to the improvement and preservation of the Natura2000 sites.

Mallorca

Our Living Lakes partner on Mallorca and the Balearic Islands is the environmental organisation GOB (Grup Balear D'Ornitologia i Defensa de la Naturalesa). The organisation has been deeply involved in nature and environmental protection on the Balearic Islands for many years. On Mallorca, the most heavily frequented holiday island in the Mediterranean, it is especially difficult to realise the compatibility of the tourism industry and nature conservation. If not for the tireless work of the GOB, many beach sections would have been built on and even more golf courses and roads constructed. Despite this important work, the GNF was only able to provide the GOB with a small grant because a submitted project proposal was sadly not approved.

Environmental Education

Nature Conservation Centre "La Trapa"

2010/2011 were years on which the Balearic environmental organisation GOB can look back on with pride. The finca La Trapa was bought 30 years ago, in autumn 1980, in order to protect it from a large building project. The finca is used as office by the GOB and has become an important building block of a network of private conservation areas in the Tramuntana Mountains. La Trapa has become a starting point for nature lovers and protectors on Mallorca because of its function as an information centre with overnight stay opportunities and as an environmental education centre. The GOB coordinates regular trash collection campaigns together with young people, children, and its voluntary workers as well as seminars about trash prevention and recycling. Planting and maintenance work are also carried out at La Trapa with the help of volunteers.



The Conservation Centre La Trapa in Mallorca.

In this anniversary year, Eurasian black vultures were again sighted on the finca and welcomed with a festive meal. A small vulture-feeding place was constructed for the second largest birds of prey in Europe where dead feral domestic goats are fed to the vultures. This may sound cruel but the feral domestic goats must be shot by the state for nature conservation reasons because their population has gotten out of hand. The wanted reforestation of the Tramuntana Mountains is made more difficult by the goats that eat all vegetation. Mallorca's original, natural vegetation - especially the holm oaks - must be protected from the voracious animals. The Eurasian black vulture, the GOB's heraldic animal, is also supported in this way since they find only few natural cadavers in the wild.

Nature and Species Protection

The GOB has also achieved many successes in nature and species protection in 2010/2011. Over 20 years ago the beautiful Es Trenc beach was declared a sanctuary. This saved the unique dune landscape and the one of a kind posidonia meadows from destruction by hotel construction - as it happened to Playa de Palma. Together with the Es Trenc beach, the Salobrar wetlands and salt lagoon were demarcated as nature sanctuaries since the dunes and the salt lagoon are together one ecosystem. The entire area is still lacking a park administration and a sensible management plan however. GOB will continue to pursue this goal.

Bird Protection Programmes

2010 was a catastrophic year for the Red Kite. Ten animals were found dead; most of them poisoned. The entire Red Kite population on Mallorca is again in danger. The government cut funding for the project despite this emergency situation.



Protests against Son Bosc golf course.



Fin Whales in the marine national park of Cabrera.



Illegal building is still a major problem in Mallorca.

On top of this, the GOB has no resources left with which to demarcate further “Refugi de Fauna” or private nature sanctuaries on the fincas of German residents. This was and continues to be a promising approach to creating more spaces where hunting is forbidden. On Mallorca private property that lies within a hunting ground is automatically made available to the local hunting club. Since most residents are not aware of this, active educational work is needed. The symbol for this is Montagu’s Harrier, which thankfully still breeds in Mallorca’s flatlands or “Pla”.

Protecting Wetlands

It was possible in 2010 to successfully prevent the building of a large settlement by Majorcan investors in the area surrounding the famous Lluc monastery. The monastery, located in the middle of the Sierra de Tramuntana, is a sanctum for Majorcans. The same can be said for the planned golf course in Son Bosc at the edge of the Albufera wetland. Due to an application by the GOB, the Son Bosc area was recently put under protection through international EU law and the Ramsar convention. However, as soon as the Majorcan government changes, everything could be for naught and the fight for the environment will begin anew.

Protecting Marine Mammals

GOB celebrated the 20-year existence of the ocean national park Cabrera in May 2011. The park, another “child” of the GOB, is located off Mallorca’s coast and is one of the best-administered ocean sanctuaries in the entire Mediterranean. In March 2011, a GOB employee took part in the evaluation of the United Nation’s national park management for the Mediterranean action plan. The team was greeted not only by swarms of Balearic and Yellow Billed Shearwaters but also by three fin whales. While there are occasional dolphin sightings, this was the first time fin whales were seen in the park. The sighted whales were two full-grown animals with one young animal that were likely on their way to the Ligurian Sea where these animals usually spend the summer. The three visitors chose Cabrera’s waters as a resting place, which is largely the result of good surveillance and a functioning management of fishing in the park. This is also true for the Balearic and Yellow-Billed Shearwaters that, now that the rats have been eradicated, they can breed undisturbed on the small islands off the coast of Cabrera. Rats are a large problem for sea birds around the world because they eat the birds’ eggs.

The sighting of a lone monk seal in the previous year has unfortunately not provided any new results this year. A flyer about the biology and endangered status of the rare monk seal was created and distributed to tourists and locals. The sirens of the Mediterranean, as they were called during Odysseus’s time, became an endangered species because of overuse of the Mediterranean, especially through building and use of beaches on which they rested with their young. Together, the GNF and the GOB filed an application with the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation for the “Protect Whales, Dolphins, Sea Turtles and Fish in the Mediterranean” project, which was sadly not granted. We will continue to search for funding for this important issue.

Actions and Campaigns

Fighting Illegal Building

The commitment to nature means for the GOB battling illegal building, corruption, and speculation. Without the GOB, Mallorca's beauty and the Balearic Islands would have been less well preserved in the last years. Sadly, this is often being forgotten and political as well as administrative authorities allow themselves to be celebrated for nature conservation successes despite the fact that without the GOB's help, these would not have come to fruition.

Therefore the daily battle against speculation and corruption continues for the environmental organisation. The focus lies on real estate speculation, the illegal distribution of building licenses and illegal building. Along with problems with the local politicians, the GOB must occasionally fight with German residents, who believe that there is no rule of law in Spain and they have special rights. Currently, 500 Majorcan politicians must answer to corruption charges in a court of law, in part thanks to the work of the GOB. It is even worse that among the accused is a former environment minister, a former tourism minister, and even the former Balearic Islands prime minister Jamie Matas. Those accused in the well-known Andratx corruption case, like the former mayor Eugenio Hidalgo, are thanks to the GOB behind bars. Where illegal buildings are concerned, Germans can of course also be named. This is shown in the case of the former tennis star Boris Becker. The GOB does not differentiate and acts against Majorcans in the same way as against Germans or other nationalities.

The GOB achieved another success on the north-west coast of Mallorca, where the famous Austrian archduke Ludwig Salvator virtually created the first nature sanctuary in the 19th century. The illegal Llucalcari villas had to be torn down after 25 years due to a complaint of the GOB. This would have been in line with the Archduke's views, who today would likely be one of the most famous members of the GOB. Even his famous cousin "Sisi" also known as "Elisabeth II" Empress of Austria visited him twice in his Majorcan nature sanctuaries, where he protected not only nature but also Majorcan culture with great love and respect. The effects that the numerous charges filed by the GOB every year have for the protection of Majorcan cultural landscapes cannot be quantified. Sadly donations have become scarce during this crisis time and celebrities and wealthy individuals give nothing. Despite this the GOB team continues the fight with great enthusiasm.

We Save Mallorca

The GOB's long-term public transportation campaigns have brought fruit and the government has intervened. In the previous years, bicycle paths were expanded in Palma, bus services were improved, and just recently a bicycle lending station was constructed in the city centre. A tram from Palma to the airport and to the Playa de Palma is also planned although the financing is still missing. The electrification of the railway line from Palma to Inca and the reconstruction of the line from Manacor to Arta are also reasons to celebrate. The only bad news is the planned second ring road around Palma, against which the GOB is fighting fiercely.

A further focal point is the promotion of renewable energy. Here the environmental organisation places the emphasis on solar energy instead of windmills. The entire Balearic Islands could be provided with solar power if mighty industry stakeholders did not prevent this. Much remains to be done before Mallorca becomes Europe's solar island.

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