



Protection of Cultural Landscapes Extremadura and Mallorca

Annual Report 2012/2013

Extremadura

The Dehesas of the Extremadura in the Spanish southwest are over 5,000 years old, which makes them one of the oldest cultural landscapes in the world. The Dehesas, like the Middle European meadow orchards, are traditional agriculture-forest-meadow systems. This means that there are various ways of using the area and multiple ways the space offers people a livelihood. An almost natural form of this has developed in the Extremadura over time. Ancient, highly adapted farm animal breeds as well as extensive use of the stone and cork oak trees for firewood, and the proximity to natural habitats such as the Monfragüe national park make biodiversity on a scale usually only seen in tropical rainforests possible. Such biodiversity is unheard of elsewhere in Europe.

Characteristic of the area are the Iberian pigs that are famous for providing the “pata negra” ham. But only if they live mainly off acorns in the Dehesas. Extensive use continues to be the key to preserving this unique landscape southwest of Madrid where visitors can still experience pure nature. Even the untrained observer can spot Black Vultures, Imperial Eagles, owls, lynx and genets as well as White and Black Storks, many songbird species, several species of snakes such as the rare Montpellier snake and countless beetles, moths and grasshoppers.

The GNF’s Spanish sister organization, Fundación Global Nature (FGN), has been working since 1993 to preserve and protect the Dehesas of the Extremadura. The FGN works in many areas such as environmental education, which takes place in their own environmental education center. They also work on campaigns outside of the Extremadura as well as on sustainable agriculture, protecting the Iberian pigs, the famous white Cacaraña cows and the black Merino sheep. They also lead conservation projects, do work in European wildlife sanctuaries (NATURA 2000) and now also organize global knowledge exchanges.

Environmental Education

Environmental Education Centre *La Dehesa*

The environmental education center can be found in the center of the Monfragüe national park, in Torrejón el Rubio between Cáceres and Plasencia. The center has over 60 beds, an environmental exhibit, seminar rooms and other facilities. Tourists, hiking groups and volunteers can stay overnight for little money. This offer is used by hundreds of travelers, visiting groups and groups from various European universities. During their stay, visitors can take advantage of a program specifically tailored to their interests. This can range from a talk in the environmental exhibit to a multi-day excursion through the national park and also includes visits to the two model fincas and to the species and nature conservation projects of the FGN.

Activities and Campaigns

“Conjured out of the Hat... The rabbits are coming with your help!”

One of the FGN’s central goals is to create a broad range of environmental education offers in the region. In 2012 one of these projects, carried out together with the Madrid based Obra Social Caja, informed over 900 people about the protection of wild rabbits. Workshops were held in 7 schools and more than 80 children took part in a short story contest that allowed them to let their imaginations run wild for the protection of the wild rabbits.

Besides the Environmental education campaign the famous magician Jorge Luengo also conjured rabbit after rabbit out of his hat during several appearances.



Nature and Species Conservation

Conservation often means taking responsibility. Together with volunteers, the FGN takes care of the protection of the unique habitats in the Extremadura, and oversees or leads development and maintenance work. Collaboration with government agencies also forms part of this work; e.g. the creation of the management plan for the NATURA 2000 areas in the Extremadura. The 7,300 hectare large Talaván Reserve is the focal point of these activities. The reserve is an official bird sanctuary and lies adjacent to two other wildlife preserves with large holm oak Dehesas, pastures, lakes and steppes.

Hand in Hand for the Protection of Wild Rabbits

For the Phoenicians, the Iberian Peninsula was the “land of the hyraxes” because they met so many rabbits when, in 1,100 BC, they founded the first ports in Andalusia. The word “Spain” is derived from this, making Spain the land of wild rabbits. Unfortunately, the population has fallen to less than a fifth of what it once was since 1975. The reason for this, besides the South American Myxomatosis (“rabbit plague”), is the destruction of habitats following Spain’s accession to the EU as well as intensive hunting, which is legal for anyone in Spain.

Wild rabbits are a key food source for the carnivores and birds of prey found in the Extremadura. The Fundación Global Nature has worked with a project manager and a field assistant since 2010 to rebuild the wild rabbit population in southern Spain. In the course of 2012, a further four hectares of fallow land were planted with grain. The focal point of these activities was the Monfragüe national park. Local hunting clubs as well as 20 volunteers collaborated on this project, which was overseen by the Extremadura University. The volunteers built 18 artificial embankments using shrubbery as well as 45 cairns that serve as refuges for the rabbits. Around 200 wild rabbits were released into these areas in 2012. Simultaneously, a hectare of land was fenced in, providing the rabbits with an area where they can breed and live undisturbed. The collaboration with the hunting organizations is noteworthy for Spain and can be seen as the biggest success of the project in 2012.



Nature Conservation on Private Property

Latifundista – this is the Spanish term for owners of large farms. Even in the Extremadura, a few individuals or businesses own whole areas. This includes bodies of water, rocks, forests and other economically unattractive areas. Nature conservation and cultural landscape protection is not possible without these landowners. The “Private Protected Areas Network” is a key initiative of the FGN for the environmentally responsible use of private land ownership. More and more latifundistas are following the groundbreaking idea to take over responsibility for conservation.

Thus, a new method for monitoring the environmental assessment and improvement of the Natura 2000 areas is being implemented since 2012. For this purpose, a detailed analysis and mapping of the 27 service agreements in the region took place. Based on the results of this study, the relevant environmental information was analyzed for each land parcel, including endangered species or habitats, agricultural and ecological characteristics and the efficiency of implemented renaturation and conservation measures. Project meetings allow detailed project descriptions and extensive knowledge exchange. The FGN provides help and guidance to all landowners. They ensure that areas are planted appropriately and, with the companies, create and implement comprehensive protection and management concepts. In this context, the FGN is responsible for over 7,000 hectares.

Protecting Wetlands

Europe's first desert is in Spain! Although it is not found in the Extremadura, water is also an invaluable treasure there, since the Tajo and Duero Guadiano rivers are dammed in their upper reaches and the water is transported through pipelines to then be used for agricultural irrigation and for drinking in other regions of Spain. Many amphibians and aquatic reptiles live in the Extremadura, including such fascinating species such as the endemic Iberian painted frog, the Spanish ribbed newt, the Common parsley frog or the viperine snake. The maintenance of existing and construction of new wetlands in the Dehesa is therefore an important task of the FGN. Through this, areas of exceptional biodiversity are created. Habitat connectivity is the magic word here and a necessary condition for preserving the rare and endemic species. As part of the custodian agreements, wetlands are also restored on private property. Improvements have been made to existing wetlands through the creation of embankments and planting.

Sustainable Agriculture

Agriculture has changed dramatically in the Spanish southwest in the last decades. On the one hand, the intensive, subsidized land use since Spain's accession to the EU, on the other there are large areas that have not been cultivated since the rural exodus between 1960 and 1990. Both factors pose a challenge to the conservation of cultural landscapes.

The famous Pata Negra or Bellota ham is a premium product that can achieve the required rates only in limited quantities. Therefore the black Iberian pigs, which are kept on an intensive diet of acorns in the Dehesas, are becoming more rare. As a result the oaks that provide the oleaginous fruits for the pigs are no longer maintained by the farmers and new trees are no longer planted to replace the dead trees. Since the traditional use of cork for wine bottles is also receding, many trees are left to themselves and suffer long-term damage. Showing how it can be done better is the primary goal of the FGN's model fincas. To try and demonstrate how agriculture can also help to maintain diverse habitats, the FGN runs two model organic farms in the Extremadura. The grazing of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats leads to an open park-like character in the Dehesa, from which the wildlife also benefits.

In 2012 the management plan of the El Baldío finca in the Talaván community was created. Here it was defined how domestic cattle breeds would be conserved, the environment protected and money would be earned simultaneously. The farm currently has 30 white Cacareña cows and 30 black Merino sheep. For the daily management of the estate, an individual was employed to do maintenance work on the pastures of the Dehesa, including tree care and planting of oak and cork trees. Caring for the pasture ponds is another task. Honey is also currently produced here by 4 honeybee colonies.



Mallorca

Like the rest of Spain, Mallorca is feeling the effects of the economic crisis. Tourism and environmental conservation are becoming seemingly harder and harder to combine. In many areas, the GOB is struggling in vain, to preserve the natural and cultural beauty of Mallorca. High unemployment and young people's lack of perspective is the final nail in the coffin. The GOB is also finding it increasingly difficult to acquire the necessary funds for its important work. This makes successes such as the natural beach Es Trenc of even greater value.

Environmental Education

La Trapa Environmental Education Centre

Thanks to volunteers, the Environmental Association GOB (Grup Balear d'Ornitologia i Defensa de la Naturalesa) could continue carry out the most urgent work on the Finca La Trapa. The olive trees had to be maintained, measures had to be taken against forest fires and the bird life in Mallorca, including black vultures, common ravens, buzzards and red kites, need to be observed. Like every year, hiking tourists visited the finca and were informed about the flora and fauna of the island. The Ornithology Group and the Children's and youth groups are supervised and guided. The GOB is a vibrant organization and is still supported by many people. In 2012, the GOB received 6,000 Euro from the GNF. It was a small contribution to the most important activities. In 2012, the GOB's focus was clearly on the politically necessary activities.

Activities and Campaigns

Fighting the Sale of the Island - "Mallorca Blackout"

The conservative regional government - supported by the Spanish central government - is according to the GOB promoting the old model of growth through landscape destruction. Unfortunately, there is no imagination available to develop a new economic model that protects the most important capital of Majorca - namely its nature and culture.

Thus, the construction of the Palma Congress Palace that, according to regional politicians, should bring the much-desired winter tourism to Mallorca, is a fiasco. The palace is rotting in plain site at the edge of Palma. The very important work on the train line from Manacor to Arta was also stopped, although the railway line would have been ecologically sound. To make the public aware of the new threats to the environment of Mallorca, the GOB and the famous contemporary artist Miquel Barceló launched the "Mallorca blackout" campaign.

Miquel Barceló was born in Felanitx in 1957 and has previously supported the GOB. The campaign was presented at the International Tourism Fair (ITB) in Berlin in March 2013. The aim of the campaign is to gain new contributors and supporters for nature and environmental protection in Mallorca, but also involve tourists in the work of the GOB more intensively than before. For this purpose a website in Catalan, Spanish, English and German, was established under www.mallorcablackout.org



We are saving Mallorca – Tourists should pay?

The conservative party in Mallorca has adopted a so-called green tax on beverage containers. Here, however, it is not about instituting a deposit system like the one that exists in Germany but simply about making money. The same is true



of the new “environmental” rental car tax. The “real” eco-tax, which was brought into being by the left wing government about 10 years ago, was still earmarked, and the money used to buy private villas for conservation, or dismantle old hotel ruins and improve tourism infrastructure for instance. As for the new “green taxes”, the Balearic entrepreneurs and the GOB have rarely agreed so vehemently that this was simply nonsense. To promote seasonal tourism it is being discussed to charge fees for entering parks from climbers and mountaineers - and maybe soon from hikers too. This could scare off many tourists.

This, however, is not the end of it. There is a plan to burn imported waste in the Son Reus incinerator. The system is far too large and only sometimes at capacity during tourist season. Waste tourism is now meant to become an important economic crutch for Mallorca. The first waste imports from Catalonia are already reaching the island. Under discussion are imports from southern Italy, and everyone knows who controls the garbage business there. The GOB rejects the plans for waste imports since there is already a higher incidence of cancer in the area around the incinerator. The GOB is calling for a deposit system like the one in Germany and an increase in recycling. Curiously, the waste import is now temporarily suspended because the central government has cut the funding. To top it off, the imported waste was subsidized

with funds for renewable energy sources, which have now been abolished entirely. Now the import is no longer profitable because of the high transport costs to Mallorca. It remains to be seen whether the matter is picked up again and other funding sources for waste tourism can be found. With the abolition of the law for the promotion of renewable energy, solar energy subsidies that Mallorca needed so badly were also abolished at the same time.

Nature and Species Protection

Bird Protection

The settlement of the Red Kite in the Llevant Natural Park continues to make progress. The danger of poison bait has decreased because the designation of protected hunting areas as “Refugio de Fauna” was introduced. The monitoring of bird life is becoming increasingly difficult for the GOB, without volunteers it would completely collapse because the state no longer gives any money for it. The tagging of migratory birds on the bird island Dragonera had to be abandoned the year before.

Protecting Wetlands

The GOB is fighting persistently and often successfully for the conservation of nature on Mallorca and the Balearic Islands. This means to working against illegal building, corruption and speculation. What has already indicated at the end of 2012, became a certainty at the beginning of 2013. The highest state court of the Balearic Islands has ordered the demolition of 22 illegal bungalows in Ses Covetes on the natural beach of Es Trenc by 15 May 2013.

After over twenty years of struggle against this eyesore near the most beautiful beach in Mallorca, the area is now finally going to be rehabilitated. According to the Spanish coastal protection laws, the construction has always been illegal. Nevertheless, the GOB had to endure many trials, so that nature could triumph. The demolition of the illegal settlement of Ses Covetes has significance not only for the Balearic Islands, but also for the protection of the coasts of Spain and Europe.

Of course the contractors, led by the mayor of Campos, who wants to build a luxury hotel near the beach of Sa Ràpita/Es Trenc, tried to prevent the demolition.

Most recently, the mayor tried to get agreement that the land could be built on once the demolition is complete. The responsible court and the Balearic government have now definitively prohibited this plan.

The only negative aspect of the demolition is that this is paid for by the taxpayers and not by the former investors or the municipality of Campos. Soon the coastal area at Ses Covetes will be rehabilitated. This is a great success for GOB. Thus, even the protected wetland Salobrar de Campos, which adjoins the beach and dunes, will be even better connected in future.



Protest demonstration at the natural beach Es Trenc: "Who loves Mallorca, does not destroy it."

The prospects of a different wetland are not looking as positive. Based on the argument that they want to fight the economic crisis and create jobs, the current regional government is focusing on land speculation, rather than focusing on sustainable development. The wetland "Ses Fontanelles" in Palma, which was protected by the previous government, is now being developed. The plan is to construct 23 commercial buildings and 2,500 parking spaces. This is a major setback not only for GOB but also for the island's retail industry.

Protecting Marine Mammals

In natural parks such as the Albufera wetland and the National Marine Park of Cabrera there have been massive job cuts, making efficient surveillance of the protected areas hardly possible. In the Cabrera National Park this concerns mainly the marine zone, which can barely be protected from illegal fishing anymore. Because the National Park is no longer under Madrid's jurisdiction but the regional government's, the park is increasingly used by local politicians for private parties with lobster meals that are conveniently caught by local fishermen. The funds for the national park, which still come from Madrid, now disappear in the deep hole in Mallorca's budget. This is a scandal according to GOB.

Ultimately, the GOB has nothing against tourism; it just shouldn't destroy itself. An example is the expansion of the marina of El Arenal at Ballermann. Due to the huge expansion of the port, the underwater meadows that serve as fish nurseries are being destroyed. The beach at Balaenrio 6 is eroding and will therefore disappear in time. Today, there are already many examples of such former sand beaches. Since the erosion process takes years, hardly anyone notices however. The type of tourism found at Ballermann is, according to GOB, important to the island's economy and will not be replaced by yacht tourism. The erosion of the beaches is literally pulling the livelihood of those employed at the Playa de Palma out to sea and will be the cause of major economic consequences in future.

YOUR DONATIONS HELP THE PROJECTS!

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