



Too green to be well – L'Albufera declared *Threatened Lake 2020*

Drought, poor water quality, uncontrolled inflows, and agricultural intensification have led the *Living Lakes Network* to declare the Albufera lake near Valencia, Spain as *Threatened Lake 2020*.

Radolfzell/Valencia, 29 January 2020: After its neighbouring lagoon Mar Menor became an ecological dead zone in 2019 and due to the similar conditions in which the Albufera is located, the *Living Lakes Network* has granted this sad award to L'Albufera de València.

A Natural Park under pressure

When the network members visited the *Albufera Natural Park* during their fifteenth international meeting held in Valencia in 2019, they were presented with a strange sight: The water was all green. The colour results from the amount of microalgae which benefit from the excessive nutrient concentration in the lake. It comes as no surprise that the Albufera ecosystem is under stress: Surrounded by 14 municipalities with a total of 1.5 million inhabitants, it is faced with industrial discharges and chemical substances derived especially from the cultivation of rice. Climate change has a direct impact on the lake by increasing evaporation and posing the threat of its total loss by sea level rise.

A history of degradation

The decline of L'Albufera dates back to the 1960s when the area was confronted with an exponential increase in industrial growth. The input of organic material caused the rise of phytoplankton and a nutrient-saturated environment in which only algae proliferate effectively – a process known as eutrophication. As the lake is only 0,5 to 2,5 metres in depth, industrial and agricultural discharges cause a threatening sedimentation. Furthermore, scientists suspect the lake to be exposed to industrial heavy metals which adds to the problem of shallowness that of pollution. In reaction, fauna and flora are massively challenged – the number of fish species, for example, has halved in recent decades. Local eels or sea bass have been displaced by exotic species (e.g. carp or blue crab) which are more resistant to pollution and thereby cause habitat deterioration. Local fishermen today struggle to make a living from their traditional activities. Declaring the lake area a Natural Park in 1986 couldn't substantially solve these problems.

An alliance for action

Even though the Albufera wetland area is the most important in the Valencian Community, saving its remaining natural treasures is a difficult enterprise – not to mention restoring its former state. Part of the problem are the confusing administrative responsibilities: As the Valencia City Council owns the lake, the regional Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development, Climate Emergency and Ecological Transition manages the Natural Park and the Ministry for Ecological Transition is in charge of the greater Valencian wetland area, it is a demanding task to take straightforward action. But there is also hope: Together with its international partners of the *Living Lakes Network* the Spanish *Fundación Global Nature* is working hard on improving the situation in the Albufera area. Its efforts are linked to several political demands.

In order to preserve and restore a unique ecosystem which is still home to 250 bird species, e.g. the beautiful and rare marble duck, two endemic and 33 endangered plant species, as well as 11 endemic and 33 endangered animal species, the Albufera first and foremost needs a supposedly simple thing: more water. An increased inflow from the Júcar river would be a workable solution to the problem of water loss – yet the



Valencia City Council is currently blocking it. Another claim of *Fundación Global Nature* concerns the dredging of the lake bottom which is periodically carried out, but is in need of higher intensity to allow the body of water to flow naturally and restore the degraded ecosystem. Agriculture around the lake must be converted according to sustainability criteria, the practice of burning rice straw or leaving it rotting in the field must end.

“There is much to do, but more can be achieved if action is taken. If we don't do it now, in 50 years the beautiful Albufera will reach a point of no return”, says Eduardo de Miguel Beascochea, Managing Director of *Fundación Global Nature*. Awarding the Albufera the title of *Threatened Lake 2020* is intended as an impetus to prevent this future and face the threatening present – to keep the lake a living one, to change its colour back from green to blue.

Background Information

Fundación Global Nature and its work in wetlands

The *Fundación Global Nature* was established in 1993 as a private entity of national scope and educational purpose dedicated to supporting sustainable development and a healthy environment. In particular, the foundation considers as its objectives:

- The conservation and protection of Iberian endemisms, biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems.
- The promotion and protection of sustainable agriculture, livestock, and native breeds.
- The mitigation of environmental pollution to fight global warming and its effects on the climate.
- The stimulation of innovative and sustainable technologies and development models.

The *Fundación Global Nature* began its restoration work on the La Nava lagoon in 1993 and has in the meantime expanded its efforts to neighbouring lagoons in the province of Palencia as well as in Castilla La Mancha. In the Valencian Community it has been working to protect the Albufera for 10 years now and is also on site in three other coastal wetlands. The foundation is founding partner of the *Living Lakes Network* and partner of the *Wetlands International Network*. In 2018, it received the *RAMSAR award* for its work in ecosystem conservation, being the first Spanish organisation to receive it. Last year, together with the German *Global Nature Fund* the *Fundación Global Nature* was organiser of the *15. International Living Lakes Conference* coinciding with the twentieth anniversary of the network. It took place in the city of Valencia, the Albufera being the host lake for the meeting.

Global Nature Fund and the Living Lakes Network

Global Nature Fund (GNF) is a non-profit, private, independent foundation for the protection of environment and nature. GNF was founded in 1998 and has offices in Radolfzell, Bonn and Berlin, Germany. One of GNF's core initiatives is the *Living Lakes Network* – a global network of organisations that champion the protection of lakes and wetlands. The network currently comprises 112 members all over the world. (www.globalnature.org/livinglakes).

Further information is available at: www.globalnature.org/ThreatenedLake2020.

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