

OC31 - LIFE Charcos: Environmental awareness & education as a conservation tool

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Environmental awareness is a powerful tool for biodiversity conservation, not only because it fosters a sense of connection with nature but also promotes sustainable development and encourages the conservation of irreplaceable natural resources as well as endangered species. It also serves as an educational tool, helping people to understand the biodiversity function in natural processes which in turn provides a wide range of free goods and services to economy, society and human wellbeing.

Mediterranean Temporary Ponds - 3170* (MTP) is a priority habitat in the European Habitats Directive and, those located in the Site of Community Importance of the Portuguese Southwest Coast were a dominant element in the landscape when the traditional soil usage was in place. Between 1998 and 2010, it has noticed an accentuated MTP degradation due to agricultural and tourism intensification. In fact, the ecological fragility and the unawareness of its natural value have proven to be the primary causes for the 56% disappearance of MTP in this Site.

The LIFE Charcos Project (LIFE12/NAT/PT/000997) aims to reverse this situation using multiple strategies. For instance, it promotes locally the dissemination of knowledge about ecology and function of MTP through demonstrations of sustainable management practices. In addition, it contributes to the long-term protection of MTP by engaging with landowners, farmers and decision makers. It also hosts training session for land managers and law enforcement authorities enabling a better recognition, proper evaluation and assist in the MTP regulation. Besides, it offers guided fieldtrips to increase awareness of the general public for MTP preservation, its biodiversity conservation and for ecosystem services' natural value acknowledgement.

Based on this framework, several activities were conducted to specific stakeholder and varied in its approach and dynamics hence attracting directly 6289 individuals and 96 entities. Public sessions were made across the intervention area, and outside, along with private and governmental meetings. Schools participated in activities such as training sessions for teachers, presentations for all school levels students with field trips to MTP and other activities that involved most families and local communities.

Complementary, the dissemination of the project actions and its results are made available in national, regional and local social media alongside with communications to international scientific community. Nevertheless, environmental awareness is manifold and assessing its direct and indirect impacts may be complex to quantify. However, the perception is that our actions are contributing significantly to the conservation of the MTP in Portugal.