

OC32 - Innovative and participative pond conservation in Portugal - Ponds with Life Project

Ferreira, A.^a, Sousa, E.^{a,b,c}, Palhas, J.^b, and Teixeira, J.^a

^aCIIMAR—Interdisciplinary Center of Marine and Environmental Research, Porto, Portugal

^bCIBIO/InBIO—Research Center in Biodiversity and Genetic Resources, Associated Laboratory, Porto, Portugal, Department of Biology

^cCESAM—Research Center Environmental and Marine Research, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

Ponds represent important habitats that highly contribute to biodiversity and promote several ecosystem services, both in natural and urban areas. However, invasive species, growing urbanism, pollution, and emergent diseases are continuously threatening such areas, especially in the Mediterranean area, where ponds present unique characteristics. In Portugal, in addition to these threats, the unknown conservation status of ponds present a major barrier to the implementation of adequate and urgent conservation measures.

To face these problems, **Ponds with Life Project (Charcos com Vida)** was created in 2011 to promote pond conservation in Portugal, through an innovative and participatory approach. Its main goals are to: **1)** develop the first interactive and open access website (www.charcoscomvida.org) with a National Pond Survey in Portugal; **2)** promote citizen's involvement in the valorisation and conservation of ponds and their biodiversity; **3)** provide proper tools and professional support for the rehabilitation, construction, and management of ponds; **4)** conduct scientific studies on pond survey, biodiversity monitoring and ecosystem services enhancement.

Until now, **Ponds with Life** has been able to survey, with citizen's participation, more than 1800 ponds in Portugal, providing crucial information for their conservation. It counts with more than 180 participating entities of which 100 are schools and where approximately 210 activities for pond exploration were developed with more than 5300 students. Almost 100 ponds were created and several management/support actions were conducted.

Also, 21 scientific studies were developed (18 Bachelor, 2 Masters, 1 Doctoral) on pond biodiversity survey and their ecosystem services, resulting in a recent paper that proves the positive impact of ponds in Environmental Education activities- "Can Environmental Education Actions Change Public Attitudes? An Example Using the Pond Habitat and Associated Biodiversity" - and several adapted identification guides for pond biodiversity.

These outcomes confirm the success of this Project and its great contribution in the valorisation of such habitats and their associated ecosystem services. Hence, many more sustainable uses of ponds are now being studied by the Project such as their use as nature-based solutions in cities to promote better water management and quality.