

## **OC33 - Using wildlife ponds for environmental offset actions in a European environmental awareness project**

Alves, A.<sup>a</sup>, Matos, M.<sup>a</sup>, Ferreira, E.<sup>a</sup>, Couto, A.P.<sup>a,b</sup>, Nunes, M.<sup>b</sup>, and Fonseca, C.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Biology, University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal

<sup>b</sup>Department of Environment, Municipality of Lousada, Lousada, Portugal

Wildlife ponds are disappearing from European landscapes and the few remaining are under threat by some of the leading causes of environmental degradation such as habitat destruction, climate change, pollution, or the introduction of alien invasive species. However, these important habitats are biodiversity hotspots and support many vital ecosystem services. These ecosystems are crucial for the life cycle of many species of plants and animals, including endangered, rare and endemic species. Moreover, wildlife ponds are excellent models for environmental education, raising ecological awareness, habitat restoration and construction. The creation of new wildlife ponds across the EU is necessary to oppose the current decline of these habitats and to reduce biodiversity loss. IMPRINT+ recognizes the importance of ponds and aims to contribute for their conservation.

IMPRINT+ is an Erasmus+ international project that brings together six partners from five EU countries. The project's motto is that each person has an ecological footprint that should be avoided, minimized, or offset, for the sake of the ecological, social and economic balance. To support the project's objectives several outputs were developed. The IMPRINT+ WebApp includes a Converter that translates everyday personal activities, such as the use of transport systems, daily shower or even the use of electronic entertainment, in several categories of practical actions to counteract the ecological footprint. The Practical Guidelines for Compensation Actions offers simple instructions for all proposed offset categories. The Tutorial for Ecological Assessment will help determine the ecological health of a site. Finally, at least four Multiplier Events and Training Courses are planned to take place in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Ireland.

Because of the remarkable capability of wildlife ponds to provide ecosystem services, their role in the water cycle and high biodiversity, IMPRINT+ proposes to use the construction of new small wildlife ponds as one of the offset categories of the Converter. Furthermore, the implications of the practical use of wildlife ponds, within IMPRINT+ context strengthens the opportunities to: i) raise awareness about ponds and their biodiversity to a wide audience; ii) experiment different construction techniques across distinct EU countries; iii) study the natural colonization on new ponds.

Finally, according to our methodology, we estimate that the wildlife pond constructed during the 1<sup>st</sup> Multiplier Event (11/2016) will offset the environmental impact from IMPRINT+ fieldwork car driving, around 10.000km.