

PST37 - Ponds and mosquitoes in Portugal – The public perception and the conflict between conservation and public health

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Ponds represent important habitats that highly contribute to biodiversity and promote several ecosystem services, both in natural and urban areas. However, in Portugal they are depreciated by the population and they are threatened by intended destruction and contamination with insecticides due to the public concern about mosquitoes and mosquito-borne diseases.

Mosquito-borne diseases are one main public health concern, specially on developing countries. Nearly 700 million people get a mosquito borne illness each year resulting in more than one million deaths. Some southern European countries were affected in the past with severe epidemic mosquito-borne diseases and are now in risk of having Dengue, Malaria and Zika.

Portugal had Malaria until the middle of the XX century and the fight against the Mosquitoes and the diseases they spread influenced negatively the way people understand and appreciate ponds and the other still water habitats. After many decades of landscape changing and Pond decline, these habitats are more threatened than back in the 60s. Since then, a lot of research has been done, both on the mosquito-borne diseases and on wetland ecology, but with less communication effort to the public. As the news alert to the risk of the new mosquito-borne diseases and always blame the “stagnant waters”, war against the mosquitoes can become also a war against ponds, with irreversible losses of biodiversity and ecosystem services (natural mosquito control included).

It is now more urgent than ever to find interdisciplinary solutions to control mosquito-borne diseases without destroying the biodiversity and it is urgent to promote well designed effective communication to the public about this subject.

This presentation resumes the preliminary results of a starting research project about public perception and attitudes towards Ponds and Mosquitoes in Portugal.