

This Life project has as a main aim to protect, restore and conserve the Mediterranean Temporary Pond (M.T.P.) priority habitats (Natura code: 3170\*) on the island of Crete. This habitat usually occupies depressions, often endorrheic, and is particularly well represented in arid, semi-arid and Mediterranean-type regions. This habitat is defined and characterized by their variability in size, hydrological functioning, ephemeral nature of their wet phase (hydroperiod) and dominant vegetation type that mainly comprises Mediterranean therophytic<sup>1</sup> and geophytic<sup>2</sup> species.

Five MTP sites are targeted while the project actions involve: Ecological monitoring, habitat mapping, estimation and restoration of the habitat hydroperiod, water / soil quality monitoring and restoration, development of a habitat management plan and respective implementation activities, increase of public awareness and gaining support from the local people for the project objectives.

### **Assessment of the situation at the end of the project**

In the broader project area the lack of a cadastre system and the extended dispute and illegal occupation of public land create significant problems in the implementation of environmental related policies and conservation efforts. Local people often consider preservation efforts as 'dangerous' for their economic activities in the sense that a protected habitat / species area may eventually end up in attempting to control man-made pressures and thus their activities.

The project team maintained frequent contact with the local people through regular visits at their meeting points (usually coffee shops) to inform them about the project progress and particularly for the activities that have direct benefit for them (e.g. the borehole in Omalos, the watering network, eco-touristic infrastructure). Additionally, various MTP conservation issues are also discussed such as avoiding specific practices that could have negative impacts on both the habitat and private interests (e.g. extracting soil from the ponds, abstracting significant amounts of water from the MTPs, disposing waste on the habitat, etc.). The outcome of these informal meetings was usually positive and a consensus has been achieved for different aspects of the project that present significance for the local communities (socioeconomic benefits). The many press article publications in dominant local newspapers has been another effort to inform efficiently and analytically local communities about the project achievements and the opportunities provided for both economic development and environmental preservation. These regular publications had very positive impacts for achieving public consensus in favor of the project and for disseminating the project's outcome.

### **After Life continuation of actions**

Given the aforementioned status and the project achievements and perspective created in the local societies a series of actions should be continued in order to achieve the long-term objectives of the project. Particularly, from an administrative perspective the Institutional integration and protection of

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<sup>1</sup> A **therophyte** is a plant which survives unfavourable seasons in the form of seeds, and completes its life-cycle during favourable seasons

<sup>2</sup> **Geophytes** are plants that have underground storage organs for storage of energy and water.

the Natura 2000 sites is an essential step. In Omalos site there is already the National Park of Samaria with the relevant managing authority that is also responsible for the MTP area. The project team was and still is in close collaboration with this managing authority (Vice-president is the leader of Forest Agency of Chania, Dr. Hara Kargiolaki) and the habitat management guidebook as well as all the relevant project studies and measurements have been offered to this Body which is responsible for the after-Life management of the habitat. Moreover, the keys to the Omalos information kiosk have been also sent to this managing authority for sustainably exploiting the infrastructure since during the summer period a large number of tourists visit the area.

In Elafonisi area a Special Environmental Study for the designation of protection zones and management principles for the Natura 2000 site has been almost concluded (Phase B has finished). The remaining stage (Phase C) is to form and declare the respective Presidential Decree which will give legislative authorization to the implementation of the study provisions (protection zones, management plan and management authority). The project team has provided significant input (maps, location of the MTPs, management practices, etc), resulting from the project activities, to this study and therefore the MTP habitat has been included as a significant and priority ecosystem in the designated protection zones.

In Gavdos island a Special Environmental Study is also about to be completed (Phase B has finished) and the project team provided all the necessary input for the inclusion of the MTP habitat in the designation of protection zones and management practices. The habitat management guidebook has been sent to the local municipality for the transitional stage and will be also sent to the relevant managing authority which will be established shortly.

In Kourna area the continuation of the habitat management plan will be done by the Municipality of Georgioupolis that had a very good collaboration with the project team throughout the entire project period. Additionally the Lake's water management which is the most important factor for the preservation of the MTP habitat in this area is planned by the Water Directorate – Region of Crete according to the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC). For this purpose, the project team has sent the climate change and water management impact report for the MTP habitat to this authority in order to incorporate it in the relevant water management plans. Further, the Water Directorate of Crete Region will undertake the operation and maintenance of the project's hydrometeorologic stations in the after Life period.

In Falasarna area the project team encountered significant difficulties as mentioned above but the willingness of the Mayor and some local people to change the developmental perspectives of the area and sustainably exploit the environmental assets have led to an agreement (Memorandum of Understanding) between HCMR and the Municipality of Kissamos. This official agreement aims to the continuation in the cooperation between the project team and the local Municipality for maintaining and expanding the eco-touristic infrastructure and foster the development of touristic sector through environmentally –friendly practices. This will be achieved through the National Strategic Reference Framework funds (Structural Fund) which covers such activities and is implemented until 2013.

### **Opportunities – Recommendations**

The wetlands of the Mediterranean Temporary Ponds constitute a comparative advantage of the study areas and their conservation may be directly and effectively combined with the existing economical activities (agriculture / stock-breeding, tourism, services) as well as with the future development of the areas under consideration. Specifically, the following opportunities are presented for each sector of activity:

#### **- AGRICULTURE**

The present requirements and approaches for the agricultural activities necessitate the alteration of mentality and practices in production by utilising environmental friendly cultivation methods and rational management of the natural resources. In addition, the existing status quo for subsidization and financing of the farmers will change in form and procedure in the context of the recently agreed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU and will impose a combination of increasing the products' quality level and reducing the environmental impact from agricultural activity. Therefore, innovative and environmentally- friendly agricultural practices, such as solar remediation of the soils, biological cultivations, reuse of irrigation water, etc. will be promoted and preferentially applied in areas of particular environmental value (e.g. Natura areas). Moreover, the production from these protected areas will constitute an advertising advantage and will have a particular value for the international market, considering the best agricultural practices which will be applied and certified on the product's label.

#### **- TOURISM**

Tourism in Greece and particularly in Crete is one of the more rapidly developed economic activities, which is expected to constitute the main boost for country's development in the forthcoming years. In the last few years, about 14 million tourists visit Greece annually. From this figure about 1.8 million visit Crete and 20% the Chania Prefecture. There is an evident dynamic for touristic development with emphasis on alternative forms (ecotourism, agrotourism, etc). About 35 millions of European tourists are nowadays interested in alternative forms of tourism and the annual rate increases with more than 20%. Therefore, it is evident that in the study areas, which belong to the NATURA 2000 European network of protected areas and involve the priority habitat of Mediterranean Temporary Ponds, a unique chance of quick but also sustainable development of eco-tourism is apparent and is facilitated by the present LIFE project.

The essential basis for ecotouristic development has been created, after the relevant project activities, and the essential cooperation has been achieved for some of the areas, through official agreements between the project team and the relevant authorities for the maintenance and expansion of the ecotouristic infrastructure. Furthermore, the existing managing authority of Samaria National Park and the upcoming establishment of managing authorities for the Natura 2000 sites of Elafonisi and Gavdos, will offer the necessary framework for the continuation of the above activities at particular sites.