



Life plateau de Montselgues - Preservation of the heathlands, peatlands and bats of Montselgues

LIFE05 NAT/F/000135



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Project description:

Background

The Plateau de Montselgue in Ardèche is a 4 000 ha French Natura 2000 site. Located in the Rhône Alpes region, the site is home to four bat species and four habitats of European importance including the priority habitat “active raised bogs”. The main threat to these heathlands and peatlands is afforestation mainly with conifers. Conifers invade these habitats and disturb their water cycle, soil and micro-climate. Inappropriate agricultural management also threatens the dry heaths and arborescent matorrals (bushes). Moreover, the habitat of the four bat species – the galleries of abandoned mines – is threatened by the closure of the access to the mines for security reasons.

Objectives

The project aimed to improve the management and conservation status of the habitats and species of European importance on the Plateau de Montselgues site.

Conservation activities would focus on dry heaths and arborescent matorrals. New management specifications of heathlands would be tested on 80 ha, which could be used in future agro-environmental contracts with farmers. The project also planned to restore and draw up management plans for 20 ha of active raised bogs and depressions on peat substrates.

Moreover, the project aimed to build on the experience gained from a previous LIFE project that focused on the management of peatlands in France and included one of the four peatlands of the site. Management plans for the three other peatlands would be drawn up. Following extensive contacts with the landowners, key plots of land would be either acquired (30 ha) or management contracts concluded (100 ha).

Finally, depending on the results of the monitoring of existing bat colonies in the mines, actions would be taken to ensure passage for the bats while keeping the mines closed to public. Communication would be a strategic part of the project, with the aim to make local actors and the public aware of the importance of preserving biodiversity both locally and at the European level.

Results

The project tested out techniques to restore and manage heathland habitats: the strong involvement of four local farmers ensured that actual requirements and constraints from farming activities were taken into account. Based on these experiments, the project developed technical guidelines and reference sheets to assist farmers in choosing adequate management techniques. These can be applied on 1 600 ha of heathlands.

The results will also be used by the partners in future discussions on agri-environmental and Natura 2000 measures at local and national level. The project participants, however, are cautious about drawing definitive conclusions from the experiments on heathland habitats because limited monitoring time was available and the choice of techniques should be based on the specificities of the site.

Specific outcomes of the project, however, include the development of a five-year management plan for 300 ha of peat bogs and the direct restoration of 5.3 ha, leading to the restoration of 13.5 ha of peatland and the creation of seven corridors between different peat bogs. But insufficient time was available to assess the impact of such restoration on peatlands. About 30 ha of land were acquired as foreseen, but this land was not bought with LIFE funding.

The project demonstrated the value of the targeted abandoned mines: the site provides habitats for what then became known as the largest hibernation colony of lesser horseshoe bats in the Rhône-Alpes region. After two years of intense discussions and negotiations with all interested parties – the mines' owner and the ministry of environment among other stakeholders – the project succeeded in ensuring that national regulations would be implemented and that the galleries would allow the passage of bats while being inaccessible to the public. Again, however, there was not enough time to assess the impact of this action: the colonies were not found in the galleries during the inventories carried out the first year after the works were done. The galleries will continue to be monitored after the end of the project, however.

Nevertheless, the project demonstrated that preserving bat colonies and securing galleries of abandoned mines can be compatible. The project was implemented at the same time discussions took place at national level regarding the integration of biodiversity issues into policy on abandoned mines. Today, the project is seen as a good technical reference.

Finally, the project developed many high-quality tools and communications and organised activities and events targeting different stakeholders – local inhabitants, elected representatives, school teachers, technicians and experts. These contributed to making stakeholders more aware of the natural heritage of Plateau of Montselgues and its value for local development.

The commitment of local stakeholders was evident during the project lifetime and will continue in the future: they are closely involved with the management of the Natura 2000 site and agri-environmental measures.

Further information on the project can be found in the project's layman report and After-LIFE Conservation Plan (see "Read more" section).

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Environmental issues addressed:

Themes

Species - Mammals

Habitats - Heath and Scrublands

Habitats - Bogs and Mires

Biodiversity issues - Ecological coherence

Keywords

agricultural method, animal corridor, land purchase, protected area

Target EU Legislation

- Nature protection and Biodiversity
- Directive 79/409 - Conservation of wild birds (02.04.1979)
- Directive 92/43 - Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora- Habitats Directiv ...

Target species

Alytes obstetricans Barbastella barbastellus Bufo calamita Myotis bechsteinii
Myotis blythii Nyctalus leisleri Rhinolophus hipposideros

Target Habitat types

- 7110 - Active raised bogs
- 7150 - Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion
- 4030 - European dry heaths
- 5120 - Mountain Cytisus purgans formations

Natura 2000 sites

SCI FR8201660

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Beneficiaries:

Coordinator	Conservatoire Rhône-Alpes des Espaces Naturels - Antenne Drôme-Ardèche
Type of organisation	NGO-Foundation
Description	The Conservatoire Rhône Alpes des Espaces Naturels was founded in 1994 with the objective of protecting and highlighting the ecological and biological diversity of the Rhône Alpes region. The Conservatoire has acquired 2 456 ha of land, managed by 19 employees. It contributes to the updating of the inventory of fauna and flora in France.
Partners	Parc Naturel Régional des Monts d'Ardèche, France Conseil General de l'Ardèche, France Communauté de communes des Cévennes Vivaroises, France Chambre d'Agriculture de l'Ardèche, France

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Administrative data:

Project reference	LIFE05 NAT/F/000135
Duration	01-OCT-2005 to 30-MAY -2010
Total budget	465,000.00 €
EU contribution	232,500.00 €
Project location	Rhône-Alpes(France)

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Read more:

Project web site	Project's website
Publication: After-LIFE Conservation Plan	Title: Plan de conservation après-LIFE Author: Laurence JULLIAN Year: 2010 No of pages: 19

Publication: Article-Paper	Title: "Bilan de l'action C2 : travaux de restauration de landes" (173 KB) Author: LAMBERET R. Editor: CREN No of pages: 4
Publication: Guidelines-Manual	Title: "La lande, ressource pastorale" (8.4 MB) Author: Benoît PASCAULT, Gilles MARTINEAU Year: 2010 No of pages: 54
Publication: Layman report	Title: Layman report Year: 2010 Editor: Conservatoire Rhône-Alpes des Espaces Naturels, An No of pages: 2
Publication: Layman report	Title: Journal du Parc Naturel Régional des Monts d'Ardèche - Spécial LIFE - Printemps 2010 Year: 2010 No of pages: 2
Publication: Pedagogical tool	Title: "Au pays de l'azuré et des plantes carnivores - Les tourbières du plateau de Montselgues" (Carnet Nature)(4.7 MB) Author: Pascal Breitenbach Year: 2010 No of pages: 15
Publication: Research findings	Title: "Les landes du plateau de Montselgues - Référentiel de l'expérimentation 2005-2009" (1.2 MB) Author: Benoît PASCAULT (CREN) et al. Year: 2010 Editor: CREN Rhône-Alpes No of pages: 52
Publication: Technical report	Title: Rapport technique final (19 MB) Year: 2010 No of pages: 321
Video link	"Des ailes dans les mines" (28')

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