

5210 Arborescent matorral with *Juniperus* spp.

Management of Natura 2000 habitats. Summary



Juniper matorral in Central Italy. Photo: courtesy Foreste Casentinesi National Park

The arborescent matorral with *Juniperus* spp. habitat is a scrub vegetation that is found in the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. *Juniperus* spp. are evergreen shrubs or small trees with few vital needs that, thanks to their morpho-physiological characteristics, colonise harsh environments such as rocky coasts and dry, incoherent soils. Juniper, with its deep and well-developed root system, is therefore an important species for soil retention and consolidation, preventing soil erosion caused by rain and wind.

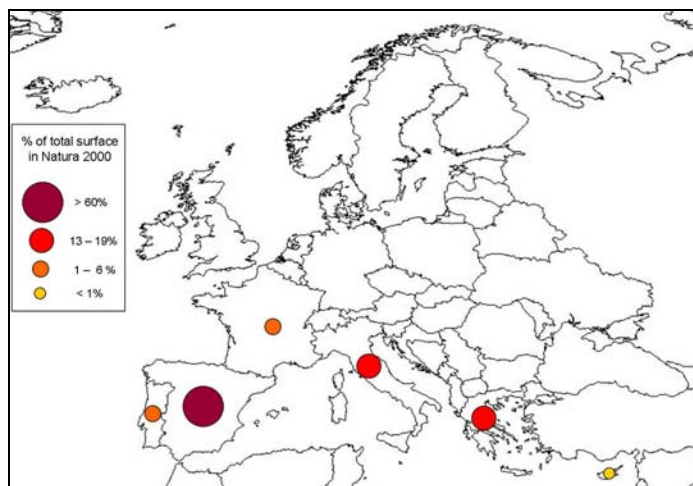
It is important as an ecotone, since it is often a transition area between ecosystems. In winter the habitat is a refuge for several mammals and wintering birds due to the protection from predators and warm sheltered conditions offered by the evergreen vegetation, and the presence of insects and of autumn-flowering and fruiting plants, such as *Arbutus unedo* (strawberry tree), *Phyllirea angustifolia* (mock privet) and the juniper itself. Old junipers often are "living monuments" due to their age and tortuous trunks. In France some specimens of juniper despite their small size (1.5 m high, trunk of 8 cm diameter) are 1150 years old. There is a specimen of common juniper aged 2000 years with a trunk of 2.75 m in circumference.

This habitat type can be both an arborescent pre-forestal stage (secondary matorral), or a "permanent plant community" when environmental conditions (aridity, rocky soils, etc.) do not allow the evolution to forest (primary matorral).

Fires, overgrazing, urbanisation and tourist pressure present the main threats to the habitat. Habitat loss is also frequently due to the clearing of areas for stock raising or agriculture. Another threat is linked to transition of the secondary matorrals to forests. This process is frequent in Portugal, France and Italy.

Management activities of matorrals vary, depending on their nature and location. In general we can distinguish two management models, primary matorrals needing natural evolution and secondary matorrals requiring active management. The first model is suitable for matorrals of projecting ledges, cornices or rocky slopes, almost inaccessible and not threatened by human activities, and coastal matorrals, where the main threat is linked to tourism. Here it is necessary to avoid actions that can trigger erosion such as construction of new roads or tracks, overgrazing and climbing.

The other model should be applied to secondary matorrals, strictly linked to human related activities, such as stock raising, requiring active management for their conservation. This is the case for small sites, where it is important to block colonisation by competing shrubs or tree species and favour the renovation of juniper plants by keeping the habitat open with moderate grazing and partial scrub clearance. The maintenance of the habitat will result in higher landscape and habitat diversity.



*Percentage distribution of the total surface of arborescent matorral with *Juniperus* in Natura 2000*

The complete text of the document is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/best_practice_en.htm

Management of Natura 2000 habitats is a project launched by the European Commission in January 2007 aimed at defining best practices for management of habitat types included in Annex I of the Habitat Directive (92/43/EEC) that need active recurring management. Twenty six habitat types that are representative of different bio-geographical regions have been considered.