PROJECT SITE

MENORCA (SPAIN)

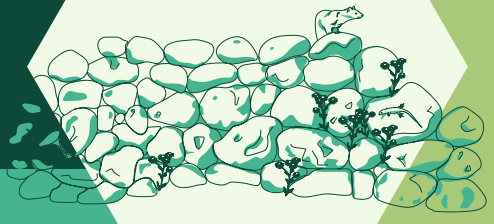
MENORCA IS THE SECOND LARGEST AND MOST EASTERN ISLAND

of the Balearic archipelago situated in the North West of the Mediterranean Sea. It is located approximatively 200km south-east of Barcelona, 40km east of Majorca and 350km west of Sardinia. The population is roughly of 93,000 inhabitants (2011). Its strategic geographical location was always of huge economic and political importance. There is evidence of an intense prehistoric presence with important archeological remains.

Menorca is characterized by a rocky (limestone) substrate and a smooth topography with a maximum elevation at 358m (Mount Toro). It is the most preserved island of the Balearic and is recognized since 1993 as a Biosphere reserve by UNESCO. The rural landscape is dominated by an agro-forestry mosaic, comprising a wide mesh of drywalls that stretch for 12,000 km and have marked the island's landscape for centuries, closed-in fields and country houses. The Menorca Biosphere Reserve shows a high diversity of ecosystems including gullies, caves, wetlands, dune systems, coasts and islets. A total of 300 species of birds, and 1400 species of plants (90 of which are endemic) have been recorded. Among the fauna, mention should be made of the large colonies of sea birds, an abundance of birds of prey and an endemic species of reptile, Lilford's wall lizard (*Podarcis lilfordi*).

Although Menorca experienced strong touristic development from the 60's, it is balanced with the preservation of the environment. Agriculture remains an important part of the economic activity of the island, mainly through husbandry (especially cattle and sheep). Menorca is known for the high quality Mahon cheese. Vine and olive oil production is recently growing.

The island is divided in eight municipalities (Alaior, Es Castell, Ciutadella, Ferreries, Maó, Es Mercadal, Es Migjorn Gran, and Sant Lluis).



Dry stonewall

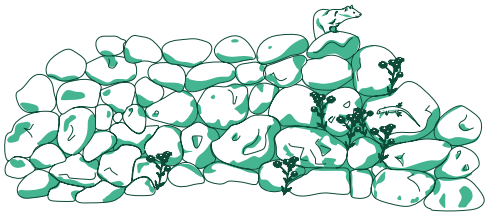
GOB MENORCA ECOLOGISME RESPONSABLE

IUCN

Tour du Valat

Alliance for Mediterranean Nature & Culture

MAVA FONDATION POUR LA NATURE



CURRENT CHALLENGES

Menorca unique landscape and its associated biodiversity is the result of the agrarian activity during thousands of years. Today, farming activities still occupy more than 70% of Menorca land. Its agricultural sector has been highly focused on animal husbandry for the last decades. Milk and cheese production has been the main activity since mid 20th century. Globalization has made this activity less profitable and trends are nowadays changing. Besides prioritizing added-value cheese production instead of milk as raw material, olive orchards and vineyards are becoming wider spread.

The ubiquitous presence of dry-stone walls and the mixture of agricultural fields with patches of natural habitats (forests, shrublands, coastal areas) shape the landscape as a mosaic, which boosts its biodiversity.

However, the landscape and the associated biodiversity is threatened by two contrasting trends resulting from changes in the economy. On one hand, some farms are economically non profitable anymore and traditional farming practices abandoned. On the other hand, intensive farming practices are increasingly aiming to find the largest and short term economic benefit. These changes result in cultural, socio-economic and environmental challenges. Indeed, intensification of agriculture leads to land degradation, soil erosion and water scarcity. It leads also to the loss of ethnological elements and agrobiodiversity (ancient breeds, local varieties). Climate change is an additional threat in a Mediterranean dry environment. Both the abandonment of traditional agriculture and intensification lead to the loss of employment in agriculture and poor working conditions.

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The general challenge of the project is to ensure that environmentally sustainable farms are also socially fair and economically profitable, so that they can maintain their activity in the long-term. It requires the involvement of all stakeholders (farm owners and managers, society/consumers and politicians) in the preservation of the environment.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON BIODIVERSITY

The rural landscape of Menorca conserves a high-level ecological value, based on a variety of natural and human-made features and sustainable agricultural practices. The threatening trends are the homogenization of landscape, resulting in the loss of critical habitats for wildlife, especially for plants, insects and birds. The stone-wall network is a key feature for insects, reptiles and birds threatened by intensification (increasing size of agricultural plots).

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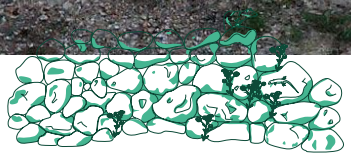
Traditional rainwater harvesting system called *aljub*. Besides recovering them, GOB builds small water troughs for small wildlife, which are critical in the summer season. © GOB Menorca



CULTURAL SUSTAINABLE LAND-USE PRACTICES

The solution lies in such an agricultural management that is beneficial to the environment and which, in turn, confers differentiation and added value to the products on the basis of health, nature and proximity. Farmers commit themselves to a series of sustainable management practices through a Land Stewardship Agreement. The agreement is specific to each farm (37), adapted to their activities and the biodiversity context.

The Land Stewardship Program is conducted by the Balearic Ornithology and Nature Defence Group (GOB) to help farms that are committed to respecting the environment in order to ensure their economic profitability and sustainability. In this way farmers can compete in a global market that is lowering prices and sustain their activity in the long-term.

This help comes through a variety of action lines. On one end, GOB supports farmers through training and consulting services, paying special attention to accompanying each farm through the processes to implement new sustainable management practices. This is also accompanied by direct actions and investments on farms to promote habitat and biodiversity conservation, landscape regeneration and improving soil fertility and fresh water management. In tandem, GOB reaches out to consumers through product promotion. Additionally, GOB works with the general public organizing regular volunteering sessions that help farmers and build bridges between them and society, and through environmental education with children. Finally, GOB influences policy and decision-making to ensure a legal structure that favors sustainable farming practices.

BENEFITS OF MENORCA AS A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The traditional management of the mosaic of agricultural land, pastures and wild areas is contributing to mitigate climate change through increasing carbon storage in agricultural soil, preventing wildfires (due to the controling efect of grazing), and reducing the use of petrol and petrol-derived-chemicals.

The landscape diversity enhances biodiversity and functional stability notably through landscape heterogeneity, the maintenance of corridors for wildlife, supporting food chains with high diversity of plants, invertebrates and birds and maintaining key habitats (ponds, stone walls). Furthermore, the diversity of invertebrates contributes to control crop pests and diseases through predation of the species that create these problem.

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