

TAURUS MOUNTAINS (TURKEY)

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THESE MOUNTAINS ARE LOCATED IN THE SOUTH OF TURKEY AND ARE TRADITIONALLY USED BY SARIKEÇİLİ NOMADIC PASTORALISTS.

The pilot site specifically covers the parts of the Taurus Mountains surrounded by Lake Beyşehir and Göksu Delta and passes within the administrative borders of three cities: Mersin, Karaman, Konya. The elevation of the lands used starts at 100 m and climbs up to 2,000 m.

This wide geographical area falls within the boundaries of the Mediterranean Biodiversity Hotspot. The Taurus Mountains, with its slopes, hosts summering/wintering grounds and migration routes of Sarıkeçililer, a community that practices nomadic pastoralism in its most traditional form. Yolda Initiative has conducted various field research activities, including semi-structured interviews and mapping of wintering and summering sites and migration routes of 14 Sarıkeçili nomadic pastoralist families.

These routes overlap with areas holding important biodiversity elements: 6 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), 4 Important Bird Areas (IBAs), and 3 Prime Butterfly Areas (PBAs). The uniqueness of the region is also reflected in the plant diversity, with up to 1,400 endemic plant species present. Different habitats are present in the region, changing from steppes to wetlands, forests and maquis formations.

Historically, the region has a deep-rooted coexistence of traditional land use practices and sustainable production systems shaping the landscape for thousands of years. This is also apparent in the presence of a high number of historical settlements and archaeological sites in and around the region. The most important of these, Çatalhöyük, a very rare example of a well-preserved Neolithic settlement, was discovered quite close to the migration routes of nomadic pastoralists.

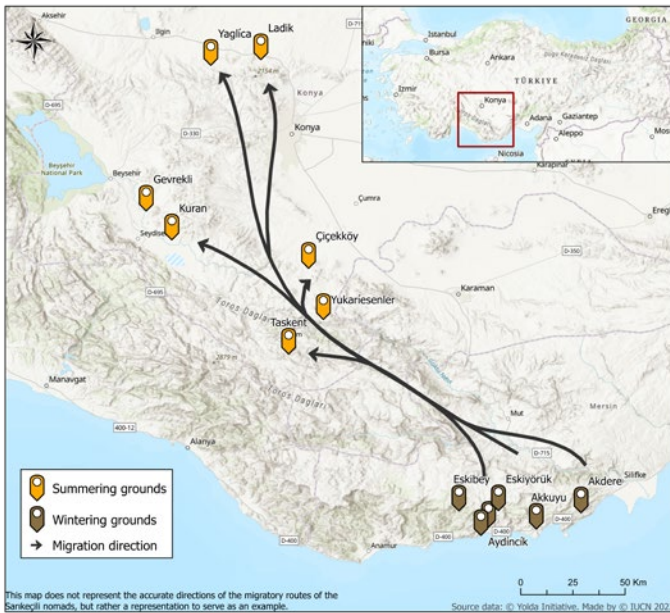
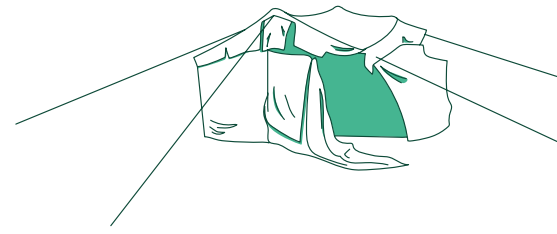
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Tour du Valat



Haircloth Tent



Sarıkeçili seasonal migration movements across the Taurus Mountains.
Source: © Yolda Initiative

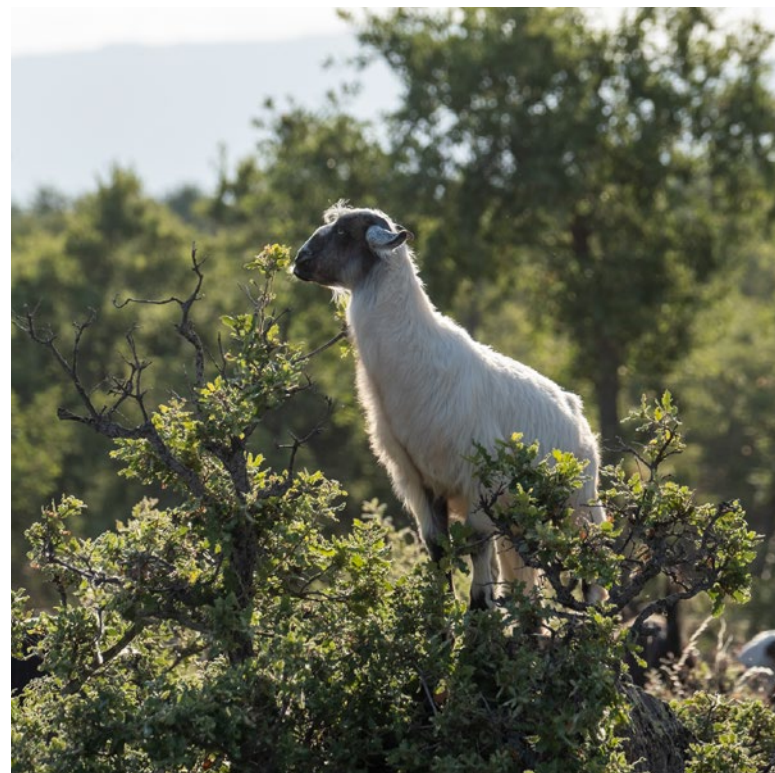
CURRENT CHALLENGES

For decades, economic development in the region has continued based on mass tourism, intensive agricultural practices, and coastal trade. The national and international migration movements also led to significant increases in population densities in the coastal areas, causing pressures on natural resources and biodiversity. The rapid change in land-use patterns and resulted fragmentation of natural habitats is evident in the region. The transformation of natural areas towards agricultural use, infrastructure projects, massive hydrological, mining and urbanization developments, unsustainable water and forestry policies and climate change are among the main challenges. These threats acting on biodiversity and ecosystems also have direct and indirect impacts on the nomadic pastoralists. Local communities are facing several pressures, such as inaccessibility to their traditional lands, restrictions to mobility, little or no access to basic services and proper infrastructure, and adverse policies that favour intensive livestock production systems. The studied site of nomadic pastoralism has been accordingly affected by the circumstances. The Taurus Mountains currently witness the decline of local food systems, small-scale producers, local cultural practices, and rural livelihoods.

NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON BIODIVERSITY

The significant threats in the region result in decreased habitat heterogeneity, fragmentation and loss of ecosystems along with the diversity of species they host. The effects of climate crisis have also become visible in Turkey, so do in the studied region. The adverse impacts of climate crisis are among the major determinants of the region. Large-scale shifts in precipitation, changes in factors that influence evapotranspiration, and alterations in the timing of snow accumulation and melt driven by rising temperatures are expected to cause the drying of water resources. The frequency of droughts and wildfires have increased remarkably in recent years due to the joint effects of climate change and unsustainable water and forestry policies. Correspondingly, the local communities have been forced to be displaced or abandon their land and traditional practices.

Rural abandonment and loss of traditional cultural practices and agricultural intensification cause the loss of habitats formed by human interaction and the extinction of many endemic plant species, carnivores and scavengers.





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CULTURAL SUSTAINABLE LAND-USE PRACTICES

The Taurus mountains have been the location for diverse land-use practices, dating back to the earliest farming practices in the world. Traditionally, most of the population in the region lived in villages, utilizing their environment with their traditional knowledge: cultivated land was a mosaic of small plots with complex patterns of land tenure, whilst the seasonal mobility of the local breed livestock grazing and browsing in the areas of natural and semi-natural grasslands and forest ecosystems was the main strategy. Accordingly, many of the threatened species found in the area are dependent on anthropogenic habitats maintained by traditional land use practices such as nomadic pastoralism, sustainable agriculture, traditional beekeeping and plant collecting with high economic benefits.

Among the many cultural practices in the region, the work of the Yolda Initiative in the region has focused on the practice of nomadic pastoralism due to its role in conserving nature and tackling climate crisis. Despite the benefits they provide for biodiversity, climate and well-being of the communities, the communities are facing many challenges including adverse policies that favour intensive livestock production systems in the highly competitive market environment. All these threats are forcing the community members either to intensify their production or abandon their practice.



BENEFITS OF AREAS TRADITIONALLY USED BY SARIKEÇILI NOMADIC PASTORALISTS AT THE TAURUS MOUNTAINS

Many of the threatened species found in the region are dependent on anthropogenic habitats maintained by traditional land use practices. Nomadic pastoralism has played a critical role as a major agent in their evolution. To illustrate, the migration routes function as ecological corridors ensuring connectivity between valuable habitats and ecosystems, so avoiding isolation and fragmentation, which are among the most serious threats to areas of high biodiversity. There are many threatened species found in the area that are dependent on anthropogenic habitats maintained by nomadic pastoralism. As herds graze, their movements create unique habitats for diverse animal species: their coats, hooves, and droppings disperse seeds of different plant species; their feeding manages natural biomass which otherwise becomes fuel for wildfires; their manure adds to the nutrient cycle, enriching and strengthening the soil combatting the climate crisis.



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This cultural practice is critical to the livelihoods and income of the community. Utilizing habitats unsuitable for sustainable crop cultivation, this livelihood can play a major role in achieving safe, nutritious, sustainable and equitable food systems in the region. With low reliance on external chemical inputs and a lower ecological footprint, it converts natural vegetation into highly nutritious food. Compared to the intensive livestock production systems, it requires the least fossil fuel energy. Considering the increasing scale and frequency of wildfires due to climate change in the region, it is a very cost-effective method of preventing wildfires since grazing and browsing reduces the biomass, which otherwise forms the fuel for fires. While industrial livestock systems have a large ecological footprint, the footprint of the community is minimum. It is the most nature-friendly and climate-friendly livestock production system with many ecosystem services in the region and beyond.



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