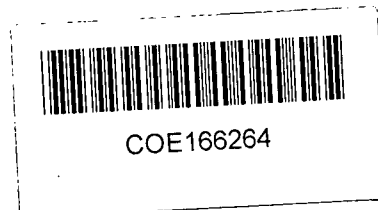


COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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SN-ZP (83) 33

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Application for the European Diploma
submitted by
Dofiana National Park

ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL

SECRETARIAT MEMORANDUM
prepared by
the Directorate of Environment
and Local Authorities

Following recognition by the Committee of Experts on protected areas of the European importance of the Doñana National Park, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe requested Mr Paul Géroutet (Geneva) to carry out the on-the-spot appraisal. In accordance with Resolution (73) 4 a member of the Secretariat, Mr Jean-Pierre Ribaut, accompanied the expert on this mission (1). This paper sets out the Secretariat representative's impressions and conclusions.

1. Conduct of the on-the-spot appraisal

The appraisal of the national park proper was conducted on 7 and 8 June. On the morning of 9 June we visited the Doñana Biological Station. Our constant guides were Mr Ramon Coronado, Director of the park, and Mr Luis Berbiela Mingot, Deputy Director. We also met Mr German Garcia Gonzales, Regional Director of ICONA, and Mr Antonio Camoyan, one of his assistants (who is also an exceptional photographer and the author of a fine work on the park).

2. Résumé of essential information

The Doñana National Park is a relatively recent creation, although the area was known as early as the 10th century B.C. and was first mentioned in a text in 1262.

1964 : With major assistance from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) 6794 ha of land were purchased and, at the same time, the Doñana Biological Station was set up.

1969 : Creation of the Doñana National Park by Decree 2412/1969.

The most significant date is, however, 28 December 1978, when Act n° 91/1978 was promulgated. This act, which sets out the objectives underlying the park's creation, is a most valuable instrument and should facilitate the establishment of an exemplary protected area.

I shall say little about the biological features of this exceptional site, since they are fully covered in doc. SN-ZP (83) 26 and Mr Paul Géroutet's on-the-spot appraisal. It should simply be noted that during our visit we observed over 100 species of birds, 9 of which appear on our European red list.

The park now covers 50,000 ha and the buffer zone 25,000 ha ; attempts are being made to enlarge it, inter alia by purchase, especially in the sensitive areas.

The vast marsh area at the mouth of the Guadalquivir covers some 30,000 ha in all ; it is hard to imagine what the 130,000 ha of marshland which existed 100 years ago must have looked like.

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(1) Mr Paul Géroutet's report appears in doc. SN-ZP (83) 34

3. Administration

The national park's supervisory authority is ICONA (National Institute for Nature Conservation), itself a department of the Ministry of Agriculture. The Doñana Biological Station and the three total reserves are attached to the Ministry of Education and Science. Although the Director is responsible for the entire park conflict can arise, since each of the two ministries seeks to play the "Doñana" card to its best advantage - and understandably so, as it is a strong card to play ! As a result, the Director of the park cannot, for instance, intervene in the total reserves without the Director of the Biological Station's agreement.

The park at present has 23 full-time wardens ; 7 more are to be appointed shortly and will live in attractive houses within the park. The wardens are all from the area. The park authorities set the greatest store by associating the local population as closely and as extensively as possible with the park's activities. The biological station has 8 wardens of its own, and there are also wardens for the privately owned land (which forms more than half the total).

The park's budget is very large, but difficult to quantify exactly. Actual investment in the park's objectives amounts to approximately 100 million pesetas per annum, to which should be added expenditure by ICONA and other ministries for the improvement or management of this area : forestry work, repairs to paths, roads, pumping of water, etc. An estimated 200 to 300 million pesetas are spent on this kind of work.

The 1978 Act provided for the preparation of a master plan, a real medium-term programme of action. This important document has just been finalised by the park authorities and is currently being considered by the Government. The plan, which for the time being is confidential, endorses the experiments conducted in recent years in the fields of planning, management, conservation of ecosystems, reception, education and information.

Before doing anything in the newly established park, the park authorities consulted sources of the highest standing :

- Everglades Park (Florida) on water problems
 - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) on observatories (hides)
 - Slimbridge (United Kingdom) on the bird clinic,
- etc.

As we shall see, the outcome is pleasing, since there have been numerous successes.

4. Planning and Management

One of the authorities' foremost concerns is to restrict and reduce as much as possible the number of visitors to the park. Prior to the 1978 Act, visitors to the interior of the park numbered some 300,000 each year. Their numbers have fallen considerably as a result of a policy of keeping them outside or on the fringes of the park. Reception areas have, for instance, been built on certain major roads 10 or 20 km away from the park. Moreover, all the information centres are sited on the park fringes

and the area around them has been improved, and in some cases totally re-planned, to enable people to discover the park's riches and importance without being obliged to visit it. Many protected areas in Europe could usefully adopt a similar policy and follow Doñana's example in running all new electricity cables underground.

Agriculture in the park and buffer zone raises no real problems, since the use of pesticides is prohibited and only traditional forms of farming are allowed. In the surrounding sectors and in the rice plantations, the situation is obviously different. ICONA is endeavouring to establish a dialogue with the farmers there in order to dissuade them from employing intensive farming techniques. The impact of this situation on the park is hard to assess, but it does not appear to be too severe, except perhaps in periods of prolonged drought.

ICONA's forestry policy is to eliminate systematically though gradually the eucalyptus trees planted a few decades ago. Felling is done gradually so as not to arouse excessive opposition among the local inhabitants and is often coupled with experimentation. For instance, on some plots nature is left to work its will once the trees have been felled, while on others seeds of native species are sown and on a third category planting is carried out. ICONA is also trying to foster a restoration of the natural vegetation outside the park, although it does suggest that the landowners conserve a few particularly tall eucalyptus trees, since they often constitute ideal nesting places for large birds of prey such as the imperial eagle, the booted eagle, the short-toed eagle, the black kite, the kite, etc.

Hunting presents a tricky problem. Some ecologists would like it stopped forthwith. This would cost 75 million pesetas in compensation. The authorities prefer to eliminate it gradually. It is currently permitted in alternate years and will subsequently be allowed one year in every three. At all events, only the owners of land are entitled to hunt on their land. The hunting problem illustrates the tensions that can develop between ICONA and ecologists (I am tempted to say "the uncompromising wing of the ecologist movement!"). Last year 73,000 greylag geese hibernated in the park. ICONA agreed a hunting programme with the landowners, who shot 1,857 of them, a quite acceptable proportion. The next day, the leading Spanish daily newspaper reported that the Doñana Park had authorised a massacre of the geese, etc. Such verbal excesses, often uttered by eminent scientists, unfortunately strike a definite chord with the public and do not make the park authorities' work any easier.

One of the major threats long hanging over the park was the proposed coast road. This danger has now been lessened thanks to the firm opposition of the park authorities and the inclusion of the area concerned in the buffer zone. The new seaside resort of Matalasconas is still, however, a major source of indirect pressure. Its inhabitants would like to stop the indiscriminate building of new houses and hotels, but planning permission is given at Almonte, where the prime concern is to combat unemployment.

The cleansing of the beach has, however, been a signal success. Until last year some 20,000 to 30,000 people lived in huts sited on the beach itself, thereby creating a situation that was unacceptable in every

respect (health risks, aesthetic considerations, etc). The authorities asked which persons wished to remain there and, when no one seemed moved to reply, demolished everything except eight houses belonging to full-time fishermen and imposed a ban on all new building.

Another problem concerns traffic on the road between St Lucia and Roccio (villages situated at the northern and southern extremities of the park) which crosses the park and its biological reserves and is in theory open to everyone. Traffic is usually slight except during the Roccio pilgrimage in May, when this small village with its 300 to 400 inhabitants becomes the destination of some 1,300,000 people wishing to worship at the shrine of the Virgin of Roccio. This obviously raises problems, especially as regards clearing up once all the pilgrims have gone home. Any attempt to prohibit these Andalusian pilgrims from crossing the park is at present unthinkable. The park is strongly backing the building of a north-south link road by-passing the park : this would help bring about a positive improvement in the situation.

5. Water

Water problems are probably the most difficult to solve, and the reason for this is simple : the very dry climate of the whole region, especially in the past few years when there has been practically no rain. Falling water levels in the marshes and lagoons - and in some cases their drying out - have been detrimental to the nesting of many birds, including herons, spoonbills, etc.

In an attempt to cope with this situation, 5 pumping stations are being built to pump water into the marshes. Pumping costs amounted in 1982 to 6 million pesetas. There is also a major scheme to divert the Cano de Guadiamar so that, when it rains, its water goes not into the Guadalquivir and then the sea but into the marshes. The planned flow is 4 cubic metres per second, and this scheme should bring about a considerable improvement.

Salt pollution raises a different problem and is often more serious than pollution by pesticides or over-use of chemical fertiliser. At high tide the water at the mouths of the Guadalquivir regularly overflows the banks and floods the surrounding marshland, thereby leaving, particularly in periods of drought, salt deposits which are damaging to the balance of these fragile ecosystems. The decision has therefore been taken to build a dyke along the right bank of the Guadalquivir to prevent its bursting its banks.

These measures taken together do not constitute a final solution to water problems, since the area is much too vast and its problems too great, but should counteract the worst effects of drought, eg by reducing the incidence of botulism or even eliminating it completely.

6. Reception, information, education

"Why spend so much at Doñana on the provision of facilities and information for visitors instead of using the money to buy more land or implement further direct conservation measures ?" is a question frequently asked by scientists. To which ICONA replies "Because we consider it vital to make the people of the area understand the purpose and value of Doñana and to help them discover its riches for themselves ; we genuinely want to associate the local inhabitants with the success of our venture. This isn't England !"

I fully endorse the park authorities' approach, and information and education are clearly the fields in which the most spectacular results have been achieved.

I have already outlined the general philosophy of keeping visitors as far as possible on the park's periphery.

Most of the information centres are sited to the north-west, ie to cater for visitors coming from Seville. Each centre of necessity offers a wide variety of carefully conceived materials. Visitors, groups and schools can generally choose from among a number of audio-visual montages, one of which uses no less than 30 projectors! In 1982, the first year they were open, the centre had 120,000 visitors, and 200,000 are expected in 1983. The park is publicised only in schools in the region and province.

Each centre also has a rest area and, in most cases

- a nature trail
- one or more observatories (hides) overlooking water.

There are currently 12 observatories, all remarkably well designed and finished, at a cost of 1 million pesetas each. Eight others are planned for 1983 and 1984. We visited several of them and followed a number of nature trails too ; the number of plant and animal species that may be espied in half an hour of patient observation is astonishing. Among the birds we saw was the very rare purple gallinule. Everywhere - along the nature trails and in the observatories - instructive information is provided in the form of signboards, tables, photographs, montages, etc.

In addition to the reception and information centres, ICONA is building three specialist centres to illustrate the specific features of Doñana's natural environments. Thus there will be a "marsh" centre, a "dunes" centre and a "Mediterranean" centre. There are also plans for a major information centre to be built to the south-east for visitors from Cadiz, Granada, etc. and in the same area, for an extensive centre for injured birds.

Visitors who genuinely want to visit the park itself must seek permission. They are offered a 4-5 hour tour by Land Rover, during which they see the park's typical ecosystems, viz. the Mediterranean, dune and marsh areas. The tour is highly instructive and impressive, particularly the section over the dunes, which stretch over an area 20 km long by 5 to 6 km wide. There are times when, were it not for the presence of some vegetation, one might almost think one was in a desert !

These guided tours are very well subscribed. Bookings for April have to be made in January, since all 8 Land Rovers set off together at 8 am and do a second tour at 3 pm. The cost is 1100 pesetas per person.

Special attention is paid to school parties. We saw several classes in the information centres and in the observatories. On the northern edge of the park (but still outside) we saw that 14 small and very simple houses, each with four twin-bedded rooms, were being built to provide accommodation for classes of young people staying for a fortnight. This village opened on 1 July 1983.

One last point that should be made in this section on information and education concerns the steps taken to foster an awareness of the cultural and ethnographic value of the marismas. This work is done principally at the Palacio Acebron, an architecturally strange building in the northern buffer zone, where the finishing touches are being put to an exhibition on "Man and marshland". There too there is a marvellous nature trail, which is built on piles and takes the visitor through undergrowth and reed beds along the edge of a very romantic stretch of water.

7. The biological station

As was mentioned earlier, the Doñana Biological Station has somewhat special status. As its name suggests, it is essentially a scientific research laboratory with a staff numbering at present some fifteen persons, half of whom have civil servant status while the remainder are attached to the National Scientific Research Centre. Between 1966 and October 1981 some 170 scientific papers were published.

The station naturally has a network of scientific correspondents and collaborators. It has particularly close working relations with the University of Seville and the Madrid Zoology Museum. Students often do degree and doctoral work there. The subjects covered are extremely wide-ranging and are not necessarily confined to the Doñana natural environment. During our visit, one student was studying deer antlers and the social structure of some deer populations ; another was working on radio tracking of the lynx.

As a result of this intensive research activity, a great deal of information has been accumulated and constitutes a major source of data on the functioning and state of the "Doñana" ecosystem.

At present the station's research programme seems to reflect hardly any of the concerns of the national park authorities. We believe that it would be highly desirable to develop cooperation in this essential field of ecological research.

8. Conclusions

The Doñana national park is, in our view, making good progress. Naturally some of its aims have still to be achieved, but the developments of the past two or three years are significant, and even impressive.

The main planning and management strategies worked out by this recently established national park seem to us both correct and realistic. What matters is that the work begun should be able to continue as planned. For this reason the Secretariat proposes that the European Diploma be awarded on condition that the responsible authorities accept the master plan prepared by the national park authorities and undertake to supply the resources needed for its implementation.