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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION  
OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Committee of experts - protected  
areas

CAMARGUE NATURE RESERVE (FRANCE)

On-the-spot appraisal

by

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## Introduction

At its meeting in May 1984, the Committee of Experts for Protected Areas was informed by the Secretariat that, in accordance with the Regulations for the European Diploma (see 4.1 below) an on-the-spot appraisal with a view to the renewal of the diploma, category A, for the Camargue Nature Reserve was scheduled for 1984.

This appraisal was carried out on 28 and 29 June 1984 by MM P Baum and Th Hunziker, who were accompanied by the Director of the Reserve, Mr Eric Coulet and, for part of the time, by colleagues of his.

The consultant wishes to thank them sincerely for the assistance received in the accomplishment of his task.

The present report describes the observations made during the visit, the discussions which took place on this occasion and the conclusions drawn from the documentary literature referred to.

In his appraisal, the consultant has taken account of the criteria laid down in the Regulations (1.5.4).

### 1. Findings

#### 1.1 General observations

The importance of the Camargue Reserve for nature conservation at European level is already fully established (see, for example, item 7 of the documentary literature). Its condition as such gives rise to no complaint. The consultant may therefore restrict his conclusions to a few points dealt with below, which are essential to the renewal of the diploma.

In particular, he will take into consideration the results obtained in complying with the recommendations made by the Council of Europe at the time of the previous renewal of the diploma (Resolution (81) 16 of 26 May 1981: see item 5 of section 4, documentary literature):

"The reserve's financial position is constantly deteriorating. The necessary credits for proper management of the reserve must be guaranteed. A systematic capital investment plan should be drawn up in order to remedy the obvious, indeed unacceptable inadequacy of the equipment available to the wardens who, despite great dedication, are no longer able to fulfil their function.

To this end,

- certain buildings, as at the Salin de Badon, must be restored;
- the wardens must be provided with transport (mechanically sound vehicles, boats and horses) and observation and communication equipment.

Efforts to inform visitors should involve a minimum of infrastructures (small observation posts, etc)."

### 1.2 Conservation situation

Effective protection against all forms of harmful outside influence may be said to exist. Some outstanding examples of this may be quoted:

- a. In 1981, 22 km of beach were put entirely out of bounds to motor vehicle traffic and campers; only cyclists and pedestrians are allowed. These measures are approved by the public, and individuals even take vigorous steps to prevent any infringements.
- b. The Reserve management co-operates with the Regional Park associations in arranging for additional supplies of fresh water to the Reserve during certain seasons of the year, eg in order to prevent excessive salinity. Co-operation is exemplary in this respect.
- c. Last year, fire broke out in part of the Reserve and half an hour later the fire-fighting aircraft were in operation.
- d. In 1980, 300 infringements against the conservation regulation were recorded, compared with no more than two last year.

### 1.3 Research and information

The protective measures for the Reserve having been consolidated, the next decisive phase consisted in making the nature conservation data compiled since the creation of the Reserve available to the public promptly and effectively (a procedure which the director described as adequate "feedback", avoiding any threat to the future of the Reserve).

Several methods are used:

- a. Fundamental research in the Reserve itself, conducted by university institutes or certain qualified specialists.

Applied research concentrating on the Reserve and its future development, undertaken by the Reserve administration itself.

These two procedures have the advantage of providing research workers in the Reserve with long-term facilities, free from interruption and based on data which have often been recorded over several decades.

- b. Excellent information for the public, provided by the administration of the Reserve.

The quality of the information for visitors is particularly impressive, especially in view of the small outlay entailed.

This may be illustrated by the following examples:

- La Capelière. This information centre also houses the administrative services of the Reserve. Prior to receiving specialised documentary material, visitors are directed through a number of exhibition rooms. These were created by the park administration itself and they provide an excellent picture,

both lively and realistic, of the protected area, without over-taxing the viewer, but on the contrary stimulating his interest. As he progresses from room to room, the visitor is confronted with the diversity of wildlife and landscapes and given help in interpreting them while being made aware of the impact of human intervention.

After that, or possibly independently of having visited the centre, it is possible to follow a discovery trail equipped with panels providing precise information and with observation platforms: this landscape interpretation helps to explain the interdependence between the existing habitat and the fauna and flora.

- Salin de Badon. This is a second information (and meeting) centre, constructed with public aid to a large extent. At the same time, it is the headquarters for the maintenance work of a 250 hectare area of the Reserve, in an effort to reduce the relevant costs. The architecture, both inside and outside, is ideally adapted to the environment. Work will be completed in approximately one year. The facilities here are also to include a discovery trail with small wooden observation platforms.

The principles used by the administration of the Reserve for informing the public are of outstanding interest:

- The important thing is to provide general information without going into excessive detail. The idea is not to provide information restricted surely to the Reserve alone. Nature conservation does not stop with the creation of reserves, but should be conceived and practised in a way that applies to the entire landscape.

- It is of paramount importance for information to achieve its target, and this can be obtained without extravagant resources such as a costly building with luxurious fittings.

- Information should be provided by simple methods, suited to visitors' expectations.

- The visitor must not be overwhelmed with information; those who are really interested will return.

- There is little point in indicating rare and threatened species. Attention should be drawn rather to the interdependent factors in the whole environment.

- Animal love can be communicated by means of tracks and traces, which are often easier to spot than the animals themselves.

- Guided tours. These are provided both for schools and for the ordinary public specially interested in the Camargue. (In the latter case, an entrance fee is charged). Two days a week, there are guided visits with staff of the Reserve. The guides adapt their explanations to their audience and concentrate on the most interesting aspects, whether inside or outside the Reserve, depending on the season of the year. The entrance charge is 10 francs per person. In comparison, the charge of 40 francs per person levied by certain hotels in Arles for such visits seems too high for the quality of service offered. It is possible that the reserve may make profits out of these guided tours, and from the organisation of national or international courses on nature conservation.

- Courses lasting four days, provided for instructors; in the past, a modest sum has been charged.

#### 1.4 Hunting and shooting

Article 7 of the Decree of 24 April 1975 setting up the Reserve states that hunting and shooting are forbidden throughout the territory of the Reserve. This regulation is respected, but it is particularly shocking to note that, in the adjoining Regional Park, meant to act as a buffer zone for the Reserve, hunting and shooting are practised to an intense degree. Some 500-600 individuals and 5,000 members of municipal shooting societies vie with each other: these two groups share the 150,000 ducks or so from the Reserve, which are shot and kept in cold storage before being marketed during the month of May. There is obviously a certain snob value attached to duck-shooting in the Camargue.

This problem calls for an urgent solution. According to Mr Coulet this can only be achieved at national level, and not at regional or local level. It must be made plain that a national asset is at stake and the threat to its existence should be removed by introducing strict regulations, while joint efforts are required to ensure reproduction.

#### 1.5 Management

The management of the Reserve may be described as exemplary. All the staff contribute to the best of their ability, according to their specific capacities and in the interests of the Reserve; even archeology, for example, is catered for and receives all the credit it deserves.

It is, moreover, remarkable to witness the extent to which the director and his staff devote themselves turn about to the supervision of the Reserve and the information of the public.

#### 1.6 Legal status

There are no problems here.

#### 1.7 Finance

This is the most thorny problem (see section 4, item 5). It is aggravated by the obvious tendency of the state to impose self-financing arrangements and to channel aid in the form of subsidies through the regional institutions, as is the case at present with Regional Park

It is no doubt legitimate to levy some financial contribution from visitors to the Reserve, especially for services rendered in terms of guided visits and information. But it must be borne in mind that the principle of self-financing taken to extremes would ultimately frustrate the very purpose of a national reserve or park. By this device, the natural and cultural assets to be protected are eventually likely to be sacrificed to the obligation to find financial resources in the short term. Guided visits, for example, although providing proper information, might degenerate into "safaris" which would finally be detrimental to the aim of nature conservation. A situation in which the administration of the Reserve is forced to devote the majority of its time to "selling" the Reserve in the most profitable way must be avoided

at all costs. It is necessary, for example, to ensure the maintenance and replacement of the Reserve's vehicles with state funds, without any self-financing requirements.

With regard to the method of finance adopted by the state, namely subsidies channelled through the Regional Park, this might lead to a state of dependence which is incompatible with the Reserve's conservation purpose. The financial exploitation of nature has very little to do with the real aims of a national park or reserve.

#### 1.8 Miscellaneous

Prospecting for oil is apparently highly developed throughout the Camargue, including the Regional Park. A watch should be kept on the impact of this activity on the Reserve, as well as on the repercussions of other development projects in the Regional Park.

#### 2. Conclusion

The consultant advocates the renewal of the diploma, category A, for the nature reserve, bearing in mind the recommendations made in section 3. He wishes to congratulate the administration of the Reserve on its exemplary work.

#### 3. Recommendations

3.1 The financial resources for the administration of the Reserve should be provided directly by the state, and not through the agency of the Regional Park. The volume of resources should be adequate and take account of the excellent work performed. They should in no way depend on self-financing operations by the administration, apart from a few activities (eg information).

3.2 The state should take all the necessary measures in order to introduce regulations on hunting and shooting at national level, having regard above all to the requirements of nature conservation, especially in nature reserves such as the Camargue.

3.3 The oil-protecting activities and other development projects in the Camargue region should be supervised, especially with regard to all aspects of nature and landscape protection. They should not be allowed to continue if they represent any threat to the future existence of the Reserve.

#### 4. Documentary literature

1. Regulations for the European Diploma (Resolution (73) 4 of 19 January 1973).

2. Decree creating the Camargue Zoological and Botanical Nature Reserve, known as the Camargue National Reserve.

3. Decree defining arrangements for the management and planning of the Camargue National Reserve.

4. Report by Mr P Géroutet (Switzerland) based on an on-the-spot appraisal on behalf of the Council of Europe, 11 January 1980. (SN-R-DP (80) 5).

5. Resolution (81) 16 of the Council of Europe concerning the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Camargue Nature Reserve (France), of 26 May 1981.
6. 1983 Annual Report on the Camargue National Reserve, Council of Europe, SN-ZP (84) 2 of 30 January 1984.
7. Council of Europe Secretariat memorandum on the meeting of the Committee of Experts for Protected Areas of 14 and 15 May 1984 (SN-ZP (84) 28).
8. Estimated expenditure for the management of the Camargue Reserve for 1984. SNPN.
9. Various brochures on the history and importance of the Reserve, in particular: "fiche L/Camargue" and "A la découverte de la nature en Camargue".
10. Two SNPN data sheets concerning La Capelière, March-August, and Salin de Badon, August-April.
11. Film on the Camargue Reserve. Extract from: "Le Courrier de la Nature", January-February 1984, No. 89.