

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 12 November 1970

Confidential
CE/Nat (70) 71

Or. Fr.



COE063504

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF
NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Working Party on Flora, Fauna and Landscapes

EUROPEAN DIPLOMA

ON-THE-SPOT APPRAISAL OF THE
CAMARGUE NATURE RESERVE (France)

Report by Mr. W.A. Plattner

The European Diploma was awarded to the Camargue Nature Reserve on 20 March 1966, and expires on 28 March 1971. In accordance with the procedure proposed by the European Committee and approved by the Committee of Ministers, it was decided to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal of the present situation in the Reserve, establishing whether the conditions which obtained when the diploma was granted have been maintained or improved.

The Secretary General instructed Mr. W.A. Plattner (Switzerland) to visit the Reserve for the purpose. Mr. Plattner did so on 6 and 7 October 1970, accompanied by Mr. H. Hacourt of the Secretariat.

1. Terms of reference

I was informed by letter No. 4084 of 31 August 1970 that the Secretary General of the Council of Europe had appointed me to "carry out an on-the-spot appraisal of the Camargue Nature Reserve (France) with a view to deciding on the renewal of the period of validity of the European Diploma awarded to the Reserve in 1966".

The letter stated: "The object of this appraisal will be to investigate the present situation of the Reserve and to see if the conditions existing at the time of the award have been maintained or improved".

A member of the Secretariat, Mr. H. Hacourt, was appointed at the same time to accompany me.

2. Documents provided

The Secretariat provided me with the following documents:

EXP/Nat	(65)	22
CE/Nat	(68)	17
"	(69)	4
"	(70)	14

The first of these documents is the proposal to grant the European Diploma. The other three are the annual reports for 1967, 1968 and 1969 sent to the European Committee by the Administration of the Reserve.

The conditions obtaining at the time when the diploma was granted should therefore have been described in EXP/Nat (65) 22; however, this consists of only one page of text and a map showing the boundaries of the Reserve. Clearly, this very short document was an inadequate basis on which to work. The Camargue's reputation was already well established when the European Diploma was awarded. Nobody would deny that the Reserve deserved the award, even though the documentation on which it was based was incomplete.

Accordingly, I decided to conduct my survey in a manner which would add to the documentary information available on the Reserve.

3. Arrangements for the on-the-spot appraisal

By agreement with Mr. Hacourt, Mr. F. Huë, President of the Société Nationale de Protection de la Nature and Mr. J. de Caffarelli, Chief Warden (Conservateur) of the Reserve, 6 and 7 October 1970 were chosen as the dates for the on-the-spot appraisal. A preliminary meeting was held in Arles on 5 October, at which the following programme was drawn up:

Tuesday 6 October

Inspection of the part East of the Vaccarès, visit to la Capelière (where Mr. Girard, warden, lives); then to the la Gacholle lighthouse (residence of Mr. Racnet, warden); visit to the Camargue Ecological Station; inspection of Bois des Rièges.

Wednesday 7 October

Inspection of the part West of the Vaccarès, then to les Stes-Maries-de-la-Mer; visit to the beach and the Méjeanne estate; second visit to the Ecological Station (to question different people); visit to the Tour du Valat Biological Station.

Thursday 8 October

Discussions in the offices of Mr. de Carrarelli and of Mr. Hudault, Director of the Camargue Regional Natural Park. (Mr. Hacourt left Arles at about midday, whereas my talk with Mr. Hudault went on all afternoon.

4. The appraisal

4.1 General

The European Diploma is awarded to protected sites which meet the following criteria:

- European interest
- scientific interest
- proper protection

It would surely be superfluous to discuss the first two criteria. Nobody would deny the European importance or the scientific interest of the Camargue. For the benefit of anyone who might take it into his head to doubt them, it is obvious that a costly and up-to-date ecological station would not be built next door to a world-famous biological station unless the area was of considerable interest.

As for the protection arrangements, while they are not wholly satisfactory, they are at least as good as when the Diploma was granted, and they will soon be better. More detailed information is given below, but it may be said here and now that the conditions required for the renewal of the European Diploma are fulfilled.

4.2 Developments and future dangers

The Camargue is caught in a pincer movement which may well present a very serious threat to its existence, or at least to its preservation in a more or less wild state. One half of this pincer is the tourist development in the Languedoc-Roussillon area to the west, the resort of la Grande Motte in particular; the other, to the east, is the industrial development of Fos-sur-Mer.

Development plans for the region involve the creation of a port three times as large as Marseilles and able to compete with Rotterdam. The population of the region would increase by several million in a few years.

The Languedoc-Roussillon holiday resorts cannot fail to exert pressure on the Camargue. Les Stes-Maries-de-la-Mer is already in a building boom. And this is only the beginning.

The most serious danger would be the building of a fast communications route linking the industrial and tourist centres via the southern part of the Camargue.

4.3 Dangers within the Camargue itself

Anyone who visits the Camargue from time to time, as I do, is struck by the steady growth of the farms and the improvement of the roads. Where a few years ago there was just a track across the salt-marshes ("sansouires"), there is now a good road running alongside meadows and ploughland. The Reserve is thus increasingly enclosed by land which once formed an extension to it.

Another danger must be pointed out. At the extreme north-west of the Vaccarès is the Méjeanne estate. This belongs to Mr. Ricard, a well-known industrialist and a major producer of apéritifs. Mr. Ricard also owns a large part of the Etang du Vaccarès, a fact which is not apparent from the map in document EXP/Nat (65) 22 showing the boundaries of the Reserve.

(I enclose a map of the Lower Camargue showing the actual boundaries of the Reserve; this should be substituted for the map in EXP/Nat (65) 22, which is inaccurate in a number of important details - see 4.5.1.)

Mr. Ricard's property is not part of the Reserve, and never has been. The Société Nationale de Protection de la Nature, which manages the Reserve, is powerless to prevent the Méjeanne estate from becoming a tourist attraction to which visitors will come, not to seek contact with nature, plants and animals, but to find fairground-style amusement.

Mr. Ricard has already built a dyke about 3,000 metres long, separating his part of the water from the rest of the Vaccarès. On land, there is already a large bullring and other amenities designed to attract the crowds.

The danger I wish to point out is not only the possible disturbance to the Reserve, but the risk that other people may follow in Mr. Ricard's footsteps if his project proves to be a lucrative business.

4.4 On-the-spot observations on 6 and 7 October

4.4.1 Wardens

On the day when we visited the Reserve, the Administration had two wardens on its staff. One lives in a really decrepit house at la Capelière. The other is very comfortably accommodated in the house attached to the la Gacholle lighthouse. He therefore has a splendid observation point giving him a very effective view of the whole southern part of the Reserve. This observation post did not exist when the Diploma was granted. I understand that a third warden was to be appointed on the day after our visit. He will live, at least to begin with, at Salin de Badon. The administration of the Reserve is studying the possibility of finding accommodation for a warden to the west of the Vaccarès, south of the Méjeanne estate.

4.4.2 The Camargue Ecological Station

This station, which is run by the National Science Research Centre, has recently been staffed by a team of young scientists, one of whom, Mr. Heurteaux, a hydro-geologist, very kindly accompanied us to the Bois des Rièges. The Camargue Ecological Station will undoubtedly have a very important role to play, and this can only be to the good of the Reserve.

Mr. Blondel, a well-known ornithologist, also works at this station. He used to work at the Tour du Valat Biological Station, and is therefore familiar with the problems of the Camargue.

4.4.3 Bois des Rièges

We reached the Bois des Rièges very easily, the water level of the Vaccarès being extremely low. Personally, I have never seen it so low. (The level in the drainage canal between Tour de Vazel and Tour du Valat was minus 52 cm on 6 October).

From the north-western point of the Bois des Rièges we were able to observe the ravages of erosion. The water in the Etang de Monro, which appears to rise unduly high at certain times, has already carried away certain portions of these dunes, which despite being wooded are very fragile. Ways of protecting them were discussed on the spot.

Furthermore, I discovered more traces of wild boar than of bulls in this area. From this it must be inferred that incursions by the herds were not too numerous and that the warden's supervision was effective.

4.4.4 In the annual report for 1969 (CE/Nat (70) 14, page 4, point 1.2.1), mention is made of the orchid *Ophrys Mangini* Tallon; the enclosure in which this orchid grows was formerly part of the Reserve proper, but is now incorporated in the departmental "Réserve des Impériaux" which is managed by the municipality of les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. Although this stand is no longer in "our" Reserve, it would perhaps be as well to point out that when we visited it on 7 October there was no sign of a fence, but we found a great many empty bottles, plastic articles and other things left behind by bathers. There is unfortunately a great deal of such litter on the south of the sea wall, at least in the part "controlled" by the municipality of les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.

4.4.5 I have already mentioned the work being done on the Méjeanne estate. The dyke is not finished, and no work was being done on it when we were there. It may be that the authorities have forbidden continuation of the work (this being a classified site).

4.5 Notes on the discussion with Mr. de Caffarelli, Chief Warden of the Camargue Nature Reserve

4.5.1 The boundaries of the Reserve

As mentioned above, the map attached to this report shows the boundaries of the Reserve (cf. 4.3).

4.5.2 Since the European Diploma was awarded, the Reserve has been the subject of a Ministerial Order creating a game reserve, issued in Paris on 23 August 1968. Two of the sections of this Order read as follows:

1. The lands covering an area of 10,231.1328 hectares situated within the territory of the communes of Arles and les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, in the département of Bouches-du-Rhône, and designated together with their owners on the attached schedule shall constitute a game reserve.

4. All hunting and shooting shall be strictly forbidden at all times in the said reserve.

This Order considerably strengthens the position of the authorities in charge of the Camargue Nature Reserve.

4.5.3 On 1 January 1970, the ownership of the whole Camargue Nature Reserve passed into different hands. The Salins du Midi Company took over all the rights and obligations of the Compagnie Salinière de la Camargue (SALICAM).

SALICAM had signed an agreement with the Société de Protection de la Nature et d'Acclimatation de France (PNA) leasing to it for a period of 75 years from 23 March 1960 the land constituting the Reserve.

SALICAM charge PNA only a nominal rent, and even stipulate that PNA shall enjoy the revenues from fishing rights in the Etang de Vaccarès.

I feel that SALICAM's gesture is worthy of mention here, especially as there is a tendency in nature conservation circles to give all industrial companies a thoroughly bad name.

I think it should be pointed out that the salt-pans currently being worked by the Salins Company are very well protected. Bird life is respected in these areas, and public access is not made easy. Furthermore, it is in this area - i.e. outside the Reserve - that the flamingoes have nested.

4.6 The Camargue Regional Natural Park

Each of the annual reports submitted to the European Committee for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (CE/Nat (68) 17; (69) 4; and (70) 14) contains a section on the creation of such a park. I refer in particular to the appendix to CE/Nat (70) 14, where Mr. Hudault, who is responsible to the Préfet of the Provence - Côte d'Azur region for the establishment of the Park, gives a brief account of his plans.

The Charter was approved by the provisional Administrative Board of the Park on 21 February 1970.

Mr. Hué is Chairman of this Board. He is also President of the Société Nationale de Protection de la Nature, which manages the Camargue Nature Reserve. Collaboration between the Reserve and the Park is therefore assured.

After a long talk with Mr. Hudault, I am convinced that no effort is being spared by him to improve the Reserve and safeguard its future.

I have already spoken (under point 4.2) of the dangers which threaten the Reserve. The creation of the Park might well offer a defence against these dangers. In Mr. Hacourt's possession are the following documents which contain very valuable information but which need not, I think, be circulated more widely:

- Statutes of the "Fondation du Parc Naturel Régional de Camargue";
- Statutes of the "Comité de Soutien du Parc Naturel Régional de Camargue";
- Charter of the Park.

However, I have incorporated in this report pages 12, 36, 37 and 38 of the Charter and a map of the Park.

The Camargue cannot be effectively protected if the pressure to which it is already subject is unduly increased by the creation of amenities on the periphery of the Park.

For this reason the Foundation cannot ignore such amenities (access, overflying, etc.) in view of the structural effects which they will have on the Park.

Inside the Park, protection of the fauna, flora and landscape calls for:

- (1) Better knowledge of the natural environment and its evolution and application of that knowledge to the preservation of the scenery, flora and fauna typical of the Camargue;
- (2) The delimitation of protected zones in town-planning schemes and of areas subject to special measures inside such zones,
- (3) Support for economic activities which enhance the countryside particularly and help to preserve its fauna;
- (4) Support for traditional activities which are tending to die out;
- (5) Preservation and rehabilitation of buildings and landscapes of historical interest or necessary to the development of the Camargue's activities;

(6) Defence against the sea;

(7) Official action on the edge of the Park to help preserve the flora, fauna and landscape.

The richness and diversity of its agriculture, its traditions, its scenery, its fauna and its flora make the Camargue an outstanding area economically, artistically, culturally, scientifically and for the tourist.

While it is important to protect this precious heritage, which is unique in France, it is equally essential that man should be brought closer to nature in the Camargue, in such a way that he may benefit fully from it without harming the interests of those who own the land and make their living from it.

This dual task of protection and enhancement pursued through the creation of the Regional Natural Park, which is to receive financial assistance from the State, requires that everybody - local authorities and land-owners, groups and associations of all kinds, residents and visitors, should give their full support and show their determination to attain the objectives established. Such support and determination imply full acceptance of the ensuing obligations, particularly the necessary discipline to respect whatever regulations will be made and those fundamental standards which must, quite clearly, be observed by all Camargue inhabitants conscious of the value of their land and anxious to safeguard its future prosperity.

Convinced of the importance of the task which they propose to accomplish together, the promoters of the Regional Natural Park:

- the State;
- the Département of Bouches-du-Rhône;
- the Municipality of Arles;
- the Municipality of les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer

will each take all appropriate action to promote and encourage respect for the natural character of the Camargue and the integrity of the Park.

In particular, they will issue regulations and use their powers as public authorities to this end and to give moral and material encouragement to the inhabitants of the Camargue, to participate in this work.

They will give financial assistance for this campaign of persuasion and the provision of the necessary facilities and amenities, in the fields of farming, science, culture and the tourist trade, within the limits of their financial resources, of which their elected assemblies are to remain the sole judges.

They will facilitate the provision of similar facilities by private individuals.

They will see to it that shooting, hunting and fishing on the lands which they own are compatible with respect for the natural environment and with the relevant legislation.

The landowners will:

- apply the regulations and measures agreed with their own representatives for the protection of the Camargue, their own rights as landowners being respected;
- work their lands, whether used for the growing of crops, the raising of livestock or for hunting, shooting or fishing, in a spirit of respect for nature and the landscape;
- facilitate the work of the Fondation du Parc Naturel Régional de la Camargue;
- work to preserve the quality and beauty of the scenery, habitats, fauna and flora, and will, in conjunction with the Administration of the Park, study the possibilities of admitting visitors.

Associations and groups will:

- continue and extend their work to maintain the traditions of the Camargue, study them further in order to increase their knowledge of them, and make the public aware of their quality, charm and value. The aim of this action will be to teach the public to respect private property and keep clean those areas to which they are admitted;
- encourage visitors to respect the regulations issued by the Fondation;
- provide active help and financial support for scientific studies and the provision of tourist and cultural facilities.

A comparison between the map of the Reserve (Appendix I) and that of the Park (Appendix II) shows the plans to enlarge the unspoilt natural zone.

Furthermore, even before the Charter was approved, the administration of the Park had turned its attention to the hydrological system:

"Without waiting for the final results of the hydrological studies currently under way, it is clear that better control of the waters of the Camargue is necessary. Provision must be made without delay for:

- the construction of sluices to drain water into the sea, in order to take advantage of an effective control system while respecting all the interests at stake;
- the building of pumping stations on the eastern side, to discharge water into the Rhône".

5. Conclusions

I must admit that the changes I have seen taking place in the Camargue in recent years have caused me anxiety as to its future.

My visit there between 5 and 9 October and the survey which I had the honour of conducting have calmed my fears on this point.

Of course, those responsible for the Reserve and the Park still have many difficulties to face; but they have a will to win and - just as important - they love the land which they serve with a devotion worthy of admiration.

Any action likely to sustain them in their efforts is welcome. The renewal of the European Diploma is one such step.

6. Acknowledgments

I am most grateful to all those who were kind enough to answer my questions and assist me in the course of my survey.

In particular, my thanks are due to Mr. H. Huë, President, who was our guide throughout Tuesday, and Mr. J. de Caffarelli, Chief Warden of the Reserve, who did everything to make our stay pleasant and interesting. I must also thank most cordially Mr. Hudault, Director of the Regional Natural Park, who spent the whole of Thursday with us. My thanks also go to Mr. H. Hacourt, a travelling companion as pleasant as he was competent.

AMVEXE II

PARC NATUREL REGIONAL DE CAMARGUE

ÉVASC 247
 1071 00011
 Juin 1983
 Institut de Recherche pour le Développement

- CIRCULATION**
- principales routes de liaison
 - voies de circulation générale interne
 - parkings aménagés
 - voies essentiellement touristiques
 - circuits empruntés par des moyens de transport collectifs spécifiques au "PIUR"

- NAVIGATION**
- ports de plaisance
 - appontements (transports publics)

- EQUIPEMENT TOURISTIQUE, EDUCATIF**
- agglomération équipée (accueil, hébergement, restauration, services, etc.)
 - ▲ accueil, information, documentation
 - ▼ dominante éducative
 - ▽ recherche scientifique
 - ✱ installation muséologique
 - points de vue aménagés

- TEMOIGNAGES ARCHITECTURAUX A CONSERVER**
- ★ monuments inscrits ou classes

ZONE POUVANT RENEFRMER DES OISEAUX A ECHEC...

- MILIEUX SAUVAGES**
- zone de nature imperturbée
 - zone d'équilibre

- ZONES TOURISTIQUES**
- voir plans d'urbanisme

ESPACES BOISES A CONSERVER

