

A viable future for Vai palm forest

“Conservation measures for the palm forest of Vai, Greece”

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The Vai Palm Forest

The electronic newsletter of the European Commission *Lifenews* and the new LIFE Focus publication, *LIFE and European Forests*, under the title “**A viable future for Vai palm forest**” feature the significance of the project “**Conservation measures for the palm forest of Vai, Greece**”, which was implemented by the Greek Biotope/Wetland Centre (1999-2002), in cooperation with the local Toplou Monastery and the Forestry Directorate of Lasithi. The project was funded by the European Commission (LIFE-Nature), the Greek Ministry of Agriculture, and the Goulandris Natural History Museum.

In those texts there is a thorough description of the characteristics, the uniqueness and the importance of the forest composed of the Theophrastus palms at the northern end of the east coast of Crete. The problems that the Vai palm grove faced, due to the agricultural activities, which limited its natural regeneration and to the poorly planned tourist infrastructure development, which declined its ecological and aesthetical importance, are also mentioned. There is a detailed description of the project, its objectives and actions. Actions that aimed to address in an integrated manner the conservation and sustainable use of the area, i.e. the improvement of the condition and the restoration of the palm grove, the regulation of the tourist and other activities and the promotion of its importance to biodiversity and to the sustainable development of the wider area.

The following points are mentioned concerning the project success:

The project almost doubled the area of palm tree coverage. Palm trees were restored on 13.4 hectares of land, and natural regeneration was secured across another 2.7 hectares. Thus, the project managed to increase the surface of the habitat type from 15.6 to 31.7 hectares. Restoration actions such as fencing, planting, setting up of irrigation system, and watering proved very efficient with 95 percent planting success.

A major factor in the project's success was the involvement of all the main local stakeholders in the decision-making process concerning key issues related to the forest's management. In particular, the project team accumulated significant knowledge of the ecology of the palm trees and of their management and conservation needs. The project successfully managed to transfer this knowledge to the Forestry Directorate, the authority responsible for the protection of the forest, which, prior to the LIFE project, lacked a clear strategy for the forest and lacked specific tools, such as the water-monitoring system.

The project also promoted the concept of sustainable tourism, a notion that had not previously been promoted through a LIFE-Nature project in Greece. This was done on a national level through the project's concluding conference, as well as on a local level, through the continuous discussions with local stakeholders about the development of activities compatible with the natural character of the northeast side of Crete.

The land exchange initiative is continuing and since the close of the project a further 3.2 hectares has been exchanged. It is expected that land exchanges will continue. The project has other ongoing results. A March 2006 monitoring visit found that the project's positive impacts have included the prevention of further uncontrolled tourist developments, whilst local stakeholders and visitors are now aware of the ecological and aesthetic value of the forest and are therefore more likely to conserve it and develop activities that respect it.

The text is a republication from the electronic newsletter of the European Commission *Lifenews*. For more information, read the [project summary](#) on the LIFE website. The “**Conservation measures for the palm forest of Vai, Greece**” project features in the new LIFE Focus publication, *LIFE and European Forests*. See the [publications section](#) in this edition of LIFEnews for more details.

Project summary:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.createPage&ref=LIFE98NAT/GR/005264&area=1&yr=1998&n_proj_id=312

Publications section:

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/news/flash/#forests>