

WWF Cork Oak Landscapes Programme

WWF launched a 5-year programme in July 2004, to protect, manage and restore the natural wealth of cork oak landscapes by influencing the policies, practices and markets that affect them. WWF's programme will address key challenges by promoting sustainable markets, improving governance, changing policy, building capacity at local, national and international levels and demonstrating solutions through field projects.

The programme will first focus on Portugal, Spain, Morocco and Tunisia, and is based on 4 inter-related pillars :

Capacity building

to promote cooperation and sharing knowledge, expertise and lessons learnt on the different issues affecting the cork landscapes, through workshops, case studies and field visits, newsletters ...

Good practices establishment

to address issues such as ecological restoration, co-management, and access rights to natural resources, etc., through pilot projects, and the promotion of good management and restoration practices based on existing initiatives such as the FSC certification standards.

Market support

to promote products from sustainably-managed cork oak landscapes, and to encourage responsible purchasing attitudes through the market chain, from processing industries to end consumers.

Policy / Advocacy

to influence and advocate for changes in EU, national, and regional policies where laws conflict or have a negative impact on cork oak landscapes.

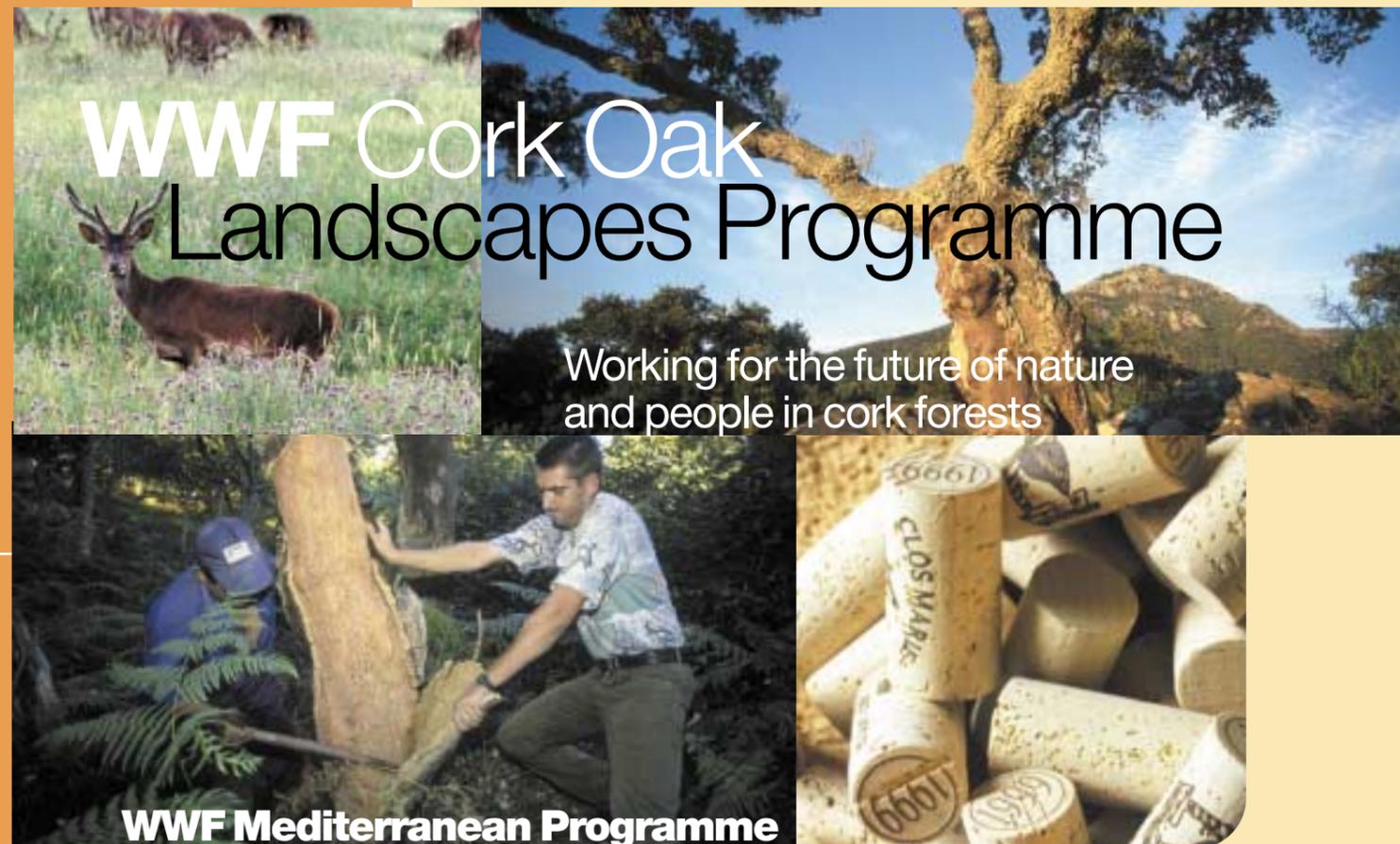
From local communities to international decision makers, from forest managers and experts to industry, from producers to consumers, support and collaboration at all levels are crucial for the success of the Cork Oak Landscapes Programme.

10 Moroccan forester visiting a tree nursery, exchange on restoration techniques, Southern Portugal © WWF-Mediterranean / F. MAAMOURI



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Covering about 2.7 million hectares and extending across Portugal, Spain, Algeria, Morocco, Italy, Tunisia and France, the cork oak landscapes represent one of the best examples of the interaction between people and nature in the region. In these landscapes high conservation value forests alternate with



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- 1 Barbary deers (*Cervus elaphus barbaricus*), grazing, El Feidja National Park, Tunisia © WWF-Canon / M. GUNTHER
- 2 Cork oak tree high in the mountains near Alcalá de los Gazules, Andalucía, Spain © WWF-Canon / E. PARKER
- 3 Harvesting cork in ancient cork oak forest near Algeciras, in Andalucía, Spain © WWF-Canon / E. PARKER
- 4 Use of cork for various kinds of stoppers, France © H. FOUGERE / BIOS

farmland systems, which integrate extensive agriculture, forestry, grazing, hunting and other recreational uses. In addition to providing a source of income for hundreds of thousands of people in the region, cork ecosystems support a rich biodiversity, including endangered species. But over the last decade, damaging policies, poor forest management and a change in the cork market have resulted in the degradation and loss of these unique habitats. WWF is implementing a new programme to reverse damaging trends and to improve conditions for the environmental, social and economic balance of these landscapes.

Cork oak landscapes are mosaics of habitats which include different mixed forest types such as holm oak and deciduous oak species, stone and maritime pines, wild olive trees, maquis and rich pastures. Levels of plant diversity can reach 135 species per 0.1 ha.



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Environmental and socio-economic values

Varied wildlife

Cork oak landscapes contribute to the survival of many species :

- Iberian lynx, the world's rarest and most endangered cat, numbering about 100 individuals, in Spain ;
- Iberian imperial eagle, one of the most endangered birds of prey in the world, with just 150 pairs remaining in the wild, in Spain and Portugal ;
- Barbary deer, the only African deer, formerly found in the whole Maghreb, but restricted to the border between Tunisia and Algeria ;
- Purple-flower Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum ssp baeticum*), a tertiary relic shrub species found only in the southwestern Iberian mountainous mixed cork and zen oak forests.

A source of income

Cork oak landscapes represent a diverse and profitable economic system, based on :

- cork extraction and processing for stoppers and building materials ;
- livestock and agricultural products such as olive oil and wheat ;
- wood collection ;
- mushrooms, acorns, berries, pine nuts, honey, medicinal and aromatic plants collection, milk, cheese, ham productions, game, etc ;
- cultural and ecological tourism.

Environmental services

Well managed cork oak landscapes provide environmental services such as :

- protection and maintenance of soil and water resources ;
- water table recharge and run-off control ;
- fire inhibition ;
- providing habitats for biodiversity such as breeding and nesting areas for migratory birds.



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5 A cork oak harvester and his mule carrying harvested cork oak out of the forest, near Algeciras, Andalucia, Spain
© WWF-Canon / E. PARKER

6 Iberian lynx (*Pardus lynx*), Spain
© WWF-Canon / J.COBO

7 Gathering of myrtle leaves. El Feija National Park, Tunisia
© WWF-Canon / M. GUNTHER

Only a quarter of the original 3 million hectares of North African cork oak forest remains today, with southwestern Iberia suffering a huge loss of cork oak forest in the mid-20th century.

Current threats

- increasing human pressure on resources, through overgrazing, over-harvesting and forest clearance ;
- forest conversion for fast growing tree plantations ;
- poor forest management practices ;
- land abandonment ;
- urban development in coastal areas ;
- forest fires.

These threats, exacerbated by climate change, affect cork oak landscapes health and increase their vulnerability to diseases, pests, and large-scale fires.

Root causes of forest loss include

- perverse subsidies in the north ;
- poverty and lack of economic opportunities for rural populations in the south ;
- lack of forest management capacity and investment to integrate environmental and social issues into management practices and land use planning ;
- cork market fluctuations.

Human-nature balance under threat



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8 Burned cork oak landscapes in Serra do Caldeirão, Southern Portugal
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9 Eucalyptus plantation, Mediterranean coast, Morocco
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