



# Andalusia: Environmental treasure of Doñana threatened by drought and illegal wells

By Sandrine Morel (Madrid (Spain) correspondent)

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**FEATURE | Doñana National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is losing its lagoons, marshes and migratory bird habitats due to intensive fruit farming and climate change.**

Juan Pedro Castellano sped along a vast, pristine beach, where a few sandpipers could be seen scurrying around. In his all-terrain vehicle, the director of Doñana National Park, an exceptional wetland area at the southern tip of Spain and listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, crossed shifting dunes and pine forests, moving through the vast clay marshes that make up the park's 60,000 protected hectares. He passed long-horned mostrenca cattle, fallow deer and wild horses, before stopping in front of the Santa Olalla lagoon – or rather, what was left of it. Arising from the aquifer, it dried up completely this summer. Gray, cracked earth has replaced this invaluable haven of biodiversity. This supposedly "permanent" lagoon – the largest in the park – is usually home to thousands of migratory birds, who should have started arriving by now. In mid-October, with its bright sunshine and unusually high temperature of 33°C, it is visited only by deer.







## A TRUCE FOR DOÑANA

MAP BY WWF SPAIN OF ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS IN DOÑANA AND THE GUADALQUIVIR RIVER ESTUARY

Report published in 2020

**Doñana's main problems are related to human activities and will be aggravated by the climate change.**

Doñana and its surroundings will be greatly affected if we do not act urgently to combat climate change.

Temperatures will rise, rainfall will decrease, sea levels will go up, and the patterns of migratory species will change. In addition, the so-called sixth-generation fires will become more frequent, as is already happening on other parts of the planet. To avoid the most severe impacts, WWF is asking the authorities for an integral management of Doñana, in order to preserve its ecological integrity and biodiversity, and which also integrates future conditions arising from climate change.

**Currently, in Doñana there are about 8,000 hectares of intensive crops under plastic, of which 1,600 are in an irregular situation.**

This growth has involved forested land being transformed into cropped areas, and has an enormous impact on the quality and quantity of water available, as well as the biological diversity and connectivity of the area. It also leads further damage, including soil erosion. Another result of agricultural activity is the dumping and burning of plastics instead of them being properly recycled. Illegal dumps and landfill sites also threaten Doñana, because, like the burning of plastics, the dumping of waste is an environmental problem that can also impact the health of the population.

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## Drought and heatwaves: Spain's Donana wetland is shrinking putting wildlife and crops at risk



**Drought is threatening the Donana wetland and scientists say farmers in the region are making the problem worse.**

Spain's Donana wetland has been a rich farming area for decades and a wildlife haven for centuries.

But climate change is drying it out and has set regional and national authorities on a collision course over how to safeguard its future.

Scientists, meanwhile, say the water needs of the farmers who grow thousands of tonnes of red berries per year are making the problem worse.

The Donana national park lies atop a 2,700-square km underground water reserve, one of the largest of its kind in Europe and an area almost twice the size of London.

Its beautiful lagoons are being depleted by **a long drought** and hotter weather, and they are surrounded by a sea of greenhouses and a complex system of pipes that takes water from in some cases illegally drilled wells.

# Andalusia achieves a new berry export record

In the first nine months of 2022, Andalusia's berry exports increased by 3.2% over the same period of the previous year, achieving a record 1.3 billion euro, the highest figure ever reached in this period.

With this data, the community reinforces its position as the national leader in berries sales, concentrating 86% of the total exported by Spain.

Berries are one of the main products that give the Andalusia brand international prestige and they're a benchmark of the export drive of the Andalusian agribusiness, a strategic sector for the region, which has again recorded record figures in the first nine months of 2022, with sales of 10,712 million euro, thanks to a 15.9% year-on-year growth.

## Europe, the main export destination

Europe is Huelva's most important international market, as its top 20 markets, 18 of which are growing, are all European. Germany is the main destination with 377 million euro in the first nine months of 2022, accounting for 33% of the total and an 8.1% decrease. It is followed by the United Kingdom, with 201 million euro, a 17.3% share, and a 15.3% drop; and France, with 136 million euro, 11.7% of the share, and a 21.4% increase over the same period of the previous year.





## WATER

- River basin authority
- Local citizens
- Irrigators communities
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## AGRICULTURE

- Berry producers
- Retailers and exporting companies
- Supermarkets
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## ECOSYSTEMS

- National park managers
- Nature Tourism
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## OTHER ACTORS

- Citizens (at different scales)
- Consumers
- Local NGOs
- International Bird
- European Commission
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# Plan to allow irrigation at Spanish wildlife sanctuary sparks outcry

MADRID, April 12 (Reuters) - A plan to legalise irrigation around the Donana wildlife reserve in southern Spain, one of Europe's largest wetlands and a wintering location for migratory birds, has sparked an outcry during a prolonged drought.

Andalusia's conservative regional government wants to allow agricultural irrigation in five municipalities around Donana, saying the move poses no risk to the national park.

The regional assembly, where the conservatives have a majority, on Wednesday voted in favour of proceeding with detailed studies of the proposal.

Scientists and the national government warn the park is in critical condition with lagoons drying out and biodiversity disappearing, and want a reduction in water extracted.

"There is no water at all. It makes no sense to promise something that is not there," Environment Minister Teresa Ribera said on Tuesday, vowing to take all possible legal measures to protect Donana from the move "that directly attacks one of the country's most precious ecosystems".

Stakeholder analysis activity (MIRO Link):

<https://miro.com/app/board/uXjVNuPV7cg=/>

While some irrigation is already allowed, many farmers use illegal wells that drain underwater reserves. The central government closed this week 220 illegal wells and plans to close hundreds more in the near future.

The European Commission, which has already taken Spain to court for failure to protect the wetlands, warned last month the plan could lead to sanctions.

Donana boasts lagoons, marshlands, scrub woodland, beaches and sand dunes and is home to fallow deer, badgers and endangered species including the Spanish imperial eagle and the Iberian lynx.

Spain is in the grip of a long-term drought after 36 months of poor rainfall. The Guadalquivir basin, where Donana is located, and Catalonia in the northeast are two of the most affected areas.

Exacerbating the drought, scientists say, is illegal use of underground waters by local red fruit producers in greenhouses and by tourism ventures that have mushroomed around Donana.

A study by the Spanish National Research Council said earlier this week 19% of Donana's 267 lagoons have disappeared over the past decade, and the number of wintering migratory birds dropped to below 90,000 from some 500,000.

Campaign group Greenpeace said in a statement the proposed regulation "threatens the survival of Donana, one of Europe's most emblematic natural areas, and punishes (legal) irrigators who have been complying with the law".

