

EUROPEAN BIODIVERSITY POLICY AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SALT PANS

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ABSTRACT

Salt pans are important habitats for a wide range of species and particularly for migrating sea and coastal birds. In Europe, salt pans occur almost exclusively in Mediterranean countries such as Greece, Italy, France, Spain and Portugal. Many small-scale salt pans have been abandoned over the last decades. The presentation will highlight some areas of interest and international nature conservation frameworks that are in place.

The main EU nature policy instruments are the EU Birds Directive (BD, adopted in 1979) and the EU Habitats Directive (HD, adopted in 1992). The areas that are protected with these directives comprise the Natura 2000 network, currently covering approximately 17% of the European land territory. Coastal ecosystems cover 3% of the Natura 2000 network. Lagoons and within these salt pans, occupy only a small fraction of this area. Salt pans are thus a rare and declining habitat.

Apart from EU legislation, several relevant international protection frameworks and initiatives exist, such as the Bonn Convention on migratory species, the Bern Convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. Of these, the Ramsar Convention offers the most specific and easily extractable information on conservation of salt pans. It lists 36 sites with salt pans across Europe. In 12 of them, with the total coverage of 33440 ha, salt pans are the dominant habitat.