

WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

The Mediterranean Sea, where the continents of Europe, Africa and Asia converge, forms a unique ecological region. By 2024, 413 wetlands of international importance had been added to the Ramsar Convention List, accounting for 17% of the global total. The region is globally renowned for its exceptional biodiversity, which is the result of its distinctive climatic and geographical characteristics.

Much of the Mediterranean coastal profile is characterized by an intricate succession of peninsulas and multiple islands and archipelagos, while the rugged topography gives rise to a highly heterogeneous range of landforms and habitats that harbor a rich and distinctive biodiversity, largely based on endemic flora and fauna species unique to this part of the world.

The **Black-tailed Godwit** (*Limosa limosa*) is a migratory shorebird that breeds in northern Europe and winters in western and southwestern Africa. They follow the Atlantic route, stopping at coastal estuaries and mudflats like the Tagus and Sado estuaries in Portugal, on their way south.

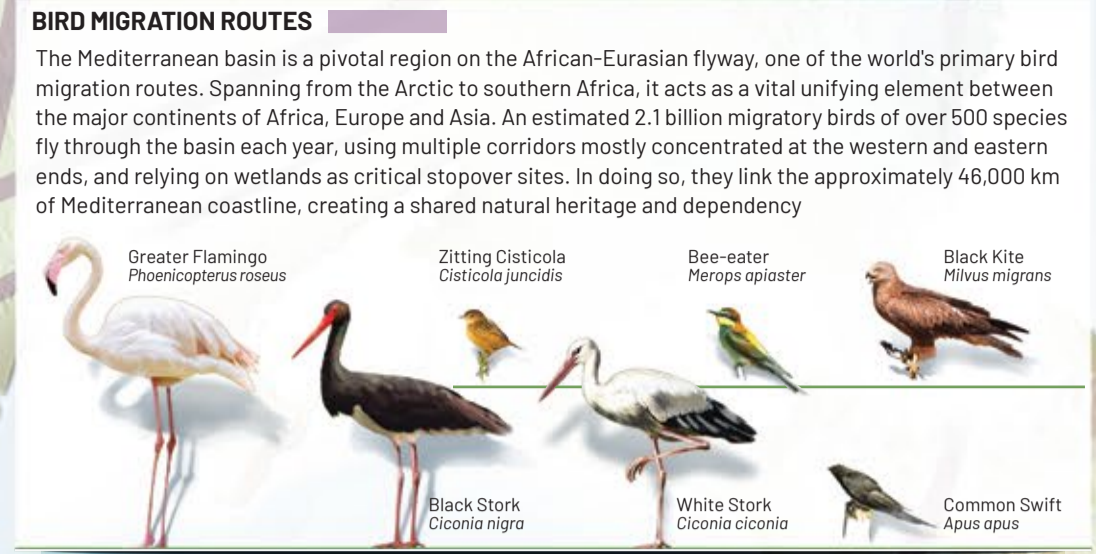
Every year, the **White Stork** (*Ciconia ciconia*) migrates from Europe to Africa, with over 30,000 birds crossing the Strait of Gibraltar. This 5,000-kilometre journey is driven by the search for food and milder conditions during the European winter.

The **Black Kite** (*Milvus migrans*) migrates annually to Africa, covering over 3,000 kilometres. Western populations cross the Strait of Gibraltar, with around 50,000 individuals passing through, while eastern populations cross the Bosphorus Strait and Sinai.

The **Bee-eater** (*Merops apiaster*), with its vibrant colours and agile flight, migrates from Europe to tropical Africa after summer. During this journey, covering several thousand kilometres, it feeds on insects, particularly bees and wasps, showcasing its adaptation to aerial life.

The **Common Swift** (*Apus apus*) leaves Europe after summer and embarks on a long journey south. This small bird, rarely lands, flies thousands of kilometres over the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Sahara, seeking insects and better winter conditions in Africa.

The **Greater Flamingo** (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) migrates after breeding in the wetlands of southern Europe, with part of the population crossing the Mediterranean to reach the lagoons and wetlands of North Africa, covering distances of up to 2,000 kilometres.



BIRD MIGRATION ROUTES
The Mediterranean basin is a pivotal region on the African-Eurasian flyway, one of the world's primary bird migration routes. Spanning from the Arctic to southern Africa, it acts as a vital unifying element between the major continents of Africa, Europe and Asia. An estimated 2.1 billion migratory birds of over 500 species fly through the basin each year, using multiple corridors mostly concentrated at the western and eastern ends, and relying on wetlands as critical stopover sites. In doing so, they link the approximately 46,000 km of Mediterranean coastline, creating a shared natural heritage and dependency.



Wetlands of International Importance of the Mediterranean Region and its hinterland

001 Albanian Prespa Lakes	036 Marsh Bourdim	070 Šrberina	102 Lake Bourget - Marshes Chautagne and Lavours	133 Lagoons Messolonghi	168 River Mouth Posada	231 Ria de Alvor	264 Ria de Alvor	283 Bay Cádiz	320 Las Tablas de Daimiel	354 Salines Cape Gata	384 Lagoon Ghar el Melh and Delta Mejerda
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005 Aïnane de Aïn Khair	040 Oases Ouled Saïd	073 Natural Park Lonjsko Polje	106 Lagoons Villepreux	137 Basin Angitola	172 Salines Margherita di Savoia	235 Merja Zerga	Caldeira da Graçiosa (Archipelago Azores)	287 Lagoonal Complex La Albuera	324 Marshlands Almenara	357 Nature Reserve Sabkhat Al-Jabbul	388 Freshwater Marshes Garaet Douza
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008 Chott El Beïdha-Hammam Essoukhna	043 Oum Lagareb	Cyprus	109 Marsh Orx and associated wetlands	140 Island Boscone	175 Lagoon Cábtras	238 Oasis Tafilalet	Volcanic Complex Sete Cidades (Azores)	290 El Hondo	327 Natural Site Laguna Palos and Las Madres	360 Reservoir Lebná	391 Salines Monastir
009 Chott El Hodna	044 Integral Reserve Lake El Mellah	077 Salt Lake Lamaca	110 Marsh Grande Briere	141 Lake Bosconero	176 Lagoon Mistras	239 Oued Assaquia Al Hamra à Layoune	Volcanic Complex Sete Cidades (Azores)	291 Reservoir Orellana	328 Natural Site Punta Entinas-Sabinar	361 Reservoir Merquellil	392 Salines Thyra
010 Chott Melghir	045 Integral Reserve Lake Oubeïra	078 Lake Bardawil	111 Marsh Sacy	142 Lake Burano	177 Lagoon Molentargius	240 Oued Tizguit	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	292 Reservoir Las Cañas	329 Natural Site Punta Entinas-Sabinar	362 Reservoir Miasbi	393 Sebkheth Halk Elmansel and Oued Essed
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015 Chott Zehrez Chergui	050 Sebkheth El Hamiet	083 Bay Somme	116 Poitevin Marshes	147 Lake Salsola	182 Torre Guaceto	245 Lagoons Sidi Sidi	Central Plateau Pico (Archipelago Azores)	297 L'Albufera	334 Nature Reserve Endorreic Complex Chiciana	367 Reservoir Sidi Saad	398 Oued Essed
016 Chott Zehrez Gharbi	051 Sebkheth El Melah	084 Bay Mont Saint-Michel	117 Salt Marshes Guérande and Més	148 Lake Tovel	183 Salines Trapani and Paccop	246 Lake Dojran	Central Plateau Flores (Archipelago Azores)	298 Lake Banyoles	335 Nature Reserve Endorreic Complex Espesera	368 Reservoir Oued Ermal	399 Oued Essed
017 Wetland Complex Guerbes-Sanhadja	052 Sebkheth Ezzmoul	085 Lake Bourneville	118 Temporary Ponds Tre Padule de Suarzone	149 Lagoon Marano: River Mouth Stella	184 Marshland Trappola	247 Lake Ohrid	Central Plateau Flores (Archipelago Azores)	299 Lake Calceado-Yuso, and Salt Pans Afana	336 Nature Reserve Endorreic Complex Chichiana	369 Chott Elguetar	400 Lagoon Akytan
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019 Garaet Annk Djemel and El Hethsel	054 Valley River Soummam	087 Arcachon Basins - Delta Leyre	120 Shores Lake Léman	151 Valley Averte (Lagoon Venice)	186 Valleys Campotto and Bassarone	Portugal	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	301 Lagoon El Hito	338 Nature Reserve Endorreic Complex Puerto Real	371 Wetland Complex Reservoirs Ghdir El Goulla and El Mornagula	402 Gökşuk
020 Garaet El Taref	055 Natural Park Valley Sorreny	088 Camarques	121 Salt Marshes Buzet	152 Valley Averte (Lagoon Venice)	187 Valley Cavanata	249 Lagoon Bertandinos and S. Pedro of Arcos	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	302 Lagoon Fuente de Piedra	339 Nature Reserve Endorreic Complex Puerto Real	372 Wetland Complex Sebkheths Dum Ez-Zessar and El Grine	403 Delta Kizilirmak
021 Garaet Guelif	056 Natural Park Valleys Comparedrosa	089 Lagoon Urbino	122 Peat Bog Molitfao	153 Lake Barrea	188 Valley Gorino	250 Upper Plateau Estrela Mountain and Upper River Zézere	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	303 Lagoon Mica	340 Nature Reserve Endorreic Complex Puerto Real	373 Wetland Complex Chott el Guetayet and Sebkheth Dhreia, and Oueds Akarit, Rekhams and Meïeh	404 Kizören Obrok
022 Garaet Timerganine	057 Valley Madriu-Perafita-Claror	090 Lagoon Biuguglia	123 Peat Bogs and Lake Jura Mountains	154 Lake Cesine	189 Valley Minico	251 Estuary Tejo	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	304 Lagoon Mica	341 Nature Reserve Endorreic Complex Puerto Real	374 Dierta Bin El Quedjan	405 Lake Burdur
023 Great Sebkhia Oran	Bosnia and Herzegovina	091 Lagoon Palo	124 Valleys Scarpe and Escaut	155 Lake and Marshes Massaciuculli	190 Valley Minico	252 Estuary Tejo	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	305 Lagoon Pitillas	342 Nature Reserve Endorreic Complex Puerto Real	375 Dierta Bin El Quedjan	406 Lake Kuyucuk
024 Karstique Cave Ghar Boumâaza	058 Wetland Bardaca	092 Lagoon Salses-Leucate	125 Gulf Amvrakikos	156 Oasis Castelvoturno - Variocni	191 Valley Minico	253 Estuary Tejo	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	306 Lagoon La Nava de Fuentes	343 Nature Reserve Endorreic Complex Puerto Real	376 Dierta Bin El Quedjan	407 Lake Seyfe
025 Guélatates Aïtal	059 Wetland Blato	093 Lagoons Humid Champagne	126 Artificial Lake Kerki	157 Oasis Seie - Serre Persano	192 Valley Minico	254 Lagoon Albufera	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	307 Lagoon La Vega	344 Nature Reserve Endorreic Complex Puerto Real	377 Dierta Bin El Quedjan	408 Lake Uluabat
026 Island Rachqoun	060 Poïje Livanjsko	094 Lagoons Petite Woëvre	127 Delta Evros	158 Ortazzo e Ortazzino	193 Residual Valleys Comacchio	255 Lagoon St. André and Sancha	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	308 Lagoon El Prado	345 Rias Ortigueira and Ladrado	378 Dierta Bin El Quedjan	409 Lake Uluabat
027 Nature Reserve Lake Birds	Bulgaria	095 Lagoons Lindre, Forest	128 Lagoons Kotychi	159 Ortazzo e Ortazzino	194 Wetland Complex Lower Tahaddart River	256 Poje Mira Minde and related springs	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	309 Lagoon and Beach Area Valdoviño	346 Rias Ortigueira and Ladrado	379 Dierta Bin El Quedjan	410 Meke Maar
028 Valley Iheri	061 Lake Anastasovsko	096 Lagoons Lindre, Forest	129 Lagoons Kotychi	160 Marsh Brusà - Le Vallette	195 Wetland Complex Lower Tahaddart River	257 Lagoons Berlandinos and S. Pedro of Arcos	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	310 Lagoons Alcazar de San Juan	347 Rias Ortigueira and Ladrado	380 Chott Elguetar	411 Caldera Nemrut
029 Lake Bouillèet	062 Islands Complex Belone	097 Lagoons Lindre, Forest	130 Lake Mikri Prespa	161 Marsh Diaca-Botrona	196 Wetland Ammiq	258 Lagoons Berlandinos and S. Pedro of Arcos	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	311 Lagoon Campotejar	348 Salbufera de Mallorca	381 Islands Kerkenah or Archipelago Kerkenah	412 Marsh Shatt
030 Lake Fetzara	063 Marsh Karst Complex Dragoman	098 Lagoons Lindre, Forest	131 Lake Vistonis, Porto Lagos, Lake Ismaris and adjoining lagoons	162 Marsh Bolgheri	197 Deir el Nouriyeh cliffs of Ras Chekaa	259 Marsh Arzila	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	312 Lagoons Cádiz	349 Salines Jandía	382 Islands Kneiss and Intertidal Areas	413 Lagoons Yumurtlak
031 Lake Telamine	064 Lake Durankulak	099 Lagoons Lindre, Forest	132 Lakes Völs and Koronia	163 Marsh Colfiorito	198 Nature Reserve Palm Islands	260 Marsh Tomada	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	313 Lagoons Laguna	350 Salines Jandía	383 Lake and Peat Bog Mejen Ech Chitan	
032 Reservoir Boughezoul	065 Island Ibisba	100 La Petite Camargue		164 Marsh Ostiglia	199 Beach Tyre	261 Marsh Bouquillobo	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	314 Lagoons Puebla de Beleña	351 Salbuera		
033 Cirque Aïn Ouarka	066 Poda	101 Lake Grand-Lieu		165 Lake Pignola		262 Marsh Talpaï	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	315 Lagoons Laguna	352 Salines Ibiza and Formentera		
034 Guélatates d'Issakarassene	067 Wetland Complex Pomorie			166 Piattassa della Balona e Risega		263 Ria Formosa	Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	316 Lagoons Laguna	353 Salines Santa Pola		
035 Salines Arzew	068 Complex Ropotamo			167 Pian di Spagna (Lake Mazzola)			Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	317 Lagoons Laguna			
	069 Lake Shabla						Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	318 Lagoons Laguna			
							Central Plateau São Jorge (Archipelago Azores)	319 Lagoons Laguna			

Key

- Ramsar Wetland
- MedWet/Com
- MedWet Meeting
- Ramsar COP Meeting
- Ramsar City
- Capital
- City
- Migratory Bird Flyway
- MedWet Headquarter
- UNESCO designation (World Heritage Site, Biosphere Reserve, Geopark)

0 200 km

MEDITERRANEAN WETLANDS: HOME TO WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE

Mediterranean wetlands include many kinds of water environments—river deltas, flowing and seasonal rivers, and lagoons and marshes with fresh, brackish or salty water—as well as floodplain forests, salt pans and reservoirs. Together they cover about 18.5 million hectares, roughly 2% of the land in the 27 Mediterranean countries and of the world's wetlands. Packed with wildlife and plants, these areas have supported local people for centuries, who fish, grow rice and harvest salt, using skills passed down through generations.

Another of the region's most distinctive features is its culture. For millennia, great civilizations, important empires, trade routes, mythical cities, and schools of thought and art have developed around the Mediterranean Sea. Knowledge has sailed from one shore of its basin to the other, and this immense cultural richness has spread globally like no other, shaping a globally recognizable cultural identity over the years.

Mediterranean wetlands have served as human habitats for millennia, uniquely showcasing cultural traits that have shaped their distinctive landscapes and traditions.

COASTAL FRESHWATER WETLANDS

The Mediterranean coastal freshwater wetlands are very special ecosystems that function as natural nurseries: rice fields – born of centuries of traditional management – protect the shoreline and provide habitat for fish and crustaceans, while small-scale artisanal fishing ensures sustainable harvests. They also serve as key stopover and breeding sites for waterbirds – flamingos, herons and sandpipers – and support a wide variety of wildlife. Conserving this mosaic of marshes and riparian corridors is essential for maintaining the ecosystem services that support Mediterranean communities.

SALT MARSHES AND SALT PANS

The salt marshes and salt pans of the Mediterranean region play a crucial role in both ecological balance and human well-being. Salt marshes act as natural buffers against coastal erosion and storm surges, while their intricate network of channels and reedbeds supports a remarkable diversity of wildlife, from wading birds to amphibians. Meanwhile, inland and coastal salt pans are vitally important to local communities, as they sustain the traditional salt-extraction industry – an essential product for food preservation and regional cuisine – and provide employment across many areas.

By understanding and protecting these unique ecosystems, we safeguard the rich biodiversity of the Mediterranean and ensure that local communities continue to benefit from the invaluable services they provide.

MEDITERRANEAN OASES

Mediterranean oases are water refuges in arid landscapes, enabling the cultivation of date palms and vegetables that sustain local communities. They provide habitat for reptiles, mammals and migratory birds, form ecological corridors and preserve ancestral irrigation knowledge, making them crucial for biodiversity, cultural heritage and regional resilience.

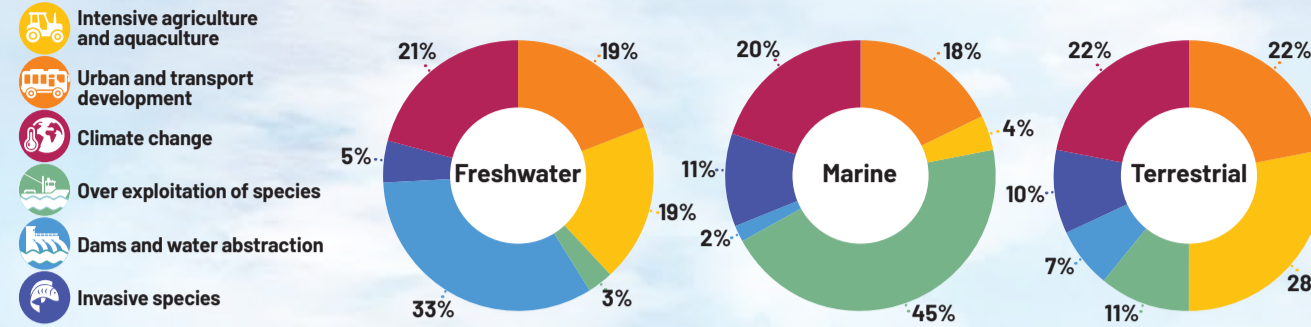
Salt lakes (chotts and sebkhas in Arabic) are some of the largest wetlands in the Mediterranean Basin. The most extensive are found in North Africa, where the combined effects of sudden torrential rain and rapid runoff in the desert-like landscapes sometimes results in the formation of vast expanses of water in continental depressions.

HISTORY AND HERITAGE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WETLANDS: A KEY TO IDENTITY

The Mediterranean wetlands keep ancient remains of the people who lived there – from Roman ditches and watermills to salt-making and rice-growing methods passed down by Islamic and Christian cultures, but also historic buildings of great heritage value. Along with local stories and water festivals, form a heritage that strengthens local identity. Valuing this history is key to involving communities in protecting wetlands and passing on traditional knowledge to future generations.

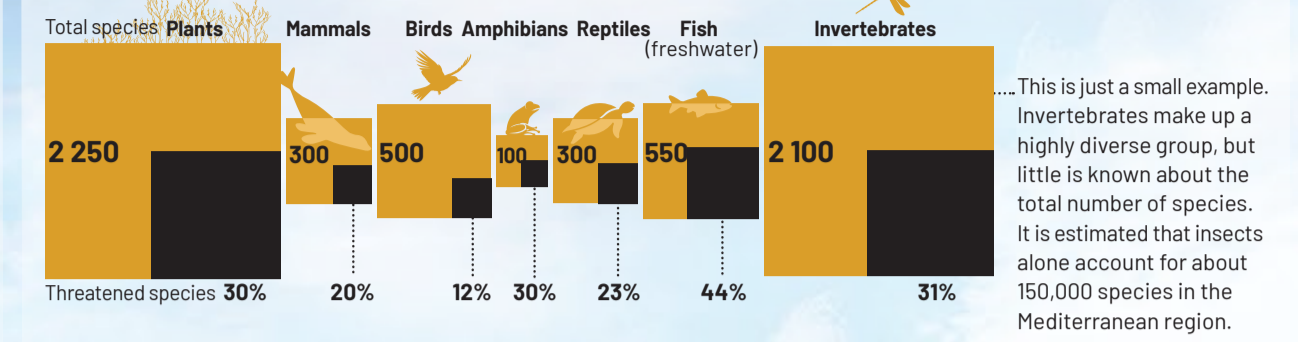
THE DIRECT DRIVERS TO BIODIVERSITY LOSS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Biodiversity loss is increasingly driven by pressures resulting from human activities. These human-induced actions, known as direct drivers, actively contribute to ecosystem degradation and species decline. In the Mediterranean context, the main direct drivers have been identified and adapted from the IUCN threats classification scheme (version 3.2; IUCN, 2020).



7363 Mediterranean species from the IUCN Red List

The IUCN Red List is a crucial indicator of biodiversity and an essential tool for preventing species extinction. In the case of the Mediterranean Basin Biodiversity Hotspot, its application makes it possible to identify trends in species decline and habitat conservation status, as well as the main threats they face. When used alongside other indicators, such as the Living Planet Index, the Red List contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the state of biodiversity.



Adapted from: Galewski T., Segura L., Biquet J., Saccon E. & Boutry N. Living Mediterranean Report – Monitoring species trends to secure one of the major biodiversity hotspots. Tour du Valat, 2021. France.



Black-headed Gull
Chroicocephalus ridibundus

Little Tern
Sterna albifrons

Barn Swallow
Hirundo rustica

Greater Flamingo
Phoenicopterus roseus

Rice is an aquatic cereal that has fed us since ancient times and is part of the Mediterranean diet.

Reedbeds are crucial habitats for a variety of wildlife, including birds, mammals, and invertebrates. They also play an important role in water filtration and nutrient cycling.

Black-winged stilt
Himantopus himantopus

Greater Flamingo
Phoenicopterus roseus

Gazela-dorcas
Gazella dorcas

Laughing Dove
Streptopelia senegalensis

Osprey
Pandion haliaetus

The most frequent place to find coastal wetlands is at the mouths of rivers and beside beaches in bays or in long stretches of sand adjacent to coastal dune systems or sandy spits.

Grey heron
Ardea cinerea

Glossy Ibis
Plegadis falcinellus

Eurasian Otter
Lutra lutra

Little Egret
Egretta garzetta

Audouin's Gull
Ichthyophaga audouinii

Northern shoveler
Spatula clypeata

The shallow salt pools of the salt pans provide vital resting and feeding grounds for flamingos, ducks and other migratory waterbirds, helping to sustain their long-distance journeys.

Shelduck
Tadorna tadorna

White-spectacled Bulbul
Pycnonotus barbatus

Desert Sparrow
Passer simplex

Great Cormorant
Phalacrocorax carbo

White Stork
Ciconia ciconia

Cream-coloured Courser
Cursorius cursor

European seabass
Dicentrarchus labrax

Eel
Anguilla anguilla

Loggerhead turtle
Caretta caretta

Dusky grouper
Epinephelus marginatus

THE MEDITERRANEAN WETLANDS INITIATIVE (MEDWET)
It was created in 1991 within the International Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) as the first Ramsar Regional Initiative (RRI), with the mission of halting the degradation process of Mediterranean wetlands and uniting all efforts for their effective conservation and the rational use of their resources. MedWet is based on the collaborative effort of the 27 Mediterranean countries, as well as entities such as the Ramsar Secretariat, and national and international organizations and institutions of various types interested in issues related to the conservation of Mediterranean wetlands, all of them with the common goal of building bridges of understanding so that our region becomes a better place for nature and people.



medwet.org

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