



Davos, 23rd January 2020

## **Wetlands: embodying global challenges – and solving them**

### **Environmental concerns make up the top 5 risks for the global economy – but what if Nature was also part of the solutions?**

The Global Risks Survey has just been released at the World Economic Forum in Davos – and for the first time in its history, its 10-year outlook is dominated by environmental issues. Climate change is striking harder and faster than many expected, driving everything from extreme weather events to mass migration. Biodiversity loss has critical implications for humanity, from the collapse of food and health systems to the disruption of entire supply chains. Nature is breaking down around us.

**Our priority must be to stop further environmental degradation, restore ecosystems and optimize the environmental services they provide to people and planet. In this respect, one of the most important areas of focus should be our wetlands. Conserving and restoring them will provide nature-based solutions to some of humanity's biggest challenges, but there's no time to waste – we need to act now!**

This year's edition of the Davos World Economic Forum has been launched under the theme "Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World". The Tour du Valat is participating to defend nature-based solutions as a relevant answer to the issues of the 21st century. During the Forum, the Tour du Valat notably organized an event entitled "Wetlands, nature-based solutions for a sustainable Mediterranean basin". The interventions of both Pavan Sukheh, Environmental Economist and President of the World Wildlife Fund, and Jean Jalbert, General Director of the Tour du Valat, stimulated a fruitful debate with various actors of the global economy.

### **Wetlands, nature-based solutions**

Lakes, ponds, marshes, rivers, estuaries, bogs, lagoons... Wetlands, the most productive ecosystems on the planet and yet the most threatened, are places of biodiversity and vital resources. Essential for the survival of humanity, they supply almost all the fresh water consumed in the world, while offering protection against floods and extreme weather. More than a billion people depend on wetlands for their livelihoods and survival, as do countless plant and animal species. However, for centuries they have been destroyed, degraded and transformed for other uses – industry, agriculture, tourism, urbanization etc. – and today we're still losing our wetlands and the multiple benefits they provide. Action to save them is urgently required.

### **What are nature-based solutions ?**

**Nature-based solutions – when nature is sustainably managed to tackle socio-environmental challenges – are robust, flexible, cost-efficient, inclusive and long-term oriented.** Whether stand-alone or combined with man-made initiatives, natural wetland solutions offer co-benefits related to food security, livelihoods, health and well-being, water regulation and disaster risk reduction, while contributing to nature conservation and restoration. As well as supporting huge biodiversity and providing almost all our freshwater, wetlands store water in times of drought and safely disperse it during floods and storm surges. Coastal wetlands from dunes to



mangroves provide a first line of defence against rising sea levels, which can flood cities and damage agricultural land.

### **The Mediterranean basin: a triple hotspot**

Wetlands have a notably important role to play in the Mediterranean basin. The Mediterranean is one of the world's most vulnerable regions in terms of global warming, heating 20% faster than the global average. It is also a hotspot of human pressures. At the same time, the Mediterranean is a biodiversity hotspot endowed with a globally significant wealth of natural resources and ecosystems. The Mediterranean's wetland areas offer critical solutions for adapting to and mitigating climate change, while increasing society's overall resilience to stresses and shocks.

### **The lights are red!**

The latest research\* from the Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory shows that the region's remaining wetlands are facing unprecedented challenges. This further underlines the urgency of acting to save them:

- 48% of wetlands in the Mediterranean basin have disappeared in the last 50 years
- The population of the Mediterranean basin has increased by a third since 1990, and by 42% in coastal areas
- The human ecological footprint in the Mediterranean basin is today almost twice as high as the world average

### **Water**

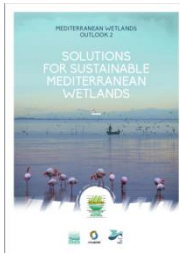
- A third of Mediterranean countries are undergoing heavy water stress, particularly in the Middle East and North-East Africa
- Most rivers have experienced a very significant reduction in flow (-25 to -75%)
- The flood control capacity of wetlands has decreased by 20% in some Mediterranean countries
- The scarce remaining freshwater is increasingly polluted by excessive use of chemicals and a lack of sewage treatment

### **Climate change**

- 95% of wetland sites hosting more than 50,000 waterbirds are coastal and threatened with submersion resulting from sea level rise

### **Biodiversity**

- 36% of Mediterranean wetland species are now threatened with extinction. Their decline is accelerating, their populations having almost halved since 1990



[\\*Read the full version of the report](#)



[Wetlands in a warming world: Why the Mediterranean needs nature-based solutions](#)



[Outsmart climate change: work with nature!](#)

### Tour du Valat

Tour du Valat is a research institute for the conservation of Mediterranean wetlands created more than 65 years ago by Luc Hoffmann. It has developed its research activities for the conservation of Mediterranean wetlands with the constant desire to reconcile man and nature. Convinced that it will only be possible to preserve wetlands if human activities and the protection of the natural heritage can be reconciled, Tour du Valat has for many years been developing programmes of research and integrated management that favour interchanges between wetland users and scientists, and promote wetland benefits to decision makers and socio-economic actors. [www.tourduvalat.org](http://www.tourduvalat.org)



### The Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory

Coordinated by the Tour du Valat, the Mediterranean Wetlands Observatory was created in 2008 in the framework of the MedWet Initiative to monitor and evaluate the status and trends of Mediterranean wetlands, and to further improve the knowledge of their multiple benefits. Its ultimate goal is to improve wetland conservation and management by providing information to as many people as possible, in particular political decision makers, economic actors and the general public. The MWO catalyzes the efforts of a number of partners.

[www.tourduvalat.org/en/mediterranean-wetlands/mwo](http://www.tourduvalat.org/en/mediterranean-wetlands/mwo)



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