



# The Latest on Mediterranean Forests

N°10 June 2008



## Editorial

I believe I will be the spokesman for all readers when I say how happy I am that our magazine, "The Latest on Mediterranean Forests", has now devoted two successive issues to countries belonging to the eastern rim of the Mediterranean: first Turkey, this time Syria. So, our European and North African colleagues have confirmation that we from the Eastern Mediterranean also have vast tracts of woodland and forest and that forestry management does indeed form an integral part of our governments' foremost concerns.

Let's just consider for a moment that Syria has: a coast along the Mediterranean, the sea which is the common link between us all (Portugal excepted, but her forests are nevertheless truly Mediterranean); a total area under forest that is a little bigger than Tunisia's; a long tradition of forestry management... Clearly Syria is a country of great interest and capable of contributing to both debate and knowledge. It is for this reason that I regret there is so little shared activity with Syria, a country that borders on my own (Turkey). No doubt this is due to travel costs.

Syria is concerned, more than Europe though no doubt a little less than North Africa, by the problem of desertification, an issue that was one of those addressed at the international seminar "Forests, bioenergy and climate change". Omar Mhirit, my fellow administrator at the IAMF, took part in this seminar and gives an account of it in this current issue.

The occurrence of such events (this one among the many others that "The Latest on Mediterranean Forests" keeps us informed about on the last page of each issue) proves, in case there was any doubt on the matter, that the small world of Mediterranean forests is indeed very dynamic. We can only hope that the combined efforts of all involved will produce concrete results. To ensure that Mediterranean woodlands endure, remain beautiful and full of life, a place where people can happily live out their lives.

**Turgut CELIKKOL**

**IAMF Administrative Board Member**

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## Recently, IAMF took part in...

### Casablanca (Morocco) March 25-26 2008

Omar Mhirit, IAMF administrative council member, took part in the international conference "Forests, bioenergy and climate change", organised jointly by the association Sylva-Monde for the Protection and Development of Forests and the Environment, Hassan II University and the Hassiana School for Public Works in Casablanca.

### Saint Tropez (France) April 12 2008

Jean Bonnier, IAMF executive secretary, took part in a

round table session about the Mediterranean Union project, organised by the "Horizons Méditerranée" association following an initiative by the French Institute for Advanced Defence Studies.

### Athenes (Greece) April 14-16 2008

Francisco Castro Rego, IAMF vice president, attended a workshop on climate change and the conservation and management of Mediterranean forests, organised by the WWF and the IUCN.

### Paris (France) May 6 2008

Mohamed Larbi Chakroun, IAMF president, attended the Blue Plan annual general meeting.

### Bari (Italy) May 8-10 2008

Patrizia Tartarino, IAMF administrative council member, represented the IAMF at the "Agriculture and sustainable rural development" workshop held by the CIHEAM and the Blue Plan.

## Membership and/or subscription form

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# Forests in Syria

Syria belongs to the Eastern Mediterranean and is a country of 18 million inhabitants, of which 60% are city dwellers. Its land area is 185,180 km<sup>2</sup>, made up of 32.5% arable land, 20% unfarmable, 45% steppe grassland and 2.5% woodlands. Half of the forests are planted stands.

The contribution of woodlands to the gross national product is relatively small compared to their important role in the protection of catchment areas, the conservation of soil, water and biodiversity, their function as carbon sink and buffer against the spread of desert, and as provider of areas for recreation and ecotourism.

## Main species

### In natural forest

The two species covering the greatest areas are, respectively, *Pinus brutia* and *Quercus calliprinos*.

#### Coastal regions:

*Abies cilicica*, *Castanea sativa*, *Cedrus libani*, *Ceratonia siliqua*, *Cupressus sempervirens*, *Pinus brutia*, *Platanus orientalis*, *Quercus calliprinos*, *Q. cerris*, subsp. *pseudocerris*, *Q. infectoria*, *Salix alba*.

#### Inland regions:

*Juniperus excelsa*, *Pistacia atlantica*, *Populus euphratica* (along the Euphrates), *Quercus aegilops*, *Q. calliprinos*.



Basilica of Saint Simon Stylites - Picture: Jean-Philippe Jahier

## In planted stands Current situation

Native species are mostly used in reforestation. These include:

- ✓ *Abies cilicica* and *Cedrus libani* in the humid and sub-humid mountainous zones along the coast;
- ✓ *Pinus brutia*, *P. halepensis* and *Cupressus sempervirens* in sub-humid and semi-arid zones;
- ✓ *Pistacia atlantica* in the semi-arid and arid zones inland;
- ✓ *Populus alba* f. *roumi* and *P. nigra* f. *hamoui* in the irrigated plains of the Euphrates.

In addition, some foreign species have proved well-adapted to local conditions, including *Acacia cyanophylla*, *Casuarina cunninghamiana*, *Cupressus arizonica*, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, *E. gomphocephala*.

60% of Syria's natural woodlands have been damaged by over-grazing, wildfire and excessive felling.

The forested areas, taken broadly, have been classed into three categories: 85% are protective forest\*, 10% are multi-purpose woodlands and 5% are protected areas.

## Administrative structure

90% of Syria's forests are state-owned and are run by the Central Forestry Service of the Ministry of Agriculture. They are protected by the Forestry Law. Forest protection is the responsibility of forestry officers and wardens who come under the Director General of Forests.

\* protection of soils



Village on the limestone plateau above Aleppo - Picture: Jean-Philippe Jahier

In 2004, Syria established a new Forestry Law that takes into account the diverse functions of woodlands, notably environmental, economic, social and cultural. But it also encompasses the participative approach to sustainable development, an integrated approach to firefighting as well as improvements to user rights.

### **Education and research**

Higher education in forestry is provided by the forestry departments in four of the country's five universities: Aleppo, Damascus, Lattaqui and Deir Ez Zor. The forestry engineering diploma requires five years of post-high school studies.

Intermediate-level training is provided by a two-year programme for rangers at the School of Forestry at Bouka.

Forestry research at the

universities and at the National Scientific Research Centre focuses above all on the sustainable development of protected woodlands, woody species with multiple uses and their resistance to drought, forest fires and their ecological and socio-economic impact.

### **Woodland management and improvement**

The natural stands of *Pinus brutia* in the coastal mountains are the only ones benefiting from a development scheme which was set up in the middle of the last century and is updated every ten years. The aims of the new improvement plan are the protection of forests against wildfire and the conservation of landscape and biodiversity. On account of their irregular pattern, these stands are managed on a "separate plot" basis.

The woodlands under kermes oak (in its eastern form

*Quercus calliprinos*, as opposed to the western variant *Quercus coccifera*) are run as simple coppice for the production of firewood.

The forests of fir (*Abies cilicica*) and cedar (*Cedrus libani*) in the coastal mountains have been classed as protected recreational areas since 2005.

### **Deforestation down the ages**

The exploitation of Syria's woodlands began with the arrival of agriculture and human settlement some 10,000 years ago. Then, 7,000 years ago came the domestication of animals and hunting. Thereafter, Syria underwent periods of population growth, the development of villages and towns, the construction of palaces, temples, public buildings and navies (Phoenecian, Roman, Byzantine, Arab and Ottoman).

Even so, deforestation

remained a slow process which did not encroach on the mountainous areas where access was difficult. In contrast, deforestation accelerated throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially during the two world wars and, also, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when developments in transportation facilitated access to the mountain areas that had escaped unharmed until then. The process has continued down to the present, though it has slowed notably over the last ten years.

## **Deforestation and desertification**

The climate in Syria and its neighbouring countries underwent major changes between 14,000 B.C. and 3,000 B.C. From this date on, there were no more such big changes in temperature and rainfall. Indeed, since 500 B.C., rainfall in the region has remained much as it is today.

Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that, by all accounts, it cannot be any general aridification of the climate that can be held responsible for the following modifications: the drastic reduction in wooded areas, the increased and accelerating deterioration in the natural plant cover in arid and semi-arid zones, and the increasing aridification of the environment in Syria and its neighbouring countries for more than a century. It is more rational to attribute such evolution to the unreasoned management of sustainable resources in general, and of woodlands in particular.

Nevertheless, over the last twenty five years a decline in

rainfall and upsets in its annual pattern, which measurements at weather stations confirm, have worsened the deterioration of the environment and the phenomenon of desertification.

Historical documents (Mesopotamian cuneiform writings from the third and second millennia B.C., Ancient Egyptian, biblical, Roman, Byzantine and Arabic documents), as well as more recent archives from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries concerning forestry activity and desertification, tend towards the same point of view as expressed here: that desertification in Syria and the neighbouring countries has contributed significantly to triggering the process of desertification.

Added to deforestation, there has been the abusive use of soils and water along with long periods of drought that have weakened the arid and semi-arid ecosystems, making them susceptible to decline into desert.

A reasoned national policy presently aims to protect forests, increase the areas under woodlands and run them using sustainable management on the principle that such goals represent effective means to combat desertification. This approach is clearly enshrined in the new Forestry Law and in new forestry policy whose basis is the reasoned, enduring development of sustainable natural resources, in which forests, and forestry and (multi-purpose) agri-forestry in general, have a key role to play.

## **Perspectives for the future**

New forestry policies, adapted to the multi-functional role required of woodlands in sustainable development, are about to be introduced in Syria.

In 2007, the Minister of Agriculture signed into effect a new strategy for the integrated fight against wildfire. This strategy completely overhauls the systems for forecasting and detection, communications, actual firefighting and the restoration of burnt-out areas.

**Ibrahim Nahal**

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# Forests, bioenergy and climate change

## Report on the international conference

Omar Mhirit, IAMF administrative council member, represented the IAMF at the international conference on "Forests, bioenergy and climate change", which took place at Casablanca (Morocco) on March 25-26, 2008. The event was organised jointly by the association Sylva-Monde for the Protection and Development of Forests and the Environment, Hassan II University and the Hassiana School for Public Works (EHTP) in Casablanca.

The conference began with two introductory papers:

1. *The impact of deforestation on climate change.* Dr Mohamed Ellatifi, president of Sylva-Monde and conference chairman, gave a run-down on the state of the world's forests, their locations, functions and roles. He emphasised the impact that the deterioration of forest ecosystems and deforestation has on biodiversity and climate change.

2. *The wood fuel resource and related activities in tropical areas in the context of climate change. Challenges and perspectives involving carbon in connection with the sustainable management of this resource.* Dr Bernard Mallet, from CIRAD-France, underlined the importance of wood as the source of domestic energy in households in the tropical regions of the world where abundant supplies of firewood are available, along with the challenges, constraints and perspectives concerning energy policy in the light of existing international instruments (Kyoto Protocol, Bali Conference of 2007...).

The main topics addressed during the conference were grouped under two main headings:

1. Forests, bioenergy and development, for which contributions centred particularly on:
  - ✓ the make-up and functioning of ecosystems;

- ✓ forests and carbon dioxide;
- ✓ forest soils as a carbon reservoir;
- ✓ forestry industries and the environment;
- ✓ energy and bioenergy: sources and consumption...

2. Climate change, risks, impact and adaptation, for which contributions focused on:

- ✓ The impact of climate change on forests and the environment, international negotiations and the political context;
- ✓ The contribution of forest improvement and development action to anticipating climate changes;
- ✓ Adapting to climate change: vulnerable sectors, strategy for, and forms of, adaptation...

Exchanges and discussion cleared up specific points of detail and led to interim conclusions on:

- ✓ The present state of knowledge about the conditions of climate change and its

Cedars and firs in the Talasemtane forest, Rif (Morocco) - Picture: Jean Bonnier



impact on the preservation of forests and the environment.  
 ✓ The situation concerning energy and bioenergy consumption as well as the role of forests in reducing the greenhouse effect.

✓ The roles of research, practices and policy in the fields under discussion in relation to the preservation, planning and improvement of forests and the environment.

This seminar, held at an opportune moment just when climate change has clearly

become the greatest threat to living beings, produced a significant contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon, including the challenges and perspectives for which forest ecosystems provide the essential backdrop.

Numerous countries other than Morocco had participants at the conference, including France, Turkey, Malaysia, Algeria, Canada, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia...

*Omar Mhirit had the honour of chairing the first session given over to the introductory lectures. He also made sure that participants heard about the IAMF during the breaks and changeovers.*

*The president of Sylva-Monde, also conference chairman, has committed to publishing a summary and the proceedings of the conference at [www.geocities.com/sylva-monde/accu.htm?200810](http://www.geocities.com/sylva-monde/accu.htm?200810)*

## Zooming in on... a new member

*With each new issue, "The Latest on Mediterranean Forests" will introduce a new IAMF member*

*The Department of Forestry and Renewable Forest Resources of the Biotechnical Faculty of Ljubljana joined the IAMF in 2008, when the organisation subscribed to the association. Kristjan Jarni, a teaching assistant, introduces his department.*

With a forest cover of 60%, it could be said that Slovenia is forest country, where planned professional work in forests has a long tradition.

### Activity

The Department of Forestry and Renewable Forest Resources of the Biotechnical Faculty is the only institution in Slovenia which offers study programmes for forestry experts. The Department has approx. 400 students and provides courses at the bachelor, master and doctoral levels. Except for the latter, the courses are organized following the

EU's Bologna Agreement (which aims at harmonizing the architecture of the European higher education system).

The department has thirty-five faculty members who are engaged in both teaching and research, as well as 10 employees working in services and administration. The result is a research-oriented and student-friendly institution. We are specialists in all aspects of research on old growth and natural forests, continuous-cover forestry, mountain forestry and small-scale forest operations.

Univerza  
v Ljubljani  
Biotehniška  
fakulteta



### Cooperation

Furthermore, the Department is committed to international cooperation in education and research. Within the framework of the Socrates / Erasmus Project we cooperate actively with several universities within the EU. The Department is a member of the international organization IUFRO and the European Forestry Institute (EFI) and research activities form an active part in European COST projects, in the projects of the framework EU programme, and in the international organizations WWF, IUCN (the International Union for Conservation of Nature) and IALE (the International Association for Landscape Ecology).

Website: [www.bf.uni-lj.si](http://www.bf.uni-lj.si)

# Mediterranean forests, the talk of the town!

**For more details and the latest updated information, don't forget to check the diary on our website ([www.aifm.org](http://www.aifm.org)).  
And don't forget: tell us about any event that doesn't appear in the diary - it will make it that much better!**

**Conference on "Biodiversity in Forest Ecosystems and Landscapes"**

5-8 August 2008 - Kamloops (Canada)

email: [iufro@tru.ca](mailto:iufro@tru.ca)

Webpage: [www.tru.ca/iufro.html](http://www.tru.ca/iufro.html)

**EFIMED annual meeting**

17 September 2008 - Orvieto (Italy)

Webpage: [www.efi.int/portal/shortcuts/regional\\_office\\_efimed](http://www.efi.int/portal/shortcuts/regional_office_efimed)

**EFI annual conference and scientific seminar "Adaptation of Forest Landscape to Environmental Changes"**

18-20 September 2008 - Orvieto (Italy)

Webpage: [www.efi.int/portal/news\\_events/events\\_extra/2008/efi\\_2008\\_annual\\_conference\\_and\\_scientific\\_seminar/programme/](http://www.efi.int/portal/news_events/events_extra/2008/efi_2008_annual_conference_and_scientific_seminar/programme/)

**Issues concerning present knowledge and the need for research on Mediterranean forests**

23 September 2008 - Saint Maximin (France)

Webpage: [www.foret-mediterraneenne.org/evts.htm](http://www.foret-mediterraneenne.org/evts.htm)

**Local Development and Natural Resources Management in Dry Areas**

30 September 2008 - Paris (France)

Website: [www.naturalite.fr](http://www.naturalite.fr)

**Issues concerning the organization of research on Mediterranean forests and its transfer**

30 September 2008 - Montpellier (France)

Webpage: [www.foret-mediterraneenne.org/evts.htm](http://www.foret-mediterraneenne.org/evts.htm)

**Seminar "Biodiversity, Naturality, Humanity"**

27-31 October 2008 - Chambéry (France)

Website: [www.arenidf.org/cooperation/developpement-sept08/developpement-sept08.html](http://www.arenidf.org/cooperation/developpement-sept08/developpement-sept08.html)

**International conference: "Water and Forests - a convenient truth?"**

30-31 October 2008 - Barcelona (Spain)

Contact: Efimed

Website: [www.efi.int/portal/about\\_efi/organisation/regional\\_offices/efimed/information\\_and\\_dissemination/water\\_and\\_forests\\_conference\\_2008/](http://www.efi.int/portal/about_efi/organisation/regional_offices/efimed/information_and_dissemination/water_and_forests_conference_2008/)

**International conference on the European forest-based sector: "Bio-responses for addressing new climate and energy challenges"**

6-8 November 2008 - Nancy (France)

Website: [http://ns32735.ovh.net/wabilis\\_v4/publi/page.php?id=2&rang=0&domain=34&lang=fr\\_FR](http://ns32735.ovh.net/wabilis_v4/publi/page.php?id=2&rang=0&domain=34&lang=fr_FR)

**A challenge to be taken up by researchers and managers: sustainable production of goods and services in Mediterranean forests**

27-28 November 2008 - Etang des Aulnes (France)

Webpage: [www.foret-mediterraneenne.org/evts.htm](http://www.foret-mediterraneenne.org/evts.htm)

**2<sup>nd</sup> international conference on Drylands, Deserts and Desertification**

14-17 December 2008 - Sede Boquer Campus (Israel)

Website: <http://cmsprod.bgu.ac.il/Eng/Units/bidr/desertification2008>

**13<sup>rd</sup> World Forestry Congress on the topic "Forests in Development: a Vital Balance"**

18-25 October 2009 - Buenos Aires (Argentina)

e-mail: [info@cfm2009.org](mailto:info@cfm2009.org)

Website: [www.wfc2009.org](http://www.wfc2009.org)

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