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Ancient Forests in the Northern Mediterranean: Neglected High Conservation Value Areas

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Ancient forests have specific ecological, economic, social and cultural values. They are part of our natural heritage and a source of inspiration. They can inform sustainable management, conservation and restoration strategies.

This study was conducted with Mediterranean partners to better understand the state of play concerning ancient Mediterranean forests and to help define a comprehensive strategy for ancient forest conservation. One-hundred and one (101) questionnaires were sent out, interviews and an extensive literature review complemented this work to obtain a preliminary picture of ancient Mediterranean forests across 15 countries in the region.

WHAT IS AN ANCIENT FOREST IN THE MEDITERRANEAN?

A jungle of words is used in each Mediterranean language to speak about ancient forests. No common definition exists. Twelve characteristics of forests were proposed and respondents had to rate each one. Responses are presented in Figure 1. The majority of respondents identified the age of trees present as 'very important', followed closely by ancientness (the continuity in time of forest cover) and the amount of deadwood. Nativeness and structure were also considered important. Species diversity was considered as less important by nearly a third of respondents.

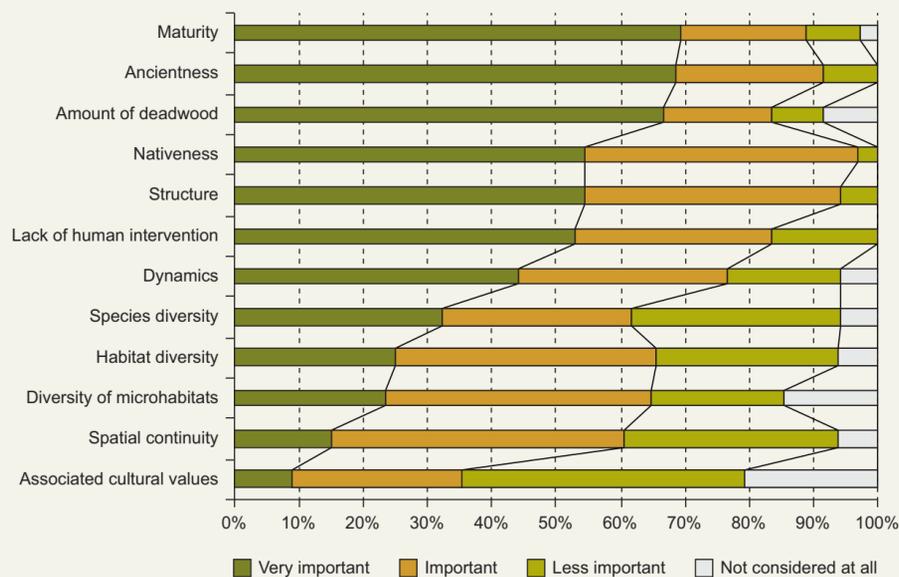
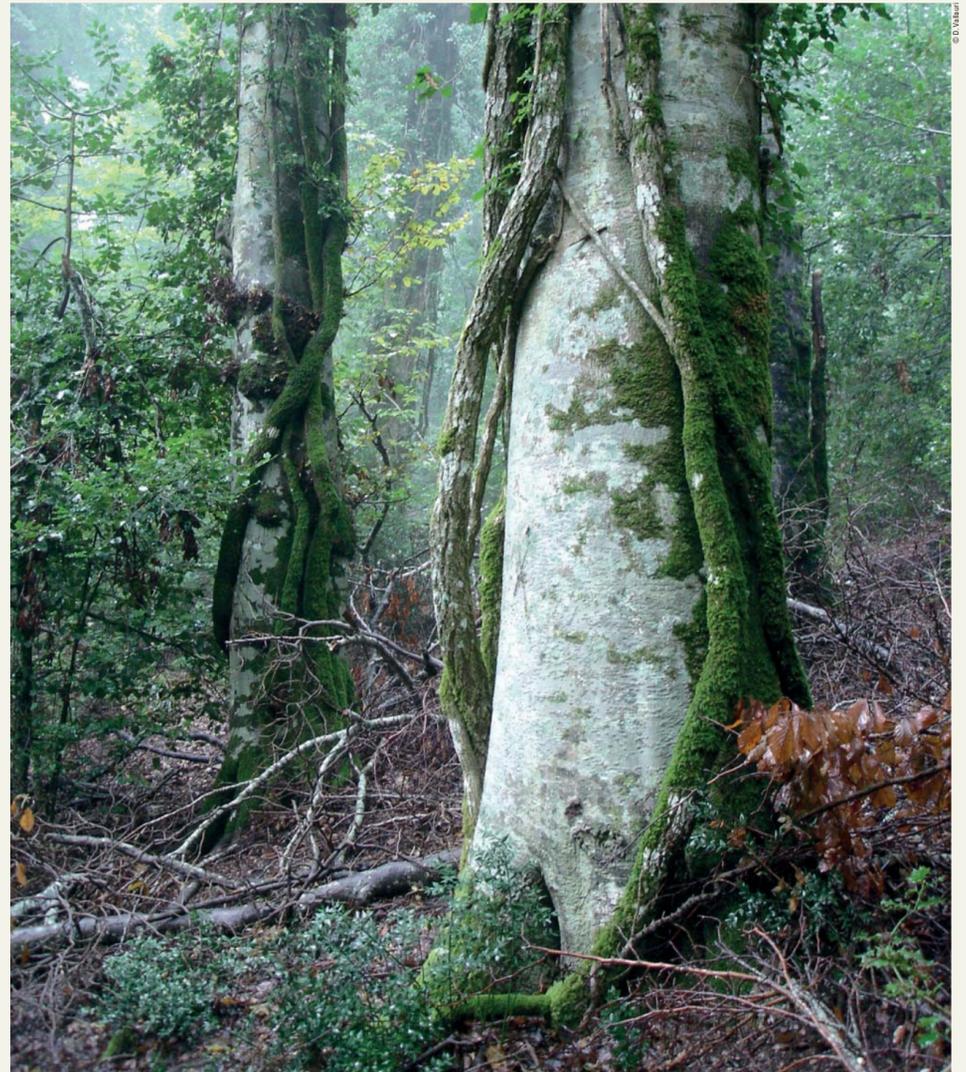


Figure 1. Characteristics of ancient forests in the Mediterranean

WHERE ARE ANCIENT FORESTS?

This study highlighted over 80 sites in 15 Euro-Mediterranean countries with potential interest. Many more remain to be discovered and researched.



A well-preserved Mediterranean forest: future protection, management and restoration of Mediterranean forests will benefit from the study of the rare remnants of ancient forests. They are crucial as a factor of resilience to climate changes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Major gaps concerning ancient Mediterranean forests can be divided into four categories: knowledge, protection, values and threats, and policies and management practices.

In the short to medium term (2-5 years), we propose 10 recommendations. Among them:

- **Define a common method** for assessing and identifying ancient forests, and their associated values.
- **Use this study** and the sites already protected as references, and to fully identify and map ancient forests in priority landscapes.
- **Promote the key role of ancient forests** to stimulate protection, management and restoration of forest biodiversity, and set up pilot demonstration activities in priority landscapes.
- **Assess threats and promote the urgent protection** of the Mediterranean's remaining ancient forests.
- **Analyse features of resilience of ancient forests** over time and use them to develop strategies for climate changes adaptation and/or restoration.

Ancient forests are part of the Mediterranean natural and cultural heritage, yet they are not sufficiently valued; and time is running out to secure their survival and recovery.

More information:

Mansourian S., Rossi, M. and Vallauri, D., 2013, Ancient Forests in the Northern Mediterranean: Neglected High Conservation Value Areas. Marseille: WWF France, 80 p.

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