



The Bois de Paiolive and the Gras

[Ardèche]

Located away from the busy roads of the Rhône valley, the Bois de Paiolive forest and Les Gras grasslands take you on a peaceful journey into the heart of Mediterranean nature.

Project supported by Tetra Pak as part of their partnership with the WWF on the "Protection of Mediterranean Forests".

 **Tetra Pak**
PROTÈGE CE QUI EST BON™



© M. L. Eyraud

The Mediterranean Basin is one of the world's richest ecoregions in terms of biodiversity. It holds for example 10% of all the world's flowers, on just 1.6% of the total planet area.

The Bois de Païolive is located in the Ardèche, in the northern part of the Mediterranean Basin. It covers about 32,000 acres and develops on limestones dating back to 155 to 131 million years.

This impressive limestone plateau used to be covered with a rich alluvial floor now eroded. The Bois de Païolive is nestled within the rocks while the Gras plateau provides more open space but both environments abound in biodiversity. Today, some of the traditional activities, the biodiversity and the spirit of place are facing serious threats involving various factors such as lack of knowledge of this natural haven, uncontrolled urbanisation and mass tourism.



© H.P. Abe naris



© C. Bauwet



© D. Vellaur

↳ A journey into the earth's core

Over thousands of years, water loaded with carbon dioxide dissolved pure limestone: rocks of all shapes, furrows or basins on the surface and underground galleries have been unveiled, allowing "open-sky" speleology from time to time. The karst area is still active and shelters many deep natural cavities.

↳ In the footsteps of human history



Prehistoric men felt safe in the Bois de Païolive. The site counts around 400 dolmens together with open habitats and sepulchral caves. Later, the Bois remained inhabited until the 18th century. From that time, more and more populations tried to take advantage of every possible cultivating area, even more so than today, leaving behind many unique dry stone constructions.



↳ Rocks and quick waters



Rocks and cliffs are the last primary environments that have never been exploited. They are full-fledged ecosystems and provide a habitat for living species that had to adapt to difficult conditions like lichens, mosses and molluscs. These are now the last habitats for some specialised plant, bird and bat species. The Chassezac river, the Beaume river and other temporary streams still shelter many heritage species: aquatic species, dragonflies, frogs and fishes, as well as beavers and otters.





An amazing biodiversity

The Bois de Païolive biodiversity is still being taken stock of and its richness is mostly due to the variety of the soil and habitats (forests, grasslands, water) and to the maturity of the forest environments. The Bois de Païolive and the Gras grasslands (32,000 acres) are a European hotspot for Mediterranean biodiversity. Part of the site is included in the European Ecological Natura 2000 Network. The Conseil général de l'Ardèche (French regional authority) delimited a natural sensitive perimeter in the heart of the forest (around 4,000 acres).

↳ A forest as old as new

The rough topography of the landscape restricted the exploitation of the forest, situation which is fairly unique in the Mediterranean area. The Bois de Païolive is a European-interest site because of the lichen, moss and insects that live there. Natural evolution can be observed in some areas with trees of all ages, including oak trees of more than a hundred years of age.



↳ Limestone grasslands

At the periphery of the site, dry grasslands, also known as "Gras", are still sometimes maintained by cattle and shelter many special plants, insects, reptiles, batrachians and bird species. Where there is no grazing land, white oak trees grow back on the untouched soil.

↳ A necessary agreement between man and nature

The silence, the forest and mineral atmosphere of the Bois de Païolive make it a privileged place to feel the beneficial otherness of nature, at the personal and cultural level. The Bois de Païolive is a source of inspiration for writers and artists.





Since 2005, the **WWF** and the **Paio Olive Association** have been working together to study, raise awareness

and protect this wonderful site, in partnership with many private and public stakeholders. This project links up with the worldwide challenge of biodiversity conservation.

↳ **Raise awareness:**

various studies and multi-disciplinary research aim at improving knowledge about the biodiversity, the naturalness and the current evolution of the site.

↳ **Invite the public to take part in the project:**

organisation of guided tours and publication of documentation to share knowledge and promote the value of this natural heritage. Please contact the Paio Olive Association or the local tourist information centres to learn more about this initiative.

You can also participate and preserve this outstanding natural heritage by following a few simple rules:



↳ You are almost always on private property. Please do not damage the stone walls built by our ancestors.

↳ Do not pick up plants and flowers you have never seen before. Many species are rare and protected.



↳ Silence is the most suited melody to listen to the nature and enjoy these poetic surroundings that are teeming with life.

↳ Rocks and cliffs are full-fledged ecosystems. It can take up to 200 years to rebuild an ecosystem for rock species. Please take care!



↳ According to the law, motorbikes, quads and 4x4 vehicles are only allowed on roads opened to public traffic.



↳ Please take all your personal waste with you as there are no waste bins on site.

↳ Fires are prohibited. Please extinguish your cigarette butts.

→ Location map



→ Together to protect an exceptional natural heritage



Founded in 2004, the Païolive Association conducts studies on the biodiversity and history of the forest. It also protects the site in collaboration with all the motivated owners and develops initiatives to address proven threats, namely by promoting quality ecotourism. The Association takes part in public debates about the projects that could affect the site's integrity and is actively supporting eco-solutions. It also raise awareness on the need for biodiversity and spirit of place protection by showing their richness through science and art.

Association Païolive

Mas de Montchamp, 07230 Lablachère

Tel. : +33(0)4 75 39 96 79 / +33(0)6 76 22 23 19

païolive@free.fr

<http://associationpaïolive.blogspot.com/>



WWF France has been working for nature protection in continental France and in the French overseas territories for more than 35 years. Forests are one of their top priorities. At the international scale, the WWF have identified 237 ecoregions where biodiversity must be preserved as a priority. Mediterranean forests are among the richest and most endangered regions worldwide. In this context, WWF France's actions in the Bois de Païolive are meant to raise awareness and increase biodiversity protection, in collaboration with all the stakeholders.

WWF-France

> Paris

1 carrefour de Longchamp

75116 Paris

Tel. +33 (0)1 55 25 84 84

> Marseille

6 rue des Fabres

13001 Marseille

Tel. +33 (0)4 96 11 69 45

