



## New plan to save Donana highlight of global wetlands celebration

Spain's Doñana National Park, a historic wetland now dangerously isolated by strawberry farms, is the centrepiece of today's World Wetlands Day celebrations.

World Wetlands Day, held each year on the anniversary of the 1971 signing of the first ever global environmental treaty in the Iranian city of Ramsar, this year has the theme of *Upstream, downstream: Wetlands connect us all*.

A highlight of the day is a scheduled balloon overflight of Donana, highlighting the risks posed to the wetland and its wildlife by encroaching mainly groundwater-fed agriculture – as well as the innovative steps that WWF-Spain and partner organizations are undertaking to keep the wetland connected with surrounding areas.

Doñana has a special place in the history of environment activism, with WWF owing its origins to a fund set up to save the wetland vital to millions of migrating birds from 1950s proposals for extensive eucalypt plantations. Scientists and philanthropists prominent in saving Donana then went on to lobby governments for a framework to protect wetlands of international significance and the international Convention on Wetlands (the Ramsar Convention) was the result.

Guest of honor on the overflight will be Dr Luc Hoffmann, a key figure in the original fight to save Doñana, a founder member of WWF and key lobbyist for the Ramsar Convention.

“The most important impact of the wetlands convention is that wetlands today are no longer considered as wastelands,” Dr Hoffmann said.

While Doñana was pivotal to this change of perceptions, it is now under threat from developments crowding up to the National Park's boundaries. Legal and illegal water extraction for intensive agriculture is threatening surface and groundwater flows through the wetlands and the farms are forming a barrier to the passage of wildlife including the last populations of Iberian Lynx and Spanish Imperial Eagles.

“Doñana is a world-wide conservation icon and a natural area that WWF helped to establish as a protected area,” said James Leape, Director General of WWF International. “In the years since, Doñana has been a much greater benefit to the community, to Spain and to Europe preserved than it would have been developed.

“We are currently working to maintain that benefit and to ensure that it is not lost through Doñana becoming isolated by development.”

WWF Spain – celebrating 40 years of association with Doñana – has had to contend with a devastating mining spill, and proposals for roads, pipelines and increased shipping off the coast in what it describes as “Spain's last wild coastal areas and one of the most important European bird sanctuaries”.



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In a pilot project for the WWF One Europe More Nature programme, WWF is working with farmers, the tourism industry and government authorities develop nature corridors through the farms to Donana, to reduce water and chemical use on the farms and to restore degraded areas.

Ramsar Convention Secretary General Anada Tiega, also participating in the Doñana flyover, said: “This year’s World Wetlands Day emphasis on wetlands connecting us all captures very well the experiences in Doñana: that our local wetlands depend upon, and are influenced by, the actions of others within the river basin.”

“Maintaining the health of the rivers, lakes and marshes that provide connections through basins requires: finding common ground between the water sector, the wetland sector, farmers, industrialists and the many other users of water and wetlands. This is the challenge facing Doñana and many other wetlands.”

**For further information:**

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**About WWF**

WWF is one of the world’s largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with almost 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF’s mission is to stop the degradation of the earth’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world’s biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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