

**Conservation of spring ecosystems in the Mediterranean region**

CONSIDERING that springs are in themselves, and due to the hydrogeological processes that they generate, of great geological interest and can be located in areas with a rich geological heritage;

CONSIDERING that recent research has revealed that natural springs are the biotopes with the richest biodiversity in Mediterranean terrestrial ecosystems, each of them being home to several hundred species in a surface area of only a few square metres, and are therefore particularly critical points or ‘super hotspots’;

CONSIDERING that they play an essential ecological role (‘keystone ecosystems’), containing the greatest concentration of biological wealth in arid or semiarid countries, and constitute a diffuse ecosystem that indirectly sustains all the aquatic and terrestrial communities in these areas where the water network is seasonal, and are thus essential for the maintenance of the European, North African and Middle Eastern biological heritage at a regional level;

HIGHLIGHTING the fact that they are rich in exclusive taxa (crenobionts), and constitute the only refuge for numerous rare and endangered species, and for the most sensitive species, especially in the more developed regions of the planet;

MINDFUL of the fact that research carried out in different parts of the world has revealed that each small-spring stronghold is the result of a long evolution in isolated conditions and, because of this, constitutes a unique biological cosmos, which is unique and different from any others;

AWARE that they probably constitute one of the rarest, most fragile habitats, threatened by the effects of climate change and the overexploitation of water resources;

WARNING that there are reports of the accelerated loss of springs, and even the disappearance of entire spring systems on a territorial level;

FURTHER WARNING that this scenario may be hiding a silent but massive biological extinction in the whole Mediterranean biogeographic region; and

HIGHLIGHTING the fact that, in the case of the Mediterranean region, springs are one of the least explored and most neglected habitats, and that *de facto* – or reasons of scale – they were not protected throughout the region by the European Union's Habitats Directive or Water Framework Directive;

**The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020, at its session in Marseille, France:**

1. URGES the Commissions to raise greater awareness regarding the importance of conserving spring ecosystems, promoting projects that allow for progress to be made in their conservation;
2. ENCOURAGES State Members in the Mediterranean region, from within the IUCN Statutory Regions of West Europe, West Asia and Africa, as well as their regional governments, to adopt effective conservation measures for spring biodiversity, its geodiversity and geological heritage;
3. URGES State Members in the Mediterranean region to include habitat conservation as a priority in the Union's policies and strategies that focus on the conservation of biological and geological diversity, and to recognise:
  - a. spring habitats as a key biotope for preserving European aquatic biodiversity, including them as priority habitats of community interest in the Mediterranean region; and
  - b. natural springs as an “ecosystem dependent” on groundwater bodies, and encourage their monitoring and management; and
4. CALLS ON all State Members to:
  - a. adopt, in their areas of competence, urgent legal measures that protect habitats and ban their direct destruction or overexploitation; and
  - b. include the conservation of spring ecosystems as a priority objective in their national strategies and plans regarding biodiversity and adaptation to climate change.