

LIFE SCRUBSNET



SCRUB: AN ELEMENT TO BE ASSESSED FOR THE REGENERATION OF DEHESAS

PROJECT CODE: LIFE20 NAT-ES-000978

CALL: LIFE 2020

PERIOD: 56 MONTHS

BUDGET: 2.329.866 €

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: VICENTE RODRÍGUEZ ESTÉVEZ



It is estimated that 70% of dehesas (wooded pasturelands) have natural regeneration problems. This means that their future is threatened, both by the progressive death of their longest-living trees, and by serious problems affecting them, such as root rot and climate change.

The European LIFE ScrubsNet project, in which the UCO is participating, is working on the conservation of vegetation and the mitigation of climate change

According to experts, scrub (brush) is an element warranting study as an element capable of bringing balance to the dehesa, since its disappearance hinders the regeneration of groves and reduces the variability of browsing by livestock, which turns to feeding on seedlings.

In this context, the LIFE ScrubsNet project came about to work together on the regeneration and improvement of the dehesa and its biodiversity. Eleven European partners from universities and research centers in Italy, Portugal and Spain, coordinated by the Extremadura-based entity Innogestiona Ambiental, have come together to study how to best manage the presence of brush in dehesas, as it is an essential element for the conservation and balance of the agroecosystem.

On this project the University of Córdoba is responsible for evaluating the use of grazing in the management of scrub, when it should be allowed, and what benefits it can offer in terms of livestock's diet and health. In addition, the Córdoba group composed of researchers Nieves Núñez and Cristina Arce, and researchers Manuel Sánchez, Cipriano Díaz, Pablo

Rodríguez and Vicente Rodríguez-Estévez, is studying the possibility of promoting points or islands of scrub in degraded areas, or those with poor soils, seeking for it to bolster the balance between livestock and the agroecosystem. The coordinator of the project at the UCO, Vicente Rodríguez, explained that the benefits of scrub include: "its antiparasitic active ingredients, its forage value, and its production of forest fruits, fed on by insectivorous birds in winter, which helps to control pests in the groves the rest of the year."

This research group, which belongs to the Ecovalia-Clemente Mata Organic Production Chair, continues with a line of work of the Department of Animal Production at the UCO, which has been demonstrating "the role of livestock and its management in the balance of the dehesa." According to Rodríguez, "without livestock there is no dehesa," so livestock "must be managed according to sustainability criteria, seeking a system with a negative carbon balance, and with carbon sequestration prevailing over emissions, something that we have already seen in other projects." In this regard, "we must elevate extensive ranching to another dimension beyond the production side, and give it the prominence it deserves in the conservation of the dehesa and the

environment," the project coordinator said.

The team at the University of Córdoba, which belongs to the Ecovalia-Clemente Mata Organic Production Chair, is working to demonstrate the role of livestock and livestock management in balancing dehesas

LIFE ScrubsNet, which began in December 2021 and is slated to last five years, will include evaluations of livestock management, studies of shrub species, and proposals for agricultural policies, such as the misguided Spanish application of the Pastureland Admissibility Coefficient, which penalizes the presence of trees and regenerative scrub in Community Agricultural Policy with reference to the disbursement of aid. Being part of this project for the Córdoba team means advancing in the study of the dehesa, on which other groups at the UCO are also working.

The "LIFE ScrubsNet - Revitalizing semi-arid extensive farming habitats through the sustainable management of their associated scrubs areas" (Ref. LIFE20 NAT/ES/000978) project is financed by the European Union through the LIFE Programme.

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