



The Wetlands

The wetlands are flat areas which retain water. They can be found inland, (lakes, swamps, peat bogs, etc.) or on the coast (marshes, river mouths, etc.) Until recently, wetlands were considered to be areas of dirty water, full of insects which transmit diseases. Because of this, many wetlands were dried out and sometimes built upon or turned into agricultural areas.



Photograph: Urdaibai wetland
www9.euskadi.net/euskadi_virtual/urdaibai2_i.htm

In the 1960's the ornithological value began to be understood. Little by little the idea to defend these areas spread as they became valued for their multiple functions. In many cases they are ecosystems which make natural borders between terrestrial areas and maritime areas. Wetlands are necessary to maintain the biodiversity as they guard the majority of species in danger of extinction in the world.

Nowadays, the international community agrees that wetlands are one of the richest ecosystems of the biosphere but also one of the most fragile. This is why there is now a claim to protect and care for these landscapes.

At this time, the major threat is climate change which interferes with water circulation and could end some of the most emblematic wetlands.

On the Basque coast, the most important marsh areas are Urdaibai (certified by Unesco as a Biosphere Reserve in 1984) and Txingudi, due to its rich ornithological component. Both on the coast and inland, diverse areas of great hydrological, ecological, and biological importance exist because of their uniqueness.

Our aim is to conserve and restore these ecosystems, creating a real green infrastructure, to stop the deterioration of the planet and improve our quality of life. The wetland ecosystems provide transcendental services for the quality of life for all citizens, from the quality of the waters to the conservation of many species.





Well conserved, wetlands are full of life. Now we understand that they are areas to conserve and enjoy. They are attractive areas to enjoy free time outdoors and hold a great environmental, cultural, pedagogical and scientific interest.

Instructions

Read the text carefully and write schematic notes about the effect of human intervention on wetlands.

Think about... where humans interfered, modified or what other biotic and abiotic components were altered by their actions.

These sentences will help you.

For many years people did not know how important it was to conserve and protect wetlands. Wetlands form part of the water cycle and are home for many animals and birds. They also have a great variety of plants.

- How do you think unlimited industrial and urban waste affect wetlands?
- What would happen if all the wetlands were converted into agricultural areas?
- What would happen if we didn't understand the necessity to conserve and protect wetlands?

