



Giving nature a hand

Engaging the community in the management of natural values in private land



Framework

The rural abandonment that has been occurring in Portugal since the mid-50s of the 20th century results into a landscape change with positive effects - the progressive recovery of many natural systems - but also with relevant negative effects. The current fire pattern is one of the most relevant negative consequences of these social and economic changes. The profound economic and social changes that are associated with this abandonment process result in a progressive distance between society and natural values, the conservation of nature and its importance.

A society disconnected from natural values leads to a decline in its valuation and serious problems in the development of efforts to put biodiversity conservation measures into practice. It also leads to the abandonment of the territory, one of the most relevant problems for the conservation of nature in Portugal, since it is the main reason for the great forest fires, which for being of great intensity have negative effects on biodiversity and natural capital.

In this context, two central questions arise: are the awareness and dissemination methodologies used to date to increase community awareness of the need to manage natural values effective? Do these methodologies have the capacity to motivate new initiatives that take management to a landscape that is abandoned and exposed to a regime of fire with destructive patterns?

Traditional awareness-raising tools are based on a descriptive approach that creates a distance between citizens and the territory (natural values are accessed and experienced through reading brochures, viewing videos or discussing problems in the theoretical sphere). This leads to a process of abstraction of the territory, as well as its values and problems, leaving aside the process based on experience. The experience-based process has a stronger long-term effect on citizen engagement: processes of internalization and the development of personal connections with the territory, based on direct physical experience.

Considering the amount of private land in Portugal, including inside Natura 2000 sites, private land conservation plays a major role in the management of biodiversity.

MONTIS seeks to contribute to the management of this problem, addressing private land conservation with a volunteering program: Giving nature a hand.

Goals

With the program "Giving nature a hand", MONTIS seeks to involve the community in the management of biodiversity with practical actions, in private land, enhancing the internalization of natural values and the development of personal connections between people and those values.

In addition, it is expected to obtain practical results for the valorization of natural capital resulting from the implementation of the program.

As secondary objectives, MONTIS seeks with this program:

- Obtain concrete conservation results in the areas that MONTIS manages.
- Collect, with volunteers, information on the biodiversity of the areas that MONTIS manages.
- Contribute to the valorization of volunteers, training and increasing their knowledge about natural values and their management, as well as the creation of "soft skills".
- Stimulate critical thinking about biodiversity management based on facts and practical experience.



How does it work?

The program provides for volunteers to support various land management tasks and participate in training sessions, workshops and other initiatives. The volunteering actions are of a diversified scope, and aim to cover a very wide target audience:

- Long-term volunteers - volunteers who are linked to MONTIS for periods of 2 to 12 months, contributing daily, on a voluntary basis, to the association's activity. The main tasks to be carried out by the volunteers concern the properties that MONTIS manages, with direct effects on biodiversity. In addition, the volunteers help with communication tasks, biodiversity registration, information organization and logistical support to the association's activities.
- Short-term initiatives:
 - With schools - although MONTIS does not have a classic environmental education program, the association works with school audiences to bring them to the land for practical conservation work, promoting the experiencing of biodiversity management.
 - With universities - MONTIS carried out an academic volunteering program, usually based on weekend modules, that brings university student to the proprieties for field work on biodiversity and habitat management.
 - With MONTIS members - every month the association organizes a voluntary action designed for members (although it is open to the general public).
 - Open initiatives - in addition to the volunteering programs described, MONTIS organizes volunteering weekends and actions open to the general public.



What will the volunteers do?

Management actions on the field

MONTIS programs and annually reviews the management actions to be put into practice in the different managed areas. The result is put into annual Management Plans that can be viewed at the association's website (<https://montisacn.com/areas-geridas/>). There is, however, a set of background actions that are more or less transversal to all properties, and which are listed below:

- Direct sowing - direct seeding of native vegetation in the soil, accelerating the installation of native forests.
- Pruning and guidance of oaks (*Quercus sp.*) - pruning trees, mainly oaks, in order to accelerate the creation of native forests, providing shadow faster and increase habitat resilience to wildfire.
- Natural engineering - creation of barriers to runoff, made of wood, branches and stones collected at the site, which induce the deposition of sediments and the improvement of soil quality in the medium / long term.
- Restoration of riparian ecosystems - by placing willow cuttings directly on the ground (a technique that consists of cutting part of the plant and placing it on the ground, so that it can gain roots and originate a new tree), MONTIS restores the willow areas along the streams, with a low resource consumption. This action can be complemented with the planting of other riparian species.
- Control of invasive alien species - actions to control invasive species in indigenous habitats, aiming to reduce their occupation. MONTIS manages species such as the silver wattle (*Acacia dealbata*), australian blackwood (*Acacia melanoxylon*) and Hakea (*Hakea sericeae*);
- Jay trays - this action consists of providing acorns of oak (*Quercus sp.*) And cork oak (*Quercus suber*) in raised trays, placed on the ground, stimulating the natural behavior of the jays, which collect the acorns and bury them in the soil, sowing forests.
- Access management - actions that allow opening and maintaining access to the interior of the managed areas, guaranteeing both public use and access to carry out the remaining management actions.

- Plantations - although it is not a central action of MONTIS, the association plants trees in some of the areas it manages, as a complement to the rest of the management.
- Collection and recording of biodiversity data - MONTIS volunteers participate in actions of observation, identification and recording of biodiversity, fauna and flora data. These actions can be organized in BioBlitz actions, guided by specialized technicians, or developed by the volunteers themselves, with the support of the iNaturalist mobile application, which validates the observations. All data are recorded in the MONTIS account at <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/montis>, and are publicly available.



Workshops

In addition to biodiversity management tasks on the ground, volunteers participate and support the logistical organization of several workshops that MONTIS organizes annually. These workshops are excellent moments for learning, exchanging knowledge and training. Annually MONTIS organizes workshops for identification, inventory and observation of bats and birds, as well as natural engineering workshops, all with theoretical and practical part in the areas managed by MONTIS.

International work camps

This program includes at least a one week long international work camp with volunteers. The international work field is essentially focused on management actions, with the goal of putting people from different nationalities and with different experiences, knowledge and backgrounds in contact at MONTIS properties, while managing natural values. In addition to field work, the workcamp includes workshops, leisure activities, and activities dedicated to learning about the local fauna and flora.



Community awareness raising

Additionally, volunteers participate in activities with local communities, aimed at promoting interaction, knowledge and experience sharing.

Where do the activities take place?

Volunteering activities are carried out in the areas that MONTIS manages in Portugal. Currently these areas are distributed over four counties in the center of the country: Vouzela, São Pedro do Sul, Arouca and Pampilhosa da Serra. The managed areas are systematized in the table below.

Additionally MONTIS has been receiving requests to support property management from the north to the south of the country, which it has not yet had the capacity to respond to. This lack is mostly due to lack of financing, human resources, and

logistical means, specially in municipalities furthest from the Central Portugal area, amongst which Esposende, Malveira, Aljezur and Monchique stand out.

Property	County	Area (ha)
Vermilhas *	Vouzela	5,5
Baldio de Carvalhais	São Pedro do Sul	100,0
Vieiro	São Pedro do Sul	25,9
Costa Bacelo	Arouca	23,9
Baldio da Granja	São Pedro do Sul	2,6
Cerdeirinha	São Pedro do Sul	3,6
Levides	Vouzela	4,8
Cabril *	Pampilhosa da Serra	5,3
Souto do Brejo *	Pampilhosa da Serra	6,0
Picôto (Levides)	Vouzela	0,8

* areas that belong to MONTIS

Budget and annual plan

To run this program annually a total of almost 45 000,00 € is needed. The following table shows the annual budget for implementing the program. The budget is based, for each activity, on travel costs, insurance for volunteers, food, accommodation and hiring monitors.

Activity	Budget
12 monthly volunteering actions, 1 day each	1 080,00 €
6 actions with schools and local community, 1 day each	540,00 €
10 academic volunteering actions, 2 days each	1 800,00 €
4 volunteering weekends	1440,00 €
1 international work camp	3 600,00 €
6 BioBlitz	770,00 €
2 bat workshops	1 200,00 €
2 bird workshops	1 200,00 €
2 natural engineering workshops	1 600,00 €
2 volunteering semesters with long term volunteers, with 4 volunteers per semester * (includes 12 €/day of pocket money for volunteers)	12 096,00 €
Accommodation for long term volunteers	6 000,00 €
Staff costs for supporting volunteers on the field, organization of work and general administration	13 200,00 €
Total	44 562,00 €

How can I support this program?

Financial support to the annual program

The program is budgeted annually, being possible to finance one, two or several years of the program, as intended by the financier.

Partial financial support

If you intend to support specific activities of the program, or if you are simply willing to support with a budget lower than the annual value of the program, contact us stating the question. The versatile organization of the program makes it possible to tailor the desired funding to parts of the volunteering program.

Participate

Excluding financial support, one way to support the program is to participate in our activities. In addition to the program described MONTIS organizes activities designed for companies, which may include volunteering, fauna and flora observation actions, workshops and teambuilding. If you have any volunteering initiative that you would like to develop with us, contact us by email at montisacn@gmail.com.



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