

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND INFORMATION IN THE PROTECTED AREA OF MOUNT PARNON AND MOUSTOS WETLAND

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Abstract

All actions taking place over the past years in the protected area of Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland to inform, educate and create an environmental conscious, are in accordance to the general effort the Management body of Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland is implementing in order to familiarize the inhabitants and visitors with the:

1. General framework of the protected area of Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland
2. Regulatory structure required in this area
3. Targets that are made in order to: a) protect and maintain the natural environment and cultural heritage, b) achieve a social and economic growth of the area, c) inform and educate the inhabitants and visitors of the importance to protect the area

These are the main reasons why the Department of Information, Education and Publicity are:

1. undertaking these courses and actions in order to promote and project why it is essential to manage and protect the area
2. informing the inhabitants and visitors of actions taken with regards to their duties and targets
3. promoting and supporting the current eco-touristic infrastructure

In order to achieve all these, the Management body of Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland is running 3 information Centers (in Agios Petros, Kastanitsa and Astros) that organize:

- Education programs with the cooperation of other public and state Bodies
- Conferences and workshops
- Seminars and other educational events that project the targets and achievements from managing this area
- Publish electronically or in a printed form anything related to the protected area of Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland

Apart than the tour guides, the staff of the Management Body of Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland are involved in various environmental activities mainly in the areas Arcadia and Lakonia, such as:

- Voluntary cleaning of beaches, wetlands, underwater areas and natural areas
- Events on Global Environmental Awareness Days
- Environmental seminars and workshops at schools and universities
- Special environmental programs for the areas in or in close vicinity to the protected area of Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland that were affected by forest fires
- On going training and educating of our staff

- Participating in local festivals, like the Festival of the Chestnut in Kastanitsa, the festival of the Cherry in Kerasitsa
- Participating in cycling events – tours
- Organizing wild bird watching events

Being fully aware of the responsibility towards society and the next generations, the Management Body of Mount Parnon and Moustos Wetland aims to continue trying to support this hard task of sustaining a healthy and long relationship between the environment and human wellbeing.

Keywords: environmental awareness, Mount Parnon, Moustos Wetland.

1. Introduction

The Protected Area of Mount Parnonas and Wetland Moustos extends along the southeastern Peloponnese, occupying an area of a little more than 1,1 million acres. Four out of its five areas are not only included in the Scientific Catalog, but also members in the European Ecological Network "NATURA 2000". Areas included in "NATURA 2000" within the limits of the Management Area occupy a little less than 600 thousand acres.

In the region of mount Parnonas and Wetland Moustos there are more than **15 types of habitat**. Some of them are unique or particularly noteworthy for the Hellenic and the European region, such as the **extensive woodlands of *Pinus nigra*, the forests with *Juniperous drupaceae* in the Malevi monastery region, the chestnut trees in Kastanitsa, the coastal wetland of Moustos south of Astros, the ravine of Dafnonas** etc.

The most important areas of Mount Parnonas and Wetland Moustos include:

- A) wetland areas with high biodiversity
- B) areas with one of the most valuable forests of *Juniperus drupaceae* in the European region, or other valuable forest species
- C) bush areas with great importance for the flora and
- D) *grassland plateaus* on the peaks of Mount Parnonas which are also essential for the flora.

The most important element of the protected area is the rare endemic flora, which must be preserved and protected.

The Management Body of Mount Parnonas and Wetland Moustos was founded in 2002 and was established in 2003 in order to:

- Protect, Maintain, and Manage the area of Mount Parnonas & Wetland Moustos
- Improve the image of this natural landscape as a natural heritage and a valuable natural resource

Clearly, scientific knowledge alone is not enough to protect and manage a sensitive area. This is why the management body of Mount Parnon & Wetland Moustos emphasizes that the

effective protection of the area is only achieved by the harmonious coexistence of environmental and human activities and therefore aims at the strengthening of environmental awareness of residents and visitors of the area through various events and activities.

For this purpose, the Department of Information, Education and Publicity of the Management Body:

- A) Undertakes programs and activities that highlight and promote the purposes of managing the protected area
- B) Informs, educates and trains the general public on matters relating to the functions and purposes of the management body and of methods to protect the area of responsibility
- C) Keep up and support the existing eco touristic infrastructure and provide assistance in the creation of new ones.

2. Regional Setting

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3. Materials and Methods

The three existing visitor centers of the Management Body focus primarily at non-specialist audience and visitors of all ages, and aim to become hubs to inform, educate and awake the visitors on issues of the protected area of Mount Parnonas and Wetland Moustos.

The main objective deriving from the operation of these centers is to inform visitors about the importance biodiversity of the protected area, its cultural elements and values as well as the ancient and uninterrupted human presence in these areas.

The aim is that visitors can experience the protected area without harming the delicate natural ecosystems, and understand that nature is a part of life and therefore should be preserved for future generations.

There are Environmental Exhibition Halls which operate within the premises of these three Environmental Information Centers. These Halls use a combination of modern technology with classic media presentation, in order to show what is most remarkable in the region and to pass on the message of how essential it is to maintain the natural habitats of the endemic, endangered, rare and protected species of fauna and flora. The Hall rooms include presentations, which are configured in a unique style and combine short texts with various images.

The three information centers are designed to attract visitors in the mount Parnonas and Wetland Moustos, to inform them about the values and natural functions of the region and to give them information for sightseeing tours.

In these Information Centers visitors can:

- Experience the remarkable ecological and cultural features of the region
- Learn about the role of the Management Body in the protected area and wetland moustos

- Become aware of the rare beauty of Mount Parnonas and Wetland Moustos, that is, the rare and endemic plants and endangered species of fauna
- Find sites with historical, religious and archaeological interest
- Find out more about protected areas that were degraded, due to huge forest fires

Through these Environmental Information Centers of the Management Body visitors can arrange organized tours (simple visits or school visits) for sightseeing, with a simple telephone appointment, all year round. These tours take place at no cost and are formed according to the ages and interests of the group.

4. Results

The Management Body:

- Operates three Environmental Information Centers (in Kastanitsa, Agios Petros, and Astros)
- Organizes training and educational programs in cooperation with other appropriate public or private bodies
- Organizes conferences, workshops, seminars and other informative events to project:
 - the purpose of management of the protected area
 - the objectives and achievements of the management body
- Publishes relevant information in a printed or electronic form.

There are three types of tours:

- A. Tour of the Information Centers**, for an overall presentation of the protected area, which is concluded by distributing brochures and maps.
- B. Tour of the protected area**, includes specially selected routes in order to become familiar with more than the 15 types of habitats, some of which are unique or particularly noteworthy for the Hellenic and the European Region. The Management Body regularly organizes hiking trips in the protected area for the observation of *Juniperus drupaceae*, *pinus nigra*, as well as visits to the wetland Moustos for observation of many rare, endangered and protected species of birds and aquatic birds
- C. Environmental Education Presentations** designed to familiarize the public with the fauna, flora and natural habitats of the region.

The staff of the Department of Information, Education and Publicity, in addition to tours, organizes and participates in a variety of environmental activities, such as:

- Volunteer cleanups of beaches, wetlands, natural areas *and seabeds*
- Festivals on the Global Environmental Awareness Days
- Environmental awareness programs targeting groups like: the local population, cultural associations, climbing clubs, students, etc

- Environmental awareness programs in the schools of the areas that were damaged by the fire in 2007, in order to inform them about the importance of black pine and the devastating damage of fires
- Participation in celebrations of local communities in protected areas, such as the Chestnut Festival in Kastanitsa and the Festival in Sitaina
- Participation in cycling tours and events
- Observation events of **many rare migratory bird species**

The Department of Information of the Management Body, through Media, on a continuous basis tries to create an environmental conscious on the general public by:

1. Sending informative press releases to local and regional media, and
2. Creating and distributing environmental leaflets.

The themes of these press releases and leaflets varies, as for example, they inform the public of various events or activities the Management Body organizes in the centers, visits to schools, etc.

The website of the Management Body, www.fdparnonas.gr, is updated and monitored on a continuous basis, in order those interested can find updated information on all actions.

There is also a website page and group on Facebook, focusing on more younger ages, aiming to create a community that follows all actions of the Management Body, which is also updated and enriched continuously.

Finally, there is a channel on YouTube where you can find the actions of the Management on video.

5. Discussion

All kinds of tours of the Management Body have been increasing dramatically every year. On an annual basis there are more and more people visiting the area from all over Greece and abroad.

From the beginning of 2011 until today, the tours at our Centers had 4,150 guests while tours in the protected area had 1,400 guests. During the same period, our tour guides visited 17 schools in and around the protected areas giving presentations to over 1100 students.

People who participating at all these tours and events (for example: volunteer cleanups, cycling tours), varying at age, sex and occupation.

We are very happy because we think we have contributed decisively to the following in light of the Protected Area

- **Awareness:** to help people to realize the environment and its related problems and to raise awareness on these issues overall.

- **Knowledge:** to help people to acquire a variety of experiences and basic knowledge on the environment and environmental problems.
- **Attitudes:** to help people to shape values and to develop interest in the environment and have active participation in improving and protecting the environment.
- **Capacities:** to help people to acquire the necessary skills to identify and resolve environmental problems.
- **Participation:** to provide people the opportunity to take action and active participation at all levels to prevent environmental problems.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, all actions and measures taken over the past years to inform and create awareness are in accordance to the broader effort the Management Body is implementing in order to familiarise residents and visitors of Mount Parnonas and Wetland Moustos with the:

1. General idea of The Protected area of Mount Parnonas and Wetland Moustos
2. Regulatory structure required in this area
3. Targets that are made in order to:
 - protect and prevail the natural environment and cultural heritage
 - achieve sustainable social and economic development of the area
 - inform and educate the inhabitants and visitors of the importance to protect the area

Being fully aware of the responsibility towards society and the next generations, the Management body of Mount Parnonas and Wetland Moustos aims to continue trying to support this hard task of sustaining a healthy and long relationship between the environment and human wellbeing.

Acknowledgments

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References

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