



# FAIA BRAVA

Creating spaces for Nature

# 25 YEARS



**HANS LUKAS "LUC" HOFFMANN**  
(23/01/1923 – 21/07/2016)

Luc Hoffman was undoubtedly one of the most influential driving forces of international nature conservation policies of the 20th century. A Swiss ornithologist, conservationist, and philanthropist, he co-founded the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), promoted the establishment of the Ramsar Convention for the protection of wetlands, and created the Tour du Valat research centre in the Camargue, France. Through the FIBA and MAVA Foundations, he supported the emergence of a civil society that was conscious and committed to environmental protection and sustainable development, especially in the Mediterranean and West Africa.

Luc Hoffman's support for Faia Brava was vital for the purchase of many of the properties that today constitute the heritage of our association 2. Without the support of the MAVA Foundation, Faia Brava would not be a reference point, and the Côa Valley would be poorer. Thank you very much, Luc.





# **FAIA BRAVA**

Creating spaces for Nature

# **25 YEARS**

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Without the support of Fundação Belmiro Azevedo, Paulo Azevedo and Natura Ibérica, it would not have been possible to offer you this adventurous and groundbreaking story.



Faia Brava team monitoring.

PHOTO: FAIA BRAVA

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Traditional Pigeonhouse. - PHOTO: HENK SMIT



## 01 Forword and introduction

# FAIA BRAVA OR THE STORY OF A HUNDRED HEROES



**HENK SMIT**  
President of the Board of Directors  
of Faia Brava

In the summer of 2005, during a Spanish course in Salamanca, I met Ana Berliner, António Monteiro, and their Riba Côa project. It was the starting point for twenty years of friendship and close collaboration, during which we built Faia Brava, together with many, many others who also left their hearts here.

This book was originally produced in Portuguese at the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Faia Brava. We are happy to present you the English version. We adapted the introduction and added the testimonial of two landowners, neighbours of Faia Brava who help extend the nature around the park. Marion van der Bliet translated the book. She got to know Faia

Brava in 2018 with her partner Kas Burger, which was the beginning of their start as nature-based landowners near Faia Brava and their involvement in the association.

The book provides us a deeper insight into the development of nature conservation in Portugal, the history of Faia Brava itself and the development of private protected areas as a category of nature reserves in Portugal.

Faia Brava has been a pioneer in nature conservation in many aspects. One of these is the creation of a new category of nature areas by the Portuguese government in 2010: the private protected areas (APP). Today, there are four of these areas, and Faia Brava actively promotes further growth. Since it is vital for the protection of nature that more private land is protected, the book pays special attention to this theme.

The story of Faia Brava shows that together we can always make a difference and that our contribution is essential to restoring nature, regardless of the role we play. Faia Brava is the result of a joint effort, and

that is why this story fills us with pride. In this book, we look to the future with hope, and with the certainty that privately managed natural areas will assume a fundamental role in Portugal and beyond its borders.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the growth of Faia Brava over the past 25 years: the founders, the members, numerous employees, sponsors, financial and cooperation partners, national and local administration.

Wishing you much inspiration as you read this book, I hope it motivates you to continue creating more Spaces for Nature.

## A roadmap for this book

This English version is to share with all our (future) friends to get to know more of Faia Brava, including its history and context. Therefore we start with a road map for the maximum benefit of reading the book.

Throughout the book you will find testimonials from our partners and colleagues.

Two articles focus mainly on the organisation and juridical aspects of private owned nature parks in Portugal.

To start with in **02 Adolfo Morais de Macedo** gives a comprehensive introduction through a legal framework, which supports the creation process of APP (Private Protected Areas). Step by step he leads

us through the process, starting with the Basic Law of Nature (1970) and including the procedural role of the INCF in this process.

At the end, in **07 João Alves** describes the protected areas under legal regime starting in 1957. In his historical overview we see Faia Brava as the first Private Protected Area in Portugal, developing like others during different types of councils, changing roles of directors and mayors of the towns around the parks.

These two articles together will help you enter the world of the APPs in Portugal, while in **03 Fernando Santos Pessoa** gives a more critical overview of the history of protected areas in Portugal, focusing on what could or should be done at national level.

**05 Nuno Lecoq** zooms out starting 18 billion years ago, showing how mankind made use of nature in different ways. Fast forward we see an overview of the past 50 years as he concludes the role of civil society in nature conservation and in the management of the land as a growing item on the agenda.

Now for a closer look at Faia Brava. In **04 Ana Berliner and António Monteiro**, the founders of the reserve, tell it's story. In a personal style, as an important part of their life: started with protecting cliff-nesting birds, going through periods of pioneering and finding partners, in and out of Portugal. Becoming 'rewilding' partners over the borders and looking for ecological restoration of the land.



In **08 Antonio Araújo and Nuno de Santos Loureiro** draw attention to the actual approach of the organisation, the creation of a national network of APPs in Portugal and the urgency to be part of it.

Together these two articles give an excellent view on past, present and future challenges of Faia Brava.

In addition to the founder's story in **04 Alcino Oliveira** illustrates with the story of Fraga Viva how an old windmill of unusual architecture on a small property can have an ecological impact when it is rightly preserved. Another APP is in focus in **04 by Alfredo Sendim** as he describes different facets of the Montado do Freixo do Meio. He notes celebrating 25 years Faia Brava is

celebrating a turning point for nature conservation policies, mostly private.









The last APP in the row: **(04) Ana Carla Cabrita and Nuno Carvalho** tell us about the Vale das Amoreiras. Bought by a German couple, this land was hit by a huge fire in 1997. After many years of conservation with great care, it is a successful example of rewilding and the capacity of regeneration after fire.

These '04' articles give a closer view of the challenges, opportunities and needs of private nature parks. Preventing wildfires, taking care of young trees, animals (wild and a bit wild), maintaining continuity in the organization and more in general: dealing with rural depletion with all it's effects on the landscape.



# Reserve of Faia Brava

## LEGEND

-  Belvedere
-  Cascade
-  Private Protected Area Faia Brava
-  Management area of the Association Transhumance and Nature
-  Great Route of the Côa Valley
-  Track of the Biologists
-  Trail of Algodres
-  Trail of Cidadelhe

0 1 km



White-throated Dipper, *Cinclus cinclus*.

PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME

# Timeline HISTORY OF ATN AND FAIA BRAVA



Initial idea to create a conservation project for Côa, Águeda, and Douro rivers.

“Cliff Breeders” Project - Beginning of support from the MAVA Foundation.



Creation of the **Transhumance and Nature Association (ATN)**, in June 2000.



Large fire and change of strategy (beginning of land purchase for conservation – private reserve model).



Purchase of Quinta do Ervedeiro in Cidadelhe (200 hectares on the left bank of the Côa).



Launch of the “Azeite Faia Brava” (Faia Brava Olive Oil) brand.



Institutional strengthening of “Faias do Côa” (300 ha property).



1999

2000

2003

2005

2007

2008

2009

2010

2011

Acquisition of the first properties (28 hectares) – Pombal do Coto.



Introduction of Garrano horses and launch of the “Rewilding concept” in Portugal.



Creation of the ZIF Vale do Côa (Forest Intervention Zone).



**Creation of the Faia Brava Private Protected Area (APP).**

Modernization and professionalization phase of the association.

Creation of the Grande Rota do Vale do Côa (Vale do Côa Grand Route) (visitation and ecotourism itinerary).





Acquisition of new land with the support of the Fundación Natura Ibérica. We reached approximately 1000 ha of properties dedicated to Nature conservation.



Elaboration of the Strategic Conservation Plan.



ATN General Assembly approves new statutes, new identity, and image.

Start of the Movement for the creation of a national network of APP.

Start of the ( ), Interreg Europe, Soil@INT projects.

Collaboration agreements with the universities of Aveiro and Algarve.

National Meeting of NGOs.  
Inauguration of photography exhibition at the Côa Museum.



**2012**

Integration into the Rewilding Europe network.

Partnership with the Fundación Naturaleza y Hombre (Nature and Man Foundation) (Spain).

**2015**

LIFE Rupis, LIFE Fincas and Wolflux projects.



**2016**

"Filling the Gaps" project. Consolidation of the ecological network and expansion of strategic partnerships.

**2017**

Creation of the Network of Spaces for Nature (EPNs) with 5 main areas:  
 • Faia Brava (APP)  
 • Vale das Loiras and Arribas da Mata  
 • Ribeira do Mosteiro  
 • Middle Côa  
 • Arribas de Fornos.



**2018**

Inauguration of the Biologists' Trail (Short Route).

**2019**

Expansion of the Faia Brava conservation area to the South.

**2020**

Support by the Portuguese Viridia foundation.

**2021**

Cooperation with the Dutch Trees for All foundation Start of VIRIDIA Foundation project.

**2022**

Start of the LIFE Aegyptus and Trees for All projects.

**2023**



**2024**

First meeting of the Community Advisory Council.

02

# LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND PROCESS FOR CREATING PRIVATE PROTECTED AREAS



**ADOLFO MORAIS DE MACEDO**  
Jurist, Institute for Nature  
Conservation and Forests, IP

The concept of a protected area for nature conservation reasons was introduced in the order national legal system by the Basic Law on Nature Conservation (Law No. 9/70, of June 19), which provided for the creation of National Parks and Botanical, Zoological, and Geological Reserves as demarcated areas with the objectives of protecting nature and its resources, namely the landscape, flora, fauna, and geological formations. However, it was only with the first Basic Law on the Environment (Law No. 11/87, of April 7) that a reference, albeit a very generic one, to private protected areas emerged, establishing,

in paragraph 3 of its article 29, dedicated precisely to protected areas, that the initiative for classifying and conserving protected areas could also be taken by private individuals. This generic reference allowed Decree-Law No. 19/93, of January 23, which created the National Network of Protected Areas (RNAP), consecrate the possibility of creating protected areas with private status, then designated “sites of biological interest,” with the objective of, at the request of interested owners, protecting species of wild fauna and flora and their respective natural habitats of ecological or scientific interest.

Currently, the Legal Regime for the Conservation of Nature and Biodiversity, established by Decree-Law No. 142/2008, of July 24 (amended by Decree-Law No. 242/2015, of October 15, by Decree-Law No. 42-A/2016, of August 12, and by Decree-Law No. 11/2023, of February 10), describes in paragraph 6 of its article 11, alongside protected areas of

national scope, such as national parks, natural parks, natural reserves, protected landscapes, and natural monuments, and protected areas of regional or local scope, the possibility of classifying protected areas with private status, designated “private protected areas.”

The classification of a protected area, as results from article 12 of the Legal Regime for the Conservation of Nature and Biodiversity, aims to attribute a legal status of protection adequate to the maintenance of biodiversity, ecosystem services, or geological heritage, or to the enhancement of the landscape. To pursue one or more of these objectives, the designation “private protected area” can then be attributed to private lands not included in protected areas of national, regional, or local scope, as referred to in paragraph 1 of its article 21. This designation assumes that there is a request in this sense by the owner of the land or lands where the private protected area is intended to be accomplished.

Ordinance No. 1181/2009, of October 7, establishes the procedures that this expression of will by the landowner must follow, clarifying from the outset that the request for the designation of a private protected area can be made not only by one owner but by several owners, if any, of the land to be covered by the protected area, and also by the holder or holders of other ‘real rights of enjoyment’ over these same lands, when authorized to do so by the owner or owners, and also by non-governmental environmental organizations or

legal entities under private law with whom the owner or owners have entered into an agreement to that effect.

Article 3 of Ordinance No. 1181/2009 clarifies where and how the application should be submitted and the elements that must be included. Thus, the application for the designation of a private protected area must be made in writing through the electronic form available for this purpose on the website of the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests, I.P. (ICNF) and addressed to the respective Board of Directors.

The application must include the identification of the applicant (and of the holders, directors, or managers, if the applicant is a legal entity), their domicile (or headquarters, in the case of a legal entity), the indication of the name intended for the protected area, and the indication of its managing entity. And it must be accompanied by a document proving ownership (or the real right of enjoyment, if applicable, as well as, in this case, the authorization of the owner or owners for the designation of the protected area), by the agreement established by the owners (in the case of land belonging to two or more owners or an application submitted by a non-governmental environmental organization or by a legal entity under private law), by the delimitation plan of the protected area at a scale of 1:25000 and 1:10000, by extracts from the synthesis and conditioning plans of the territorial management instruments and the graphic parts of the planning, management, and intervention



Bee-eater, *Merops apiaster*.

PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME

plans of forestry scope that apply, by the land use cartography at a scale of 1:10000, by the explanatory note on the reasons and objectives of the designation of the protected area, with an indication of the natural values that occur there and the planned actions for the conservation and promotion of biodiversity, ecosystem services, geological heritage, or landscape enhancement, by the framework and characterization of the area in the geographic, biological, geological, landscape, and socioeconomic domains, by the draft management plan to be concluded with the ICNF, and also by any other elements considered relevant for the assessment of the application.

If there is no reason for summary rejection of the application, due to a lack of necessary documents or because it contradicts legal or regulatory rules in force, the application is analysed and decided by the ICNF within 90 working days, from its receipt or from the receipt of the additional information that may be requested, with the counting of the deadline suspended, up to 20 working days, whenever there is a need to consult local authorities in the area or entities of the central administration, as results from article 4 and paragraph 1 of article 5 of Ordinance No. 1181/2009.

At the end of the deadline, the ICNF decides favourably, as requested, for the designation of

the private protected area, provided that the draft management plan presented provides for active conservation actions and that the need for a legal status of protection is confirmed for the maintenance of biodiversity, ecosystem services, or geological heritage, or the enhancement of the landscape, and the existence of natural occurrences that, due to their rarity, scientific, ecological, or scenic value, are particularly relevant, requiring specific conservation and management measures for their maintenance and enhancement.

This decision to recognize the private protected area is made by order of the President of the Board of Directors of the ICNF, which, as provided for in paragraph 5 of article 21 of the Legal Regime for the Conservation of Nature and Biodiversity and in paragraph 3 of article 5 of Ordinance No. 1181/2009, may prohibit or condition the authorization of the ICNF for the practice of certain acts or activities that may prejudice biodiversity, geological heritage, or other characteristics of the protected area. Upon receipt of the notification of this order, the applicant has two months to conclude a management protocol with the ICNF, under penalty of expiry of the recognition. Then, within 30 working days following the signing of the management protocol, the order recognizing the private protected area is published in the *Diário da República* (Official Gazette), together with the delimitation of its area, the identification of its

managing entity, and the indication of the places where its management plan can be consulted, and the private protected area then becomes part of the RNAP, with this fact being disclosed on the ICNF website.

Continuing to follow the provisions of Ordinance No. 1181/2009, now in its articles 6 and 9, the management of the private protected area is carried out under the terms of the management protocol agreed with the ICNF, which must include the actions to be undertaken for the maintenance of biodiversity, ecosystem services, or geological heritage, or the enhancement of the landscape, as well as all the conditions determined for achieving the objectives of nature conservation and biodiversity fixed. Annually, the managing entity of the private protected area must prepare a report on the execution of the management protocol, to be sent to the ICNF, with the explanation of the actions developed and their results on the objectives of the designation of the protected area and the conclusion as to the contribution of the protection status for the maintenance or enhancement of the natural occurrences existing therein.

Finally, the status of a private protected area may lapse at any time at the request of the owner or owners of the land or the applicant or due to non-compliance with the assumptions or obligations arising from the status of a private protected area, namely those contained in the management protocol.

Faia Brava Reserve.

PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME



Albergaria Forest in autumn  
Peneda-Gerês National Park.

PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME

03

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF PROTECTED AREAS IN PORTUGAL



**FERNANDO SANTOS PESSOA**  
First President  
of the National Service for Parks,  
Reserves and Landscape Heritage

Environmental policy in Portugal only gained expression after the change from the dictatorship to the democratic regime, which happened in 1974. Previously, thanks to the personality of Eng. Correia da Cunha, there was the National Environment Commission, which he chaired, and which was fundamental to starting to talk about environmental issues, especially after the Stockholm Conference of 1972, although the Commission devoted itself mainly to the physical aspects of the environment. Meanwhile, the Peneda-Gerês National Park had been created, which did not follow UNESCO's guidelines regarding the classification of protected areas,

as the characteristics of that region brought it closer to a natural park than a national one. This gave rise, even at the time, to some technical discussion, which I witnessed, notably between some landscape architects (Caldeira Cabral, Ribeiro Telles) and for example some foresters such as Baeta Neves – the title of national was more a matter of giving notoriety to the Peneda-Gerês Park, which is, indeed, a region very rich in natural and cultural values.

The natural park is a European concept and the first to be established was the Lüneburger Heide Park, in 1920, in the Lüneburg region, near Hamburg, which I had the opportunity to visit, and later, in the 1960s, the French regional natural parks were born.

The Environmental Policy initiated with the democratic regime had, among other things, the great importance of drawing on the fundamental pillars of conservation and the adjustment of landscapes in the Portuguese biophysical space: Nature Conservation (CN- Conservação da Natureza) and the Spatial Planning (OT - Ordenamento do Território).

The CN - and not the protection of Nature as was said until then (because to conserve is to manage, to protect is only to keep it in the same state - proposes to manage ecosystems in such a way that their use can serve the interests of human communities without affecting the values and balances of Nature.

CN and OT are thus the two fundamental pillars of a conscious environmental policy that allowed the construction of the legislative framework for environmental intervention: the RAN, the REN, the PDM, the PROT and the Protected Areas. It can never be overstated to insist on these concepts, especially in a time when, strange as it may seem, this evidence has been abandoned in favour of less clear interests of business and disorganization of the territory. Neglecting the authority of the REN and RAN, always for “essential national interest”, seems to have become commonplace.

In the first information leaflet published by the National Service for Parks, Reserves and Landscape Heritage (SNPRPP), then ICN and now ICNF, it was explicitly stated: “A portion of a territory, more or less vast, with its agricultural exploitations, its handicrafts, its dwellings, its herds, its villages, will become a natural park with the participation of its inhabitants.”

When there are mainly valuable natural values at risk, the protected area takes on the character of a Nature Reserve.

These Protected Areas arise as an exaltation of the values of the rural world and nature, seeking

to promote local values, of the landscape, of the communities and of biodiversity.

The Protected Areas (AP) such as natural parks and nature reserves with large territorial dimensions, had an organization that included the Director, responsible for management, and a General Council where the Local Authorities (Municipal Councils and Parish Councils) and representatives of regional technical services most linked to the destinations of each PA were represented. All matters of investments and measures that fell on the PA were discussed and therefore this body had a great didactic role and of environmental education.

All of this gradually disappeared, and some even claimed at one point that the Protected Areas (AP) had too much decision-making power and that decisions had to be centralized in Lisbon. The organizational structure was being changed, and currently, the APs don't even have a Director!

One of the main missions of the APs, as originally conceived, was precisely the involvement of the population, and, while the General Councils lasted, there was always excellent and fruitful participation from the population, whether in Serra da Estrela, Arrábida, or Castro Marim and Ria Formosa. Today, despite co-management, there seems to be a greater detachment from the populations, and the bureaucracy of the system has increased. The work of daily management of the territory and Nature Conservation actions seem to have



been superseded in favour of purely administrative tasks, despite the zeal and competence of so many technicians who remain 'attached' to their APs.

The current situation is not new, as in the past there were two Secretaries of State, one for the Environment and the other for Forests, who wanted to merge the two institutions without the knowledge of the Minister himself, Eng. Amílcar Teias, who publicly denounced this strategy for considering it counterproductive. Unfortunately, the creation of ICNF (Institute for Nature Conservation and

Forests) does not seem to have brought benefits to either the Protected Areas or the Forests.

Portugal has some APs of great international importance, and it is enough to mention Arrábida, Serra da Estrela and Ria Formosa as Natural Parks, and the Tejo and Sado Estuaries as Natural Reserves. Let's hope that one day they will each have a director again, an employee who is recruited for their technical skills in this specific area of sustainable Territory management and Nature Conservation.

# TESTIMONIALS



**JOSÉ PEREIRA**  
President of the Palombar Association

The Transumância e Natureza Association and the Faia Brava Protected Area were instrumental in my professional journey. It was there that I had some of my first real contacts with the nature conservation movement in Portugal. Faia Brava is not just a private reserve; it is a territory where one experiments, learns, and cares for nature with vision and courage. For me, and for many colleagues who trained with me, it represented a true open-air school, where biodiversity, landscape, and people intersect in a project that inspires.

Today, as president of Palombar - Conservation of Nature and Rural Heritage, it is with great satisfaction and a sense of responsibility that we

celebrate, in cooperation, these 25 years of Faia Brava's history. Palombar and Faia Brava share a common genesis, with some founding members in common, and walk side by side in celebrating their anniversaries and the results achieved. It's 25 years of great impact!

Palombar now reinforces its commitment to partnership and cooperation with Faia Brava, for a future with more nature in Portugal. Faia Brava continues to be an example of what is possible to achieve with dedication, persistence, and love for the land.

May the next 25 years be even more ambitious and transformative — because we need territories like this more than ever.



**SANDRA SARMENTO**  
Regional Director of Nature and Forest Conservation for the North and Member of the Board of Directors of the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests, IP

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the classification of Faia Brava as a Private Protected Area is to remember the importance of a collective commitment to the conservation of nature and biodiversity, in a territory that is, par excellence, a meeting point of heritage – the Special Protection Zone of the Côa Valley, an Important Bird Area - IBA Côa Valley, and, of course, the Archaeological Park of the Côa Valley.

Created by Notice No. 26026/2010, of December 14, with an area of 214,65ha, Faia Brava, due to its biophysical characteristics, is a refuge for numerous faunal and floristic species of high conservation value, with emphasis on cliff-dwelling birds, a subgroup that

here brings together the largest number of species with a high threat status and which includes the Egyptian vulture and Bonelli's eagle.

In this context, special reference should also be made to the work developed by the Faia Brava Association (formerly designated Associação Transumância e Natureza - ATN), both in the implementation of its management plan, aimed at increasing biodiversity, namely the breeding stock of various cliff-dwelling species; and in the involvement of communities and in the promotion of partnerships, collaborative networks and volunteer camps, which are crucial for the appreciation and promotion of the natural and cultural heritage of this territory.

Côa Valley. - PHOTO: MISHELL FARINANGO

## 04 Stories to Tell...

# FAIA BRAVA: OUR PERSPECTIVE ON THE FIRST 25 YEARS



**ANA BERLINER  
AND ANTÓNIO MONTEIRO**  
Founding Partners of the  
Transhumance and Nature  
Association

**F**or us, the story of the Faia Brava Reserve is also our own story. Over the course of a quarter of a century, passion for nature, commitment to the territory, personal and family investment, and a profound conviction have intertwined in this unique place: that a citizen can make a difference—whether in a community, a region, or an ecosystem.

This contribution, included in the commemorative book for Faia Brava's 25th anniversary, is not intended to be a monograph or an official history of the project. Rather, it is our personal testimony.

An account from someone who experienced firsthand the birth, doubts, challenges, and achievements of a bold project that began with a simple and generous idea—to protect the cliff-nesting birds of the Côa Valley—and has become an international reference for rewilding, conservation, and rural development.

With this text, we propose an annotated chronology, told in the first person. A timeline lived, where facts intersect with emotions, decisions, hesitations, and learning. Our intention is to record not only what happened, but what we felt and what motivated us at each moment. Because we believe that memory is also an instrument for the future, and that sharing this journey can inspire new generations to continue and reinvent Faia Brava with equal dedication and a sense of mission.

Our formula has always been that of perseverance, concrete action, deep conviction, and an unconditional love for Nature, for our Land. It is this story that we begin to tell here.

## The Genesis: Creating an Association to Protect Cliff-Nesting Birds (1999–2003)

The Transhumance and Nature Association (ATN), which celebrates 25 years of existence in 2025, originated in June 1999 during a congress on vultures held in Saint-Rome de Dolan, in the Tarn canyons (Grands Causses Natural Park, southern France). The meeting, promoted by FIO - International Ornithological Fair, brought together some of the most prestigious European experts in birds of prey. It was there that we met Jesús Garzón and Maarten Bijleveld, leading figures in nature conservation. With them, in an empathy that arose spontaneously, between mountain walks and terrace conversations, the idea emerged: to create a non-governmental organization dedicated to the protection of cliff-nesting birds—Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), Bonelli's eagle (*Aquila fasciata*), Black stork (*Ciconia nigra*)—in the Douro Cliffs and its tributaries, in north-eastern Portugal.

At the time, we worked for the Institute for Nature Conservation (ICN), in the process of establishing the newly created Douro International Natural Park (PNDI). This mission-like work, in which the entire park team and its director, Domingos Amaro, were bubbling with positivism and motivation, was part of a broader context of creativity and institutional enthusiasm experienced in Northeastern Portugal, with the recent formalization

of the Côa Valley Archaeological Park (1996) and the creation of the first Natura 2000 sites (1999). It was also the time when other local associations emerged, such as Palombar, AEPGA, Pantorra, Aldeia or Frauga—some of which we helped to found.

But there was also a discomfort: the southern area of the park—Escalhão and Almofala, and the special protected areas (ZPE) of the Côa Valley (Algodres, Vale de Afonsinho, Cidadelhe)—remained forgotten, without surveillance, with growing threats and without institutional presence. We knew these landscapes well, we had family roots there, we were affectively and historically linked to that rurality: to the crags, to traditional agriculture, to the pigeon houses. That's where we wanted to intervene.

ATN was born from this urgency to act against environmental threats—recurring fires, use of poisons, persecution of predators—and to create an autonomous, innovative and community-based response. It was a time of youth, enthusiasm and confidence in the socio-ecological potential of this territory. We believed that the Northeast could cease to be a peripheral space and assert itself through the appreciation of its extraordinary natural heritage. For this, it would be necessary to create projects based on the ground, with community involvement and international partnerships. At the time, there were no private conservation initiatives or environmental citizenship projects in the region. We wanted a small, agile association with the freedom to innovate where the



In the Côa Valley with Luc Hoffman, Rosane, and Jan Koemann – June 2000.

PHOTO: ANTÓNIO MONTEIRO

State did not reach—and that could also be an operational extension of the PNDI in terms of bird conservation.

All this coincided with the first steps of our journey of life together. On June 2, 2000, we got married and, four days later, we interrupted our honeymoon to officially found ATN in Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, in the presence of illustrious guests such as Luc Hoffmann himself, who supported the idea from the beginning.



Visiting Cidadelhe with Luc Hoffman, Jesus Garzon, and friends – June 2000.

PHOTO: ATN

Jesus Garzon with landowners from Algodres after a land purchase deed at the notary's office in Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo – May 2001.

PHOTO: ANA BERLINER

The choice of name derived from an international project promoted by Jesús Garzón under the coordination of the Stichting Nature and Transhumance (STN), based in the Netherlands. We adopted that name as a sign of integration into a European network and out of reverence for our friend and mentor Jesús. The choice of the logo was also symbolic: I proposed a magpie, but Jesús insisted on a sheep and an Iberian magpie (*Cyanopica*



Days after the fire of August 1, 2003.

PHOTO: ANTÓNIO MONTEIRO

*cooki*)—symbols of Iberian rurality. And he was right: the image remained, and so did the energy.

With the support of the MAVA Foundation, secured through Jesús and Maarten, we immediately started a pilot project for the triennium 2000–2003. That summer, we acquired the first land on the banks of the Côa, which included a traditional pigeon house, and installed a feeding station for Egyptian vultures. Thus, was born the Cliff Breeders project. We took the first steps with few resources, but with a contagious will. More than founding an association, we were building a life project. Where many saw abandonment, we saw promise. ATN was born like this: with ideas, affections, strategy and

a deep commitment to ecological regeneration and the valorisation of the territory. Without knowing it yet, we were walking towards what would be Faia Brava.

### **Times of Doubt and Resilience (2003–2006)**

ATN faced its first major trial by fire—literally—right from the start. On August 1, 2003, during what was one of the darkest summers in our country, a devastating fire, coming from afar, ended its journey on the slopes of the Côa, in Algodres. Scrubland, olive groves, centuries-old cork oaks burned, and thousands of holm oak



With Jesus Garzon visiting newly acquired properties - November 2001.

PHOTO: ANA BERLINER

bushes were reduced to ashes. I, António, was there and witnessed that infernal afternoon. The fire front was wide and dispersed, driven by a scorching wind. A vast sheet of scorched land grew until the end of the day, and the valley was plunged into smoke.

Two weeks later, we returned with friends and colleagues. We crossed the burned landscape and camped on the banks of the river. It was at that moment that we realized how both harsh and fragile the valley was. Our commitment had to be broader and more lasting.

ATN was then a nascent structure. The initial project had ended, we had 30 hectares and 3pigeon houses to

manage—but without stable funding, without a long-term plan, without institutional support. We were alone. And the doubt arose: would it be worth continuing?

We sought inspiration in other projects. We visited reserves in Spain, Scotland, Holland and Belgium. We dreamed of pristine forests like Bialowieza, the Forest of Dean, Veluwezoom, Muniellos. Gradually, the utopia of autonomous and regenerated nature began to take shape: perhaps the solution was not to manage species, but to give time to the territory and trust in natural processes.

On the ground, the difficulties remained: high frequency of summer fires, persecution of predators, antagonism to birds of prey, scarcity of prey. But something unexpected happened: the neighbours of the lands already purchased began to knock on our door and offer us the sale of more properties. Our desire to acquire more land and gain scale found a window of opportunity. A kind of Pandora's box opened: to acquire more and more land and enhance the territorial expansion of the project. It was there that we realized that a puzzle was beginning to form—with pieces that touched each other and others that would take time to fit.

We bought, from our own pocket, several parcels, among which stood out the approximately 10 hectares at the Saboia site. The land was beautiful, untouched by fires, maintained a mosaic of vegetation, with an

extensive natural meadow, bordered by a rough wall with brambles and rosemary as a hedge, but also a gallery of ash and willow trees that accompanied a temporary water line (Ribeira da Frieira). There was also an appreciable number of holm oaks and cork oaks, of different ages and shapes, which dispersed spontaneously regenerated next to granite outcrops.

Inspired by ARK Nature (which already used horses and cows in nature reserves in the Netherlands), we acquired five young Garrano horses at a traditional fair in Arcos de Valdevez—a male and four females. One of the mares had an open wolf bite wound, the scar of which allowed it to be identified for years. The owners of the Garranos, fearing losing them in the mountains of the National Park, sold them, at that fair, almost at symbolic prices—and that is why the wounded female cost us 30 euros! After the trip, we released them in “Sabóia” in a much drier and more arid habitat than the green hills of Minho (Northwest Portugal). Thus, was born, in our own way, the first micro-reserve in Faia Brava.

On a personal level, we were also transforming our lives. Our daughters, Madalena and Beatriz, were born. We launched Casa da Cisterna, which began to welcome visitors, volunteers, researchers and friends. We shared bread, wine, ideas and dreams, and thus practical opportunities also arose to continue this private nature conservation project.



Henrique Miguel Pereira and Ana Berliner, planning the ZIF (Special Intervention Zone) of the Côa Valley – July 2008.

PHOTO: ANTÓNIO MONTEIRO

That’s how, in 2005, Henk Smit visited us. He brought a clearer, more structured vision about the economic sustainability of the project. A friendship and partnership were born that lasts until today. With Henk, ATN ceased to be just an experimental hobby—it gained direction, method and strategy.

### **Strategy, Technical Team and the Faia Brava Private Protected Area (2006–2010)**

Between 2007 and 2010, ATN went from being a resilient but fragile project to becoming an organization that defined its mission, vision, values, and strategic

objectives. We then developed a 10-year management plan (2009–2019), with a simple strategy: acquiring more land as a way to guarantee autonomy and effectiveness in nature conservation processes—namely, reducing the number and impact of fires. Benefitting from agricultural resources and applying for national and international support (the commonly designated “funded projects”) became a permanent part of the organization’s agenda. This growth process was possible thanks to the voluntary contribution of Alexandra Cerveira Lima, who at that time played the role of manager and caretaker of ATN.

Little by little, small victories began to emerge. The acquisition of Quinta do Ervideiro, on the left bank of the Côa, in 2008, was a decisive milestone, only possible with the direct support of STN (Jan Koeman and Nicole Wevers) and the fundraising campaign in the Netherlands organized by Henk Smit—in which we “exchanged” olive oil from our olive groves for the purchase of more square meters. This territory reinforced our presence in the landscape, with a strip along the cliffs (‘faias’) and more than two kilometres of riverbank, which included griffon vulture colonies and nests of two Egyptian vulture pairs.



Alice Gama and a volunteer during the griffon vulture census – March 2008.

PHOTO: ANTÓNIO MONTEIRO

The expansion to the left bank of the Côa symbolized something deeper: we were beginning to see the river as a single ecological axis, and not as two separate banks.

It was also during this period that the project gained the name that accompanies it to this day: Faia Brava Reserve. The name comes from the most rugged and wild toponym of the entire Côa Valley—a crag almost one hundred meters high, impassable, where, according to local accounts, no goat herd dared to pass—and which became a symbol of the untamed nature that we wanted to protect. The reserve ceased to be an archipelago of small, dispersed properties and became a continuous territory with a long-term vision.

It was a time of strategy, but above all of many and diverse experimental actions: we reinforced the number of Garrano horses, opened ponds in collaboration with the local hunters' association, created a vulture feeder, conditioned small game hunting on the association's land, successfully populated the pigeon houses for the Bonelli's eagle, planted hundreds or thousands of trees and acorns, and let natural regeneration take its course along the water lines.

In this context, perhaps the most decisive step was the entry of the biologist Alice Gama into the small ATN team. Still far from a professionalized structure, the association gained with her a permanent and sensitive presence in the territory. Competent and deeply committed, Alice became the cornerstone of ATN's

practice, ensuring the continuity of the project in the field, internal organization, and management of the first structured monitoring and conservation programs.

We established the headquarters in Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo and focused on contact with the public and increasing the number of members. ATN grew under the direction of Henrique Pereira dos Santos, and thus the first support from Portuguese entities emerged, with emphasis on funding obtained through competitions from BES and EDP. For the first time, we felt that Faia Brava was gaining robustness and that the project was being taken seriously.

In 2010, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the creation of ATN with a set of remarkable activities: we launched the first commemorative book, with texts, images, and testimonies that helped build our institutional memory, and we organized a technical workshop on private reserves, with the presence of various regional and national entities, including the ICNB. It was felt that the project had roots, people, territory, and a clear future—and that it was here to stay.

To culminate this stage, in 2010, under the coordination and commitment of the group of people already named, we achieved one of our greatest achievements: the official recognition of Faia Brava as the first Private Protected Area (APP) in Portugal. This recognition, granted by the Portuguese State, marked, in our view, a historic turning point in nature



In Norway in June 2015, establishing networks with local NGOs.

PHOTO: ANTÓNIO MONTEIRO

conservation policy in the country. For the first time, the private management model—based on ownership, volunteering and citizen science (which at that time was just beginning to be timidly disseminated)—was formally validated and legitimized.

The process of creating the APP culminated in the memorable visit of the Secretary of State for the Environment, Humberto Rosa. It was an official visit, but with an atmosphere of informality and positive energy: in the middle of Saboia, between cork oaks and in view of a meadow where a herd of Garrano horses grazed, the Secretary of State greeted, one by one, all the employees of the reserve, including the guards who were then wearing the first ATN uniform.

## Consolidation and Rewilding (2010–2014)

Between 2010 and 2014, ATN fully assumed the responsibility of managing its core project: the Faia Brava Reserve. After years marked by resilience, trial and error, and building a foundation, a functional and effective structure was beginning to consolidate. We had ceased to be a promising project and had become a national reference, with prospects for greater internationalization.

During this period, ATN once again had the support of the MAVA Foundation, which allowed for a qualitative leap: on the one hand, the true professionalization of its technical team; on the other hand, the realization of one of the most important moments in ATN's history—the acquisition of the 'faias' of Algodres/Vale de Afonsinho. This was the largest property acquired to date, with approximately 340 hectares, essential for cliff-nesting birds. It was a difficult but highly symbolic acquisition, only possible thanks to the help of one of the association's great supporters, Dr. Manuel Braga da Cruz. More than a territorial expansion, it represented the affirmation that Faia Brava was viable, respected, and capable of growing sustainably.

The association now had the capacity for a response in the field response, proposal development, project execution, and, above all, competent technical representation in meetings and networks.

The relationship with universities deepened—with emphasis on the University of Aveiro and the University of Wageningen. Internships and bachelor's and master's theses multiplied, reinforcing scientific rigor and openness to the academic world.

Without fires, the signs of change were becoming evident. The scrublands diversified in species, the slopes transformed into dense and wild thickets, on the plateaus spontaneous groves of holm oaks and Portuguese oaks appeared. More rows of ash and willow trees were born along the water lines, and areas that were previously excavations of bare earth were converted into re-naturalized ponds. It is important to highlight that, in the case of small trees, everything was the result of years and years of reforestation with the friends of the 'Colectivo Germinal'. In certain places, the landscape already looked more like a forest and in balance.

The fauna also showed signs of recovery: the return of the black stork and peregrine falcon, the increase in sightings of black vultures, the confirmation of the presence of wildcat, and the timid entry of the roe deer into the landscape. The Bonelli's eagle benefited from the presence of the restored dovecotes. In fauna and flora, the ecosystem reacted and re-naturalized.

In 2011–2012, together with our long-standing institutional partners—the Fundación Naturaleza y



After a tree planting action with the team and volunteers – November 2012.

PHOTO: ANA BERLINER

Hombre, chaired by Carlos Sánchez—we joined the Rewilding Europe initiative. We were, along with the Spanish, one of the five pioneering projects of this European network. Our rewilding efforts, until then still without a formal name, were finally recognized and integrated into a continental vision. As a result of a new campaign to acquire missing parcels (project “Closing the Gaps”), the reserve reached 800 hectares. The extension of the single perimeter fence

allowed for more effective management actions at the level of large herbivores.

The herds of Garrano horses increased and stabilized, with several harems—one of them with a stallion and 15 mares! —reacquiring some of the behaviours of wild equids.

We continued with the introduction of Maronesa cows, realizing the dream of the return of mixed herds of proxies of large wild herbivores in the Côa Valley itself, after 15 thousand years! This effort to bring these species back always took into account that Faia Brava itself is located within the Côa Valley Archaeological Park and that, on the banks of the river, at Quinta do Ervideiro, there is an interesting centre of rock engravings: the “Faia”.

With the support of friends like Alfredo Sendim and Hardy Oelke, we expanded in 2014, the experience of “rewilding” large herbivores, in Freineda (municipality of Almeida), in the place we call “Middle Côa”, with a small herd of Sorraia-type horses, also a contribution to the preservation of this endangered breed.

These were times of confidence. We began to believe—and to make others believe—that it was possible, in a forgotten corner of the interior, to build an innovative model of conservation and nature management. A technically rigorous model rooted in the rural territory, but which promoted the “internationalization” of the project and the region.

## Growing and “Creating Spaces for Nature” (2014–2019)

Between 2014 and 2017, ATN experienced its most thriving period. It was a time of consolidation and affirmation — of ideas, of scale, and of influence. Faia Brava continued its journey as a national and European reference in private conservation.

It was during this period that the motto “Creating Spaces for Nature” emerged as the perfect synthesis of our mission. More than just a slogan, it was a reflection of what we had been doing for years: acquiring, restoring, protecting, and letting nature run its course. The concept of rewilding, which until then seemed exotic, became familiar, and ATN pioneered its practical and replicable translation for the Iberian reality.

The technical team grew, becoming more robust, dynamic, talented, and multidisciplinary, under the direction of Pedro Prata. With talent and broad vision, the organization structured itself internally: procedures were created, communication was reinforced, and more demanding and effective management plans were outlined. We began to act not only on the ground but also in institutional and political forums. Faia Brava gained ecological value, but also communication capacity and public influence. ATN grew in all positive indicators: area acquired, annual budget, team size, number of international partners, and ongoing projects — including

important initiatives such as LIFE Rupis and Life Club de Fincas, both with the structural support of the MAVA Foundation, with whom we maintained a solid relationship of mutual trust.

Faia Brava was consolidating, but the horizon was expanding. We began to think beyond the limits of the reserve, with a strategic view of the entire Côa Valley and other potential areas of intervention. The idea of replicating the Faia Brava model in other territories — in Middle Côa (Freineda), in Ribeira do Mosteiro, in Arribas da Mata de Lobos, or in Arribas de Fornos — began to take shape. The project ceased to be “insular” and opened itself to the territory as a true living laboratory of collaborative conservation.

This was the time of identity. The slogan “Creating spaces for nature,” which was already our mission — albeit expressed in other words — ceased to be just a goal: it became a practice, a network, a philosophy, and a concrete contribution to the future of the border territory.

### **Sustainability and Ecological Restoration (2019–2025)**

From 2019 onwards, ATN entered a new phase marked by the pursuit of sustainability. It was a time to consolidate what was built, ensure continuity with consistency, and prepare for the future without losing

the essential focus: creating and managing spaces for nature with ecological, social, and financial balance.

In this stage, the technical structure stabilized, and the institutional identity was reinforced. We invested in more strategic management rooted in the territory, but also more demanding in the consolidation of results. Faia Brava ceased to be just a symbol of innovation and became an example of organizational resilience. Funding sources diversified, the management plan was revised, and priorities were defined with greater precision.

The policy of acquiring and leasing land continued selectively, with a focus on ecological connectivity and strengthening the territorial matrix. Voluntary agreements with landowners were maintained, and long-term protocols were opened, promoting more collaborative management and greater involvement of the local community. This model allowed us to expand the area of intervention without compromising management capacity.

It was also during this period that scientific research gained prominence. The doctoral path I began in 2023 reinforced the link between practice and knowledge, bringing new perspectives on the ecological and social processes of landscape regeneration in the Côa Valley and the Iberian West.

In 2023, under the direction of António Araújo — who closely followed ATN’s 25-year trajectory — a



Observing the cork oak forest from the “King’s Chair” viewpoint – September 2024.

PHOTO: ANTÓNIO MONTEIRO

smooth and professional transition in leadership began. The new direction brought stability to the team, reorganized internal processes, and deepened the institutional culture, in a pragmatic, cooperative, and long-term oriented style. Thus, a phase of maturity was consolidated, preparing Faia Brava for future challenges.

### **The Great 25th Anniversary Celebration!**

In 2025, we celebrate 25 years of the Transumância e Natureza Association and the Faia Brava Reserve — a journey marked by commitment, perseverance, and vision. Throughout this time, Faia Brava maintained

its experimental and avant-garde vocation but evolved towards a more strategic and focused approach on effective results. It was a path made with feet on the ground and eyes on the horizon, with a profound sense of mission, responsibility, and citizenship. Here we invested life, time, and ideas — and we have a lasting legacy.

Nothing would have been possible without the contribution of dozens of people — technicians, volunteers, neighbours, friends, and partners — who gave body, soul, and continuity to a collective, robust, and transformative project. Faia Brava has become more than just a reserve: it is a space for ecological and social regeneration, a living laboratory of innovation in nature conservation.

From a few dozen initial hectares, we moved to more than 1000 hectares managed directly, to which are added hundreds of hectares, bordering, and under collaborative management. Faia Brava is today the largest private nature conservation area in Portugal — a pioneering example that inspired similar projects and consolidated the concept of rewilding in the national debate.

“Creating Spaces for Nature” ceased to be just a motto: it is a replicable practice with measurable impact. In a territory marked by depopulation and stagnation, nature conservation has become a concrete path to development. Over these years, some millions

of euros have been invested in the local economy, qualified jobs have been created in rural areas, nature tourism has been boosted, and dozens of young conservationists have been trained — many of them now active in other geographies, carrying Faia Brava with them as a reference.

At the institutional level, ATN has joined international networks and consortia, and brought to Portugal a new approach to conservation — less focused on control, more focused on the autonomy of natural processes. Without being deliberate, Faia Brava has become a contribution to the present decade of ecological restoration, anticipating the principles of the new Nature Restoration Law. Here, habitats are regenerated, species return, the resilience of ecosystems increases, and efforts are made to reduce the impact of climate change and large fires. The landscape is now richer, more autonomous, more known, and more respected.

Welcomed by people of various nationalities - Dutch, Spanish, French, English, Italian, and, above all, Portuguese - Faia Brava represents a supportive, collaborative, and regenerative Europe, that values local identity and civic involvement. It is a project where ordinary citizens actively participate in ecological recovery and revitalization of rural territories.

Long live Faia Brava.

First herd of Garrano horses  
in Saboia – May 2008.

PHOTO: ANTÓNIO MONTEIRO





Watermill - PHOTO: LUIS MOREIRA

## FRAGA VIVA - REDOUBT OF THE BATRACHIAN, A DISCREET WORLD BY THE WATERS OF THE TÁVORA

**ALCINO OLIVEIRA**

One of the initiators of Fraga Viva

We begin this text trying to overcome a primary embarrassment of talking to others about ourselves, an embarrassment more felt because it happens as a result of a public celebration of a larger initiative. We proceed, under the cover of our irrelevance, as a contribution to the dissemination of the ideal of private protected areas in Portugal and, thus, a simple tribute to Faia Brava and its initiators.

Fraga Viva – Reduto do Batráquio) is not an initiative of environmentalists, it does not arise as an environmental cause, it is definitely not an exercise in environmental activism. Whatever it may be or may become, let the reader judge by the brief account of its history.

It began with the desire to recover and animate family heritage in the small village of Arnas and surroundings. Here is an old water mill which, due to its remarkable construction and setting, inspired ideas of recovery. Meanwhile, by chance of our friendships, we came to know Faia Brava and the legal figure of the private protected area. This legal figure was studied as a value-enhancing hypothesis for the territory around the mill, considering it as a participating element in its reanimation. Believing that we fulfilled the necessary prerequisites, we decided to initiate a process of application for the classification of a private protected area for this territory: a small valley through which a stream runs, accompanied by a riparian gallery, encompassing the slopes that form it until it reaches a plateau. The application, well conducted by the biologist Antónia Soares, was successful and, in 2021, the private protected area Fraga Viva – redoubt of the batrachian appears. Thus ends the first chapter of this story.

The classification of private protected area committed us to a management model and plan for

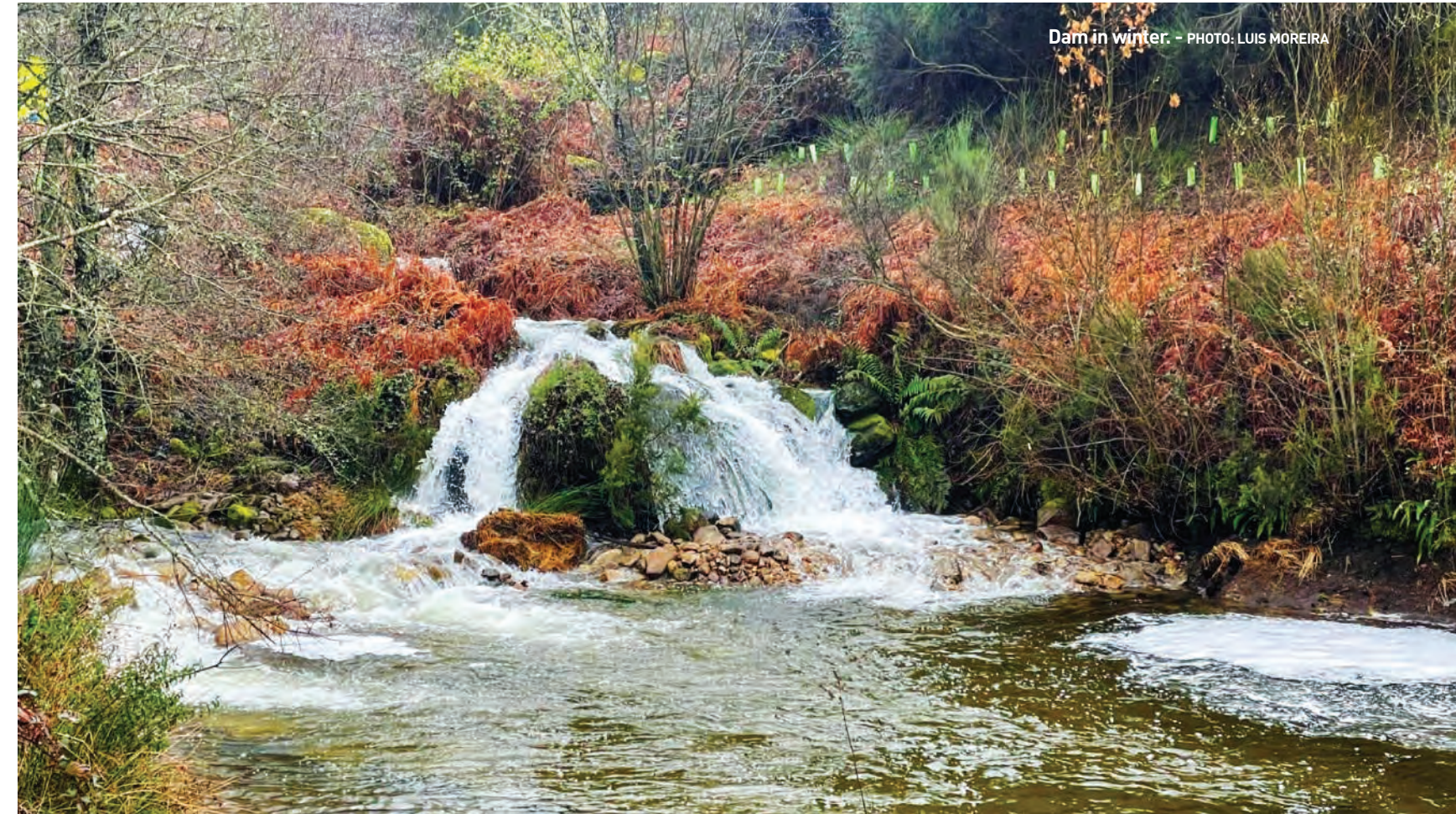
the area, in agreement with the ICNF (Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests). Another attention was imposed on us, giving rise to a new experience of the local environment; to the curiosity of what is perceived as wild and what it means to protect an area - even if so small - for its natural values - even if so simple. The profusion of Iberian frogs in the place was then recognized - beginnings of the name "redoubt of the batrachian" - we were amazed by the sight of a small owl perched on a branch (or was it an owl?), we rejoiced with the flight of a pair of wild doves (would they be turtle doves?), with the hustle and bustle of water between trees covered in a healthy green...we heard of a pregnant wolf in a den nearby. These experiences brought new considerations about the protected area which, if it started for merely nominal reason, was assumed as an essential reason. Our main order became the ability to stimulate and protect, managing, an area of wild nature, under the tutelary presence of the old mill; governed not by goals or ends, but by obedience to that order, to keep a space for the possible wild, the undomesticated. This never means abandoning the processes of natural recovery, as we are committed to a management that confesses an acting will, although uncertain of its results. It tries to follow a nutritionist's maxim - knowing that not much is known, the advisable is the maximum of variety in

the diet - and to stimulate the wild diversity of the area, as a criterion of protection of Fraga Viva. This new consideration of the protected area made us rethink its integration in the region. The boundaries of the area are not its limits: without illusions of self-sufficiency, it relates and extends through the spaces and communities that surround it, also culturally - we hope. This protected area is not a pristine and wild space, being inserted in an essentially cultural and worked landscape, once intensely, by those who have in the natural resources their wealth and source of subsistence. It proposes then to articulate the respect and defence of wild nature as a crucial dimension of the local economy and culture. Here ends the second chapter of the story.

The third chapter, still open, comments on the emergence of a new awareness of the needed capabilities and resources that the management of Fraga Viva should assume. Making our presence significant in the region, in the desired terms, is supported by well-founded knowledge and the ability to communicate it. Also as self-defence, it must show itself to be of public interest, enriching local culture and economy. This broader horizon leads us to explore the concept of ecosystem services as the theoretical basis of a new management plan to be developed. Thus, to study the provisioning, regulation and cultural services existing in the area and ways

to increase them. The ultimate sense is to find lines of action that, by protecting and stimulating wild biodiversity, also economic benefits are provided. The protection of the protected area must be aware of the associated expenses, the need to generate revenues that sustain practices and collaborations - which are not intended in a voluntary regime. Here we

remember the etymological kinship between economy and ecology that obscures the temptation of more immediate financial gains, of costly sustenance. In the investigation of this alternative path, whose course is not certain and the destination imprecise, Fraga Viva is found, always keeping as a guiding star the stimulation and protection of wild biodiversity.



Dam in winter. - PHOTO: LUIS MOREIRA



Marbled newt,  
*Triturus marmoratus*.

PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME



Watermill. - PHOTO: LUIS MOREIRA

Based on the narrative, a judgment of what Fraga Viva is, is now possible, believing that there will be dissenting judgments. Those more hardened by the challenges of restoration and environmental defence will, rightly, judge this initiative as naive. Certainly it is, its management premise indicates this, waiting for experience to temper the original expectations and moderate the practices followed, while maintaining an imaginative perseverance. Also naive because it is an initiative that is not calculated in ambitions projected in time.



Reforestation experiments after the fire. - PHOTO: LUIS MOREIRA

This conservative character defines us, of defence and continuity of a wild nature that still survives in time, without a nostalgic background, knowing that its surprising future is always ignored. Therefore, Fraga Viva is not something turned towards the future: past and present are in a permanent reorganization. We dare to present our naive impulses as a tribute to the initiating spirit of Faia Brava. An initiative that we imagine started by a sense of intimate urgency in the defence of wild nature, not arising from a considered

calculation of possible successes, but from the fulfilment of a sense of duty - in these terms, also of naive beginnings. An initiative whose knowledgeable persistence has made it grow as an example of environmental intervention.

We end this text with a description of what someone will find who comes to pass through Fraga Viva, a hidden entrenchment with less than 15ha, in the village of Arnas (Sernancelhe), in a mountainous area today punctuated by wind turbines. At its entrance is an old 3-story mill, still under recovery work, which will serve as accommodation and presentation of the protected area. This mill is powered by an old 'levada' (irrigation channel) started in a dam in the heart of the protected area. This 'levada' and the mill will be the only notorious human elements in this protected area, traced by nocturnal incursions of wild boars, which is not preoccupied with the comfort of visitors, but cares for the spontaneity of wildlife. This 'levada' is parallel to a riparian gallery with its ash trees, alders, elderberries and willows, old and new, fallen or attached, which have been taking old agricultural lands in a gradual process of wild return. Gallery that escorts a small stream uneven between rocks, on the way to the Távora river. In this area Iberian frogs and anonymous life typical of these ecosystems swarm, as well as the rock vegetation on the rocky

outcrops and walls found here, being the richest space of the protected area. On the higher slopes of the area and upstream of the dam is a territory violated by fire a few years ago, domain of the broom, extending the riparian gallery over two smaller streams that feed the dam. Apart from the riparian gallery and an adult pine forest with its mushrooms, on one of the slopes of the protected area, the entire area was heavily affected by fire, justifying a restoration phase that combines our intervention with the natural regeneration of the small oaks and chestnut trees that are sprouting. A stony, steep terrain - where, surprisingly, rye used to be grown - whose difficulties of access enable it in its intentions of protection and stimulation of wildlife. Thus helping the populations of threatened species proven in the region, such as the Montagu's harrier, the Iberian wolf or the wildcat.

Small protected area, without any magnificence, where the only exceptional detail - a mill of unusual architecture - loses relevance to the wild environment that has been remaking the territory and we are committed to protecting. The most used word in this text will be "wild", but this should not be perceived as a vehement expulsion of the human from this space - the wild never erases the human, or we would not have, each of us, an undomesticated side, a heart also wild.

# TESTIMONIALS



**LOUISE VET**  
Professor Emerita of Ecology,  
Wageningen University

**M**y connection with Faia Brava started some 13 years ago after an inspiring conversation with Henk Smit, chairman of Faia Brava ATN. His enthusiasm about this rewilding project, the first private protected area in Portugal and home to rare and highly threatened bird species, was the trigger. As an ecologist and connected to many organizations that work on biodiversity recovery, I saw great opportunity to transform such remote areas, where people moved out and traditional small-scale agriculture had stopped, into biodiverse hotspots. It did not take long before I visited Faia Brava, and it stole my heart. I was impressed by their ambition and the many ongoing activities like reforestation, the construction of water pools and measures taken to prevent the frequent, and often devastating, climate change related fires.

The land is also managed to return old, abandoned organic olive and almond groves. What a wealth!

In 2012, as director of the Netherlands Institute of Ecology (NIOO-KNAW) the first thing I did was to buy the Faia Brava Christmas packages of delicious local wine and olive oil for all our NIOO researchers and other staff. No surprise that was a great hit, and I repeated this for several years. Since then, I am pleased and proud I was able to help Faia Brava with some donations to enlarge the protected Faia Brava area and I want to encourage others to follow. Any gift, even the smallest amount, can and will help to increase this valuable biodiversity. My slogan always is: “restore and connect habitats and nature eagerly follows”. Faia Brava is a great example of that!

During my last visit I experienced the mesmerizing event of feeding carcasses to the scavengers, wow! And I enjoyed the high-quality lodging in the area. It is all the result of local people, farmers and ecologists working together on nature conservation, landscape and socio-economic quality. Such sustainable bottom-up initiatives are crucial in times of uninterested or incompetent national and European governments. Bravo Faia Brava!



**JELKA BOTH**  
Member of the board  
of Natura Iberica



Natura Iberica tour in the Netherlands. PHOTO: HENK SMIT

**E**xtra water pools for the animals, nesting platforms for the return of the black vultures, a new tractor after bad luck necessary for planting trees... these are some of the projects we support in Faia Brava as the foundation Natura Iberica. We promote ecological sustainability on the Iberian Peninsula, mainly by organizing funds for special projects in support of nature reserves. But we also organize activities in the form of ecotourism, offer culinary explorations and distribute olive oil from Faia Brava in the Netherlands. Since our foundation in 2015, we focused our efforts mainly on the Faia Brava nature reserve. Over the years this cooperation grew into a steady Dutch Portuguese friendship. The Iberian Peninsula is home to many great natural values that require attention and care. Many Dutch people visit the rural areas on the peninsula and feel involved with what is going on. Next to the efforts of governments on alle levels, involvement from citizens is necessary and we are happy to contribute to this.

Find us on: <https://www.naturaiberica.nl/>

## 25 YEARS OF FAIA BRAVA: A NEW COMMITMENT TO THE LAND



**ALFREDO SENDIM**  
Founder and Manager  
of the Private Protected Area  
of Montado do Freixo do Meio

**C**elebrating the 25th anniversary of the Faia Brava movement means, first and foremost, acknowledging the vision and work of all those who have made this dream come true. Our deepest gratitude to all.

It also means celebrating the rediscovery of another way of looking at Nature, giving it a primary place in our socio-political sphere that facilitates the enrichment of our relationships with Life, at a functional, emotional, and cultural level.

For authors such as Baptiste Morizot or Viveiros de Castro, the current environmental crisis derives not only from the crisis of human society or the crisis of the terrestrial system, but mainly from the way we relate to other living beings. We suffer from a terrible loss of sensitivity towards nature, translated by the way we accept to deal with it, without giving it any

right, using it only as a scenario and as a storehouse of resources. This crisis, promoted by our anthropocentric attitude towards the natural system, conditions the relationships we can establish with other living beings. Today, the system that brought us into this world and on which we vitally depend does not exist for us as the reality that it is. It exists only as an abstract concept, as Viriato Soromenho Marques points out. As a consequence of a dualistic vision, nature has left our sphere. We now exist only as humans, without understanding that our sovereignty is worthless without the terrestrial system functioning. It is like owning a key on a computer without the software running, as Paulo Magalhães says. Obviously, no one can change their relationship with something that does not exist! That is also why the existence of areas of nature in good conservation status becomes absolutely essential, being in reality vital for all of us. In this context, Private Protected Areas (APP) are structures, fundamental spaces for this other ethic to be possible.

This movement also celebrates the importance of Civil Society Action in the structure of democratic and free states. The concept of APP, implemented in Portugal for the first time by Faia Brava, is an

Montado (Cork Oak Forest)

PHOTO: JOÃO CARLOS FARINHA

extraordinary example of citizen commitment to the current reality and challenges in terms of territorial management. It constitutes and initiates the implementation of an instrument to promote the necessary balance in the mosaic of the Portuguese Landscape. All of us who are aware of the current reality feel the urgency to guarantee spaces, conservation and re-naturalization areas to mitigate urban, food, energy pressures.... We believe in the importance of the economic competitiveness of each solution/piece of the mosaic, so the legal figure of the APP potentially plays a determining role as an effective formula for communication and differentiation. The creation of a national brand of regeneration and conservation (APP) that allows sufficient clarity to implement the necessary actions such as the payment of ecosystem services or the restoration of habitats, currently assumes a determining role.


Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Faia Brava Private Protected Area is celebrating a real turning point in the direction of renewal and the implementation of effective nature conservation policies in our territory, mostly private.

As empathic beings, the inspiration promoted by the creation of Faia Brava was fundamental for us. For a long time, the natural values that occur in Freixo do Meio, assumed, due to their scientific, ecological and landscape value, a special relevance that justified their

recognition and integration into the National Network of Protected Areas. However, for various reasons our process only materialized from the moment Faia Brava was constituted. Ten years later, through the ICNF Order 003/2022, of April 19, 2022, we had the honour of seeing the entire Herdade do Freixo do Meio, with 584 ha, recognized as an APP. The work of preparing the Management Plan was carried out internally by Biologist Ricardo Silva and Forest Engineer Ana Vasconcelos, guided and with the support of the tireless Biologist João Carlos Farinha.

Aware of the cultural and identity importance of the multifunctional system “Montado” and the existing ecological values in this territory, the Montado do Freixo do Meio has been for decades a Living Laboratory of Agroecology: integral Organic Agriculture since 1997, integration of regenerative practices, integration of the environmental education component, nature conservation actions (started in 2006 through the implementation of the Wildcat Management Plan), Permaculture, Holistic Pasture and Management, Dynamic Succession Agroforestry, use of alternative resources (such as acorn), and close cooperation with different Research institutions.

The creation of the Private Protected Area of Montado do Freixo do Meio was thus accompanied by the elaboration of a Management Plan that guides the activities towards the protection and promotion



Preparatory meeting for the future management plan of the Private Protected Area of Montado do Freixo do Meio.

PHOTO: JOÃO CARLOS FARINHA

of its natural values and that guides us in the permanent search for good practices and solutions for continuous improvement of the relationship between Man and his environment.

The Private Protected Area of Montado do Freixo do Meio is home to more than 1,000 catalogued species, wild and domestic, such as the wildcat (*Felis silvestris*), emblematic for being an endangered species, which coexists with the northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), the Bonelli's eagle (*Aquila*

*fasciata*), the booted eagle (*Aquila pennata*), the short-toed snake eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*), the purple heron (*Ardea purpurea*), the white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), the honey buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*), the Bosca's newt (*Lissotriton boscai*), the Pygmy marbled newt (*Triturus pygmaeus*) and many other beings of high ecological importance (naturdata).

The splendour of the Montado, resulting from the ancient Portuguese cork and holm oak forest, is a medieval if not Neolithic agroforestry system, which



Montado and Agroforestry Interpretation Center (CIMA).  
PHOTO: JOÃO CARLOS FARINHA



Small Market.  
PHOTO: JOÃO CARLOS FARINHA

results from a relationship of respect and harmony between Man and Nature, developed over centuries. The beauty and magnificence of the Montado are based on a symbiotic network of cooperation between many different species of plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms. In our view, it is a true inspiration for our human community.

The domestic animal species existing in the Montado do Freixo do Meio (MFM) today assume, in the natural ecosystem, the functions that the wild species performed until they were extinct by us (aurochs, zebro, sarrío and others). They are six of the most ancestral breeds of the Iberian Peninsula, that is, closer to the wild ancestor that originated them: Barrosã cow, Black Merino sheep, Alentejo pig, Sorraia horse, Bagueiro donkey and Black Lusitanian hen.

This important Mediterranean ecosystem is a biodiversity refuge recognized worldwide, where it is possible to discover wildlife and domestic life as well as observe the integration of these two worlds into an agroecological model that allows the cohabitation of a food production system with high levels of biodiversity and ecological functionality. There are no good winds for a sailor who does not know which port he is heading for, and therefore our strategy is to continue to dream, freeing the victim of our dreams of the last 500 years, once and for all. We will add value to all the assets that we can gather in the protected area, without compromising the dynamic succession of ecosystems. At this moment we have 13 micro food processing factories, we are giving shape to an on-site accommodation and catering operation based on our products, we develop didactic programs in the areas of Ecological, Anthropological and Biological literacy, aimed at different age groups, we promote actions



Replica of a Neolithic Village.  
PHOTO: JOÃO CARLOS FARINHA

such as company retreats, trainings, celebrations, compensations and we welcome visitors with whom we carry out activities in the natural space, such as retreats and festivals.

Our micro-utopia is to structure the Private Protected Area of Montado do Freixo do Meio in order to effective not only a natural system, but also to promote a true pole of contact/relationship/compatibility between this and the human system. We dream of the possibility of in just 5% of the area

(Social Zone), being able to guarantee all the needs of our species, on our scale, such as economy, work, housing, health, inspiration, ... thus allowing to prioritize the natural system in the remaining area. This in turn is organized into three distinct concepts. A Conservation Zone (50ha), a Classic Montado Zone (450ha) and an Innovation Zone where we install new agroforestry systems inspired by the Montado, but that incorporate not only current knowledge but also present challenges.

# TESTIMONIALS



**JEROEN VAN DER HORST**  
Trees for All

Faia Brava already had a special reputation as a private Portuguese nature reserve when we at Trees for All in 2021 were looking for projects and partners in Europe to collaborate with. Through our board member Cor, a longtime fan of Faia Brava, we were put in touch with you. We clicked. We learned that while Faia Brava has a rich plant and animal life, it is also very degraded due to past land use, and we saw opportunities to support ATNatureza's ambitions for reforestation with native species. In 2022, we therefore did a pilot project to plant 8,000 trees on fenced 'tree islands' and in heavily deforested areas. The subsequent prolonged drought and damage from wild boars did not benefit the young planting. Yet your dedicated and capable employees managed to limit the loss of young trees by using resistant species and replanting in places where there was sufficient moisture and wild boars had no chance.



During our project visit with a delegation from Trees for All in December 2023, we were not only pleasantly surprised by circling kites, fire salamanders and mighty cork oaks, but we also saw green oases where especially the planted holm oak, strawberry tree and dog rose were doing well.

We became completely enthusiastic when we started working out a new concept with the newly appointed director Antonio and Henk. It became an integrated approach under the motto 'Plant a tree, help a tree & protect a tree'. ATNatureza set up a nursery for endangered species, created even more ponds and pruned oaks to transform them from shrubs into a real forest. And this year, in addition

to planting the cultivated trees, over 20,000 acorns were planted in niches between the rocks to give the cork oak population a boost. The field team had seen how mice collected acorns to create winter supplies, a portion of which germinated and took root as a 'forgotten snack'. Or as Antonio said: "Mice are the engineers of the ecosystem: they create, transform and maintain the forest in the Faia Brava. They show that what we sometimes consider unimportant, or respect less can be of inestimable value."

We continue to mimic Mother Nature to support forest restoration in Faia Brava, with José, Luis, Carlos, Ana, Silvia, António and many others.

We congratulate Faia Brava and our partner heartily on their 25th anniversary and wish further expansion of this unique area where griffon vultures, red deer and Iberian lynx will soon raise their young in peace and where visitors enjoy the sunrise over the wooded Côa Valley. May the Faia Brava be an example of successful nature conservation in Portugal and far beyond!



**GIULIA MONTESI**

I had the privilege of spending four months at Faia Brava during my Erasmus internship. It is, without a doubt, the wildest place I have ever been, a corner of the world where nature reigns and holds supremacy.

We, humans, just have to stop, observe, and let ourselves be enveloped by its silent power. The extraordinary richness of wildlife in the reserve provided me with a surprise every day. Seeing the griffon vultures circling in the sky, recognizing the tracks left along the paths, and encountering animals up close that I had never seen before was exciting and unforgettable. I always felt free and deeply connected to what is essential. Faia Brava left me with a feeling of calm and balance. It made me rediscover the value of simplicity and time, without hurry.

GIULIA MONTESI did an internship within the scope of Erasmus, 4 months in 2025.

## VALE DAS AMOREIRAS PRIVATE PROTECTED AREA, A LIFETIME DREAM



**ANA CARLA CABRITA AND NUNO CARVALHO**  
Rewilding Southwest

**W**hen Raban and Nelly von Mentzingen moved to southwestern Portugal, they found in Aljezur, the property they acquired in Vale das Amoreiras, the place they still call home today. They fell in love with the landscape and the nature that surrounded them. Thus, this family of German origin began decades of work for the conservation and protection of the region's nature. Passionate about the beautiful specimens of oaks, cork oaks, strawberry trees, and the many other native species that had thrived on this property for a long time, Raban dedicated himself to their preservation and maintenance, with an innovative approach at the time: letting nature develop its natural processes and dynamics with as little intervention as possible.

Unfortunately, in 1997, the von Mentzingen family saw a huge fire reduce the green slopes of the

surrounding landscape to ashes and partially destroy the property. With only a few old surviving cork oaks on the property, Raban did not give up. Patiently, and against most opinions, he decided to "let" nature develop its natural processes and dynamics of landscape recovery. Thus, over thirty years, only making use of occasional interventions, mainly to eliminate exotic species, everyone witnessed the recovery of the surrounding landscape, the reappearance of new plants that were born from the seeds existing there, or from those that were carried there by the natural action of winds and surrounding fauna. Raban's simple but innovative approach thus allowed the total natural recovery of the vegetation cover, which led to the return of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects over time. After all these years, almost the entire forest has reached the climax state of development, and today it is possible to find several species of protected plants there (such as the Portuguese oak (*Quercus canariensis*) or holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and even rare ones (such as *Senecio lopezzi*) and a huge variety of animals, such as badgers, foxes, genets, eagles, owls, Mediterranean turtles, etc.

PHOTO: REWILDING SUDOESTE

It was this nonconformist spirit and this dream of conserving the natural landscape that led a group of people motivated by Raban von Mentzingen to decide in 2018 to create a study and defence group for the Native Forest in Aljezur. Composed of people from the region, with greater or lesser technical knowledge, but above all aware of the enormous ecological value

still present in this region and concerned about the degree of progressive abandonment of this valuable natural heritage.

Thus, and in collaboration with this group, Raban decided to move forward with the creation of the Vale das Amoreiras Private Protected Area (PPA). After some time of work, surveying its natural values



Acorns of Portuguese Oak,  
*Quercus canariensis*.

PHOTO: REWILDING SUDOESTE

and identifying the species present, the proposal for the creation of the Vale das Amoreiras PPA is submitted, resulting in its formal creation, through the publication of government decree nº 836/2022 of January 7, 2022. This PPA protects a unique area of forest mainly composed of cork oaks and oaks, but where it is possible to find several rare and classified species, which currently justifies its maximum protection and appreciation.

The Vale das Amoreiras PPA is more than just a native forest. It is a successful example of rewilding processes and the capacity for landscape regeneration after an intense forest fire. Thirty years after the fire, it is now possible to find several species of vines, trees, shrubs, mushrooms, and herbaceous plants, among them several plants that indicate that we are facing a valuable native forest, with a unique value at the national level, especially due to its location in the south of Portugal. The Vale das Amoreiras PPA is the dream and commitment of the von Mentzingen family, who recognize the values existing there and who, with unwavering belief, believe that by protecting and preserving their natural heritage in the present, they can leave a unique legacy for the future. Currently, the Vale das Amoreiras PPA is managed by the Rewilding Southwest Association in collaboration with the Von Mentzingen family and is the stage for numerous



Mycology Workshop. - PHOTO: REWILDING SUDOESTE

environmental awareness, education, and research actions carried out throughout the year, also being a leisure and visiting area for locals and tourists.

Knowing that example is one of the most powerful ways of awareness, we believe that this PPA has the potential to be the beginning of a path of creation, appreciation, and protection of many more private areas in Southwest Portugal, and throughout the country, since almost the entire national territory belongs to private individuals. The dream has come true, the Vale das Amoreiras PPA is the first Private Protected Area in Southern Portugal. We believe it will not be the only one.

# TESTIMONIALS



**NUNO DE SANTOS LOUREIRO**  
University of Algarve

The Faia Brava Association and the University of Algarve (UALg) formalized a cooperation protocol in March 2024, envisioning the reciprocal valorisation of the two institutions. The Master's in Geographic Information Systems at UALg has been particularly active, and during the academic year 2024/2025, three students came to Faia Brava to complete their master's theses. The topics covered are very varied:

1. Development of mobile applications intended for the daily management of the Faia Brava Private Protected Area and other properties of the Association, and also for the collection and integration into databases of records of observations on biodiversity;
2. Application of advanced computer techniques and tools for mapping land cover and use, based on images from drone flights and Sentinel-2 and Pléiades-Neo satellites;



Aerial survey work with drone, for carrying out cartography of occupation and land use.

PHOTO: ANTÓNIO ARAÚJO

3. Evaluation of the impacts of climate change, namely the reduction of precipitation, and its consequences on the arboreal vegetation of Faia Brava.

At the same time, UALg has already carried out approximately 1000 hectares of aerial coverage with high resolution. These 'orthophotomosaics' already allow the production of diverse thematic cartographies, valid for improving the rural property registry, knowing the occurrence of vegetation and rocky outcrops, constructing digital surface models, recognizing the entire network of dirt roads, footpaths, and wildlife trails, walls, and ruins, etc. UALg will continue to be committed to its partnership with the Faia Brava Association because it is firmly convinced that this partnership between education, research, and the management of the territory and landscape is fundamental for the present and future of our 'common home'.



**JOÃO CARVALHO**  
Team of the University of Aveiro

Faia Brava - Nature Conservation Association and the University of Aveiro have a long history of scientific and formative collaboration. In recent years, the relationship between the two entities has become even more solid and fruitful, with several ongoing projects aimed at assessing the impact of large herbivores and global changes on the ecological processes in the services provided by Mediterranean ecosystems. This assessment counts with the



European Tree Frog (*Hyla molleri*) photographed in one of the several ponds of the reserve.

PHOTO: EDUARDO FERREIRA

participation of several researchers and students who have dedicated themselves to different terrestrial and aquatic compartments. The recent partnership with the National Laboratory of Energy and Geology (LNEG) has made it possible to apply the latest remote monitoring methodologies, which have proven essential for understanding and describing the observed environmental dynamics. From soil to vegetation, from small invertebrates to large herbivores, from precision mapping using unmanned aerial vehicles to satellite images, the work developed will constitute an important information base relevant for the conservation, management, and valorisation of the natural resources of the Faia Brava Private Protected Area and the region.



Study and inventory of the amphibians of Faia Brava. Application of a sampling technique.

PHOTO: EDUARDO FERREIRA

Peneda-Gerês National Park.

PHOTO: JOÃO CARLOS FARINHA

## 05 Man and Nature

# HISTORY OF NATURE CONSERVATION



**NUNO LECOQ**  
Agricultural Engineer  
and Landscape Architect

### Evolution of Landscapes and Spatial Planning

Around 18 billion years ago, the “Big Bang” took place, from which the universe is believed to have expanded. The appearance of the first man (*Homo erectus*) occurred 200,000 years ago. Subsequently, modern man (*H. sapiens*) appeared about 40,000 years ago, and the beginning of agriculture in the Iberian Peninsula occurred about 8,000 years ago.

To survive and guarantee his subsistence, the human being lived exclusively from the products he obtained in the natural environment, a collector phase. He invented tools that allowed hunting and fishing, discovered fire which he used to scare away animals and set forests

on fire, being able to hunt them more easily afterwards. The natural balance began to change as the stage of simple collector and hunter began to be transformed by that of shepherd through the domestication of some herbivorous animals. The next phase was that of farmer, and there is evidence that the plow was already in use in 4000 BC, both in Mesopotamia and in the Nile. This transformation had a great impact by allowing the ploughing of heavy lands, the increase in production and a significant population growth. With the modification of natural habitats and the accelerated retreat of the forest, there was an increase in erosion and changes in the water regime.

The great deforestation in Europe is believed to have started around 400 BC in the central part of this continent, in the territories that today belong to Poland, Hungary, Germany, and Belgium.

Later (from the Middle Ages onwards), the pace of deforestation increased for several reasons, such as the conquest of larger areas for agricultural crops and pastures, the obtaining of wood for naval construction and, in some cases, for social reasons (e.g., combating banditry taking refuge in the forests). The accelerated

disappearance of the forest was counteracted by the great feudal lords who maintained it to guarantee the inviolability of their hunting preserves.

Small game was the one that best resisted the destruction of original habitats. Large mammals were the most affected. Examples of this reality are the disappearance of the aurochs, the near extermination of the European bison, the extinction of the lion in Europe less than 2,000 years ago, and the sharp decline in the numbers of the bear and wolf (*Canis lupus*). In North America, with the intense colonization by Europeans from the 17th century onwards, the balance that the Indians had maintained with the environment around them was broken. In just over two centuries, there was a brutal transformation of that almost virgin territory with serious consequences for local flora and fauna. The primitive forest was reduced to 4% of the initial one to allow for various agricultural crops. The disappearance of the passenger pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) (there were 250 million...), the Carolina parakeet (*Conuropsis carolinensis*) and the California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) are examples of the impact of the colonization of North America.

Among the mammals, the American bison (*Bison bison*) was almost extinct due to the disappearance of its natural habitat and the real massacres to which it was subjected. The dodo (*Raphus cucullatus*), a non-flying bird endemic to Mauritius Island, became extinct

in 1662, only about a century after its discovery. Similar cases occurred in the Antilles, South America, Asia, Oceania, Australia, Africa, and the Oceans.

In Portugal, as a result of demographic growth and the increasing use of natural areas for agriculture and pastoralism, and with the intensification of hunting, some animals disappeared, such as the Gerês goat (*Capra pyrenaica lusitanica*) and previously the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), declared extinct in the mid-17th century.

Since the beginning of the 18th century, many hundreds of species and breeds of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates have disappeared from the face of the earth, and there are currently thousands of species of animals and plants at risk of extinction. The main reasons that contributed to the disappearance of so many species are varied, but they almost always have their origin in the human being (e.g., transformation and destruction of biotopes, intensive and unregulated hunting, introduction of exotic species, pollution).

## The Evolution of Concepts of Nature Conservation

Already 2,300 years ago, Plato drew attention to the existence of skeletal soils due to erosion and the need to reforest them. Recently, in 1965, Dorst stated that “*Man’s survival on Earth requires a profound transformation of large areas through intensive*



Iberian ibex, of the subspecies *C. p. victoriae*, in the Peneda-Gerês National Park.

PHOTO: DANIEL PINHEIRO

*agriculture, but also the maintenance and protection of natural areas, that is, the establishment of a balance between Man and Nature. Man will always be an integral part of a natural system whose fundamental laws he must follow.”*

It has been known that the situation has been dramatic for a long time and it has not been possible to reverse the millennial trend, but despite everything, over the most recent millennia, there have been signs of concern and conservation measures have been taken by great figures in history. This is the case of Emperor

Asoka of Asia who, in 242 BC, decreed the protection of fish, terrestrial animals and forests, the Incas punished with the death penalty anyone who killed seabirds because they produced a natural organic fertilizer, guano, used by them in agriculture.

In the Middle Ages, this awareness gained greater expression with the promulgation of numerous laws for the protection of fauna and forests that suffered massive cuts. These measures aimed, for example, at preserving the aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) and the European bison (*Bison bonasus*) in Poland and Russia.

## Landscape Changes and Nature Conservation in Portugal

Different people have occupied the westernmost part of the Iberian Peninsula (Portugal and Spain) for millennia and have created a humanized landscape (cultural landscape) through the destruction of native forests, the installation of pastures, the cultivation of soils, and the introduction of various crops, in addition to the exploitation of some resources (namely metals and marine resources). In our Iberian context, the Discoveries had an enormous impact on forests and promoted the arrival of many exotic species.

In 1997, Paiva mentions that the rate of degradation of national forests was so intense that “in the first quarter of the 15th century, numerous local measures had been promulgated by royal decree in order to safeguard forest production. In that period of our history, noble woods from the forest, namely cork oak, oak and pine, were used for the construction of ships and other vessels. For this purpose, large specimens of those species were also chosen, and between 2,000 and 4,000 trees were needed for the construction of a ship. It should be noted that 700 ships were built for connections with India, 300 for Brazil, and 200 ships were needed for the expedition to Ceuta, in the time of D. João I.” Impressive!

Already in the 20th century, the Wheat Campaign, the intensification of afforestation of common lands

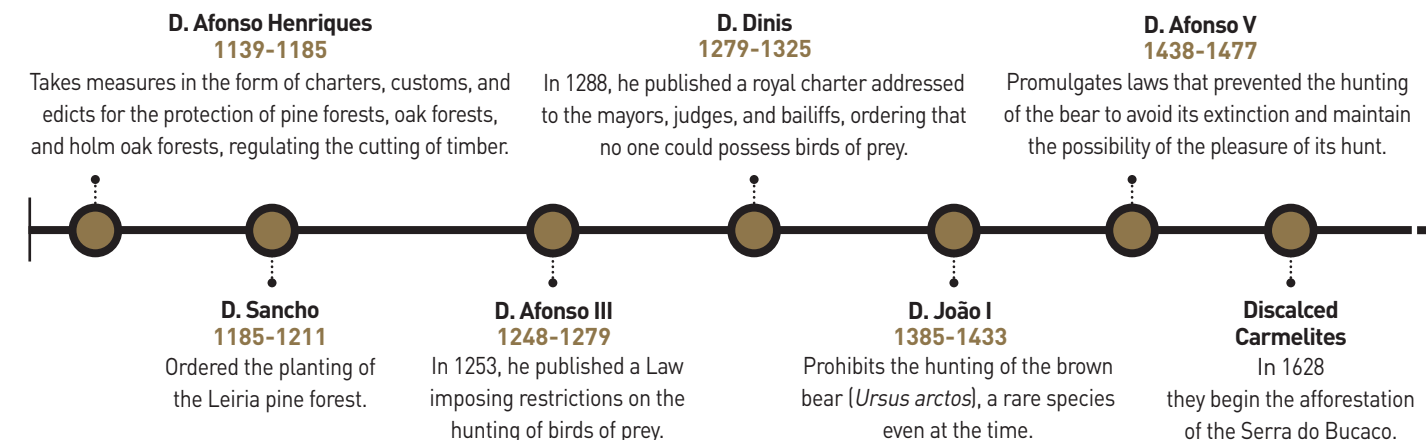


achieved with maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*), and more recently the introduction of mono-specific eucalyptus stands for the cellulose industry had a high-magnitude impact on the national territory, benefiting some species and manifestly harming many others. All these acts contributed to the destruction of natural habitats and the extinction of species, deforestation, erosion, salinization and desertification, air, water and soil pollution. The result was the creation in mainland Portugal of 128 landscape units that result from the interaction between human beings and nature, provide multiple values and functions, including natural resources, habitats, economic benefits in the form of goods and services, recreation and an undeniable cultural heritage that is important to preserve when it benefits the biodiversity that remains.

## Historical stages of nature conservation

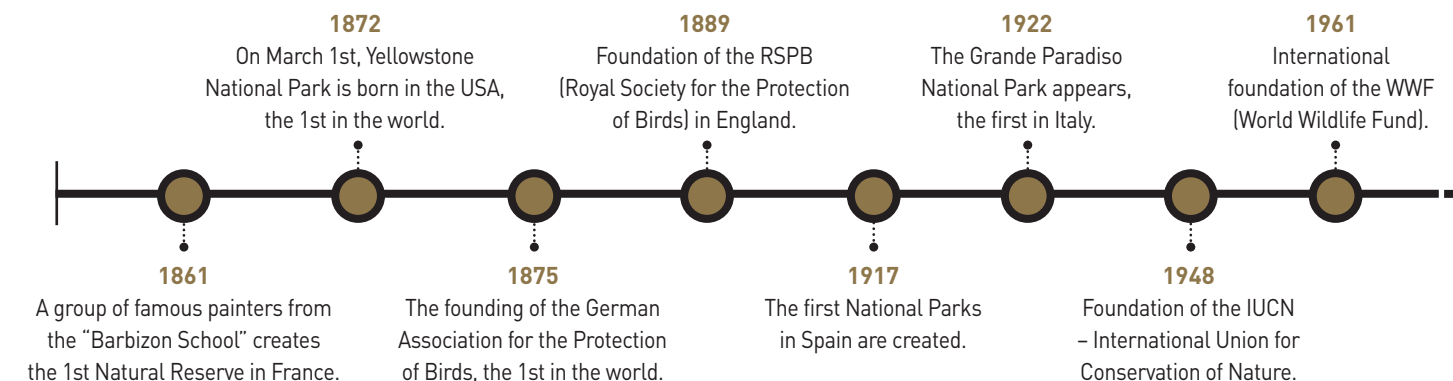
### In Portugal

However, it should not be thought that throughout the centuries and since the Declaration of Independence of Portugal, no measures were taken to protect flora and fauna. I refer below, due to their interest, to some of the most significant:



### Worldwide

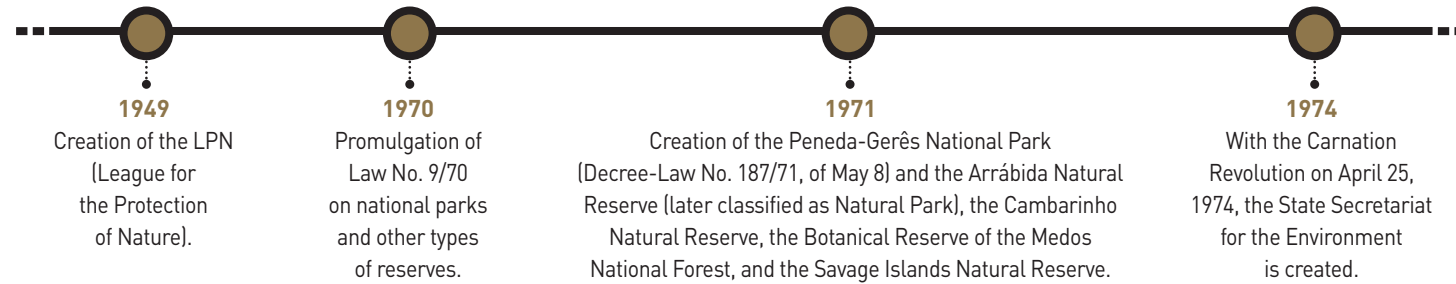
Throughout the world, some measures were also taken by civil society:



## Evolution of concepts of nature conservation

### In Portugal

For different reasons, some dates considered important in the history of nature conservation in Portugal are indicated below:



With the Carnation Revolution on April 25, 1974, the State Secretariat for the Environment was created through Decree-Law No. 550/75, of September 30, with the following general directorates: the National Environment Commission, the Environmental Studies Service, the National Service for Parks, Reserves and Landscape Heritage and the Regional Environment Commissions. In the 70s, with the consolidation of environmental policy in Portugal, the initial concern of planning, centred on the establishment of building and urbanization rules, moved to the establishment of rules for the occupation of rural space with uses and occupations that should reflect the protection and valorisation of the landscape and biophysical systems that support human activities and life in general.

The principles of territorial cooperation and cohesion, social equity and the protection of resources, whether natural or cultural, will be the basis for defining the territorial planning policy. In fact, following the publication of the Basic Law on Soil Policy and Territorial Planning (in the first version of 1998), the multi-faceted dimension of planning is assumed. From a legal point of view, the structure of the current territorial management system, which results from the Basic Law revised in 2014, is organized on a national, regional and municipal scale.

Over the last fifty years, diverse legislation has been published involving the creation of protected areas and their forms of management in Portugal, namely with the publication of Decree-Law No. 142/2008,

of July 24, which created the Fundamental Network for Nature Conservation (RFCN) that involves: a) the National System of Classified Areas composed of Nationally Protected Areas (National Park, Natural Parks, Natural Reserves, Protected Landscapes, Natural Monuments); Regionally or Locally Protected Areas; and Privately Protected Areas; Sites on the National List of Sites and Special Protection Zones of the Natura2000 Network; other Classified Areas under international commitments; b) by Continuity Areas (National Agricultural Reserve, National Ecological Reserve and Public Water Domain).

In the year in which the 25th Anniversary of the “Transhumance Nature Association/FAIA BRAVA – Nature Conservation Association” is celebrated, it is recalled that Privately Protected Areas are considered as part of the National Network of Protected Areas (RNAP) and had legal recognition through DL 142/2008 (“Article 21, No. 1 - In order to achieve the objectives set out in Article 12, the designation of “private protected area” may be assigned to private land not included in protected areas”).

These areas can and should constitute an important contribution from a pedagogical point of view and in the architecture of the National System of Protected Areas, especially since most of the national territory is private. To give an example, it will be interesting to mention that the RSPB – Royal Society for the



Cambarinho Botanical Reserve. - PHOTO: JOÃO CARLOS FARINHA

Protection of Birds was created in 1889, has more than one million members mainly in England where it was born (but also a bit all over the world) and, with this purpose, has acquired over the years, dozens of areas that have a protection status similar to our Private Protected Areas, mentioned above, simply began to be created and managed 85 years earlier.

The role of Civil Society in Nature Conservation and in the management of the territory and landscapes is increasingly on the agenda and deserves to be reinforced.



**LUIS PEREIRA**



**JOSÉ DINIS**



**CARLOS BARROQUEIRO**



**SILVIA LORGA**



**ANA NUNES**



**ANTÓNIO ARAÚJO**

# OUR TEAM

**LUIS PEREIRA,  
Nature Ranger**

“Working at Faia Brava gives me freedom. For me, the reserve is a sanctuary for biodiversity and a natural refuge for those who visit it.”

**JOSÉ DINIS,  
Nature Ranger**

“Faia Brava has been part of my everyday life for 12 years. I want no other life than this. Always in the field, in permanent contact with nature.”

**CARLOS BARROQUEIRO,  
Biologist**

“My first professional experience was at the Faia Brava Reserve. There, I had the opportunity to enhance my theoretical knowledge and apply it to nature conservation initiatives. This work allowed me to acquire practical knowledge about ecology, habitat management, and wildlife monitoring in a region marked by biodiversity and the ongoing effort to restore and enhance natural ecosystems. It has been a fundamental experience for consolidating my vocation in nature conservation and understanding the real challenges of managing protected natural spaces.”

**SILVIA LORGA,  
Administrative and Financial Manager**

“My work at Faia Brava is much more than just a professional career. It’s been 15 years of deep commitment, a unique connection with nature. Over the years, I’ve witnessed the transformation not only of the landscape around me, but also of myself. Witnessing the regeneration of natural habitats and the return of endangered species is an experience that brings a unique sense of fulfilment.”

**ANA NUNES,  
Biologist**

“Faia Brava is an exceptional territory and a true paradise for biodiversity. It was there that I was fortunate enough to begin my professional career and establish myself as a biologist and conservationist. I learned a lot and had the opportunity to contribute to the definition of conservation strategies, restore degraded habitats, and monitor species, promoting sustainable biodiversity management. Working in this unique place, in collaboration with several exceptional partners, has been an honour and a privilege. The high ecological potential of Faia Brava has always been and will continue to be a source of inspiration for me.”

Hortas da Sabóia. - PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME



## 06 Civil society

# AT THE SERVICE OF ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION, NATURE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



**ANTÓNIO ARAÚJO**  
Director of Faia Brava



**NUNO DE SANTOS LOUREIRO**  
Teacher University

acquired properties strategically located to achieve such objective. The set of these properties was given the name of Faia Brava (Faia is, in regional vocabulary, synonymous with 'fraga') and in 2010 the Area was officially classified Faia Brava Private Protected Area, the first in Portugal with this statute.

Currently, Faia Brava - Conservation Association da Natureza, heir to ATN, owns around 1,200 ha of wild land, mostly located along the lower course of the Côa River, in the municipalities of Pinhel and Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo. In these properties, in addition to many other species of resident and migratory birds, nest more than 50 pairs of griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) and two pairs of britangos (*Neophron percnopterus*), as well as bonelli's eagles (*Aquila fasciata*) and royal eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) and black storks (*Ciconia nigra*). Several species of somewhat restricted distribution in Portugal, as is the case roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) and otter (*Lutra lutra*), not

The story of Faia Brava is the story of an activist Civil Society promoting common well-being through the implementation of a model of territorial management based on respect for Nature. We are convinced that this is, in reality, the only way forward to implement policies consequences of Sustainable Development.

25 years ago, the main objective was to guarantee the conservation of several threatened species in the Northeast of Portugal, a noble objective and still very up to date. With the support of international philanthropy and the financing of several projects, the former Association Transhumance and Nature (ATN)

**Bem-Vindo (Welcome)**  
**Hortas da Sabóia**  
Recepção de Visitantes da Faia Brava  
(Faia Brava Visitors Reception)

**RESERVA FAIA BRAVA**

**Normas para uso das Hortas de Sabóia**

**Grande Rota do Vale do Côa**

**Pequena Rota dos Sobreiros da Faia Brava**

Extensão: 1872 m

**CONTACTOS**  
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**Apelo**  
wing

to mention the very rare wild cat (*Felis silvestris*). It is also worth underlining the existence of conditions very favourable for the reappearance of key predators, such as the Iberian wolf (*Canis lupus signatus*) and the Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardinus*). The properties of Faia Brava and a few hundred more hectares of private properties, from neighbours who share our goals and are our partners: together they constitute a unique network in Portugal that we hope to see grow, always with the objective of Creating more Spaces for Nature.

In the lands of Faia Brava we give space to nature which emerges along around 5 km of cliffs, or that is, of wild slopes with great slopes, of outcrops of granite rocks, some with engravings and cave paintings. The region has been inhabited for many thousands of years. Despite its still high value for biodiversity it has suffered negative impacts from a secular agriculture, dedicated to cereal farming and of intensive pastoralism and almost always associated to uncontrolled fires. A centuries-old series of fireworks was interrupted 22 years ago and despite a strong natural regeneration it is essential to implement an integrated forest management policy that allows native forest species, particularly those most threatened, recover their place in the territory and create a mosaic of habitats favourable to a biodiversity in balance.

The integrated reforestation of Faia Brava is a huge challenge. The rocky soil and dry continental climate,

with large thermal amplitudes that can go from less 3 degrees centigrade in January to more than 37 degrees in August, associated with a weak annual rainfall (ca. 400 mm/year), do not facilitate forestry activities. The risk of fire is high despite our efforts. To mitigate it, we operate a daily surveillance system with our own staff and/or volunteers supported by drones and control the density of the bushes and herbaceous vegetation, through the existence of two herds of Garranos living in semi-wild regime.

The vegetation is dominated by broom bushes (*Cytisus scoparius*), sometimes arborescent, with the presence of Cork oaks (*Quercus suber*), holm oaks (*Quercus rotundifolia*) and Portuguese oaks (*Quercus faginea*), strawberry trees (*Arbutus unedo*), Montpellier maple (*Acer monspessulanum*) and junipers (*Juniperus oxycedrus*). Closest to water lines we protect and promote the riparian forest, with ash trees (*Fraxinus angustifolia*), white willows (*Salix alba*) and some more species of the region such as the hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), wild rose (*Rosa canina*) and nettle trees (*Celtis australis*). On the sunnier slopes there is yellow broom bush (*Retama sphaerocarpa*), the wild olive trees (*Olea europea* var. *silvestris*) and terebinth trees (*Pistacia terebinthus*). On the rocky and sandy banks of the Côa river, develop massive tamujos (*Securinega tinctoria*).

The Faia Brava rewilding policy has had as its main objective the maintenance and strengthening of a

landscape mosaic consisting primarily of native forest and sclerophyllous (evergreen) shrubs, but which also includes the region's typical flora and species characteristic of traditional extensive agriculture, such as olive trees and cereals like wheat, rye, and barley, combined with legumes to improve and enrich the soil. Maintaining extensive cereal farming also provides food for a number of prey species that form the base of food chains, such as the rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), the partridge (*Alectoris rufa*), the turtledove (*Streptopelia turtur*), and the wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus*). Domestic pigeons, raised traditionally and freely in the pigeon houses that we are progressively rehabilitating, also benefit from our efforts, which are essential to ensuring healthy predator populations and protecting key Iberian fauna species.

The integrated management of Faia Brava in general and the forest in particular involves a set of annual and cyclical activities, some of which have already been mentioned here. Throughout the year, we maintain our Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo Forest nursery and conduct daily surveillance of Faia Brava, while also systematically cleaning the 21 ponds currently on the property, which are severely affected by an invasive aquatic plant of the genus *Azolla* or water fern. This plant must be periodically removed from the water bodies to maintain and enhance their ecological functions. This network of freshwater



Otter, *Lutra lutra*. - PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME

sources, spread throughout the property, is absolutely crucial for maintaining biodiversity and is a source of great pride for all of us.

We also perform almost continuous selective pruning to ensure faster growth, especially of oak and holm oak trees, making them more resilient in the event of fire and contributing to soil enrichment by incorporating the pruning material into the soil after it has been shredded.

During spring and summer, we monitor the arrival of birds to their nesting sites, monitor the breeding season, conduct annual rabbit and partridge censuses, and we supply our scavenger bird feeders. We remain particularly attentive to the movement of people on the

property to minimize fire risks. In autumn and winter, our busiest times of the year, we collect and sow acorns from the three oak species mentioned above, begin transplanting trees from our nursery, harvest the olives, and sow the cereal that will be used to maintain the prey and ungulate populations of Faia Brava.

By the end of the year, we hope to open a new 2-km-long firebreak on the northern edge of Faia Brava and plant approximately 10,000 trees and shrubs of different species, including ash, oak, cork oak, strawberry, Montpellier maple, nettle, wild rose, junipers, willows, and hawthorns. This is ongoing work, as mortality rates in our crops are high due to low rainfall and high summer temperatures. Implementing our forestry intervention strategy “sow, plant, help to grow and protect each tree” also involves sowing approximately 40,000 cork oak, Portuguese oak, and holm oak acorns, and pruning at least 8,000 young holm oaks, cork oaks, and oaks, under 10 years old, in the growth phase.

This new integrated management strategy will contribute to considerable habitat improvement, promoting local and migratory biodiversity, starting with soil invertebrates, insects, reptiles and amphibians, birds, and mammals. The return of the roe deer is a good example of the results of our efforts and the effectiveness of our wildlife rangers who keep human activities in Faia Brava under control, reducing

disturbance and fire risks. We hope that over time, symbolic species such as the wolf and lynx will return to our territory, with the support of the friends of Faia Brava and all our partners.

### The Creation of a National Network of Private Protected Areas in Portugal

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines a Protected Area (PA) as “a clearly defined geographic space, recognized and managed through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature, including ecosystem services and associated cultural values.” The IUCN classification system considers six management categories and four governance typologies for Protected Areas worldwide. One of these concerns the private management of Protected Areas, defined by the IUCN as “conservation areas created and managed by individual landowners, nonprofit organizations (e.g., NGOs, universities), and for-profit organizations (e.g., landowning companies).”

In Portugal, Private Protected Areas (PPAs) are tools for managing the territory and landscape; the possibility of their creation was established through Ordinance No. 1181/2009, of October 7. PPAs are areas of the national territory where natural resources occur that, due to their rarity, have special



Southern smooth snake,  
*Coronella girondica*.

PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME



Loped Argiope spider,  
*Argiope lobata*.

PHOTO: NUNO LOUREIRO



Iberian marbled white butterfly,  
*Melanargia lachesis*.

PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME

scientific, ecological, social, or scenic significance, and which require appropriate protection and management measures.

The owners of PPAs, whether associations, profit-making or non-profit organizations, or individuals, take the initiative to request the legal status referred to in the previous paragraph from the competent official authority, currently the ICNF. This request is formalized through the submission of an application, accompanied by a management plan and various documentation, resulting in a Management Protocol if the proposal is accepted and the PPA is officially classified.

### The Reason for this “Movement”

According to European Union statistics, the average share of private forest areas is 40%, and properties with public status account for 60% of the EU territory. Portugal is the EU country with the highest percentage of private forest area, around 97%. Despite this situation, in 24 years, only four APPs have been created in our country, currently occupying approximately 816 hectares, a very small area, particularly considering that most of the national territory is privately owned. This reality alone seems to justify the creation of a civil society movement that, in close collaboration with the authorities, will enable us to take on the challenge of creating a Network of

Private Protected Areas, representing diverse and comprehensive territories and landscapes.

This initiative aims, fundamentally, to promote the participation of Civil Society in the definition of regional and national Territorial Planning policies, to value its important role in defining consistent and effective nature conservation strategies, to ensure its active participation in the development and implementation of the National Nature Restoration Plan and in the promotion of sustainable development.

### What are the objectives?

1. Encourage the creation and development of a Portuguese Network of Private Protected Areas (RPAPP);
2. Promote the creation of a department within the ICNF dedicated to various types of support, such as: i) the creation; ii) the effective management of APPs; iii) their development; iv) their financing;
3. Develop a Charter of Principles and Recommendations for the sound management of Private Protected Areas to be submitted for approval by members;
4. Create a platform for dialogue, exchange of experiences, and training among the management entities of legally recognized APPs in Portugal;
5. Advise and support APP managers in seeking funding and developing meaningful projects that

contribute to the restoration of degraded habitats and the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable natural and rural landscapes in Portugal.

### Epilogue

Twenty-five years ago, this crazy idea of starting to buy properties to make more space for Nature arose here in Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo.

Faia Brava and its history inspire, and the region has become better known and more visited. Now that the Côa Valley is on everyone’s lips and everyone is talking about “rewilding” and restoration, no one doubts the relevance and timeliness of our commitment, our intervention strategies, and the positive results of our work. We act to mitigate the negative impacts of human activity, in general and, in particular, the accelerated degradation of the Douro, Côa, and Águeda river valleys and their respective watersheds. We work in close collaboration with local authorities, communities, and various stakeholders in the region, whose support has always been and will always be indispensable to achieving our purpose.

Currently, our main area of intervention is Faia Brava, but this idea, this certainty that the future increasingly involves Creating Spaces for Nature, leads us to think further and gives us the conviction that our



Bridge over the Côa River.  
PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME

accumulated experience must be valued nationally and must reach the rest of the country. We are in favour of the renaturation of habitats degraded by centuries of intensive exploitation, in favour of territories and rural and forest landscapes that are not periodically ravaged by destructive fires, in favour of the return of threatened and endangered species such as the black vulture and the wolf. Above all, we are in favour of a balance between Man and Nature, without either wanting to impose itself and endanger the future of the other. Finally, we are fully convinced that without more nature, there will be no development that is sustainable, contributing to the well-being of people and their communities.

# TESTIMONIALS



**FRANK VAN DER VORM**  
Landowner surrounding Faia Brava

Faia Brava is surrounded by plots owned by various private landowners who came here especially for expanding nature. In 2025 the total of these private terrains around the reserve has helped expand nature 1,5 times. So it is high time to introduce two of these landowners about their dreams and the challenges they face.

Dutch social entrepreneur and war veteran Frank van der Vorm visited Faia Brava first in 2020 because of his son Rodrigo Machado, who was doing research in the Coa Valley. Frank decided this was the place to make his dream come true, drawing and admiring trees since early youth. Now he plants trees to restore biodiversity, reduce CO2 and combat desertification. With his project Arvorest he manages hundreds of hectares of nature reserve between the Coa and Massueime rivers, nearby Faia Brava. Rodrigo with his Brazilian background

helped him with building up local connections and finding his way in Portugal. Frank's project is a social enterprise with international partners, involved in reforestation of former agricultural land.

The challenge on his land is planting as many trees as possible and taking care of them in the first years. But preventing fires is by far the main challenge. He experienced this recently when a major fire destroyed a great part of his land. Fortunately the young planted trees were spared. Frank sums up the challenges he sees: alarm systems for early warning -preventing bigger fires-, clear agreements with all actors in the valley and continuous focus on the common interest of expanding and preserving nature. Ownership is the base: once land is again taken care of, you are surprised what is possible. Attracting people to live and work in the region is also a challenge.



**KEITH MELLEN**  
Landowner surrounding Faia Brava

Keith Mellen from Oxford UK worked more than 20 years as a nature conservationist, volunteer as well as professional. Yet what he sees is that nature conservation doesn't seem to be very successful. Some years ago he heard about rewilding and decided to invest in nature. 'Investment with emotional return' instead of the usual financial benefits. In 2020, through Rewilding Europe, he first visited Faia Brava and the region, where he simply fell in love with the place. He sees Faia Brava ATN as an incredibly special organisation, the first private nature park in Portugal. He decided to buy land with his wife Anne Veck, and to donate for another piece of land. They have two wild parcels along the Coa, south of Faia Brava. Keith very much enjoys his walks over the land, binoculars in hand, during their visits a few times a year.

Keith also calls fire the greatest challenge and searches for ways to spread the risks. In this era of climate-change, with more extreme weather every year and long dry periods, there is a permanent risk of fires. Depopulation in the region is moving rapidly, and has to be turned into something positive. It at least creates space for nature to recover. Resilience of the land is so urgently needed.

In Keith's view, the private landowners around Faia Brava have a model role, considering the future. Also, for the long term, one should look for low-cost maintenance which is effective nonetheless and leads to restoration of the landscape. As there will always be a shortage of funds, Keith concludes Faia Brava must cooperate with a strong partner in the region. Because it is an extraordinary organisation and deserves a future!

Common Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs*.

PHOTO: © JOÃO COSME



## 07 Classified Areas

# PROTECTED AREAS AND OTHER AREAS UNDER LEGAL REGIME, BETWEEN 1957 AND 2025 \*



**JOÃO ALVES**  
Biologist, Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests, IP

The establishment of a legal regime for protected areas (PA) in Portugal first emerged on June 19, 1970, through Law No. 9/70. Two years after April 25, 1974, this law was replaced on July 27, 1976, by Decree-Law No. 613/76, which established in greater detail a new regime for nature protection and the creation of “parks and nature reserves, protected landscapes, and listed objects, complexes, sites, and places,” including a clear definition of each of these typologies, and entrusted the National Service of Parks, Reserves and Landscape Heritage (SNPRPP) with the “management of these protected or classified areas, in collaboration with the local authorities, assemblies

of shareholders, and other State departments” with an interest in the matter.

Although some classified areas were designated before April 25, 1974 (Mindelo Ornithological Reserve, in 1957; Peneda-Gerês National Park, in May 1971; and Arrábida Reserve and Cambarinho Botanical Reserve, both in August 1971), only the areas classified from the second half of the 1970s onwards, under Law No. 9/70 of June 19, resulted from a structured, albeit still very simple, governmental approach that allowed for the specification of an incipient typology of “national parks and other types of reserves.”

In fact, it was only after 1974 that the Portuguese Republic created the conditions and gradually adopted effective regulatory measures aimed at establishing a coherent and sustained policy of nature conservation. The initial adoption of the classification of a broad set of protected areas was crucial to its implementation. The approval of Decree-Law No. 550/75 of September 30 was crucial for its subsequent implementation,

\*Except forest regime and Natura 2000 network



Yellow lilies, *Iris pseudacorus*.  
In the background, the National Center for Environmental  
Education and Nature Conservation, Monte do Paio,  
Santo André and Sancha Lagoon Nature Reserve.

PHOTO: JOÃO CARLOS FARINHA

which resulted in the simultaneous establishment of three national bodies – the National Environmental Commission, the National Parks, Reserves and Landscape Heritage Service, the Environmental Studies Service, and Regional Environmental Commissions.

Even before the approval of the aforementioned Decree-Law No. 550/75, on March 23, 1975 (Decree-Law No. 162/75), the Castro-Marim Marshland Natural Reserve – Vila Real de Santo António was classified as an urgent measure to sustain the deterioration of the marshes and transitional aquatic systems on the right bank of the Guadiana River estuary. This was the first protected area created in Portugal after April 25, 1974.

On July 27, 1976, Law No. 9/70 was repealed by Decree-Law No. 613/76, which established a new typology of protected areas. It was under this law that four new protected areas were created (Almada Landscape Reserve (subsequently declassified), Serra da Estrela, Tagus Estuary, and Arrábida), which were managed, as defined by Decree No. 4/78 of January 11 (amended by Decree No. 37/78 of April 17), by a Director appointed by the Minister of Supervision, on a proposal from the SNPRPP. These new protected areas had collegiate support bodies and advisory body, designated by a general council and a scientific committee or council, also defined by these 1978 laws. On August 1, 1979,

through Decree-Law No. 264/79, two new types of territorial areas with legally protected status were created – “ornithological refuges” and “ornithological areas to be restored,” under which category only Monte Novo do Roncão was classified in March 1991. After 1976 and until 1980, eleven new protected areas were classified – Ria Formosa, São Jacinto Dunes, Coruche Historic Center, Monte de São Bartolomeu, Serra de Aire e Candeeiros, Zambujal Cave, Montesinho, Monte da Barca, and Açude da Agolada, Paul do Boquilobo and Sado Estuary.

Between 1981 and 1983, five new protected areas were classified (Berlenga, Sintra-Cascais, Serra da Malcata, Serra do Açor, and Alvão). On January 31, 1983, the Organic Law of the new Ministry of Supervision of the SNPRPP - Ministry of Quality of Life - was approved by Decree-Law No. 49/83 – which dissolved the SNPRPP, reclassifying it as the National Service of Parks, Reserves, and Nature Conservation (SNPRCN). This new Service was restructured in 1986 through Regulatory Decree No. 3/86 of January 8, which approved staffing for central services and dedicated staffing for protected areas. From that date forward, it introduced a new model of joint management for protected areas grouped by common staff, typically led by a single Director, who thus assumed joint management of protected areas grouped by geographic proximity. In 1984, only one protected area was classified in May: The Fossil Cliff of Costa de Caparica. In 1985, no designation was made, and the

classification of new conservation units resumed only in 1987, with the classification of the Coast of Esposende (later known as the North Coast) in November.

In June 1986, through Decree-Law No. 130/86, of June 7, the SNPRCN became subordinate to the new Ministry of Planning and Territorial Administration, with this law defining the central management structure and the status of the Directors of Protected Areas, who were equated to Service Directors, with the exception for the Director of the Peneda-Gerês National Park, who remained equated to Deputy Director-General. Between May 1984 and November 1987, nine areas with diverse characteristics, functions, and uses were transferred to the responsibility and management of the SNPRCN. These areas were previously managed by the Forestry Services (Trafaria Dunes, Caparica Dunes, Vila Real de Santo António Dunes, Seteais Garden, Vale de Canas National Forest, Queluz Forest, Gelfa Pine Grove, Sete Montes Forest, and land adjacent to the Santa Luzia Hotel), through joint Order MPAT/MAPA No. 202/86 of September 3, 1986.

Through the Environmental Framework Law – Law No. 11/87 of April 7 – the concepts of regional and local protected areas were introduced, while the typologies remained of the existing of areas protected at national level. The management of these new regional and local areas was assigned to local authorities or municipal associations. In addition, the concept of private status

protected areas, conventionally called “sites of biological interest,” also appeared for the first time in this Basic Law on the Environment. These areas could be proposed and managed by the owners of the land covered.

Beginning in 1988, the usual cadence of classifying one or more protected areas each calendar year was resumed, with seven new areas having been classified by 1991 (Paul de Arzila, Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast, Serra de São Mamede, Monte Novo do Roncão, Rocha da Pena and Fonte Benémola, Granja de Serrões and Negrais, and Montes de Santa Olaia and Ferrestelo).

In 1990, the jobs of watchman and nature guard, which had been created in 1980 by Regulatory Decree No. 47/80 of September 20, were finally regulated by Decree-Law No. 321/90 of October 15. In 1991, the symbol identifying protected areas was approved on July 29 (Marn Order No. 25/91) and became part of the national road network signage system.

In early 1993, Decree-Law No. 19/93 of January 23 was approved, establishing the concept of “national system of protected areas” and proceeding to clarify and revise the characterization and definition of the various types, including National Parks, Natural Parks and Reserves, and Natural Monuments, all of national interest, and Protected Landscape Areas, of regional or local interest. It also included, while maintaining the previously established designation—“site of biological interest”—protected areas with private status. It also

provided that, in any of the aforementioned typologies, integral reserves could be delimited, which should preferably be established on publicly owned land or, if not, should undergo an expropriation process under applicable legal terms. This law also provided for: i) the preparation and approval of management plans for all classified areas, whether of national, regional, local, or private scope or interest (these plans override the PDMs), and ii) the creation of Steering Committees, responsible for the direction and management of protected areas of national scope or interest. This change took on enormous importance and became a relevant meaning, as it began to involve mayors in the autonomous governing body of the National Park or Natural Parks and Reserves, which lasted until 2007, when the Institute for Nature Conservation was dissolved and renamed the Institute for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity. As an advisory body, the Advisory Council was established in January 1993, bringing together representatives of scientific institutions and experts of proven merit in the fields relevant to each protected area, as well as representatives of central government services, municipalities, and NGOs.

The President of each Management Committee was appointed and reported directly to the Minister of Supervision, upon a proposal from the President of the ICN, with one Member appointed by the President of the ICN and the other Member appointed by the local authorities covered by the conservation unit. These



Zêzere Glacier Valley,  
Serra da Estrela Natural Park.

PHOTO: JOÃO CARLOS FARINHA

remained in office for one year, rotating with the other local authorities when the classified territory covered more than one municipality, which was the majority of cases. The term of office of the Steering Committee was three years. This same law, in its Chapter IV, redefined and further developed the criteria and clarified the procedures necessary for classifying protected areas with private status, which had been first provided for in the Environmental Guidelines and Bases Law, in April 1987.

For all the changes recommended in Decree-Law No. 19/93 to be operationalized, all protected areas existing in January 1993 should be reclassified, under the terms set forth in Article 32 of Chapter V of this law,

ceasing any previous classifications made under either Law No. 9/70 or Decree-Law No. 613/76. However, in reality, not all protected areas existing until January 1993 were reclassified, with the following remaining under the management of a Director, appointed by the President of the SNPRCN (later, ICN): Peneda-Gerês, Alvão, Coast of Esposende (North Coast), Serra do Açor, Serras de Aire and Candeeiros, Tagus Estuary, Costa de Caparica Fossil Cliff, Sado Estuary, Ria Formosa and Castro Marim Marshland – Vila Real de Santo António. The others were reclassified under and for the purposes of Decree-Law No. 19/93, and began to be directed and managed by Executive Committees until April 2007

(natural parks of Montesinho, Douro International, Serra da Estrela, Tejo Internacional, Serra de São Mamede, Sintra-Cascais, Arrábida, Southwest Alentejo and Costa Vicentina and Vale do Guadiana and nature reserves of Dunas de São Jacinto, Serra da Malcata, Berlenga, Paul de Arzila, Paul do Boquilobo, and Santo André and Sancha Lagoons). After the approval of Decree-Law No. 19/93, several regional protected areas were classified as Protected Landscapes (Azibo

Reservoir, Corno do Bico, Bertandos and São Pedro de Arcos Lagoons and Serra de Montejunto).

The SNPRCN maintained this designation until May 24, 1993, when it was dissolved and replaced by the Institute for Nature Conservation, through Decree-Law No. 187/93 of May 24, which approved the organizational structure of the new Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources. The newly created ICN was, in turn, approved by Decree-Law

No. 193/93 of May 24. This new designation and corresponding new organization led to a profound reorganization and expansion of the ICN's central services, but essentially left the regulatory regime, organization, and technical structure governing protected areas and their respective management and direction bodies established by Decree-Law No. 19/93 virtually unchanged, with the exception of the position of Director of the Peneda-Gerês National Park, which would become Director of Services when the then-acting director terminated his/her service.

In April 1994, by Joint Order of the Ministers of Agriculture, Environment, and Natural Resources, dated April 7, the Monserrate and Pena Parks, along with the adjacent Tapadas (Sintra), were transferred to the management of the ICN, ceasing to be under the management of the Forestry Institute. In 1997, through Decree-Law No. 213/97 of August 16, slight changes were made to Decree-Law No. 19/93 of January 23, affecting the system for appointing members of the Steering Committees and the composition of the Advisory Councils.

After 1993, four new nationally protected areas were classified: the Guadiana Valley, the International Douro, the International Tagus, and the Santo André and Sancha Lagoons. Since 2000, only regionally protected areas, local areas, or those under private initiative and status, have been classified.

## Natural Monuments

Dinosaur Tracks of Ourém/Torres Novas, Carenque, Lagosteiros, Pedra da Mua, Pedreira do Avelino, Cabo Mondego, Portas do Ródão, Canyon Cársico da Ota, Livraria de Mondego.

## Private Protected Areas

Faia Brava (Notice No. 26026/2010, dated December 14); Fragá Viva (Order No. 835/2022, dated January 20); Vale das Amoreiras (Order No. 836/2022, dated January 20); Montado do Freixo do Meio (Order No. 9662/2022, dated August 5).

The classification of the Faia Brava Private Protected Area was thus a pioneering process, establishing a protected area by initiative and with private status. Twelve years later, three more areas were classified with this same typology, following the identification of justifying values and the development of a management plan, instruments that proved to be extremely important and indispensable for the classification of private protected areas.

The management and model for protected areas at the national level, established by Decree-Law No. 19/93, based on the existence of Steering Committees that allowed mayors to be involved in their daily



Dinosaur Footprints Natural Monument - Ourém / Torres Novas.

PHOTO: JOÃO CARLOS FARINHA

management, prevailed until April 2007, when the ICN was abolished by Decree-Law No. 136/2007, of April 27. In its place, the Institute for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity was created, with the direction and management of protected areas being assigned in areas named 'aggregates' to the directors of the Classified Areas Management Departments of five regions. For this purpose, the mainland of Portugal was divided into North / Central and Upper Alentejo / Lisbon Coast and West / South / and Wetlands, with territorial aggregations that, for example, in the case of the DGAC-Wetlands, the one with the greatest geographic dispersion, aggregated, within its northern jurisdictional limit, the Dunes of São Jacinto and, within its southern limit, the Castro Marim Mangrove - Vila Real de Santo António, losing the desired effect of sharing and optimizing resources. Protected areas now have Strategic Councils, which replaced the pre-existing general councils, advisory councils, and scientific committees.

Furthermore, the director of each DGAC could be responsible for between three and seven or more areas, including the Sites of Community Interest (SIC) of the Natura 2000 Network. This decision resulted in tremendous overload and dispersion, and in the almost permanent absence of the Director from the protected area headquarters, preventing him from fully exercising his role as a present

manager and interlocutor with citizens residing in larger or more populated protected areas. This circumstance also resulted in the protected areas gradually no longer having their own local staff of technicians and even Nature Rangers, with in-depth knowledge of their biophysical characteristics and social and economic realities. This situation worsened in 2012 with the merger of the ICNB with the AFN, and these areas began to have to deal with increasingly larger areas classified or subject to forestry regulations, and to perform very diverse functions for which they had not previously been called upon to intervene and had no prior training.

These difficulties were further worsened by the fact that the protected area management plans ceased to be specific, and therefore higher-level, territorial management instruments. They became planning programs and ceased to bind private entities. Through legal changes, they were integrated or absorbed into the PDMs, whose integration process was not carried out uniformly. There were several cases in which important regulatory standards for safeguarding the heritage of relevant values (landscapes, habitats, species, and geological and cultural heritage), which were provided for in the planning plans, were lost and were not adequately or sufficiently transposed into each PDM.

More recently, through Law No. 50/2018 of August 16, operationalized and regulated by Decree-Law No. 116/2019 of August 21, this "anomaly" was partially remedied through the creation of Co-Management Committees. These once again involved Mayors and other local stakeholders and agents in the management of certain components or issues inherent to the normal and overall management of protected areas, particularly those related to their dissemination, use, and enjoyment by the resident or visiting population.

This finding led the ministerial authority to announce very recently that the responsibilities of Co-Management Committees would be expanded, granting them new powers and thus expanding their management capacity. These announced changes would include the appointment of a Director, "... on an experimental basis...", initially in a protected area in each of the five Regional Directorates. This would, in a sense, restore the management model established by Decree-Law No. 19/93, which provided for the existence of a Steering Committee. This model, in my opinion, based on participation in at least six Steering Committees between 1999 and 2007, has worked best, involving Mayors in the management and decision-making process, based on the standards set forth in the management plans and associated regulations.



## TESTIMONIALS

**EVGENIA EMETS**  
Artist and founder  
Global Eternal Forest

I visited Faia Brava for the first time several years ago. I was inspired by the landscape and the way nature is recovering, despite many centuries of unsustainable practices. I immediately saw the potential to connect ancient cultural heritage, cave paintings and engravings, natural heritage, local culture, and what we are creating through contemporary artistic practices.

For the Eternal Forest team, <https://eternalforest.earth/> <https://eternalforest.earth/> Faia Brava is a sanctuary where you celebrate Nature, a living work of art, a biodiverse forest, and an excellent habitat for wildlife.

It provides knowledge and a deep connection between people and the forest. Faia Brava is a privileged cultural space for immersive artistic residencies, interventions, artworks, and artistic journeys.

Let's all work together to unite the natural and cultural legacies of this place and build bridges with the local community, establish a lifelong vital usufruct right, and link Faia Brava to the global network of 1,000 protected forest sanctuaries that we are creating for 1,000 years.

Garranos.

PHOTO: MISHELL FARINANGO





**JESUS GARZÓN HEYDT**  
(11/03/1946 – 24/12/2023)

Jesus Garzón was a pioneering Spanish naturalist and conservationist. He remains an essential reference point for environmentalism and nature conservation in Spain to this day. He promoted the creation of Monfragüe National Park. He fought with the administration, with landowners, with politicians, and with local authorities in the area, but his unwavering commitment led to the creation of the Park. Supported by scientists and nature lovers, among whom Luc Hoffmann stands out, Monfragüe was classified as a Natural Park in 1979, as a Biosphere Reserve in 2003, and as a National Park in 2007. Garzón was also the driving force behind the recovery of transhumance on foot to reclaim the environmental value of this activity that has shaped the landscapes of the Iberian Peninsula for thousands of years. Garzón was always one of Faia Brava's best friends, and we owe him a great deal. Thank you very much, Suso.

