

Key Spanish lagoon dries out due to drought, overexploitation

August 11 2023



An aerial picture taken of the dried out Santa Olalla lagoon in southern Spain.

The largest permanent lagoon in drought-hit southern Spain's Donana

natural park, home of one of Europe's largest wetlands, has completely dried out for the second summer in a row.

A huge patch of cracked white earth has replaced the waters of the Santa Olalla [lagoon](#), which usually houses abundant aquatic life and huge colonies of migrating birds.

The lagoon—which once covered around 45 hectares (110 acres)—has been shrinking in recent years but this is the first time that it has dried out for two consecutive years, according to the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC).

Scientists blame the lagoon's disappearance on a prolonged drought combined with the overexploitation of aquifers for farming and tourism.

"Recent years have been very dry, which is not rare for a Mediterranean climate," Carmen Diaz Paniagua, a researcher at the Donana Biological Station, told AFP.

Most lagoons in the reserve are temporary, filling with rainwater in winter and then drying out in the summer but a few contain water year-round, providing an important refuge for animal life.

"The real problem is the mismanagement of the aquifers. We don't even know how much water is being extracted because there are many illegal wells," she added.

The Donana [national park](#) is surrounded by a sea of greenhouses and the Matalascanas resort town is located less than a kilometer from the northernmost lagoons of the reserve.



Scientists blame the lagoon's disappearance on a prolonged drought combined with the overexploitation of aquifers for farming and tourism.

"This is not a natural thing happening only because of climate change. It can be reversed, if we can reduce the water extractions the lagoon could resist," said Diaz Paniaga.

Water use restrictions are in place on other parts of Spain but that is not the case in towns near Donana where beaches still operate showers, she added.

The Dona reserve boasts marshlands, scrub woodland and beaches and is home to deer, badgers and [endangered species](#) including the Spanish imperial eagle and the Iberian lynx.

But at the Santa Olalla lagoon where [wild horses](#) once drank water

surrounded by storks and flamingos, they now graze alone on the few tufts of grass they find growing from the cracked earth.

Despite warnings from UNESCO and the European Commission, the conservative regional government of Andalusia where Donana is located is pushing to extend irrigation rights near the park.

A draft law currently making its way through the regional parliament would regularize hundreds of hectares of berry farmland currently irrigated by illegal wells.

Defenders of the proposal argue it will aid those who unfairly missed out during a previous regularization of farms in the area put in place in 2014 under a Socialist government.

"The [water](#) management policy is really not conducive to the conservation of Donana's lagoons," said Diaz Paniagua.

© 2023 AFP

Citation: Key Spanish lagoon dries out due to drought, overexploitation (2023, August 11)
retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-08-key-spanish-lagoon-dries-due.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.