

# ***A Natura 2000 Management plan and its partners for the Heathland's safeguard***

## **A concertation process**

According to the French method, the Moulière-Pinail N2000 site was bestowed with a « Document d'Objectifs » (Docob), a kind of territorial management plan, elaborated through a vast concertation process with local partners and users. The 1<sup>st</sup> version, agreed in 98, was the result of a national experimental procedure carried out on 35 sites in France. It concerned only one particular estate sector of the site (about 4 000 ha). A complement is actually in preparation so as to cover all 8 000 ha of the SPA.

## **A strong local partnership**

Since 1995, LPO Vienne has been in charge of co-ordinating first the elaboration then the implementation of this Docob for which it is being commissioned by the Ministry of the Environment. Most efforts bear on managing and restoring heathlands, which constitutes the focus biological issue of the site. Actions were carried out by National Forestry Office (ONF) and GÉRÉPI (NGO in charge of managing the nature reserve that covers part of the Pinail). Ever since 2002, the incoming of new economic local partners gives a new impulse to the whole process.



Male of Montagu's Harrier (Picture CHOISY, LPO)

## **Heathlands condemned...**

The heathland, dominated by *Erica scoparia* (local name : « brande »), was previously used by man to make brooms, roofs, fencing, draining soils, road stabilisation, ovens heating, or stable litters. Running fires, aimed or accidental, helped to created poor pastures and in consequence maintained poor soils in these heaths issued from forest overexploitation.



Flowered heathlands (Picture LIPOVOÏ, LPO)

The Pinail's underground singularity caused the site to be dug out with thousands of excavations some of which now became ponds : the silicate rocks were extracted for grind stones (see picture). This activity gave the site its peculiar geomorphology as well as its name « Moulière » (« grindings »).

Agricultural modernisation since the second half of the 19th century caused the disappearance of 99% of this kind of habitat in Poitou-Charentes region. The end of heath usage after 1950 prepared the further disappearance of the relictual 2000ha. The conservation of this biological, cultural and historical richness started with the creation of the Pinail Nature Reserve in 1981. It is now enhancing through the development of commercial channels.



Grind stone in Pinail (Picture GRANGER, LPO)



## Rejuvenation therapy : from mimicry to innovation

Being secondary growths, heaths necessitate human intervention so as not to turn back to forest. The goal to be achieved is thus to periodically rejuvenate the heath and export all organic matters to maintain low soil fertility.

Mimicking the ancient human practices first came to mind of the first site's managers. The process for instance consisted in the development of controlled fires operations by the GÉRÉPI. Surrounding firebreaks, presence of fire brigades and appropriate climatic conditions were necessary for the burning of areas from 3 up to 10 ha, in autumn or winter (see picture). This solution is particularly adapted for highly excavated sectors. An enclosure receives, after burning, a sheep and goats herd to maintain apertures and herbaceous vegetation.



First fire up by ONF's agent (Picture PAPOT, LPO)

Noting the imperfections of forestry crushers which left behind a thick layer of crushed materials on the ground and damaged briar roots, ONF and LPO Vienne were looking for innovating techniques since 1994. The meeting of a highly motivated forestry contractor lead to a first very satisfying experience : 7 ha of heathland were rejuvenated and all crushed organic matter exported out of site : the modified crops ensilage machine (see picture) is now available on Mr REDON catalogue, who also operated in Brenne and in Chambord forest.



Heath's ensilage (Picture DUBOIS, LPO)

Furthermore, manual heath cutting operations as well as heath bundle making continues to make brooms and palisades. After the disappearance of a local reinsertion team workers, the only subsisting Vienne manufacture is that of Mr GUILLET. Same as running fires, this technique offers the advantage of being freed of access problems. Manoeuverers cut finger-thick stalks and bind them into bundles using a very strange wheelbarrow (see picture) !



Wheelbarrow for making heath's bundles (Picture DUBOIS, LPO)

Since winter 2004-2005, Pinail is the centre of very strange scenes: a simplified combined harvester (the beating complex having been taken out) is being driven through the heathland by Mr GUILLET (see picture). This machine collects loose heath which will be used to confection food industry fumes filters. As a consequence, almost 12 ha of 30-40 age-old heathland were thus regenerated, divided in two lots so as to create a habitat mosaic: the flora will benefit from light increase and soon will Dartford Warbler (*Sylvia undata*) and harriers (*Circus cyaneus*, *C. pygargus*) nest again.



Heath's "harvest" (Picture DUBOIS, LPO)

Same as bundle making, this technique offers the advantage of an economical valorisation of all cut products. Some operations will then be allowed to quit financial aids systems to enter standard distribution channels. After some years of banishment, heathlands are now ready to find their true place again within social, economical and cultural landscapes. That's how this biological heritage will route towards real conservation.