

THE TURQUOISE COAST ENVIRONMENT FUND (TCEF)

Part of the Conservation Collective



The Turquoise Coast Environment Fund (TCEF) is being set up to protect and restore nature along the Aegean and Mediterranean coasts of Turkey.

TCEF will raise funds from people and businesses, locally and internationally, with strong Turkish connections, and distribute that funding to the most effective grassroots environmental initiatives, campaigns, and projects.

In the pages to follow is the executive summary of the full scoping report, commissioned by Conservation Collective and written by Esra Basak (February 2022).



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The scoping study describes the environmental situation in the area, and highlights key challenges, threats, and opportunities for change in the region. Local and national environmental organisations contributed to the report, which will feed into TCEF’s strategy.

Turkey’s wide variety of habitats and species makes the country one of the most biodiverse in the region. However, Turkey’s natural environment and coastal and marine resources face increasing pressures from growth in energy use, industry, transport, tourism, and agriculture, all of which have resulted in habitat and species’ loss, water stress, soil erosion, and pollution. Negative pressure from sea snot and wildfires last summer affecting biodiversity and much needed tourism income.

The new Turquoise Coast Environmental Fund (TCEF) will fund projects and support groups working to preserve, protect, and regenerate Turkey’s native species and habitats, both on land and at sea. The TCEF is based on the proven and successful model of the Conservation Collective – a global network of over 16 local foundations funding effective grass-roots conservation initiatives to protect the environment, restore nature and safeguard against climate change. TCEF will operate under the auspices of the Conservation Collective, a UK charity, in partnership with a local regrating organisation in Turkey.

Turkey – One of the Most Biodiverse Countries in the Region

Turkey is a land of transition situated between Asian, European, and African continents with critical natural wealth and biodiversity in agro-ecological landscapes and species. Three biogeographical regions merge in Anatolia which have been declared global biodiversity hotspots by Conservation International¹: the Mediterranean (Black), Irano-Anatolian (Grey), and Caucasus (Blue) (Fig. 1).

The country boasts an impressive variation in geographic features such as extensive mountain systems, closed water basins, micro-climatic conditions, and encirclement by three seas have resulted in high terrestrial, marine and freshwater diversity. Turkey nature highlights:

- Two major bird migration routes pass through the country.
- 1,500 species of vertebrates, 19,000 of invertebrates and 11,000 species of native vascular plants (recorded so far) of which more than 30% are endemic.
- Two endangered marine species: Mediterranean monk seals and loggerhead marine turtles.
- Five micro-gene centres – important for the sustainability of many plant species cultivated across the world.

¹ Biodiversity Hotspots are regions that collectively have an endemism of no less than 50% of its vascular plants or 42% of terrestrial vertebrates (amphibians, mammals, birds, and reptiles) and which have lost at least 70% of their original natural habitat.



- Six Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS), established by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN-FAO), to protect valuable agricultural systems rich in biodiversity and home to indigenous knowledge, technology, and cultural value.



Figure 1. Turkey sitting at a crossroad of geographic variation and consequent outstanding biodiversity. The three biodiversity conservation hotspots come together in its landmass: the Mediterranean (in Black), Irano-Anatolian (in Grey) and Caucasus (in Blue). Map source: Conservation International



Figure 2. Forests, Woodlands and Scrub are important features of the Mediterranean culture. Olives, pistachio, figs and laurel are key species in the local human culture. The Fertile Crescent springs from Turkey, an area of valuable agricultural land that supported some of the earliest human civilizations (photo: Esra Başak)

Challenges

Protected Areas in Turkey's Aegean and Mediterranean coasts fall mainly under the Special Environmental Protected Areas (SEPA) status. There are also other categories of protection such National Parks, Nature Parks and Ramsar sites, but often they lack the applicable management plans and respective enforcement to be effective. Overall, less than 10% of Turkey's territorial waters are protected under a formal conservation status. Additionally, the legal base of MPAs in Turkey is not well-grounded, often with overlapping public institutional authorities.

The Mediterranean Basin has been identified as one of the two most responsive regions to climate change globally. The IPCC - Intergovernmental Platform on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report considers the Region as "highly vulnerable to Climate Change" highlighting that Turkey will experience three accelerating trends: **rising temperatures, dehydration, and rising sea levels**. Thus, the country is likely to experience more frequent and more severe weather conditions throughout the year. These have consequences on marine and coastal waters and increases overall strain on the environment.

Turkey's growing population putting strains on resources (it has doubled in the past 40 years). Effects of human-related pressures and climate change have a greater impact on communities and economies that depend on landscapes and seascapes. Water abstraction or diversion for agriculture has resulted in the disappearance of several key wetlands and lakes. Coastal-intensive **tourism developments** are common and contribute to erosion, pollution and sedimentation which threaten both the marine as well as terrestrial habitats along the Mediterranean and Aegean coastal regions of Turkey.



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Areas of Interest

TCEF will focus on three main thematic areas in Turkey, on land and at sea, identified thanks to the research in the scoping report, and aligned with the Convention on Biological Diversity – Global Biodiversity Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sustainable Food Systems

Food systems need rebuilding and adapting to sustain Turkey’s high and growing population, and to adapt to changing climatic conditions, currently causing water shortages and increased fire risks. TCEF will support the resilience & maintenance of agricultural and traditional landscapes/seascapes, the reduction of waste & chemicals, and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods.

Biodiversity Conservation & Ecosystem Services

Projects addressing marine and terrestrial biodiversity through the protection of endemic and threatened species will be of prime importance for TCEF, particularly those driven by or involving participation from local communities. The connectivity & improved (co) management of protected and priority areas will also be key. Ecosystem-based approaches to e.g., fisheries management, with a holistic focus on ecosystem restoration and the enhancement of ecosystem services to protect society, and economic activities, against negative impacts of climate change, will be prioritised.

Legal & Institutional Empowerment of NGOs

It will be fundamental for TCEF to support and empower the local entities (CSOs, NGOs, civic platforms) with legal & institutional support; collaboration, transfer of knowledge and best practice; and capacity building – proposal writing, campaigning, and networking.

Cross-cutting themes

Issues that are related to freshwater systems, climate change, invasive alien species, social inclusion, sustainable resource management, environmental education & awareness raising will also be considered.

Opening new channels of funding for local NGOs

There are a great number of NGOs and CSOs addressing environmental problems in the Turkish Aegean and Mediterranean. According to the national NGO registry system DERBIS, in 2021 a total of 2,602 environmental, natural life and animal rights associations are active in Turkey, 25% of which are in the Aegean Region.

Local environmental champions work tirelessly to protect the place they call home from the impacts of climate change and the biodiversity crisis. Those closest to the problem are often best placed to provide the solution. However, in Turkey, as with many other parts of the world, there is a very small pool of funding directly available for grassroots conservation initiatives, especially community level actions. Any funding which is available, tends difficult for small groups to access.



The TCEF aims to be a nimble, responsive, and non-bureaucratic funder, awarding grants to boost and amplify the impact of these organisations addressing TCEF’s priority areas of concern. A local executive director will lead the organization on a full-time basis. Projects will be screened by way of an independent local advisory board and then selected by a donor-advised steering committee.

A small amount of targeted financial support, together with mentoring and technical assistance, can be very powerful in driving long term conservation benefits and systems change.

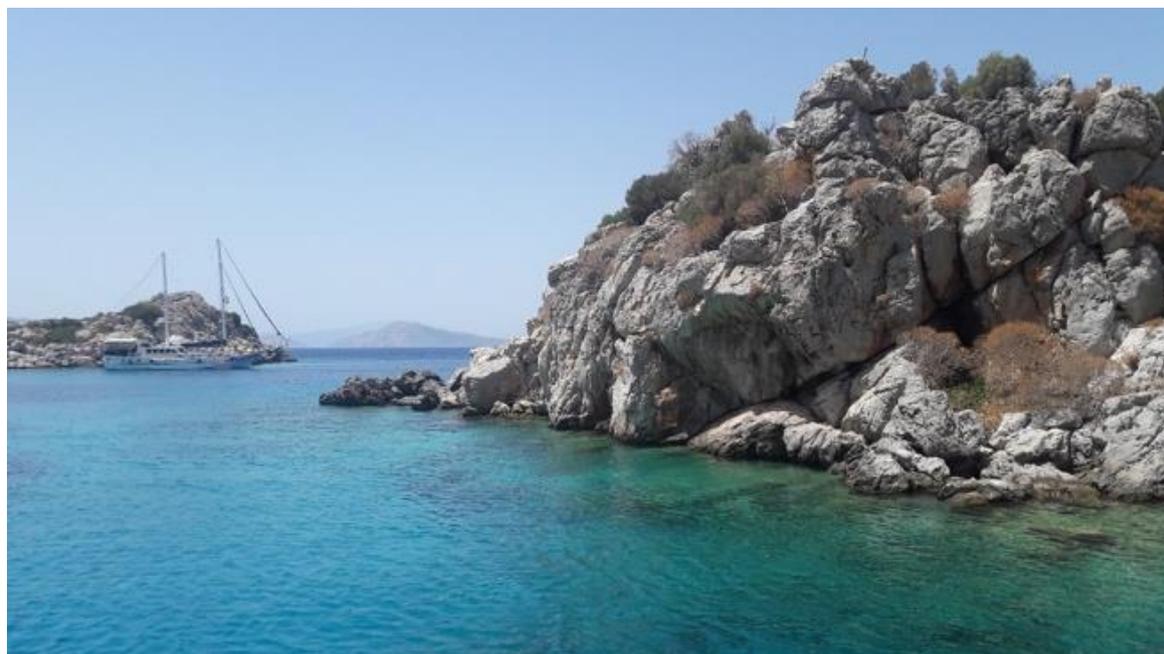


Figure 4. Datça-Bozburun Peninsula, one of the Special Environmental Protected Areas in Turkey’s Turquoise Coast (photo: Esra Başak)

The Road Ahead for TCEF

The overall objectives for TCEF are:

- To raise funds to support the most effective environmental projects and campaigns working to protect and restore nature along the Aegean / Mediterranean Coasts of Turkey
- To facilitate funding for the most effective grassroots environmental initiatives, with professional oversight, management, and programme aid
- To provide a neutral platform through which to coordinate already existing environmental organisations’ efforts towards an aligned and cohesive long-term strategy for protecting nature in the region.

Drawing on the enormous passion for Turkey’s coastal environment from both the national and international communities, TCEF will raise a minimum of €100,000 a year. A small group of committed founding donors has already been identified. We will aim to grow the fund 20% per year, bringing in local businesses and corporate partners, as well as larger trusts and foundations to scale and replicate successful projects, and increase its impact



Join us!

Every effort to conserve Turkey's unique coastal and marine landscapes and its tremendous biodiversity matters because the country's growing economy has come with costs to environmental and natural resources which are currently in a stage of increasing degradation and depletion.

The need to demonstrate and scale-up locally implemented, practice-oriented conservation cases is more valuable than ever to reverse the fast-paced habitat destruction/fragmentation and consequent biodiversity loss in its Aegean and Mediterranean. Please join TCEF's efforts to help build a philanthropic giving mechanism to protect and restore our precious nature for generations to come!

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Visit the Conservation Collective website <https://conservation-collective.org/>

