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"Brief Historical Ecology of Northern Portugal during the Holocene"

Pinto, Bruno, Carlos Aguar, and Maria Partidário

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This study reviews the main changes of the vegetation and fauna in northern Portugal during the Holocene, using literature from palaeoecology, archaeology, history, writings from travellers and naturalists, maps of agriculture and forestry and expert consultation. The ecological history of this area shows a trend of forestry decline, with periods of recovery of the vegetation related to the decrease of human pressure on natural resources. The deforestation began on the high plateaus of this region, extending later to the heavier and more productive soils of the valleys. In the beginning of the Holocene, the climate seems to have been the most important trigger of change in this area, but human impact probably became preponderant in the last 5000 years. The natural herbivorous fauna was probably reduced, with the extinction of species such as wild horse, aurochs and European beaver, and partially replaced by human action. Nevertheless, the high resilience of ecosystems has enabled their sustainability for eight millennia and has also allowed the recovery of the vegetation and fauna in the recent decades.

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