

Session 5 – Conservation issues and biological invasions

**INCORPORATING LOCAL INSIGHTS THROUGH INTERVIEWS AND
A PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP FOR INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT
IN SOUTHEASTERN IBERIAN ARID ECOSYSTEMS**

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Effective Invasive Alien Species (IAS) management requires understanding ecological impacts and stakeholder perceptions, yet these are limited in arid and semiarid ecosystems. We tackled this using the South-eastern Iberian Peninsula as a study case. We conducted over 35 semi-structured interviews across the region and a participatory workshop in the Guadalfeo river watershed, gathering insights from diverse stakeholders including land managers, officials, and specialists. Through Framework Analysis we structured the interview data into thematic categories, reflecting stakeholders' concerns and priorities. This, along with species prioritization during the workshop, provides nuanced understanding of local management needs. Key species identified through interviews include *Cenchrus setaceus*, *Cortaderia selloana*, *Nicotiana glauca* and *Ricinus communis*, alongside invasive species such as *Arundo donax* and *Ailanthus altissima*. The latter two were also noted during the workshop for their marked socio-economic and environmental impacts on local ecosystems and agriculture in the Guadalfeo watershed. The interviews underscored urgent challenges as prioritized non-chemical control, collaborative strategies, and greater legislative enforcement to address IAS spread effectively. During the workshop, stakeholders shared their direct experiences and perceptions reaching a consensus across common challenges. Specifically, they emphasized the importance of socio-ecological approaches in resource management and the need for a coordinated long-term plan across sectors for IAS management. Finally, 17 actions were identified to tackle the challenges. By leveraging local knowledge through interviews and participatory methods, the study enhances our understanding of the dynamics at play in invasive species management and underscores the necessity for strategies that are both scientifically informed and culturally attuned. This approach can potentially ensure that management interventions and IAS plans are responsive to local needs, facilitating more effective and sustainable outcomes.