

THE FOREST OF YERAKARI KARAVAS KYTHERA

LOCATION:

The Yerakari Forest is located in the north and northwest part of Kythera. It extends from the northern outskirts of the village Yerakari and occupies all the northern and western ravines of the area, West it reaches up to almost the sea and north up to the location KALAKATHI where there is an old settlement.

CREATION-EXTENT:

The forest of Yerakari was created by technical reforestation from the middle of the 1960's until the years 1974-1975. It occupies an area of 6500-7000 stremmata.

In the decade of 1960 the World Council of Churches began to do reforestation next to roads and various parts of the island with volunteers, mainly foreigners but also many Kytherians. For this purpose the WCC had created a small nursery in the area of the monastery of Myrtidiotissa with plants of chalepio, pine and eucalyptus. The Forest Service then produced a special reforestation study for the island of Kythera. A large nursery was created for the production of plants in the monastery of Agios Theodoros, where the plants were prepared for the reforestation. The plants used were chalepios and brutia pines, eucalyptus, cypress and oak (*Quercus*)

CHALEPIOS PINE *Pinus halepensis*: It is small to middle tree with a height of 15 to 30 meters and trunk diameter that reaches 60 cm which in rare cases reach up to one meter. The needles are very thin, they have a length of up to 15 centimeters and their characteristic is the yellowish green color. The needles develop in two on short branches. Cones are narrow and initially green, and when they ripen after about two years it is reddish. Then in the coming years they open slowly, a process that speeds up with exposure to the summer heat of the sun and to a forest fire. The seeds are scattered by winds..

BRUTIA PINE (epiast. *Pinus Brutia*-Larch the trachea) is a pine, indigenous to the eastern Mediterranean region and is found from the sea level up to 1200 meters altitude in the most southern regions. It's called a tracheal pine because of the "roughness" of the needles. The needle leaves of the Pines are compressed (flat) but curl (like cigarettes). In the brutia pine the edges of the leaves are serrated (as in other pines) and the needles do not fully curl giving a rough feel when touched. It has several common names such as Turkish pine or Calabrian pine, although in Turkey they call it Kızılçam (Kigilcham-Red pine). It is closely connected with the Chalepio Pine, and for this reason some researchers consider it a subspecies of Chalepa pine, but it is usually considered a separate species. It is on average taller than Chalepa and can reach 35 meters in height and has a rougher reddish-red trunk with more pus. It also has longer needles with slightly darker green color that are thin and coarse to the touch. The cones also grow correctly and symmetrically (two or three with a length of 6-10 cm) in contrast to the CHALEPA which have a stalk and turn to the ground.

EUCALYPTUS In Greece the Eucalyptus is called the spherical (*Eucalyptus globulus*) It is an angiosperm, native plant and belongs to the Myrtaceae family. There are about 550 species of large trees grown in temperate areas for commercial exploitation and also for their shade. Its leaves are long, leathery and hang from the tree. The fruit forms a dish that is surrounded by a sheath and contains many small spores while the flowers when opened unite together forming a small container. The leaves of many species contain an oil known as eucalyptus oil used in the pharmaceutical trade particularly for nasal sprays. From the trunk of some other species the resin is taken and used for tanning and pharmaceutical purposes.. The trees are high and can reach a height of 90 meters and the circumference of the trunk reaches up to 8 meters. They are the tallest flowering plants.

In the area of YERAKARI before the planting of saplings a dense network of access roads for fire prevention were created and exist until today. The woodland and zones were used as firewalls. Today with the growth of trees and the density of vegetation some roads do not offer this protection. For the preparation of the planting area of the trees, by mechanical means there was deforestation of the existing undergrowth and brushwood vegetation. Planting was done with workers who opened the pits and then planted the saplings. This process lasted more than ten winters. Hundreds of workers of all ages were employed and a great deal of money was spent by the state.

Over the years, along with the growth of the trees, the pre-existing brushwood vegetation was restored, where it was destroyed. Also with the development and maturation of pine and eucalyptus trees, the forest every year is now extended with the seeds of pine cones in all directions. This is seen everywhere in the forest with the new little saplings that we observe everywhere.

ZONE OF EVERGREEN BROADLEAVES. In the zone of the evergreen broadleaf, an altitude of 0-1000 meters, spreads the entire area of the forest of Yerakari. It is covered today by Chalepa Pine (*Pinus halepensis*), the trachea pine (*Pinus brucia*), and eucalyptus mixed in with the evergreen broadleaf. The evergreen broadleaves are mainly represented by the koumaria (*Arbutus Unedo*), heather, filliki (the *Phillyrea latifolia*), the Skina, the eucalyptus, the *Aspalathos*, oak and wild olives. The dominant species of brushwood found in the forest are: thyme, *Asperito*, Throumpa or Throubi, *Ladania*, lavender, afana, oregano, straw leg, mint etc. All these aromatic herbs are necessary for beekeeping.

Apart from the reforestation, there were also projects for the development of livestock. One of these works is the rainwater tank that exists and operates until today. It is located near the settlement on the first vertical road left in the Great Firewall. Rich fauna abounds in the forest and the wider region. From the mammals the hare, the Badger (commonly *Zourida*) and many species of birds, endemic and migratory pass through the island of Kythera twice a year. Due to the rich fauna of the region, the forest of Yerakari has defined a large area of it as a training area for hunting dogs. Its demarcation is done with the cooperation of the Hunting Association of Kythera and the forestry service. Hunters come here with their dogs but without shotguns.

GENERAL

Chalepios and the trachea pine together with all the bushy species of the evergreen broadleaf, have similar ecological requirements, and are found in the entire coastal and inner zone of South mainland Greece, the Peloponnese and the islands. They occupy 31538820 stremmata of 48.2% of the country's forest cover. The importance and value of the Yerakari forest for the island of Kythera and forests in general is invaluable for our lives and their continuous reduction creates the huge and great responsibility for their protection. In the face of the threat of forest destruction, especially from fires, no-one can be or must not be indifferent. Why: Today the importance of forests for the economic and ecological health of all countries is increasingly recognised.

Why: The forest is a natural resource with the possibility of multiple rich and renewable offerings. Why: The use of forests for recreation, rest and enjoyment of nature, is a vital necessity for the inhabitants, especially for those from the cities, the number of which constantly increases. **Why:** The role of forests in protecting against corrosion, preserving soil quality, regulating the water cycle and supplying the aquifer, arresting atmospheric carbon dioxide and stabilizing the climate SHOWS the decisive importance in tackling the greatest modern environmental problems. WHY Because the protection of forests * appears today * as a prerequisite for ensuring the survival and well-being of man.

Thus, the taking of drastic measures for fire protection is imposed, not only because of the destruction of forest products, but mainly because of the loss of significant multi-function forests. Our forest requires immediate fire protection with the creation of new firewalls especially in the northeast boundary with the widening of the existing road, but in other sensitive places that will be deemed necessary.

According to article 24 of the Forest Constitution : as a forest or forest ecosystem means the organic whole of wild plants with a woody trunk, on the surface of the soil, which together with the co-existing flora and fauna, constitute through mutual interdependence and interaction, a particular biocommunity (forest biocommunity) and a particular natural environment (forestry). Forest area exists when in the above, the wild woody vegetation, high or bushy, is sparse.