



**Environmental Awareness Programme  
&  
Ecological Conservation Project**

Last revision: June 2026

**Welcome to Start Campus' Environmental Awareness Programme, an initiative that reinforces our commitment to protecting local biodiversity and enhancing the unique natural heritage of the Sines region. The coastal landscapes of Sines, which are part of the Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park, form a meeting point between land and sea, where sand dunes, temporary ponds and sea cliffs create a mosaic of habitats protected under the Natura 2000 Network.**

The project includes awareness-raising, monitoring, conservation and ecological restoration activities, focusing on two priority habitats protected under the Natura 2000 Network.

## Awareness Signage

Signage will be developed — both identification and descriptive panels — for species, in order to promote environmental education programmes. In parallel, workshops aligned with school curricula will take place. The following themes are suggested for educational activities: a) Individual endemic and vulnerable species; b) Climate change; c) Biodiversity; d) State of the sea and soils; e) Water and effluents; f) Waste; g) Priority habitats belonging to the Natura 2000 Network and the Habitats Directive. Two types of signage will be developed: a) Individual identification panels — already installed in the community at Escola Poeta Alberto; b) Ecosystems

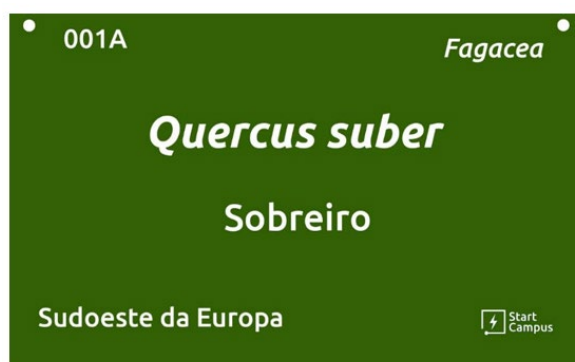


Figure 1. A)



Figure 1. B)

## Local Ecosystem and Biodiversity

Start Campus' Data Center is in an area of exceptional ecological value, where two priority natural habitats historically intersected: Mediterranean Temporary Ponds (3170\*) and Atlantic Wet Heaths (4020\*). These habitats are recognised under the European Union Habitats Directive for their rarity and the unique biodiversity they support.

### Mediterranean temporary ponds (Habitat 3170\*)

These seasonal wetlands — flooded in winter and dry in summer — are considered a priority habitat for conservation, distinguished by their unique ecological conditions and by the species that live, feed and reproduce within them. Among the most characteristic are several species of quillwort (*Isoetes* spp.), the lagoon-thistle (*Eryngium corniculatum*), amphibians such as the pygmy marbled newt (*Triturus pygmaeus*), and rare crustaceans such as the tadpole shrimp (*Triops vicentinus*).



Carla Pinto-Cruz

## Temperate Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica ciliaris* and *Erica tetralix* (Habitat 4020\*)

Characterised by a mosaic of heathers, notably *Erica ciliaris* and *E. erigena*, and dwarf gorse (*Ulex minor*) these heathlands grow on waterlogged soils with a high carbon sequestration capacity. They are a central element of the coastal system of natural habitats, supporting a remarkable diversity of insects, small reptiles and small mammals, such as Cabrera's vole (*Microtus cabrerae*).



## Conservation and Community Engagement

Start Campus is committed to conserving these habitats and species through ecological restoration actions, species translocation and continuous monitoring, as defined in the Environmental Impact Assessment. Educational programmes, workshops and informative signage are also being developed to raise awareness and foster a culture of environmental responsibility among visitors and the local community.

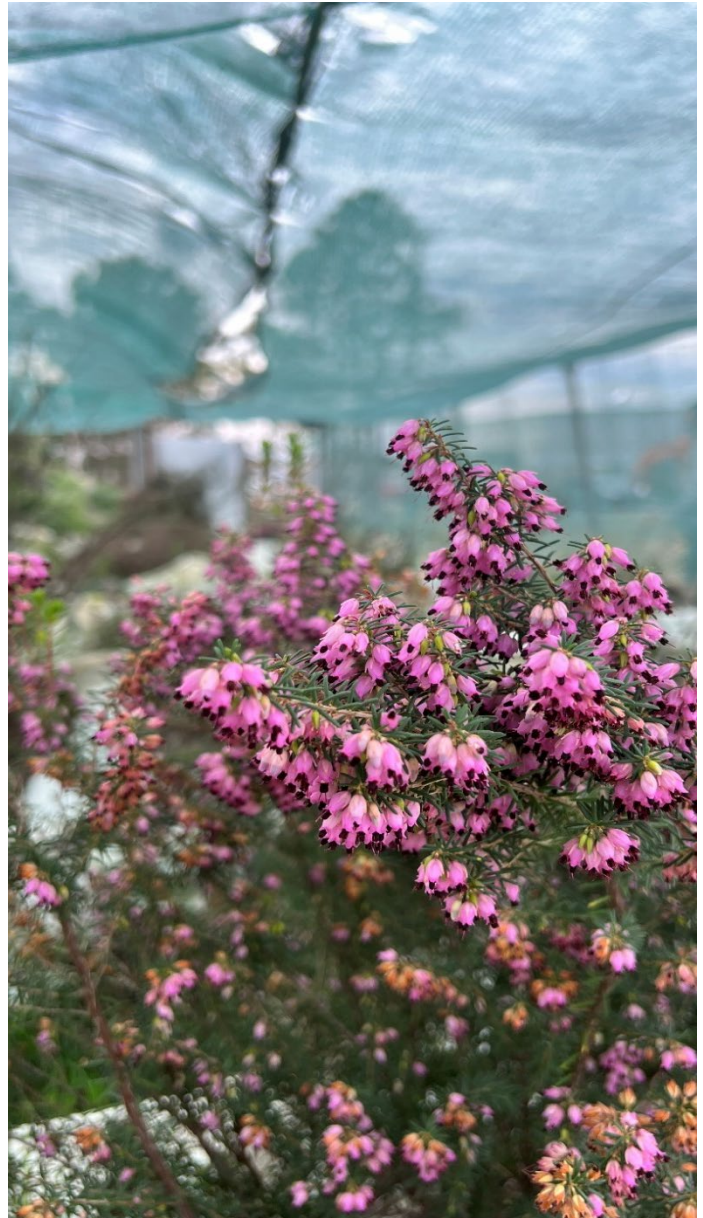
### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## Start Campus' Ecological Conservation Project

Start Campus is leading an innovative environmental conservation project, with the main objective of restoring and protecting two priority habitats in Portugal — Atlantic wet heaths (habitat 4020\*) and Mediterranean temporary ponds (habitat 3170\*) — on a 55-hectare plot at Herdade das Pousadas Novas (HPN), within the Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park. This area of the estate provides the appropriate soil and climate conditions for this purpose, serving as the baseline destination site for the translocation of habitat 4020\* and the restoration/recreation of habitat 3170\*.

In addition to the EIS requirements regarding these two priority habitats (4020\* and 3170\*), Start Campus is laying the foundations for an active conservation management programme that provides holistic protection for several habitats and species of community interest, under a 150-hectare lease for a period of 25 years. Although this project is based on compliance with the environmental licensing requirements of the Sines DC, the Ecological Conservation Project (ECP) goes far beyond legal requirements by integrating a robust, scientifically grounded plan to ensure not only the mitigation of construction impacts, but also the active enhancement of local biodiversity.



*Figure 5. Start Campus nursery, before translocation. Big bags containing Erica erigena.*

In collaboration with experts from the University of Évora's Mediterranean Institute for Agriculture, Environment and Development (MED) and the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests (ICNF), Start Campus is committed to developing the various phases of the project, namely:

1. Safeguarding and translocating three habitat 4020\* nuclei, representing an area of 0.50 ha, as well as 185 big bags of this habitat containing soil blocks with rooted vegetation.
2. Conserving and restoring the Mediterranean temporary ponds (3170\*) existing in the destination area.
3. Creating a 25-year conservation plan, with continuous scientific monitoring.
4. Enhancing other threatened and endemic species of the Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park (PNSACV).



*Figure 6. HPN — 150 ha of protected area, dedicated to restoration, conservation and continuous monitoring activities, located within the PNSACV.*

**The first phase of the Project was completed on 26 March 2025 and constituted the largest translocation of habitat and protected flora specimens at European level.**

All habitat blocks were transferred to ecologically suitable areas within HPN, with no impact on existing habitats. The operation took place under daily technical-scientific supervision and was subject to frequent drone monitoring.

For the purposes of translocation at the final destination site, seven areas were identified within HPN, with access facilitated by existing paths. Prior to translocation, invasive species were removed and treated, in accordance with ICNF guidelines.

These actions are detailed in the Pinto-Cruz & Almeida Technical Report (2024), led by Prof. Carla Pinto Cruz, which should be read together with the Addendum to the Plan, where the changes resulting from the reference conditions observed in February 2025 are described.

## **Dune Habitats — Present at HPN**

Dunes, formed by sand accumulated and transported by the wind, act as natural barriers that protect inland areas from the advancing sea and the force of the wind.

Dunes are harsh environments. Plants must withstand salt spray, lack of freshwater, extreme heat or cold, and constant exposure to sand and strong winds. These are not easy conditions to survive. Yet, dune ecosystems host an extraordinary diversity of plant life.

When dunes are covered with vegetation, they become stable. The wind cannot carry away the sand, as plant roots and stems provide effective protection. In this way, dunes safeguard inland territories—even during storms—protecting homes, gardens, and infrastructure.

Without vegetation, sand is easily transported, dunes are degraded, and nothing blocks the advance of the sea or the impact of wind carrying sand and salt spray.

Key Species:

*Ammophila arenaria*

Marram grass is a key dune-building plant. Its roots form extensive underground networks that stabilise the sand. Its flexible leaves withstand strong winds and burial.

*Pancratium maritimum*

The sea daffodil stores water and energy reserves in a large bulb. Its seeds are unique—black and buoyant, allowing them to float and disperse.

*Biscutella vicentina*

This plant produces disc-shaped fruits resembling small biscuits, which change from bright green to reddish-brown as they mature. It is endemic to the southwest coast of Portugal.

*Armeria pungens*

The sea pink produces striking pink flowers that attract many pollinators. Its deep and extensive root system helps anchor the plant in unstable dunes.

*Corema album*

The Portuguese crowberry is an endemic shrub found only along the coastal strip. In summer, it produces pearl-like fruits with a delicate sweet and slightly acidic taste.

*Juniperus turbinata*

Juniper occupies dune areas further inland and, together with pine forests, forms the most inland line of coastal protection.

*Charadrius alexandrinus*

The Kentish plover is a small bird that nests directly on the sand. It does not build a nest—its eggs are laid on the ground, perfectly camouflaged.

*Oryctolagus cuniculus*

The European rabbit thrives in dunes with good vegetation cover, where it finds food year-round. It is a key species in terrestrial ecosystems, serving as prey for more than 30 carnivorous species.

## Natura 2000 Network and Costa Sudoeste SAC

The Natura 2000 Network is an ecological network of the European Union created for the long-term conservation and restoration of Europe's threatened species and habitats. It is one of the EU's main instruments for nature conservation, aiming to halt biodiversity loss in harmony with human activities relevant to economic and social development.

The Special Area of Conservation — Costa Sudoeste SAC — encompasses the Parque Natural do Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina and is defined by a landscape of remarkable diversity: sea, cliffs, dunes, streams, wetlands, coastal ranges, woodlands and the River Mira. It stretches along 110 km of coastline, from São Torpes in the north to Burgau in the east, passing through the Sagres headland to the south, covering a total area of around 261 000 hectares — roughly one third land and two thirds sea.

### Further Reading

- [Flora-On: Área protegida sudoeste alentejano e costa vicentina \[flora-on.pt\]](http://flora-on.pt)
- [ICNF - Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas](http://icnf.pt)
- [Portugal Endemic Species List \[intreasures.com\]](http://intreasures.com)
- [Projeto LIFE Charcos](http://projeto-life-charcos.org)

