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Abstract

Astatic soda pans are important natural heritage sites of Europe, which are unique to the Carpathian Basin (eastern Austria, Hungary, northern Serbia). They are listed as priority habitats in the Natura 2000 network of the EU. They are seriously threatened ecosystems, with a habitat loss of 80% in the last 150 years. Seewinkel in eastern Austria with its relatively tiny area hosts 25% of all the remaining soda pans and therefore has a key role in the long-term conservation of these ecosystems. Crustacean invertebrates mean high quality food for waterbirds. Among all aquatic habitats worldwide, soda pans produce the highest crustacean biomass, which makes them particularly important as stopover-sites for migrating birds. While we know that soda pans represent an outstanding resource especially for migrating birds, we are unaware how the food web functions. The project aims at achieving a general understanding of the trophic pathways from primary production up to the birds. Understanding the functioning of an ecosystem is mandatory for its protection and we currently miss crucial knowledge about the basis of a food web and how it contributes to an important ecosystem service (sustaining large flocks of migratory birds). This also has crucial implications for habitat restoration plans.