

Tunisia

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Location and area

Tunisia is a republic in northern Africa, bordered on the north and east by the Mediterranean Sea, on the south by Libya, and on the west by Algeria. The Gulf of Gabes contains the islands of Jarbah (Djerba) and Qarqannah (Kerkennah). The total area of Tunisia is 164,418 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

Tunisia may be divided, from north to south, into four main topographic regions:

1. In the north, the Maritime Atlas Mountains traverse the country in a southwestern to northeastern direction. Peaks range in elevation from about 600 to 1,500 m. Fertile valleys and plains are interspersed among the mountains of this region.
2. To the south the mountains give way to a plateau that averages about 600 m in elevation.
3. Further south, the plateau descends gradually to a chain of low-lying salt lakes, known as shatts, or chotts, which extend east west across the country. Several of these lakes lie below sea level.
4. To the south the shatts adjoin the Sahara Desert, which constitutes about 40 % of Tunisia's land area.

The country's only major river, the Majardah, crosses the region from west to east, emptying into the Gulf of Tunis. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

A mild Mediterranean climate prevails in the north of Tunisia; towards the south the climate becomes progressively hotter and drier. In the north, temperatures average 9° C in January and 26° C in July. The northern regions have a rainy season that lasts from October to May. Average annual rainfall is about 600 mm (24 in) but may vary greatly from year to year. Annual rainfall decreases to the south and is only about 200 mm in the Sahara. Water is scarce in Tunisia, and drought is common. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

The plant life of the coastal region of Tunisia is similar to that of southern Europe. The fertile, well-watered regions of the north are characterized by vineyards and by dense forests of cork oak, pine, and juniper trees. Farther south, the semi-arid conditions support steppe vegetation. In the arid regions of the extreme south, date palms flourish in oases.

The growth in the country's population has led to increased demand for farmland. About half the productive land is used for grazing, and, because of drought, the livestock industry is also subject to fluctuations. As agricultural production has increased, so have marginal land use and overgrazing, resulting in extensive soil erosion and desertification. Only 3.6 % (1995) of the country's total land area is forested, and this figure is shrinking as the country experiences a 0.5 % (1990-1996) annual rate of deforestation. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

Tunisia has 51 km² of freshwater marshes (Britton & Crivelli 1993). Howard-Williams & Thompson (1985) mention the Ichkeul lakes and swamp (120 km²) and the Sebka Kelbia Swamp (130 km²)

Without further reference, Lappalainen & Žurek (1996c) give a total wetland area 8 km².

Peatlands

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols exist in Tunisia and 93 km² of gley soils.

Still to be checked:

STAMBOULI, S. & ROCHE, E. 1998. Evolution du paléoenvironnement holocène dans la zone côtière Kroumirie-Mogods (Tunisie septentrionale) : étude de la séquence de Majen El Orbi. XII simposio de Palinologia (Asociación de Palinólogos de Lengua Española) - Libro de Resúmenes, 63 p. **10** Kasserine (35°20'N, 8°50'E), ca. 600 m, Tunisia. Pollen.

Medus, J., Laval, H. 1997. Transition palynologique Tardiglaciaire/Holocène dans un site de Tunisie meridionale. Archs. Sci. Genève, 50, 1, 17-26.

Ben Tiba, B. & Reille, M. (1982) Recherches pollenanalytiques dans le montagnes de Kroumirie (Tunisie septentrionale): premières résultats. Ecologia Mediterranea VIII/4: 75-86

Brun, A. (1987) Etude palynologique des limons oraiques de l'ouest El Akarit (Sud-Tunisien). Bull. Assoc. Fr. et Quater. 29/1: 19-25

Molle, H.-G. & Brosche, K.-U. (1976) Morphologische und klimageschichtliche Untersuchungen im südöstlichen Vorland des Djebel Chambi und des Djebel Mrhila in Zentraltunesien. Die Erde 107 (2-3): 180-227