

Nature Conservation in Europe: Approaches and Lessons

Annex IT.1. Large Carnivores: Conservation and Conflicts in Italy

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Italy has been a crucial country for the European recovery of large carnivores. Despite its very high human density, it is one of the few countries in Western Europe where the Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*) and Wolf (*Canis lupus*) never completely disappeared, due to its remote mountains.

The recovery of the Wolf population is an almost incredible success story, that originated from a few remaining individuals in the central Apennine in the 1970s. Over the last 30 years, the Wolf has spread to occupy its original range in the Apennines, Alps and now in the lowlands. There are several natural and policy related reasons for this success: abandonment of mountain areas, increases in forest area and ungulate prey populations; as well as the Wolf's protected status, improvements in the systems for preventing livestock loss and other damage, and necessary damage compensation schemes. Whilst acceptance of the Wolf in rural areas is low and decreasing, its recovery now seems to be irreversible, and the species had a favourable conservation status according to the 2013–2018 reporting under Article 17 of the Habitat Directive. The most recent census, made under the Habitat Directive, estimates the presence of 3 300 Wolves in Italy for 2020–2021 (La Morgia *et al.*, 2022).

The recovery of the Brown Bear has been more complicated, and its prospects are uncertain. The Apennine *marsicanus* population is still present and has a stable trend. But the population is small and isolated, and therefore has an unfavourable-bad status (Gervasi and Ciucci, 2018).

The Alpine population comes from a reintroduction project (which added to the 2–3 remaining local old males), with bears translocated from Slovenia as part of EU LIFE projects¹. Now the population is about 100 individuals and, even though the situation is slowly improving, its future is uncertain over the medium-term. Local conflicts are high and some recent attacks on humans have made the image of the bear worse.

The Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx lynx*) is not common in Italy, as the forest habitats are not optimal for the species, and it has an unfavourable-bad status. Some are observed every year in both the eastern and western Alps, but there is no standardised monitoring of the species. A recent LIFE project on the Lynx², which has included releasing individuals to increase genetic diversity, has also involved the Italian Alps, where, however, no releases are foreseen.

The Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*) has been present in north-east Italy for the last 30 years, and has been rapidly expanding recently to the west and south. Since 2021, the species has been breeding south of the Po River and by 2022 had established core populations in Tuscany and Lazio. No official census data on the species are available at the moment. The Italian peninsula seems to be very suitable for the species (Ranc *et al.*, 2018), based on habitat modelling, but the real success of the Golden Jackal will probably depend also on the conservation status of the Wolf (Lapini *et al.*, 2021).

References

- Gervasi, V. & Ciucci, P. (2018) Demographic projections of the Apennine Brown Bear population *Ursus arctos marsicanus* under alternative management scenarios. *European Zoological Journal*, **85** (1), 242–252.
- La Morgia, V., Marucco, F., Aragno, P., Salvatori, V., Gervasi, V., De Angelis, D. *et al.* (2022) *Stima della distribuzione e consistenza del lupo a scala nazionale 2020/2021*. Relazione tecnica realizzata nell'ambito della convenzione ISPRA-Ministero della Transizione Ecologica "Attività di monitoraggio nazionale

¹ LIFE96 NAT/IT/003152 Ursus/Brenta - URSUS Project: Brenta brown bear conservation plan.

LIFE00 NAT/IT/007131 Ursus Brenta II - Project URSUS: protection of the brown bear population of Brenta.

² LIFE16 NAT/SI/000634 LIFE Lynx - Preventing the Extinction of the Dinaric-SE Alpine Lynx Population Through Reinforcement and Long-term Conservation.

nell'ambito del Piano di Azione del lupo". www.isprambiente.gov.it/it/attivita/biodiversita/monitoraggio-nazionale-del-lupo/file-monitoraggio/report-nazionale-lupo-20_21.pdf

Lapini L., Pecorella S., Ferri, M. & Villa, M. (2021) Panoramica aggiornata delle conoscenze su *Canis aureus* in Italia, *Quaderni del Museo Civico di Storia Naturale di Ferrara*, **9**, 123–132.

Ranc, N., Krofel, M. & Cirovic, D. (2018) *Canis aureus*: European regional assessment. www.iucnredlist.org/species/118264161/133235906

Website sources of further information

Annual detailed update on the conservation status of large carnivores (Brown bear, Wolf, Lynx and Golden Jackal) in the central eastern Alps (Italian and English) <https://grandicarnivori.provincia.tn.it/Large-Carnivores-Report>

Periodical update on the conservation status of the Wolf in the Alps (part Italian and part English): www.lifewolfalps.eu/download/

LIFE project for saving the alpine-dinaric Lynx population: www.lifelynx.eu

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