

TERRE DELL'ORSO

Newsletter by

SALVIAMO L'ORSO - Associazione per la conservazione dell'orso bruno marsicano ONLUS

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COVER: ph. Gaetano de Persiis

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EDITORIAL

Dear friends,

I would like to start the second edition of our newsletter with a brief presentation of what our association has done in its first 7 months of life, in particular for those members that were not able to take part in the general meeting held on the 20th of April 2013.

In particular we would like to highlight what we have done with regard to communication, a first order issue for those who, like us, aim to increase the awareness of a wider audience than the one made of professionals working in the sector, in order to influence political decision makers within the institutions tasked to implement and manage the Marsican brown bear conservation.

- We have created and managed the Facebook page “Salviamo l’orso”, which has to date exceeded our expectations with nearly 1000 “friends”, and about 50,000 visits.
- We have set up the Association’s web site (www.salviamolorso.it) that thanks mainly to the work of some of our members has been constantly updated at least weekly and often with higher frequency, and that has received about 10,000 visits since its launch.
- We have completed the first edition of the Association newsletter, which was sent to all our members as well as to all individuals and entities that are involved in general conservation initiatives, and in the Marsican bear conservation in particular.

We believe that our communication effort has made a difference [compared to those of other environmental charities and associations], as it has focused both on divulging scientific information on the Marsican bear, and on providing information and soliciting action on the initiatives that we have proposed and on which we are working.

We are quite proud that our organization has often been the first, and sometimes the only one, to provide the public with information regarding facts or events concerning the bear and its conservation effort.

For the year to come, we plan on keeping an active focus on our communication strategy, hoping to confirm the success we have achieved to date.

Here is a list of all the initiative we have launched to date:

- We have intervened publicly, both through national and local press, on a number of issues affecting the medium to long term survival chance of the species: in particular regarding infrastructural projects planned within the bear habitat (such as windfarms, ski lifts, or roads) and administrative procedures such as the determination of the hunting seasons and of the perimeters of the protected areas. The two most notable instances that have seen us as protagonists

are the battle to stop the construction of the wind farm at Pizzoferrato-Quadri, adjacent to the Majella National Park, and the opposition to the downsizing of the Sirente-Velino Regional park, within the area of the municipality of Aielli.

- Through meetings, public statements and private letters, we have constantly brought to the attention of the Ministry for the Environment, PNALM, Abruzzo Region and Ministry for Public Health, the unsolved problems that are still threatening the survival of the Marsican bear.
- We have started cultivation of a fenced area adjacent to the park, in such a way to make it accessible only to bears, so to limit bear incursions into the local villages.
- We have designed a plan to mitigate the risk for bears to cross roads present in their primary habitat (PNALM) in the area of the municipality of Gioia dei Marsi. This plan is now close to its implementation phase.
- We are working on three more projects to implement measures aiming to reduce the risk of bears being killed or disturbed by anthropic causes, and we have started the fundraising campaign to fund these projects.
- Most importantly we have revived the interest and the attention of the public in the protection of the Marsican bear, which was at serious risk to be forgotten or dismissed because of the lack of interest of the policy makers, the disinterest of the institutionally responsible entities, the inertia of the Ministry for Environment, and sadly also because of the tiredness and lack of focus of the traditional environmental charities, that seem to be operating on too many different fronts, when not solely concentrated on the promotion of a misconceived form of “green economy” that is at serious risk of becoming one of the causes of the destruction of the bear habitat in the Apennines

The sour note in all this remains the difficulty that we face in raising funds required for the implementation of our project pipeline. In 7 months to date we have raised about €5,000, funds just about sufficient to cover administrative costs, the agricultural works in or field off the National Park, and to start the works on the traffic risk mitigation measures.

We have lost the sponsorship that was promised to us by two corporates, upon which we were relying since the foundation of our association, but which decided to withdraw due to the current adverse business environment that has drastically reduced, when not eliminated the sponsorship budget of many companies.

Clearly we have not given up and we are in discussion with other companies to rectify the situation; we have also taken part in the donation program sponsored by the technical outdoor wear brand Patagonia with our road safety project, and we are waiting to hear if we have obtained the requested funding (about USD 8,000).

Spring has started with the horrible news of the death of the bear that was killed on the motorway close to Tornimparte, but with spring has also started a new season for the battles of the association, and two of them above all others: the final cancellation of the wind farm of Piz-

zoferrato-Quadri, where we will see what the real intentions are of the Abruzzo Region with regard to keeping true to its commitment to bear conservation, and the establishment of real protection measures in the area of the Ernici mountains, where we are witnessing an important attempt of the bear to return to the area, an attempt that the Region of Lazio and the Province of Frosinone must favour with appropriate actions.

Later, in the beginning of summer, we will need the help of some of you to take part in the annual count of females with cubs to help the University of Rome and the PNALM in the monitoring of the species included in the LIFE ARCTOS project, and to experience together some emotional moments!

I would like to conclude this newsletter by reiterating how neither making the decision to create this organization nor kick start it was easy, but today, thanks to our efforts, everyone who really cares about the future of the bear has a means to pursue the goal of ensuring a future for the most charismatic species of the Italian fauna.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stefano Alano". The script is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.



Help the Marsican brown bear

What can you do for the Marsican brown bear ? There are many ways to support our association and its initiatives for the conservation of bears and their habitat. Your material, and moral, contribution is valuable to us.

JOIN US: joining Salviamo l'Orso is a little step to show us your support and to enter a community of people who care for the destiny of bears and of their natural environment

See how: <http://www.salviamolorso.it/about/join-us/?lang=en>


MAKE A DONATION: funds are important for our projects and initiatives: land protection, conflict mitigation, cultural marketing and education are just some of the aspects that we want to take into consideration. Any material contribution is an opportunity for us to act in favour of bears. We will always keep you updated about the way your donation are spent in order to help bears.

See how: <http://www.salviamolorso.it/projects/make-a-donation/?lang=en>

AWAKENINGS

by Mario Cipollone





With Spring nature awakens after the ruthless harshness of the mountains winter. To escape the grip of frost and the scarcity of food, reptiles, bats and many species of rodents went into hibernation, which allowed them to minimize the consumption of vital energy.

With the first warm days, they peep out again from their burrows in the ground, rock crevices or tree hollows, as the meadows grow lush and the forests start resounding of the warbling of birds busy building their nests.

Among the ungulates, only the strongest individuals survived the frost, the shortage of food, and the attacks of wolves which find in the snow a relentless ally.

With the blossoming of spring, the does are getting ready to give birth to their offspring, the antlers of stags, still covered with velvet-soft fur, start growing in preparation for the autumnal duels for mating privileges, and the predators are busy providing for their ever hungry litters, often at the expenses of their prey's issue.

Also the Marsican brown bear is now ready to wake up from its partial hibernation, (partial as this animal can wake up to seek food in the warmest days of winter, or to escape in case of danger).

During the winter sleep, the females that had mated in spring or summer, have given birth to 1 or 2 bear cubs (3 in some very rare occasions). Blind and deaf at birth and of the same size and weight as a rat, the cubs are now (and for the next few weeks) growing up exponentially, thanks to their mother's breast milk, rich in fat and proteins.

As the season grows mild, mother bears leave their dens with their new born cubs, (which by late summer will be half the size of their mother), or with those of the previous year, that are already two-thirds of their mother's size.

By this time, the mother bear is incessantly dedicated to the search of food, as well as to the care and protection of her offspring from predators. The bears reach sexual maturity between 4 and 8 years of age, and they remain

with the cubs for about two years, as they reproduce at intervals of 1,5-4 years. The low rate of reproduction, combined with high infant mortality, make each single cub particularly valuable and important for the survival of a critically endangered species, such as the Marsican brown bear.

Mother bears are proverbially caring and protective of their cubs, so approaching them can prove very dangerous indeed.

As these animals do not have good eyesight, social interactions amongst bears are mostly based on their highly developed smell and hearing.: members of the same family are recognized through specific odours and voice calls. The life of the adult male is more lonely, except during the mating season between the spring and summer, when he seeks the company of females available to mate.

Whilst an adult bear is threatened only by man, the new cubs are extremely vulnerable (Infant mortality is estimated to be around 0.34-0.67). As in many other species (such as lions, tigers and other bears), infanticide is not an uncommon cause of death for cubs, as adult male bears can kill the litter to mate again with the female.

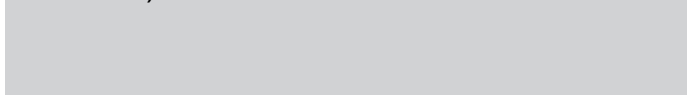
Within a few months the bear cubs are getting stronger and bolder. Their reckless games will initiate them to the hard life of the forest. Mother-bear transmits her knowledge to the cubs, teaching them what to eat and where to go in search for food (berries, acorns, beech cupules, insects).

Particularly at this stage of learning it is critical to ensure that the mother CANNOT easily find food sources near houses, farms and villages, so that the cubs do not assimilate potentially "problematic" behaviours in relation with the local human population.

The transfer of information from mother to cubs has been repeated for generations, demonstrating that animals have their own history, as claimed by the philosopher Benedetto Croce, born in Pescasseroli and one of the forerunners of the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise, of which the Marsican brown bear is the symbol! Our task is to make sure that bears live in our mountains forever!

Mario Cipollone

OPENING: Spring on Monti Ernici (ph. Gaetano de Persiis)



MONTI ERNICI: a Park for a new civilization

by Gaetano de Persiis





The term “civilization”, in its broadest sense, stands for a particular form in which material, social and spiritual life of people manifests itself in their whole existence, or in a particular period in history.

The common meaning of the word can stand as a synonym to “progress”, in contrary to “barbarism”, to indicate conquests of a man over nature as well as a certain level of perfection in the social order.

An aspect that catches one’s eye at first sight is, that a term generally used in such a positive way as “civilization”, includes in its definition a negative concept: conquest over nature, in other words fight against nature.

But this used to have a meaning in prehistoric times, or maybe even in times not so distant, when it was necessary for a man to rip nature of everything needed for his survival, which does not apply anymore in present now that the players have exchanged their roles.

Today nature needs to be defended against the conquests of a man!

The so-called “civilized” man, who’s more than exceeded the level of satisfying his basic needs to finally adopt the cult of surplus. Today we do not ask nature for the necessary anymore, but enforce our request for surplus. But who can understand, or better who wants to understand nature, understands that (and it has been for too long) it is not able to satisfy our obstinate and blind demands for surplus

without limits.

Thus, nature needs to be saved from the man’s requests.

But who can save it from a man but the man himself? And what a man, if not the “civilized” man, the one and the same, who, that is, considers nature an object of further conquests?



It is an unmistakable sign that we have reached some kind of a top of the peak beyond which, if conquests are not satisfying enough, we risk falling onto the opposite dark side of the new barbarism.

It is an unmistakable sign that it is time to consider nature a thing we cannot exist without, a thing quite the opposite to inexhaustible, a thing with defined, not infinite physical limits to its ability recover.

Being so, it is an unmistakable sign that the time has come for the people, at least those ones with the sense of humanity (although a paradox!), not to move anymore against nature, but towards it in all of its manifest, ensuring “civilized” behaviour.

It is the time to show our love for everything living and everything that serves living. In Konrad Lorenz’s words: “It is this love, which weighs down a man, who has become the absolute master of all things, the responsibility for everything living on the surface of our planet.”

It is the love that must make us stand up, all of us, also for the salvation of the Monti Ernici from this civilization, which has arrived to a dangerous peak of its evolution, as aforementioned.

Save them from those who plunder their most beautiful and ancient forests, pretending to have carried out “forestry actions, healthy and beneficial” for the forests themselves.

Save them from those who allow helicopter and drillers to violate the silence of their cliffs and their undergrounds looking for hydrocarbons, pretending it to be necessary and unavoidable, causing the ruin of the whole country.

Save them from that army of “nature lovers” who claim reopening of mountain paths to make the mortal sounds of their sporty shooting be heard everywhere and decorate large areas with multicolour bullet shells, but not “lovers” enough to let their voices to be heard against cutting and perforation, for the defence of their “beloved” fauna.

Save them from speculators of all kinds who, with the false glimmer of collective welfare, project and create structures, plants and construction which their only pockets benefit from.

Save them also from that multiform horde of ill-breds who ruin their meadows with the tires of their “metal placentas” to leave obscene traces of their revelries of Ferragosto, Easter, and holidays in general.

Thus, saving the Monti Ernici.

Save them on its physical and biotic level.

Save their peaks, valleys, forests, waters and prairies.

Save their precious and exceptional flora and fauna of which we must be responsible guard-

ians, in the eyes of the world more and more conscious of cultural and scientific values, they represent.

Save also structures made by a man’s hand giving them back their value, not in an unnatural way though, but through incentives which stimulate a spontaneous rebirth of traditional jobs, clothing, culture and farming, original architecture, and not vulgar, barbaric, disharmonic copies of different urban realities.

Through this educate a man to be able to find again and respect himself and his traditions, to find again the right sense of life and to pass this over to another man coming to visit his land: to a tourist. It is this man in search of what his land has never been able to give him or cannot give him anymore elsewhere. He comes from different places, nevertheless intact, to find new landscapes and new cultures.

Or comes from similar places, but degraded, to simply find again his human nature. Beware though: in this last case, the man comes from places representing the maximum expression of what is considered to be today’s “civilization”. But can we really consider the air unbreathable due to smoke and dust, the water of rivers and lakes dirty and smelly, seas reduced to only impotent trash bins, lowlands not green anymore due to asphalt, cement, heaps of trash, poisoned by thousands of poisons, cities more and more full of noises and hustle, to be civilized conquests?

This cannot be “civilization”, because from these places people try to escape as soon as possible!

Our Monti Ernici are still in their most parts intact, with towns, forests, peaks. But they will only be saved if their identity and dignity is protected as a natural park.

Their towns should resist the temptation of



changing their image: a lot of them, on the other hand, will have to repair the aesthetic and material damages already done.

Their forests and fields, jealous guardians of the wonderful floral and animal presence, should be the frame full of colours and scents, of natural agricultural and pastoral activities, not places to be deadly wounded with obscene roads.

Their peaks should remain a kingdom of silence, sun, clouds and wind, a place of meditation and gratification for the little man who reaches them tired and sweaty, and not become too easy and devalued target to be reached by mechanical means.

We watch over the Monti Ernici the way we would watch over the last paradise on Earth and we ask not to change their character against the nature because we would not know what an excuse to give standing eye to eye to that disappointed man we call a tourist, who has come with hope to find another man more civilized and nature more civilly preserved, or

eye to eye to the generations to come who will damn us for the theft we have commenced.

All of us, moved by a good will, let us do everything within our own powers, either big or small, because with the foundation of Parco dei Monti Ernici develops and consolidates this new sense of “civility” based on harmony (and not on fight and conquest) between a man and the great mother nature, so that this revitalizing inspiration can from here go down into the valleys, lowlands, cities.

Gaetano de Persiis

NOTE:

This text has been written by me in 1989 to support an initiative for the institution of the Parco Regionale dei Monti Ernici, but, after more than twenty years, it appears to be even more current.

This is the story of a not-yet-born Park and of the bears that still live there (but for how long?)

On April 19, 1989 the Regional Council of Lazio, Italy, overwhelmingly voted in favour of the creation of a new protected area, the “Parco Regionale dei Monti Ernici”, or Monti Ernici Regional Park.

The statute of the Park was then temporarily halted by a government commissioner, because of six marginal points which were judged to need revision. Despite the fact that the suggested amendments had been promptly inserted, the statute was not brought up for review in the Regional Council of Lazio by the maximum time limit; it was therefore scrapped. In the twenty years that followed, the topic was never again inserted in the Council's agenda, whatever was the political “colours” of the regional government.

In neighbouring areas, meanwhile, conservation efforts had better success:

- a regional protected area was created in the provinces of Rome and Frosinone (“Parco Naturale Regionale dei Monti Simbruini”, Lazio Regional Law n° 8 del 29.01.1983).
- on the Abruzzi side of the same Ernici mountain range, in the Morino municipality, the Abruzzo Regional government created a protected area of 1,025 hectares (regional Law n° 24 del 29.05.), called “Riserva Naturale Guidata Zompo lo Schioppo”. Though it is within the Abruzzo territory, this protected area is contiguous to the Lazio side of the Ernici mountain range, and they constitute a single ecological whole.

All research, preparatory to the final discussion on the above mentioned statutes, documented and highlighted the presence in the area of the Marsican brown bear (*Ursus arctos marsicanus* Altobello, 1921), an endemic subspecies of extreme importance and priority according to the Habitat Directive of the European Union.

The presence of the Marsican brown bear in the Ernici range has been documented by several sources, both historical and relative to the past 40 years (the latest documented presence of the bear is attested from late July to winter 2012).

The all-important Lazio side of the Ernici mountain range, therefore, not only lacks protection, but it also the scene of many human activities.

Their ever-increasing intensity and variety is incompatible with the bear's presence and conservation. This situation may well mean the disappearance of the bear in this area.

Not even the P.A.T.O.M. committee (Action plan for the conservation of the Marsican Bear, or Piano d'Azione per la Tutela dell'Orso Marsicano), now rather outdated (it was created by the Ministry of the Environment in July 2006) seems to have produced tangible results, despite the Lazio region has been one of its members from the very beginning. The committee's written protocol, Part II (Conservation Strategies), states:

“- Home range expansion: the population of the Marsican brown bear is now confined to the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise and its external protection area, where natural or above-average population densities are documented. The area of the Park is totally insufficient to even minimally ensure the natural dynamics of a bear population. The home-range of some adult males often exceeds the Park area, and frequently isolated individuals seek an expansion area in all directions (towards the following regions or mountain ranges: Molise, Frusinate, Majella, Simbruini, Sirente, Gran Sasso, Monti della Laga, Reatino, Sibillini and so on).

A gradual expansion of the bear home range must be implemented to ensure that the animals' distributional movements and new settlement areas have a chance to succeed.

Central Apennines have a wide range of wilderness areas that could be suitable for this purpose, but these areas must be made danger-free. The creation of new protection areas is not a mandatory solution, while the calibration of local anthropic activities is of vital importance. We must think and act for an Apennine bear population, and no longer only for a bear population set in the Abruzzo National Park.”

To this day, though, not only any additional protected area has been created, but we have not witnessed even the slightest implementation of the strongly recommended “calibration” of anthropic activities”!

Quousque tandem abutere patientia nostra... et ursina?

Action C2 of Life Arctos

Implementation of healthcare management plan of domestic livestock in the Marsican Brown Bear area

by Adriano Argenio



The conservation of the surviving population of the Marsican bear is strictly linked to an appropriate healthcare management of the ecosystems in which this species lives. Relict populations, such as the one in consideration, typically exhibit a limited ability to adapt to sudden environmental changes, such as the introduction of a new pathogen or by the increase in virulence of an already existing one.

The high vulnerability of the Marsican Bear population, due to its small numbers and the consequent scarce genetic diversity, makes it crucial not to underestimate any potential environmental risk factor.

The Office for Natural Conservation of Abruzzo Region, within the scope of implementation of Action C2 of LIFE09NAT/IT/000160 - ARCTOS "Marsican Bear Conservation, coordinated actions for the Alpine and Apennine areas" has drafted a proposal for a healthcare management plan related to the protection of the Marsican Bear, which aims to achieve a better understanding of the presence of infectious diseases in the areas inhabited by the Marsican Bear, and to create a permanent and continuous system to monitor health of both domestic and wild animal species which share the Marsican Bear ecosystem.

This project attempts to create a flexible and dynamic process, capable to adapt to the high variability and mutability of the pathogens. The A2 action takes its cue from Action B3 of PATOM (National action plan for the Marsican Bear conservation), and it is based upon the results of Action A2 of Life Arctos itself, and in particular on: the "Evaluation study on the risk of infectious disease linked to the presence of domestic livestock, and current monitoring procedures" (by Dr. Massimo Fenati, veterinary epidemiologist) and "Guidelines for the management healthcare issues linked to the protection/conservation of the Marsican Bear populations" (by the Technical Health-

care Committee of the Ministry of Health). Based on the results of Dr. Fenati analysis, the monitoring plan has focussed on the ten infectious diseases deemed potentially dangerous for the bear. In (decreasing) order of potential risk of transmission these are: Brucellosis, Distemper, Canine Parvovirus, Pseudorabies (Aujeszky's disease), Leptospirosis, Infectious Canine Hepatitis, Toxoplasmosis, Chlamydiosis, Q Fever, and Bluetongue.

These are pathogens that can be transmitted not only by livestock but also by other domestic animals (such as dogs) as well as by wild animal species, all of which therefore require careful monitoring.

It is evident that, with the exception of Brucellosis (that is constantly monitored in livestock by the veterinary services of the local health authorities (ASLs) as a disease subject to compulsory prophylaxis), this study attributes a higher degree of danger to diseases transmitted by dogs (Distemper, Canine Parvovirus, Leptospirosis, and Infectious Hepatitis) and wild boars (Pseudorabies).

The first initiative within the framework of Action C2, has been to organise a public meeting with the different stakeholders (such as hunters, doctors, veterinaries, and livestock farmers). This is required as the implementation of a healthcare monitoring plan for the protection of the Marsican Bear is relevant not only for the parties involved in the conservation of this particular species, but also for all other relevant people and entities operating in the areas inhabited by the Marsican Bear. The Marsican Bear is an "umbrella species" requiring large and diverse habitats to survive, any healthcare management action on this species will have a positive spill over effect on other domestic and wild species present in the same habitats.

Only a coordinated process involving all the

relevant entities and categories, may keep the hope of survival of the remaining Marsican Bear population alive. The second intervention (in chronological order) of Action C2, has been to seek and obtain the cooperation of wild boar hunters active in the External Protected Zone of the Abruzzo Lazio and Molise National Park to monitor the diffusion of Pseudorabies.

Thanks to the cooperation of Dr. Antonio Liberatore, Veterinary Manager of the ASL of Region Molise, it was possible to collect 70 samples of lungs, spleen, kidney and muscle tissues of wild boars, to monitor Pseudorabies, Brucellosis, Leptospirosis and Trichinosis, respectively.

This sample has mainly come from the Molise Contiguous Area, but it is hoped that during the next hunting season the sampling will extend to the Abruzzo and Lazio areas. The results will be presented during a dedicated public meeting, where researchers, hunters, public administrators and citizens will be all invited to attend.

A third initiative has been to monitor the diffusion in the canine population of pathologies potentially dangerous for the bear. In cooperation with the Abruzzo Lazio and Molise National Park an awareness campaign was started ("The dog, the bear's best friend"), which has obtained the sponsorship of FNOVI (Italian National Federation of the Orders of Veterinary doctors) that reaches out to the owners of dogs in the "Bear area" to reiterate the

necessity of vaccinating their dogs and of not letting them roam freely without strict supervision.

At the same time (in cooperation with Dr. Armanado Giovannini and Dr. Daria Di Sabatino, of the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale of Teramo) veterinaries and biologists of both the local ASLs and the Protected Areas of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise, were requested to report the size of the canine populations present in the area populated by the Marsican Bear, and in particular the areas potentially

at risk of contacts between dogs and female bears with cubs, in order to better form a strategy of canine vaccination. The cost of the vaccination will be entirely borne by the Office for Natural Conservation of the Abruzzo Region with funds made available



by Life Arctos: this will allow the purchase of about 7,000 doses of vaccines that will allow to mitigate the transmission of pathogens from dogs to bears. The vaccination process will be implemented in cooperation with the veterinary services of the relevant ASLs and of the Protected Areas.

In summary, these are the first initiatives implemented within the framework of Action C2 of Life Arctos, which will terminate on September 2014. The ultimate goal is to implement an infectious disease monitoring process in the Marsican Bear area, which could be truly effective in bear conservation, as well as in the conservation of other priority species (most importantly the wolf). This proc-



TOP: stray dogs around the streets in Pescasseroli PREVIOUS PAGE: livestock grazing in Abruzzo National Park (ph. A. Argenio)

ess will also attempt to get information that may be useful for traditional human activities such as farming, tourism, hunting, and truffle gathering.

It is worth stressing that a health management plan, is only one first, albeit important, step for the conservation of the Marsican Bear, that will lack real effectiveness if not implemented together with other initiatives (such as a local plans for livestock farming, and the management of stray dogs), which would allow for the implementation of best practice to eliminate or mitigate the persistence and the spread of pathogens within the population of sympatric domestic and wild species.

Adriano Argenio

Veterinary surgeon freelancer, consultant of the Conservation of Nature in the Abruzzo Region

OPENING: livestock at Prati del Sirente (ph. F. Ferreri)

IL PASSAGGIO DELL'ORSO: interview to Giuseppe Festa

by Mario Cipollone

Giuseppe Festa, a graduate in Natural Sciences and teacher of environmental education, is a passionate musician, singer and songwriter of the group Lingalad. Nature inspires his musical production and not only. In fact, Giuseppe Festa is also a sensitive and refined writer, author of the novel “The passage of the bear”, published by Salani in 2013.

The writer served as a volunteer in the National Park of Abruzzo, living close to the rangers. In the mountains of Abruzzo he learned to know and love the bears. Just the love for the Marsican brown bear permeates the fluid and compelling plot of “The passage of the bear” that I had the fortune to read. “A novel,” Dacia Maraini says, “which celebrates nature and animals, but with no disrespect to the man”.

A book so rich in content and events, with the bear as a protagonist, has clearly drawn the attention of those who share the author's passion for this wonderful animal and the curiosity, licit in every reader, to know the boundary between reality and fiction. So, I am going to ask some questions to Giuseppe Festa, being careful not to reveal the plot of a book which I do recommend to read.

MC: Dear Giuseppe, first of all thank you for writing a book on the bear in such a passionate and compelling style. During your volunteer services in the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise, how many times have you got to come across in a bear or in its “passage”?

GF: A few, actually. I have often seen Yoga, the famous confident bear that in the mid-nineties



frequented the Camosciara mountains, and now lives in the fauna area of Villavallelonga. But every time I go to the park, I always peer into the woods hoping to catch a glimpse of a furry friend. And this makes my visits always new and full of excitement.

MC: How do you identify yourself in the characters of the novel? By sex and geographical origin, the reader would think that the most autobiographical character is the young Kevin, at first “volunteer against his will”. If this is true, what does particularly conquest of the nature of Abruzzo? Do you think that the people of Abruzzo are fully aware of the true wealth of their land?

GF: In me there were both characters, Kevin and Viola. I lived in the city like Kevin, but I spent my childhood in contact with nature like Viola. Two opposites that in the Park had a short circuit. In the end Viola won, and my life changed. When I returned to Milan I abandoned the city and my engineering studies, dedicating myself to environmental education. That is my job today. The nature of Abruzzo has won me over with his reassuring wild temper, even though this may sound like an oxymoron. I immediately felt at home there. About the relationship of Abruzzo people with their land, I have many friends in the Park and they all love the mountains as themselves. Of course, not all people are like them. Often who lives in a paradise ends up taking for granted that privilege. But I think that it happens everywhere, not only in Abruzzo.

MC: As an enthusiast for bear and nature, the chapters that impressed me most are those which had the bear as a protagonist. Is the encounter with the wolf in Chapter 2 based on a true story? Is the character of the poacher authentic or is it the sum of the evils that threaten the survival of bears in our mountains?

GF: One day the former ranger Peppe Di Nunzio told me that he saw a wolf which, in approaching a small prey, had flattened on the grass so that it seemed at first sight a piece of wood. A behaviour that I wanted to insert in the book.

The poacher Orante Della Morte? He is the image of ignorance of man. Even if the most negative character is, in my opinion, the mysterious man dressed in grey. Even more dangerous than Orante, despite the suit, tie and clean hands. I think he is the exact representation of the evils that threaten the bear and nature in general.

MC: You describe in an extremely suggestive way the processes of habituation to humans that turned Karhu in a “confidant bear”. What bears inspired the story? In reality, were they as bold as Karhu appears in some chapters of the book?

GF: Yoga has been my muse. It was Yoga which was around Casone Antonucci when I was a volunteer for the first time. The friend Andrea Gennai, now director of the San Rossore Nature Park, followed for several months the confidant bear, and told me many incidents it caused. It may shock you, but in the book I decided not to include some of Yoga's most striking bravados because they would have seemed too far-fetched to the reader. But the reality, in this case, exceeds the imagination.

MC: The tendency, when writing about animals, is to give them human feelings. How do you think you were able to prevent this from happening and how, however, do you think

that this process is inevitable or, perhaps, necessary to encourage the reader to empathize and sympathize with the beast?

GF: When it comes to bears, I think it is very difficult not to attribute human feelings to them. As J.O. Curwood wrote, “there is something in the bear that leads us to love it”. Perhaps in this animal we see something that once belonged to us too: empathy with nature and awareness to depend on it, the quiet wisdom that comes from knowledge. A gift that unfortunately we are rapidly losing.

MC: Writing is a need. Can you tell us the genesis of the novel, as the idea has made its way into your mind until “The passage of the bear” was achieved?

GF: The experience of volunteering at the Park was so important that it was natural to report it in a book. When I decided to write the novel, I sketched the plot, I came to the park and talked to as many people as I could: rangers, researchers, and ordinary citizens, old shepherds. There are many friends who helped me: Claudio Manco, Giuseppe Di Nunzio, Titian Head, Antonella Ciarletta, Lucia Eusepi, Giovanna Di Domenico, Alessandro Virgilio and others. Each of them gave me something and contributed to enrich the story. I owe a lot to each of these people.

MC: The plot of the book is fluid and compelling. Paragraphs and chapters follow one another like scenes in a film. Have you ever thought about a possible film version while you wrote the book? How much do you think a movie about the Marsican bear can benefit to raise public awareness on the issues of conservation of this species and its habitat and which, instead, are the risks of turning the bear and nature into a show, particularly in vogue today especially in some TV programmes?

GF: No, I have never thought about a film adaptation while writing. Although I was told by many people who read the book that it might be a good script (please, directors, prick up your ears!). To focus the attention of public opinion would be important, especially in times of economic crisis during which we tend to forget completely of environmental emergencies. Of course, the risks to turn the bear into a show are there. Would we be able to resist the temptation to invade the territory of a “bear character” we fell in love with, searching for a stolen photograph? The doubt remains.

MC: “The passage of the bear” highlights the conflict that may arise between conservation efforts based on a vision of romantic-fundamentalist approaches and purely technical-scientific ones. Did you personally experience this change in the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise or the plot is just the result of your personal thoughts? How much do you think that science and technology can support measures for the protection of animals at risk of extinction such as the bear and how, paradoxically, can jeopardize the purpose?

GF: I noticed the clash between these two opposing views, well mentioned in your question, during the interviews I collected before writing the book. In the book, Sandro is distrustful of the research programme on bears, for more ethical than scientific reasons. The biologist Valer-

io is rather pragmatic and practical, and therefore disagrees with the vision of Sandro. But both men deeply respected each other, despite having different ideas on conservation strategies. Technology in the protection of animals is fine, provided that it is always at the service of nature. My humble opinion is that it is useful to look for a compromise between the two visions.

MC: What are, in your opinion, the main threats to the Marsican brown bear and possible solutions for a peaceful coexistence between man and bear, in the light of what happened in Switzerland with the killing of the bear called M13?

GF: I believe that the biggest threat is the lack of knowledge of the bear's universe. On this front, we have to work a lot. The bear M13 was killed by bullets of ignorance. If there is one thing I hope is that my book can somehow help our plantigrade friends to be better known.

MC: Since the institution of the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise, ninety years ago, the number of Marsican brown bears has not increased as hoped and the risk that the bear will disappear forever is always looming. Do you think our bear is really a goner?

GF: I will not even think about it for a moment. We really have to fight because this does not happen. It would be a tremendous loss for everyone, not only for the Park.

I believe that the only way to save the bears is to create the conditions so that they can expand in security even out of the Park. The bear does not increase in number as the territory of the park can support only a finite number of bears, this is an irrefutable fact. It is a rule that applies to any ecosystem. When the bears are able to colonize a larger portion of the Apennines and create a more genetically diverse population, only then we could breathe a first sigh of relief.

MC: Dear Giuseppe, I thank you for your patience and I renew Save the Bear's compliments and mine for your book that we are sure is doomed for the greatest success!

GF: Thanks to you!

PAOLO FIORUCCI: BEARS' HEAVEN (Il cielo degli orsi)

by Mario Cipollone

Paolo Fiorucci was born , in Chieti on September 27, 1984, in the street entitled to the composer Vincenzo Bellini. He began to play the classical guitar at home and he started studying saxophone when he was 16. He began to write songs shortly before the age of 18. Decisive was the encounter with the guitarist Vitale Di Virgilio, who helped him to arrange five songs that were released in the first self-produced EP, "In the realm of Pop" (January 2006).

In April 2007 he was invited to the first "Chieti festival of songwriting music". In July 2007, Fiorucci won the award for the Best Text with the song "Ten twenty-five" at the contest "Sing your song" in San Demetrio ne' Vestini (AQ). In November 2008, he ranked first in the International Award "One step to the poem" in Tollo (CH). In December 2009, he won the Jury Prize at the "Augusto Dao-lio contest" in Sulmona (AQ) with the songs "Beyond the window" and "Faces of documents". In December 28, 2010 he released his debut album,



"Six Characters in Search of heart", with which in September 2011 he won the International award "Cesare De Lollis" for the category "Best debut for Songwriters". In October 2011, he performed in the Smeraldo Theatre in Milan as finalist of the "Endrigo Prize". He is currently busy in Milan, at Flamingo Recording Studios, with the achievement of his second album, arranged by Massimo Gemini, historic guitarist of Roberto Vecchioni.

Fiorucci embraced the cause of the protection of the brown bear after the killing of the bear M13 in Switzerland. To the unfortunate bear from the Trentino region to which he dedicated the song "Bears' Heaven" (Il Cielo degli Orsi) that had such an echo to rise to prominence on the Swiss press.

Paolo, following the invitation of some friends, decided then to carry out a single to raise awareness of the possible coexistence between man and bear. "Bears' Heaven" became the "Bears' Heaven Project" in favour of the Marsican brown bear, whose population is concen-

trated in Abruzzo, the same region as the author's.

Fiorucci called for the project many artists from all over Italy belonging to various music genres but sharing songs concerning animal welfare and / or environmental-ecological issues, to achieve a compilation of 16 tracks, which will be sold and the proceeds donated to the association Save the Bear to contribute to the Road Safety plan on the SS 83 Marsicana between Gioia dei Marsi and Gioia Vecchio, an area frequented by many Marsican brown bears, including



the female called "Forchetta". Unfortunately, the issue of wildlife-vehicle collision is back in news after the death of the bear "Rocco" on April 25, 2013 on the motorway A24, near the exit of Tornimparte (AQ).

The author decided to contribute to this project long before the death of the bear Rocco. In fact, he had already launched a crowd-funding campaign (address [www.buonacausa.org / causes / ilcielodegliorsi](http://www.buonacausa.org/causes/ilcielodegliorsi)) to collect \square 2,000 to print CDs. To spread the initiative on Facebook he livened up the campaign with the motto "Invite a bear at breakfast". Fiorucci says: "In times of poaching, poisoning and mindless killings, even at the hands of national governments (such as in

Switzerland), I felt the duty and the need to create the project THE BEARS' HEAVEN. Why the bear? Because the brown bear is without a doubt the most critically endangered large wild animal of the Apennines. The bear is an "umbrella" species, on the top of the mountain ecosystem, so to protect the bear means to protect the whole habitat of the bear with all the plants and animals that live in it. I am asking you to invite a bear at breakfast."

At the end of the campaign, who has donated 2 euro will get the mp3 of the song "Bears' Heaven". By contributing with € 10 or more, you will get by post, after the necessary time of implementation, the whole disk "BEARS' HEAVEN PROJECT". The album will come together with a short booklet containing some rules of POSSIBLE coexistence between man and bear, edited by prof. Roberto Colombo (University of Milan) and illustrations by the illustrators Francesca Lu, Ilaria Colombo and Olga Gomoreva.

Two euro is the price of a breakfast in a bar. Paolo Fiorucci and Save the Bear are confident that you will give up a cup of coffee to support a noble cause,. You can donate in all the possible ways BY LOGGING IN THE LINK: <http://www.buonacausa.org/cause/ilcielodegliorsi>

The progress of this project will be constantly updated on [www.facebook.com / canzonidadi-vedere](http://www.facebook.com/canzonidadi-vedere)

Thanks to everybody that will contribute to this project!

MARSICAN BROWN BEAR KILLED ON A24 MOTORWAY

by Mario Cipollone

April 25 was a day of mourning for those who love bears, but also for all the people who do not remain insensitive to the toll that Nature pays every single day to the tools of our haste. At 5.45am a young Marsican brown bear, a male of 3-4 years of age and about 90 kg of weight, was hit on the highway A24 Rome-L'Aquila, near the exit of Torninparte (AQ). The car driver was unhurt in the impact which, however, was fatal to the poor bear.

The presence of the bear on the Parks Motorway, despite the planned fencing along the most expensive motorway in Italy, is still under investigation by the authorities. But the incident suggests a general reflections on the state of wildlife-at-risk-of-extinction conservation in Italy. Fortunately,

the crossing of motorways by large wild animals is an exceptional event. However, in 1991 a bear was the victim of a similar collision on the A25 motorway, Pescara-Pratola Peligna, a wildlife passage zone between the mountains of the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise (PNALM) and Sirente mountains. This would lead to a greater care in securing the parts of motorways that cut through the areas in which the presence of the bear has been

reported, and increasing the so-called “ecological corridors” (underpasses, overpasses), and update the maps of the Marsican brown bear range, especially following the publication of the data of the 2011's genetic census that have proved the prodigious vitality of this species in PNALM and in its area of external protection, despite the serious risk of extinction than still threatens it.

The desired numerical expansion of the bear population must necessarily coincide with a more intensive protection of bear territory in the three host regions. Concerning the news of the April 25's tragedy, many newspapers remarked the presence of the bear in an area so far from PNALM as a reason for amazement, forgetful that wildlife is



not subject to any border drawn by men on paper, and it also moves out of protected areas that otherwise would not differ from larger zoos.

In addition, the press seems to ignore that the Sirente mountains are historically frequented by bears and are a connecting zone of vital importance among Marsica and Gran Sasso, as evidenced by the decision to establish the



Sirente-Velino Regional Park and the Nature Reserve of Duchessa Mountains. Unfortunately the Regional Park is still held hostage by a series of plans (skiing and wind plants, parceling plants, galleries, modifications of boundaries with the summary exception, for hunting purposes only, of areas of great importance for wild plants and animals) that make its primary goal very little functioning: the conservation of nature and the bear, whose footprint is evident on the logo of the park.

All data prove that the Regional Park is “land of bears” but not “land for bears” because of the number of specimens found dead in its area, given the low numerical presence of sedentary individuals still to be ascertained. So it is proved that the bears living in or passing through this vast contiguous area are extremely vulnerable to threats of anthropogenic nature, as the 25 April’s collision reminds us.

It is more and more difficult to imagine a world where bears are not dying from causes related to man, but we can try to create a world in which these facts become increasingly rare,

so that the Italian populations of brown bear (the Marsican brown bear in the Central Apennines and the European brown bear in the Alps) can expand without being killed on the roads or by the insane use of poisoned baits or various acts of poaching.

We humans are a completing part of the evolutionary process of the Earth, but we must not ignore the risk that excessive alteration of the natural balance of which we are responsible, with the gradual disappearance of animal and plant species that surround us, can only harm ourselves.

TOP: bear killed in Tornimparte (by Alesio Evangelista)

TERRE DELL'ORSO (Bear's lands)

Newsletter by Salviamo l'Orso - Association for the conservation of the Marsican brown bear

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