

# Salviamo l'Orso

## Pescara



Photograph courtesy of Gaetano De Persiis

### Mario Cipollone writes:

The Marsican brown bear is considered Critically Endangered by the IUCN National Red List of Italy. Its small population – ranging from only 40 to 60 individuals! - has little ability to adapt to environmental changes such as the introduction of a new disease or the major aggressiveness of an already-present disease. The high vulnerability of the population of Marsican brown bear, due to inbreeding, depression and the few individuals remaining, compels us to organise correct health management of the ecosystems in which it lives. Between 2008 and 2014, diseases were probably due to interactions with cattle and caused the death of three bears: one in the bear core area of The Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (ALMNP) and two in the massifs of Duchessa and Velino-Sirente. It has been scientifically proven that at least 80% of these potentially fatal diseases for bears are transmitted by cattle or dogs. Some of them, such as distemper, parvovirus, leptospirosis, infective canine hepatitis, may also be transmitted by dogs. The occurrence of a transmission can be dramatically reduced thanks to vaccinations and the correct management of dogs.

**T**his latest project supported by AISPA brings us to the wild heart of Italy - the Central Apennines - the last stronghold of the Apennine or Marsican brown bear (*Ursus arctos marsicanus*). Based in Montesilvano, near Pescara, and operating in the bear home range, Salviamo l'Orso is an NGO founded in 2012 by a team of highly motivated individuals and professionals, who volunteer their time to carry out all necessary actions to save this subspecies of the European brown bear which is on the brink of extinction.

In 2014 Salviamo l'Orso have been able to begin the 'Caring for dogs saves the bear' project. This project is combatting the threat of epidemics passing from stray dogs and sheep dogs to bears. This has included:

- An extraordinary vaccination campaign of all feral and working dogs to prevent the possible epidemic of distemper, parvovirus and infective canine hepatitis being passed from dogs to bears.
- Raising awareness amongst the people



Mario Cipollone and Andy Geddes

and local institutions on the importance of correct sanitary management of dogs and domestic animals for both the endangered wildlife and also public health.

- Supporting the registration of dogs in a Canine Registry and providing free microchipping.
- Prevention of stray dogs breeding uncontrollably, by offering free spaying and neutering campaigns.
- Raising awareness of Marsican brown bear conservation issues among local communities.

To date, it has been possible to vaccinate 960 dogs and microchip/register 300 dogs in The Molise Region of the bear's home range. In The Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park, Salviamo l'Orso has provided vaccines to the Lecce de' Marsi dog compound for a vaccination programme

for 150 dogs. Moreover this charity took part in another vaccination programme, launched by the Park Veterinary Service and ENPA, which has led to the registration of 323 stray or vagrant dogs. In the Sirente Velino Regional Park the project is in progress, but already 154 dogs have been vaccinated and 84 micro-chipped.

With grateful thanks for the generous support that AISPA has given, the project will now be strengthened in the Sirente Velino Regional Park and extended to the Monte Genzana Alto Gizio Nature Reserve, a green wildlife passage between The Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Parks and the Majella National Park. This reserve is critical for the future of the Marsican brown bear and the sanitary action will be part of a Bear Smart Community programme, consisting of a set of conservation interventions to prevent conflicts between humans and bears and educate local communities on how to co-exist with bears. Erasmus trainees from the UK will soon play a key role in this programme.



Photograph courtesy of Antonio Liberatore