

TERRE DELL'ORSO

(Bear's lands)

Newsletter by

SALVIAMO L'ORSO - Association for the conservation of the Marsican brown bear

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COVER PHOTO: Ernico sniffing the air (ph. Francesco Culicelli)

SUMMARY

Editorial

by Stefano Orlandini

Bears' autumn

by Mario Cipollone

News and updates

by Daniele Valfrè

**Between Genzana and Majella: looking
for new territories**

by Francesco Ferreri

Bears of Sirente

by Siro Baliva

The bears of Cicolano

by Gianpiero Di Clemente

The Marsican brown bear in Molise

by Il Sannita

Promised land

by Francesco Ferreri

The story of Ernico

by Gaetano de Persiis

Stories of men and bears

by Domenico Serafini and Mario Cipollone

EDITORIAL

Dear friends,

I'm happy! I tried ten different ways to begin this article as president of "Salviamo l'Orso", but all of them seemed to me pompously false. Therefore I decided to simply follow my hearth to tell you that I'm happy that I succeeded in starting this adventure which is "Salviamo l'Orso", together with a small group of friends.

It has not been easy at all; it is never easy to put together people, even if they share a common interest; it has not been easy to overtake the bureaucratic impediments and difficulties in creating a new association. We all have a job, we all have a family, nobody of us is well-to-do, but through discussions and step by step, we succeeded!

Today we have a new tool to amplify our voice and broaden our actions to protect an animal which is unique in the world, is matter of pride and is a symbol of wildlife of our Apennines and our country.

We created the association at the end of September, by October 10th we already had a facebook page and our website; we are working only from three months and even so we did much more than expected:

- 1) the association reached about 100 new members (and all paid their share, which is not easy in this period of crisis),
- 2) we established contacts with people and public institutions involved in brown bear conservation,
- 3) we publicly declared our position on issues which could negative affect the bear or could reduce its survival probability, both on short and on long time; these issues regarded projects and actions on bear habitats (wind farm, ski resorts, roads for tree clearings) as well as bureaucratic acts (hunting calendars, new borders of protected areas and so on),
- 4) we started to till the soil in a small area outside the Abruzzo, Lazio, Molise National Park (PNALM), close to a village which every spring attracts the bear; the field is accessible only to the bear and hopefully it will limit the raids of the bear into the village,
- 5) we planned an action to reduce the risks of road kills and accidents in the core area (PNALM),
- 6) we are preparing three projects to reduce human-induced mortality or disturbance,
- 7) we started a fund raising campaign for the over mentioned projects.

But moreover we threw light on bear conservation just when the species was being forgotten for many reasons: no interests from politicians, sluggishness and indolence of public institutions, laziness of the Italian Ministry for the Environment, tiredness of traditional environmental associations; these are too busy or, even worse, are only focused

in promoting a “green economy” which in the Apennines could become a tool to destroy bear habitats.

This is the first outcome of our association. In this newsletter you will find other issues that demonstrate how this beautiful animal is from time immemorial part of memory and historical and cultural heritage of our Apennines, of the villages rooted into the mountains, of their inhabitants. You will learn about the bear run over by a bus in 1943 in Filettino and the bear found dead in the Sirente – Velino Regional Park. But you will also learn about the signs of bear to come back to those mountains which probably until few years ago were its home: from the certain presence of bear on Ernici mountains to the recent sightings in the Simbruini Regional Park, from the raids of a young female in Pettorano sul Gizio to the stable presence of some individuals in the marvelous Monte Genzana Nature Reserve, from many bear signs in the Majella National Park to the recent reproductive events in Molise, to end with the story of Ulisse and its transits in the Duchessa Nature Reserve and the Cicolano area.

All these information, joined to the positive data coming from the monitoring of newborns in PNALM, let us hypothesize a new vitality of the population. This is an additional reason to resolutely and quickly act to bring into action the National Action Plan for Apennines Brown Bear (PATOM), and to make an efficient policy for bear conservation after talks and talks with no sense. It means that, in case of need, unpopular decisions should be made and put in practice without hesitation and compromises.

The Italian Ministry for the Environment, the Abruzzo Region, the system of protected areas (first of all, the PNALM) are all called into action. The politicians must take the responsibility of the future of the bear; if they don't want to do this, if they think bear conservation is a luxury that Abruzzo or Italy cannot afford, they must publicly state this. So we will know who is responsible for bear extinction.

Stefano Orlandini

President - Salviamo l'Orso

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stefano Orlandini". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

BEARS' AUTUMN

by Mario Cipollone



In these cold days and first snowfalls, also us human beings are enticed to stay in our warm bed, to eat up seasonal food and minimize outdoor activities. It is the same for the bear. The bear is an “umbrella” species, definition that does not pertain to any weather condition, but to the location of this large mammal at the top of the mountain ecosystem. To protect the bear means, in fact, to protect the habitat of the bear with all the plant and animal species that inhabit it.

With the lowering of temperature for the decreasing daylight hours and seasonal atmospheric phenomena, the bear comes down the valley from the mountain peaks on which it spent the summer to escape the heat and feed on the buckthorn berries. The food requirement of a creature of this size is increased because of its carnivore digestive apparatus that does not provide with a full assimilation of the vegetable substances which, on the other hand, represent the 80% of the bear’s omnivorous diet. So the animal expels seeds and fruits almost one-piece, so that the droppings smell like the original essence. For this reason the experts sniff the excrements to determine if they belong to the bear.

In the coldest months, unable to balance the high heat loss of its big body with large amounts of food because of the long-lasting snow cover, the bear retreats to its den, where it falls into a state of partial hibernation from which it can wake up at any time, especially in those warmer days that often interrupt the winters of our latitudes. During this period of low metabolism, mother bear gives birth to her cubs, usually two, rarely three. The females which have reached sexual maturity, at the age of 4, give births usually each 3-4 years because they remain about two years with their issue. So births are a very special event, even more special when you consider the small “relict” population of Marsican brown bears.

So the autumn for the bear is the season of preparation for hibernation, birth and cub-rearing. However, in order to achieve the gestation and nourish its issue, it is necessary that the female bear has stored a thick subcutaneous fat in autumn, during the period of hyperphagia (overeating), when the bear stores fat for winter by eating mostly seasonal fruits (acorns, chestnuts, beechnuts, roots, etc.). Just because autumn is such a delicate season to the biology of the bear, if we humans really want to preserve the species, we should limit or stop completely those human activities that may interfere with the bear’s preparation for hiber-

nation. Wild boar hunting in the bear’s home range, especially if carried out by packs of dogs remains the main disturbing factor for the plantigrade in search of food.

The conservation of bears cannot disregard a proper management of hunting activities in areas frequented by the plantigrade, involving, as far as possible, the associations of local hunters who know every inch of the territory and then may contribute to the monitoring of the presence of the species in their hunting range.

The winter solstice is coming up. Nearly all the Central Apennines are snow-clad now. The bear has already sunk in its winter sleep and maybe, who knows, it is dreaming about the many dainties on which it fed itself in its bears’ autumn.

Mario Cipollone

NEWS & UPDATES

by Daniele Valfrè

Camerata Nuova (RM), Lazio.

Salviamo l'Orso joined other environmental associations (ALTURA, CAI, FederTrek, Italia Nostra, Mountain Wilderness, WWF) to save Fosso Fioio, a narrow valley which extends for 16 km along the border between Lazio and Abruzzo.

On the bottom of the valley is a bumpy track which goes from Camerata Nuova to a Sanctuary (Santuario della Santissima Trinità, municipality of Vallepietra); the roughness of the track is due to soil erosion and stone transport caused by water runoff (rain and moreover meltwater from snow in spring). According to the management plan of the Park, this track is a service road and can't be used as a touristic road, as believed by the municipality of Camerata Nuova and its major Settimio Liberati.

Large part of Fosso Fioio falls within the Simbruini Regional Park; the area has also been recognized as a Site of Community Importance (European Directive 92/43/CEE) and a Special Protection Zone (European Directive 79/409/CEE) both on the Lazio and on the Abruzzo side. It is a biodiversity hotspot because of many rare species, first of all the brown bear, who has been observed here in fall 2012.

In July 2012, works started to make the track safe: in many parts stones and boulders were removed and gravel was put in place to smooth the floor and allow car transit. In November, the water runoff caused by the rain canceled most of the works.

Our association, together with others, is trying to obtain from public institutions all the project documents to check for inconsistencies with project implementation and to look for rules violations. We are also considering the possibility to ask to the European Environmental Commission to start an infringement procedure against Italy for habitat degradation and for threatening species of community importance as the brown bear.



TOP: Fioio gorge before and after the interventions (ph. Daniele Valfrè)

In 2011 the WWF Lazio presented a special appeal to the President of the Italian Republic to save Fosso Fioio.

Rocca di Mezzo (AQ), Sirente-Velino Regional Park, Abruzzo

The area of the Sirente – Velino Regional Park is one of the most interesting of the whole Apennines for its nature and landscapes. Unfortunately many infrastructures have already been built and many others will follow in the next few years, so that the natural equilibrium of the area will be severely affected, and many species and communities of high conservation value will be permanently lost.

The starting point of infrastructure development is the so-called “Protocollo Letta”, an agreement “to promote development and increase the value of the area of L’Aquila for touristic and environmental purposes”. The agreement has been signed by many institutions: parks, Abruzzo region, L’Aquila province, municipalities. It clearly violates land plans which currently exist at all levels: the national law for protected areas, the regional laws which created the park as well as urban plans of different municipalities.

To “increase the value of the area” 10 new lifts will be built to connect Ovindoli ski area with Campo Felice ski area, together with golf courses, roads and car parks, hotels, houses and so on.

Among the most dangerous actions there is the new border of the regional park: more than 4000 hectares of park will be cut out, in particular the Campo Felice Plain, the ridge from Punta dell’Azzocchio to Monte Rotondo with the slopes of Piani di Pezza, and the alluvial plain between Rocca di Cambio, Terranera and Rocca di Mezzo, where a process of “lottizzazione” should be carried on (“lottizzazione” is an intensive urban development where a vast land is parceled out and all the parcels are used only for buildings).

The park should be replaced by a “hunting district”, where the hunting associations would become the managers of natural habitats.

Another destructive action is the Serralunga tunnel, which has been partly realized, and the new roads in the Campo Felice plain. The tunnel is a Pharaonic work strongly advocated by the member of the Italian Parliament Gianni Letta; it will cost overall 25 million of euros of public funds and will connect the Campo Felice plain to the Altopiano delle Rocche. Large areas of beech woods have already been cleared and many wetlands and peat bogs have been irreversibly altered.

The purpose of all these projects is to connect Ovindoli ski resort with Campo Felice ski resort through Piani di Pezza, a Karst plain with a very high value both for nature and for landscape. Here 10 new lifts and many cross-country skiing trails will be built. Piani di Pezza is a key area for brown bear because it is a corridor between the Sirente – Velino massif and the Monti della Duchessa massif.

The project gained a new attention from Russian purchasers linked to Gazprom, who want to buy both the current ski resorts and build all the connections.

Last but not least, another harmful project is the nine holes golf course in Rocca di Mezzo; it should be realized in a Karst plain rich of natural sinkholes and periodically flooded, adjacent to one of the areas most used by the bears. The project has been rejected twice by the Environmental Impact Assessment Committee of the Abruzzo Region, but the Administrative Court canceled both the rejections.

Aielli (AQ), Abruzzo.

In the municipality of Aielli, in an area included until last year in the Sirente – Velino Regional Park (Prati di Cerro is the placename), a slaughter of wild animals occurred: wild boars, hares, quails and rock partridges.

The area changed its status from protected to unprotected last year and only few people knew about this new status; also local hunters and hunting public agency (“Ambito Territoriale di Caccia, ATC) assumed it was still inside the regional park. Salviamo l’Orso and other environmental associations will ask to Abruzzo Region and to the regional park the reasons for this exclusion: how is it possible that such a zone, very important for wildlife and mainly for birds, has been cut out from the park and left in the hands of few hunters without any hunting regulation?

After the slaughter, the ATC Avezzano designed Prati di Cerro as a no-hunting zone until the end of the current hunting season. It is absurd that an area, previously included in a regional park, was excluded from it and then protected by the ATC.

We must point out that between 2003 and 2007 Prati di Cerro was the centre of a LIFE project named “Apennine brown bear conservation in the Sirente – Velino Regional Park”, a special conservation project funded by the EU and whose primary recipient was the park itself. In the project the area was considered of primary importance for the bear.

Tornimparte (AQ), Pizzoferrato and Quadri (CH) Abruzzo.

On December 11th the Environmental Impact Assessment Committee of Abruzzo Region reviewed three projects for wind farms with potentially severe impacts on landscapes, natural habitats and wildlife; two were rejected, the third was sent back to the proponents.

One of the rejected projects regarded a wild area between Montagne della Duchessa Regional Reserve and Sirente – Velino Regional Park (Tornimparte municipality); direct sightings and bear footprints, dating back to 2004 until now, demonstrate that the area is recurrently used by bears and therefore is still intact and undisturbed. The wind farm was composed by 7 wind turbines of 70 meters each (a previous project, also rejected, consisted of 12 turbines of 150 meters each). It would be a threaten not only for bear habitats, but also for golden eagle and for the local colony of griffon vultures, the most important of the whole Italy.

The Committee reviewed also a project in the municipalities of Pizzoferrato and Quadri, close to the border of Majella National Park. This is another wild area very important for the bear; the Committee decided to defer its final decision and asked for more information regarding bear presence in the area.

Many critics to the project were made by environmental associations (ALTURA, LIPU, GNR and Associazione Mediterranea per la Natura) in the light of the importance of the area for the bear as habitat and as feeding site.

L’Aquila e Pescasseroli (AQ), Abruzzo. What we are doing.

Salviamo l’Orso is in touch with representatives of Abruzzo, Lazio, Molise National Park (PNALM), Abruzzo Region, L’Aquila Province, National Forest Service, municipality of Gioia dei Marsi.

The persons in charge of our association met the director of the Department for Land of the Abruzzo Region arch. Sorgi and the superintendent of the Park Office dott.ssa Annabella Pace, the director of the Transport Bureau of L’Aquila Province dott. Fucetola, the superintendent of the office for compensation of damages caused by bears to livestock of L’Aquila Province dott.ssa Iacoboni, the commander of the National Forest Service of Frosinone dott. Cavaioli, the director of Abruzzo, Lazio, Molise National Park dott. Febbo, the superintendent of the Hunting Office of the Abruzzo Region dott. Recchia, the town councilor for the environment of Gioia dei Marsi dott. De Ioris.

All these meetings had some common purposes: start a cooperation with public authorities, realize with them the conservation actions of the PATOM (http://www.minambiente.it/home_it/showitem.html?lang=&item=/documenti/biblioteca/biblioteca_0016.html), realize the project “Implementing mitigation works for the safety of the regional road 83 Marsicana between Gioia dei Marsi and Gioia Vecchio to preserve Apennine brown bear”, establish a fund to compensate livestock damages outside the PNALM and other protected areas.

In addition, in the last few days we have been in touch with the director of Majella National Park dott. Cimini, with the person in charge for the Lazio Region of the implementation of PATOM dott. Russo, and we are waiting for another meeting with the director of PNALM Dr. Febbo and the superintendent of PNALM Scientific Service Dr.Sulli.

BETWEEN GENZANA AND MAJELLA

Looking for new territories

by Francesco Ferreri



The meeting entitled “The Marsican brown bear towards a shared management of a flag species for the territory” was held this afternoon in the picturesque setting of the Cantelmo Castle in Pettorano sul Gizio (AQ), organized by the Nature Reserve of Monte Genzana – Alto Gizio as part of communication initiatives for the European LIFE Arctos project.

The meeting was held with the participation of a large audience that showed interest and enthusiasm for the Marsican bear, generally considered as an important opportunity for the area. Dr. Mauro Fabrizio, director of the reserve, which this year celebrates 16 years, opened the meeting and illustrated the activities of the protected area, particularly with regard to monitoring and research on wildlife and bear in particular. At present, the reserve personnel are following at least three separate specimens of Marsican bear frequenting the protected area, including a radio-collared female. It is a situation of considerable importance, given the rarity of the dispersion of Marsican bear females from their core area in the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise.

The news of the presence of these specimens, together with findings and historical reports, confirm the Nature Reserve of Monte Genzana – Alto Gizio as a strategic area for the connection between the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise and the Majella National Park. There has been some positive and effective collaboration among the technical and scientific staff of the three protected areas, and some measures of mitigation of risk on the road infrastructures (SS 17, in particular) that cross the territory of the reserve, intersecting the directions of movement of the plantigrade, are in progress.

The meeting continued with the intervention of Dr. Daniela D’Amico, communication manager of the Arctos LIFE project for the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise, who introduced the theme of conflict with human activities (farming, beekeeping, agriculture), highlighting in particular the socio-cultural aspects of the conflict and illustrating the activities that the park has put in place in order to mediate and mitigate critical situations (confident bears protocol, compensation, information and communication, farmers’ support and training).

Dr. Cinzia Sulli, chief of the Scientific Department of the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise, concluded the evening with an overview of the general

state of conservation of the species, its size and the main risks to which it is subject.

While the bear population inside the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise and its External Protection Area can be considered almost perfect, the fate of the species is determined in the territories outside the park, because only a population distributed over an increasingly wider area (the species was originally widespread in the Apennines from the Sibillini Mountains to Basilicata) can ensure adequate survival. Hence the crucial role that ecological corridors between large protected areas and nature reserves, such as the Monte Genzana, play in the protection of the habitat quality along the species movement lines.

Francesco Ferreri

BEARS OF SIRENTE

So that their stories may not always be sad

by Siro Baliva





It was October 3, 1996 when, at lunch time, a dear friend of mine, who had gone to pick up mushrooms, phoned and told me that there was a dead bear in Prati S. Maria (the southern slope of Mount Sirente) in the municipality of Aielli.

At first I could hardly believe his words, but then I realized he was not joking, and so, together with other friends, I went immediately to see what happened and, as the photos taken on the spot prove, unfortunately I had to acknowledge that it was true!

We called immediately the then-young-director of the Sirente-Velino Regional Park, Mr. Giorgio Boscagli, who in turn alerted the authorities. While my friends and I were waiting for the arrival of the State Forestry Corps (we waited more than an hour), we had the opportunity to take a long look at the fine example of Marsican bear at our feet, lying on its side.

It was a young male of maximum 4/5 years. It died on the place where he had eaten the poisoned food. He had vomited around several times before dying and this left us imagine how it might have suffered. In the surrounding area there were still some poisoned baits that had caused its death. It was big guts (maybe beef or horse meat), packaged sausage-like, full of animal offal and “seasoned” as we got to know later, with a Class A pesticide (the most dangerous), normally used in agriculture in the Fucino Valley (unbelievable!).

An extremely powerful poison, which we could still smell, that not everybody is permitted to purchase! So we discovered that some merciless “horsemen” used to make a circle with these baits around the places where they gathered their animals for the night, to keep out wolves or feral dogs that are very common in the area. Certainly the bear was not their main target but, you know, with that method all animals might be killed and who knows how many times it had already happened (the area is also frequented by many birds of prey such as golden eagles, vultures, etc.).

So, after having searched and followed for years the signs of presence of the plantigrade in different mountains of Abruzzo, this was my first face-to-face meeting with a Marsican bear, but unfortunately it was dead! What a disappointment, and above all, what an anger!

Later the bear was taken away by the Forestry Corps for the analysis of service to be performed by the Zoo prophylactic Institute in Teramo and, later, as far as we know, it was returned to the Sirente-Velino Park which still should keep its remains in some freezer for future exposition in a museum. In the previous months, in the above mentioned area, there were several reports of bear by some farmers, but to tell the truth, they were not taken very seriously. In the same

year another bear was spotted by several people in the area of Forca Caruso as reported by the newspaper “Il Centro” on April 20, 1996. The year before, in July 1995, a young bear (perhaps the same, who knows!) was even photographed (Mauro D’Amore) in the Val Cordora (northern side of Sirente mountain), which is certainly one of the most suitable areas for the species.

Later on, the Life Project “Rocky Gorges” and Connection Projects “Life I and II” set in the Sirente-Velino Regional Park, to which I participated in person, confirmed the presence not only of possible vagrant individuals but also of some wintering and breeding ones.

After a few years of relative “calm”, during which other bears had certainly continued to frequent the area of Sirente, here is unfortunately a new negative episode. It is still fresh, in fact, the memory of last January 2012, when a Marsican bear, which had already been reported in the area in previous weeks, was found dying in the locality Prati del Sirente (16 January 2012) in the municipal territory of Secinaro.

The bear, taken away and entrusted to the technicians of PNALM, died few hours later. So far, the cause of death has not yet been disclosed even if at the time someone said it was caused by some forms of “viral infection” (suspected Aujeszky’s disease). We hope it was not poisoned! The presence of Marsican brown bears in the mountains of the Sirente-Velino Park was historically documented with continuous reports throughout the 20th century (and now the 21st). A research made some time ago by several authors (G. Boscagli, M. Pellegrini, D. Febbo, M. Pellegrini, C.M. Calò, C. Castellucci – Atti Soc. it. Sci. nat. Museo civ. Stor. nat. Milano, 134/1993 – June 1995), concerning the reports of Marsican bears outside the then-Abruzzo National Park, for the period 1990-1991 reported a total of 310 reliable reports and as much as 18.2% of them came from the Sirente-Velino chain with a majority of sightings in the Sirente mountains.

So, the Marsican bear has always frequented, albeit in small number, all the mountain chains surrounding the Abruzzo National Park (now National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise - PNALM). Currently the area of Sirente can be regarded as being a part of the so-called “secondary home range” of the Marsican bear, but, within it, it is certainly a very important territory both as a transition” area, at the core of many mountainous areas, and as an area of “permanent



SOPRA: orso morto sul Sirente (foto Siro Baliva)

IN APERTURA: il versante settentrionale del Sirente (foto Siro Baliva)

presence”, although at low density.

Of course, the characteristics of the Sirente territory as a whole could possibly never allow a presence of bears equal to the population of PNALM in numerical terms, especially for the lower extension of the forest cover of the Southern slopes, but, however, the area at issue could certainly give an important contribution to the achievement of the “minimum vital” of the total population, so that to give the Marsican bear a more certain future.

One thing is sure, in the memory of the people living in this area the presence and figure of the bear have never disappeared, especially among shepherds or simple mountaineers.

The importance of the Sirente territory for the protection of the Marsican bear (and not only) is explained by the fact that the most southern part of it is connected through the Subequana Valley directly with the Sagittario Valley on one side and the valley of the Giovenco on the other, and then with the Marsican bear’s core area, corresponding to the present territory of PNALM and its External Protection Zone.

Unfortunately, this area of transition, which has its cornerstone among the mountains of Prezza, Selva di

Goriano Sicoli and the pass of Forca Caruso, a very important “wildlife corridor”, was initially within the boundaries of the protected area of the Sirente-Velino Regional Park and then excluded to respond to the usual irrational, and very little “green” political logic.

As recent history has taught us, the limits of the protected area in recent years have been “accordion-like” extended or more often shrunk, depending on the regional “political climate”, with surely no benefit for wildlife.

An extremely recent and serious piece of news is that, as a result of another redefinition of the park limits passed completely unnoticed, another important area for bears, many mammals, numerous birds of prey, with the presence of one of the most important colony of native rock partridge and many other birds, was incredibly excluded from the park limits.

I am talking about the area of “Difesa and Prati di Cerro”, above Aielli Alto, at the foot of Mount Etra, in the southern Sirente. An area exposed to the south, rich in wild plants and shrubs, fruit and water even in the driest periods of the year.

Well, this area, where in the past the presence of bears was reported several times and where there have been



SOPRA: il versante settentrionale del Sirente in Autunno (foto Siro Baliva)

several interventions thanks to European funds under the various Life projects, was excluded from the park limits with a simple “stroke of the pen”, perhaps to open the way to some other areas, less important from the point of view of nature, but more politically appealing. So one of the purposes for the sake of the Marsican bear and the rest of fauna is to make sure that these key areas will be protected in an integral manner once again.

Not necessarily all the bears who have been frequenting over the years the beautiful area of Sirente died or will die in the same way. We are convinced of the contrary, indeed. To prevent this to happen again, or at least to minimize the risk, more timely and minutely coordinated actions by various organizations and institutions are necessary both on the ground and among the local population, and always aiming at greater knowledge, protection and supervision. Collaboration of associations and citizens is therefore important, with the assistance, encouragement and control of institutions.

Siro Baliva



Help the Marsican brown bear !

What can you do for the Marsican bear ? There are many ways to support our association and its activities for conservation of the bear and its habitat. Your material and moral contribution is very important to us.

JOIN US: becoming a member of Salviamo l'Orso is a little action to demonstrate your support to our efforts and, especially, to join a community of people who care for the fate of our bear and of the natural environment in the Apennines, sharing their ideals and hopes, and , why not, becoming a reference point for a particular territory.

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

DONATE: fund raising is important to realize projects and initiatives that we are going to consider. Land protection, conflicts and risks mitigation, cultural promotion and didactics are just some of the issues we want to focus on: every single contribution, small or large it may be, is a great opportunity for us.

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

THE BEARS OF CICOLANO

A story in progress

by Gianpiero Di Clemente



The adventure began one morning in late August 2005; that day recent summer storms suspended the fire prevention service in the Regional Nature Reserve Montagne della Duchessa, a small protected area on the Lazio-Abruzzo border.

The jeep of the rangers had just entered the reserve, when, along a dirt road, I noticed a big muddy puddle. Without stopping the vehicle, I asked my colleague to look at the track which was visibly imprinted on the ground.

Luigi Di Giorgio, looking at it astonished, could just utter: << It is big ..., but>>.

It was a dream come true: finally we had the confirmation before us that a bear spent the previous night in our reserve.

My hypothesis was proved true: “Also Marsican bears, like Scandinavian brown bears or black bears in North America, move as and where they please.” And so my hypothesis was not so far-fetched!

A few months went by and no other signs of its presence were found, but the first snowfall unveiled that the bear was still in the reserve, and it was not alone.

In fact, it spent most of the time with another specimen: double and parallel tracks in snow with footprints of different size were an unmistakable evidence!

“Maybe a brother?” We will never know it, because the reduced genetic pool of this subspecies of brown bear, the *Ursus arctos marsicanus*, does not allow such assessments.

The Nature Reserve Montagne della Duchessa is situated in the area of the province of Rieti called Cicolano, which seems wedged in Abruzzo, opposite the massif of Mount Velino. Historical and recent data

and local place names testify the presence of bears in this area. Its geographical location makes it an area of connection between two potential lines of movement for bears around the Fucino Valley:

- 1) PNALM (National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise) – Sirente-Velino Regional Park – Rieti
- 2) PNALM - Ernici-Simbruini mountains – Rieti.

Over the past seven years specific monitoring programs, first started under the guidance of external experts

and then formalized at the regional level within the Marsican Brown Bear Regional Monitoring Network, were able to collect a considerable amount of data on the presence of the species throughout the area of the high Cicolano.

This monitoring network is made up of personnel of the Lazio Region (representatives) and staff of the State Forestry Corps (CFS), Provincial Police and volunteers (field operators). Once an operator reports a sign of presence (droppings, footprints, predations, direct sightings, hairs, nail tracks on trunks, etc.), the representatives begin controlling and verifying the reports.

The adventure of bear-monitoring in Cicolano had even dramatic moments that have deeply

marked all of us, as when it was rumoured that someone had killed one of our bears. Fortunately, soon the rumour was contradicted by ascertained data.

But the worst day was December 7, 2008. 8:00 a.m. had just struck when I received a call from a fellow ranger telling me that some hikers had found a wounded bear between some boulders.

I cannot deny that at first I thought it was a joke in poor taste, but I had to change my mind immediately: ar-



TOP: a bear track on the ridges above Tornimparte. (ph. Stefano Orlandini)

OPENING: The summit of Murolungoin the Nature Reserve Montagne della Duchessa (ph. Francesco Ferreri)



iving at the scene I saw with my own eyes, “fogged” with emotion and anger, the extent of the tragedy. An adult bear lay in silence in a dip, stretching on his back, staring at us and slowly moving its fore paws in an anthropomorphic gesture of request for help.

Meanwhile, we alerted all the Regional Monitoring Network and the PNALM, researchers by the University La Sapienza and local institutions in charge of wildlife management. The veterinary of Borgorose promptly arrived on the spot. In direct line with the veterinary of PNALM, he was working to sedate the animal, but it died as soon as a helicopter of CFS was taking off to bring the vet of PNALM to us and take the bear away.

The scrupulous analysis on the carcass by the Zooprophyllactic Institute for Lazio and Tuscany ascertained that the death of the bear was not caused by man, but by bacterial infections.

The death of the bear caused in us all employees of the Reserve a period of apparent dismay, exacerbated by the fact that the collected data showed that the other bear was no longer in the area, since it had moved to the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise.

But after a while we began to collect the first rumours,

then certain signs of presence, not only in the already-known areas, but also in the neighbouring Val di Varrì, natural corridor connecting the Reserve and the Simbruini mountains.

“Maybe nothing was over, that cold morning in Valle Amara!”

In the fall of 2010 we had the confirmation that Ulysses, the bear that for years frequented the Sibillini mountains, went through the Duchessa leaving its hairs and, so, its DNA in the same places frequented by the other bears of Cicolano.

Seven years now, every year some bears spend a longer or shorter time in the Duchessa mountains and probably in the surrounding areas, such as Valle di Malito.

The scientific literature has shown that one of the necessary requirements for the conservation of the Marican brown bear is that the population expands out of PNALM, the core area of its range, where the density of the population is high. So far considered “peripheral northern area”, i.e. Cicolano and in general all the Province of Rieti to the Sibillini mountains, could become then one of the favourite and permanent habitats of our friend the bear!

This is a story that we wish it would never end, and that every year upgrades with new episodes as far as the bears will be able to move freely in all the mountains of the Central Apennines.

Gianpiero Di Clemente

Nature Reserve Montagne della Duchessa Head of Surveillance Service

Marsican Brown Bear Regional Monitoring Network

BELOW: the Duchessa Lake (ph. Francesco Ferreri)


PREVIOUS PAGE: summit ridge of Mt. Morrone (ph. Francesco Ferreri)



THE MARSICAN BROWN BEAR IN MOLISE

by Il Sannita



A landscape photograph showing a wide valley with rocky, light-colored terrain in the foreground and middle ground. The hills in the background are covered in green vegetation. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The text is overlaid on the lower part of the image.

The Molise area, in particular the Province of Isernia, is one of the areas of greatest interest to the Apennine population of the Marsican brown bear, consisting in the Mainarde mountains (part of the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise or PNALM), and the territory of Alto Molise (High Molise) located near the Sangro Valley and the Majella National Park.

However, while the area of the Mainarde is permanently frequented by a large part of the bear population, in Alto Molise the bear appears more sporadically, irregularly, with a touch-and-go presence of vagrant individuals, as this territory does not seem to show ideal conditions for wintering because of the lack of suitable dens.

In 2012, however, very encouraging signs were reported because, besides a renewed presence of different specimens in the area near the Volturno Valley, with bears reported even faraway from areas of ordinary frequentation, there were also many reports regarding the mountainous area between San Pietro Avellana (various summer-autumn reports), Capracotta (a first report of tracks in snow at Easter and other signs of presence in autumn) and Pescopennataro (particularly in the area of fir forests on the border with Rosello and Roio del Sangro).

However, most of the reports, although considered reliable, were not always quickly verified. Undeniably the whole area of Alto Molise is worthy of closer scrutiny and investigation by researchers.

This is necessary not only to reduce the margin of error, which is often likely to cause confusion, but also to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of conservational efforts in an area that is certainly peripheral to the core area of PNALM, and for this specific reason is one of those potential areas of expansion to the south and the Matese mountains.

In this sense, the last report near Conca Casale, a few kilometres from Venafro, checked and verified by the staff of the CFS (Italian Forestry Corps), confirmed the importance of the peripheral area of the PNALM, especially in a season rather poor of beech nuts like the past one that might have pushed some animals down dale, including the female with cubs whose tracks were found by the Venafro's CFS about 10 days ago in an area characterized by intensive traditional agriculture. But the walk down of the bear family confirms another fact of great management interest: only a small number of bears damages agricultural structures and farms, even in a season apparently poor in food.

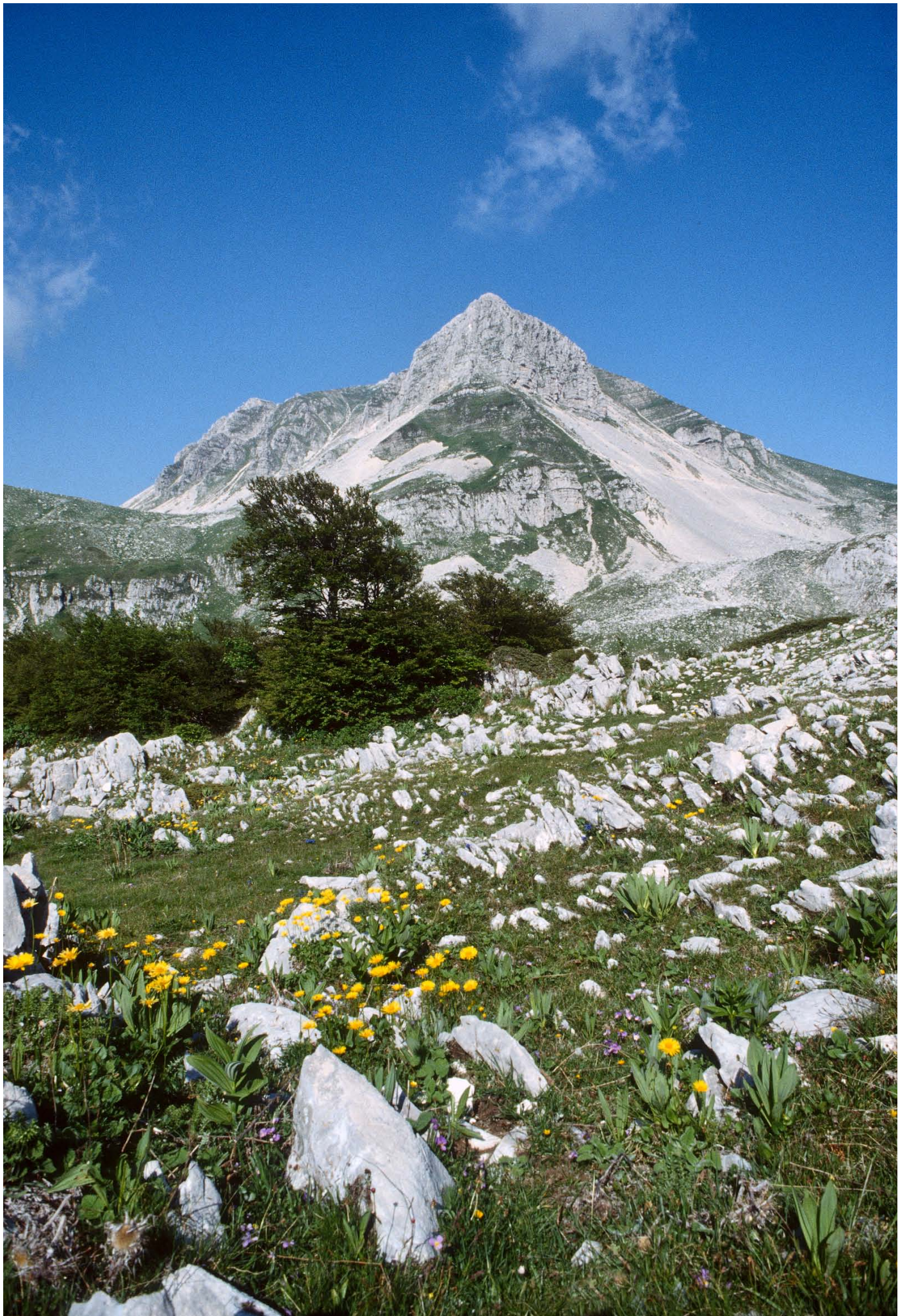
The bear needs large spaces to move over refuge and feeding areas, and it is the quality of these areas, and the level of man-large carnivore conflicts, to make a difference from a conservational viewpoint. Recent attempts to install huge wind and/or photovoltaic

farms in pristine areas or mountain ridges make urgent the need to protect these areas of essential importance if we want to give a future to the Apennine brown bear population, hence the crucial importance of the institution and proper management of contiguous areas prescribed by National Parks' law, and the consequent protection of the corridors connecting protected areas would ensure the necessary continuity to the habitat of the species.

Il Sannita

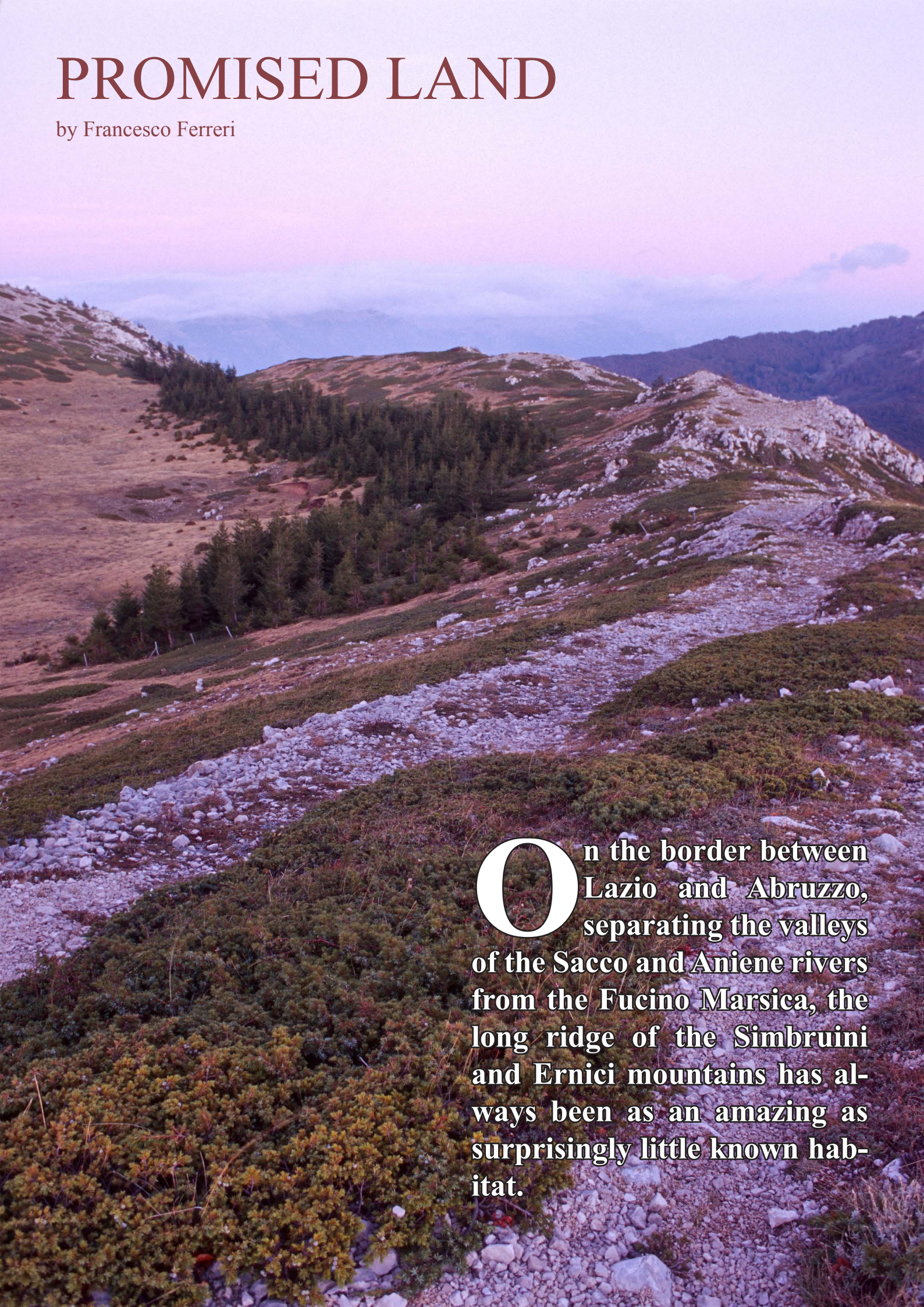
OPENING: Venafrana Valley (ph. Daniele Valfrè)

RIGHT: Mt. La Meta (ph. Daniele Valfrè)



PROMISED LAND

by Francesco Ferreri



On the border between Lazio and Abruzzo, separating the valleys of the Sacco and Aniene rivers from the Fucino Marsica, the long ridge of the Simbruini and Ernici mountains has always been as amazing as surprisingly little known habitat.

Tens of thousands of hectares of valleys deeply carved by capricious streams, “lunar-charming” karst plateaus, immense beech forests, some of the largest in Europe, peaks over 2000 m, sometimes with soft and good natured slopes, others with winding and sharp ridges full of cliffs and cirques.

All the south-eastern edge of the chain, from Mount Viperella, in Simbruini, to Pizzo Deta, an extreme offshoot of the Ernici, directly dominates the Roveto Valley, dug by the Liri river, just opposite to the chain of Serralunga, in the External Protection Zone of the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise (PNALM), with an important connection area consisting of the Nature Reserve of Zompo Schioppo. This geographical contiguity, together with the high natural suitability of the territory (extensive beech forests, valleys and cliffs, abundance of old and abandoned cultivated fields, still practiced sheep-grazing, though not so intensive), make it an ideal habitat for the bear, a promised land to colonize in order to ensure a future for the most endangered mammal in Italy.

The presence, albeit rarefied, of bears in Ernici has been well ascertained in recent decades. It is even possible to assume the presence, in recent years, of a breeding nucleus. Otherwise, the presence in Simbruini seems to be more linked to reasons of exploration and supply, along recurring lines of movement often coinciding with the long valleys in the north-west (Fosso Fioio, Campolungo di Pereto). In past years, sporadic specimens were reported up to the extreme northern edge of the chain, in the territory of Cervara di Roma.

Just in the last year, and in particular from this summer, several reports have established a lively presence

of bears on the territory. To the numerous sightings of the individual renamed “Hernico” in the area between the towns of Guarcino and Filettino, in September it was added a report (sighting) in the territory of Camerata, which might suggest that a second specimen arrived up to the northern edge of the Simbruini Park.

If, therefore, the fate of the Marsican bear is to be determined mainly in the lands outside the core area of PNALM, in this particular time it is right and proper a reflection on the state of conservation and protection of the territory of the Ernici and Simbruini, that may have a strategic importance for the establishment of a new independent vital unit.



TOP: Simbruini's beech forests are among the largest in Europe (ph. Francesco Ferreri)

OPENING: high grounds of Mt. Viperella face Roveto Valley and the mountains of Abruzzo National Park (ph. Francesco Ferreri)

The situation on the ground is quite complex and the administrative fragmentation of the territory does not help at all. Only a portion of the entire chain is comprised in the scope of the Simbruini Regional Park, while either the adjacent areas in Abruzzo (municipalities of Pereto, Carsoli, Tagliacozzo and Cappadocia) or the entire ridge of Ernici (Lazio) are essentially excluded from structured protection policies, subject to the existence of SPAs and SCIs.

Overall, the level of human pressure on the whole territory is very high: strong penetration of roads open to vehicular traffic, intensive wood cutting activities, the persistence of territorial hunting scopes (Ambiti Territoriali di Caccia, ATC) in areas of extreme

importance for wildlife (outside the park), poaching, recurrence of speculative projects that periodically propose harmful and economically losing development models (ski slopes and lifts, imaginative tourist thoroughfares, new buildings at high altitudes).

A few critical situations, on which the associations are trying to take action to avert the worst, are emblematic in this sense.

In the district of Ernici it has been observed some overlapping territorial hunting scopes on areas in which the presence of the bear has been ascertained. Wild boar hunting, especially with the method of *batutta* (or *cacciarella*), involves high risks for the bear, either for the disturbance caused by the use of packs of dogs or for a not remote possibility that the bear could be mistaken for a wild boar and killed. A technical table has been set just to mitigate this situation by the Lazio Region, which has been raising awareness in teams of hunters, reaching a collaboration agreement to involve hunters in the minimization of risks for the conservation of the bear. An experiment to follow carefully.

Equally critical is the proliferation of roads of penetration into the mountain that have always been frequented for agro-forestry-pastoral use by man, who has thus maintained an extensive network of roads through valleys and high-altitude pastures.

But the number of mule tracks and dirt roads of various

kinds that cross the mountains has continued to grow despite pastoral and agricultural use of land is dramatically reduced now. It is along these arteries that creeps the deafening traffic of jeeps, motocross bikes and quads bearing secure disturbance to wildlife, pollution and degradation of the landscape, facilitating all the illegal activities that heavily impact the territory (dumping, poaching, illegal wood cutting).

Part of this context is the paradoxical story of the Fosso Fioio, the deep and wild valley that separates Lazio and Abruzzo for most of the length of the Simbruini chain, that has proven over time to be a preferential movement track for bears. Crossed by a track that in many points coincides directly with the river bed of the same name, the valley has always been a target of visionary projects that would like to turn it in a communication route for religious tourism that, from the

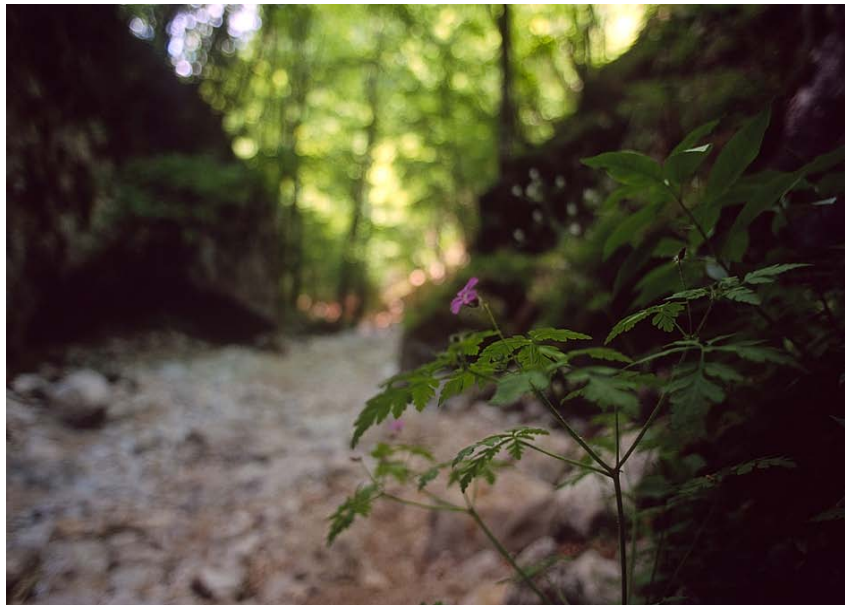
area of Carsoli and Sabina, would lead to the very popular Sanctuary of SS Trinity of Vallepietra. In recent years, thanks to a substantial state funding (one and a half million euro), a project for “securing” the road, which should ensure the viability to emergency vehicles and, in the future, an eventual bustle of tourist shuttles full of pilgrims, has been started. Apart from the obvious environmental damage that would result to this habitat of extraordinary value, the idea is also stubbornly utopian, given the precarious hydro-geological equilibrium of the valley which is, in fact, a huge water catch basin.

Unfortunately, despite a long and obstinate opposition by some associations, a first phase of work started in mid-July of this year with some interventions to restore the viability of the precarious cart track in the valley, with removal of stones, remodeling and beating of slopes.

Inevitably, with the first November and December rains (and snow), the rushing fury of the river washed away all traces of domes-

tication, bringing back the environment more or less to its initial conditions with the consequent, predictable waste of public money that could be spent to promote and enhance other cultural and environmental emergencies in the area (the ruins of Camerata Vecchio or the magnificent karst plateau of Camposecco). After a technical winter break, the works should proceed like a feat which closely resembles the famous Penelope’s web.

Besides all these issues, it is urgently needed a drastic intervention leading to the closure to public traffic (agreed with the municipalities and respecting the needs of the local population) of the penetration tracks, especially of those insisting in particularly sensitive areas for the presence of the plantigrade. Our association is considering and promoting initiatives in this direction.



TOP: *Geranium robertianum* flowering in the Fioio gorge, before the intervention for “securing” the area (May, 2011 - ph. Francesco Ferreri)

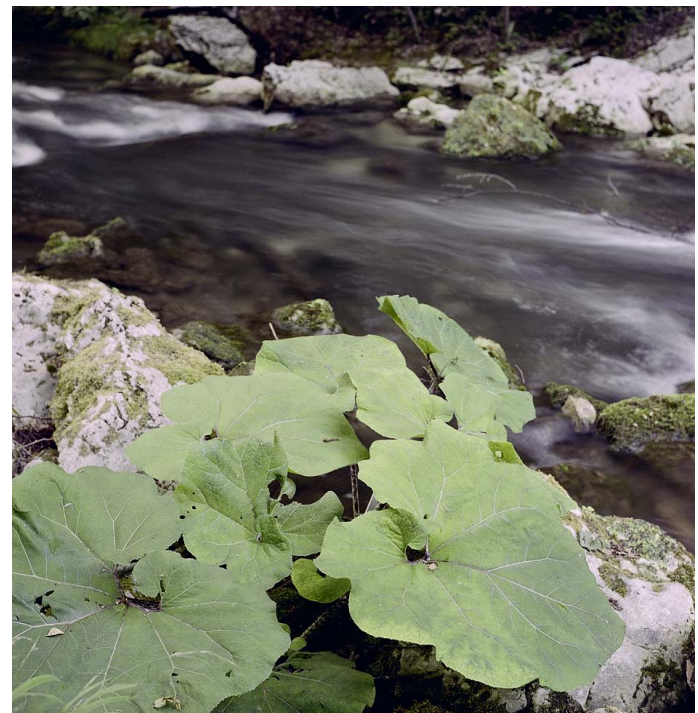
But problems do not end here: new ski lifts and other projects of speculation are always just around the corner, uncontrolled grazing, widespread throughout the country, which leads to problems of conflict with wildlife (especially wolf), ventilated industrial initiatives incompatible with the nature of the places, the problems of water withdrawals on major basins ... there is something for all tastes.

The confirmed presence of the bear, at this time, in the mountains and forests of Simbruini and Ernici is a doubly important occasion.

It is important to the bear that has a real chance to settle in a new land, the promised land where it would be guaranteed the survival of a new vital nucleus, distinct and independent from the PNALM's, safe from the threat of genetic depletion and catastrophic epidemics.

But it is also important for the territory and those who live in it, so that a healthy and serious policy of conservation and environmentally friendly development of this priceless natural heritage could be finally raised. The Simbruini Regional Park Authority can and must be a leader in this battle of culture and civilization, supported and prodded (if necessary) by associations and citizens.

Francesco Ferreri



TOP: Trail signs on Ernici Mountains, near Campo Catino (ph. Francesco Ferreri)

BELOW: alongside the banks of the Aniene river, richness in water is a major call for wild species (ph. Francesco Ferreri)

THE STORY OF ERNICO

by Gaetano de Persiis





I was far away, on the evening of July 26 this year, but when my dear friend Francesco called me on phone to give me good news, I heard “that” particular voice and I guessed at once that the news was about a bear: it had already happened too many times and I well knew that tone full of enthusiasm and wonder together.

But I could not imagine that that fortune - grace, I would say - which happened to me only twice, had happened to him this time: to see Him in our beloved Ernici.

Francesco told me that the bear had been close to him approximately for an hour, intent to smell the soil and the air, to overturn stones and “pick” insects and larvae. In the spell of a peaceful and warm high-altitude midsummer sunset, the bear had materialized in front of him in the shade of a little glacial valley where many times we had longed to find Him and many times we looked out with the mute hope to meet Him.

This time, anyway, He was really there! He “grazed” quietly, disproving, once again, the fierce reputation of his cousins from Central Europe and the rest of the northern hemisphere.

He appeared calm and quiet, intent in a painstaking search of tiny samples of food that only at the end of a long day of research and wanderings could feed Him enough.

He gave Francesco sufficient time to take three hundred photos of Him and shoot some videos, which then allowed us to determine that He was a young and vigorous male of 3-5 years of age.

In the following days we went looking for Him again, especially in the buckthorn scrub, whose berries, however, were not fully ripe yet. And the search was sorely disappointed.

But one morning a fortnight later, the many indirect signs of his presence materialize again. We (again with Francesco, but this was my son) found a large bush of buckthorn almost completely crashed. I had never seen a buckthorn reduced so bad by a bear ... yes, just a bear could do it, because Francesco found three large droppings full of buckthorn drupes around.

A few mornings later we found (Francescos, there were two of them this time, and I) too small tufts of hairs, also collected, as well as excrements, because we could get to know the genetic identity of our friend the bear. In the meantime, we affectionately named Him Ernico, almost to feel Him closer, so as to share the long days in search of food and places to discover an area still unknown to Him.

We have no evidences to say with certainty that Ernico was born here, in Ernici mountains. In 2005 I met and photographed what seemed to me an adult female (without having absolute certainty) and in 2007 I was sure I saw a large male. Ernico might be their son.

In March 2011, I found footprints in the snow! Was it another bear or maybe



TOP: Tracks in the mud, probably belonging to Ernico. (ph. Ilaria Guj / Simbruini Regional Park)

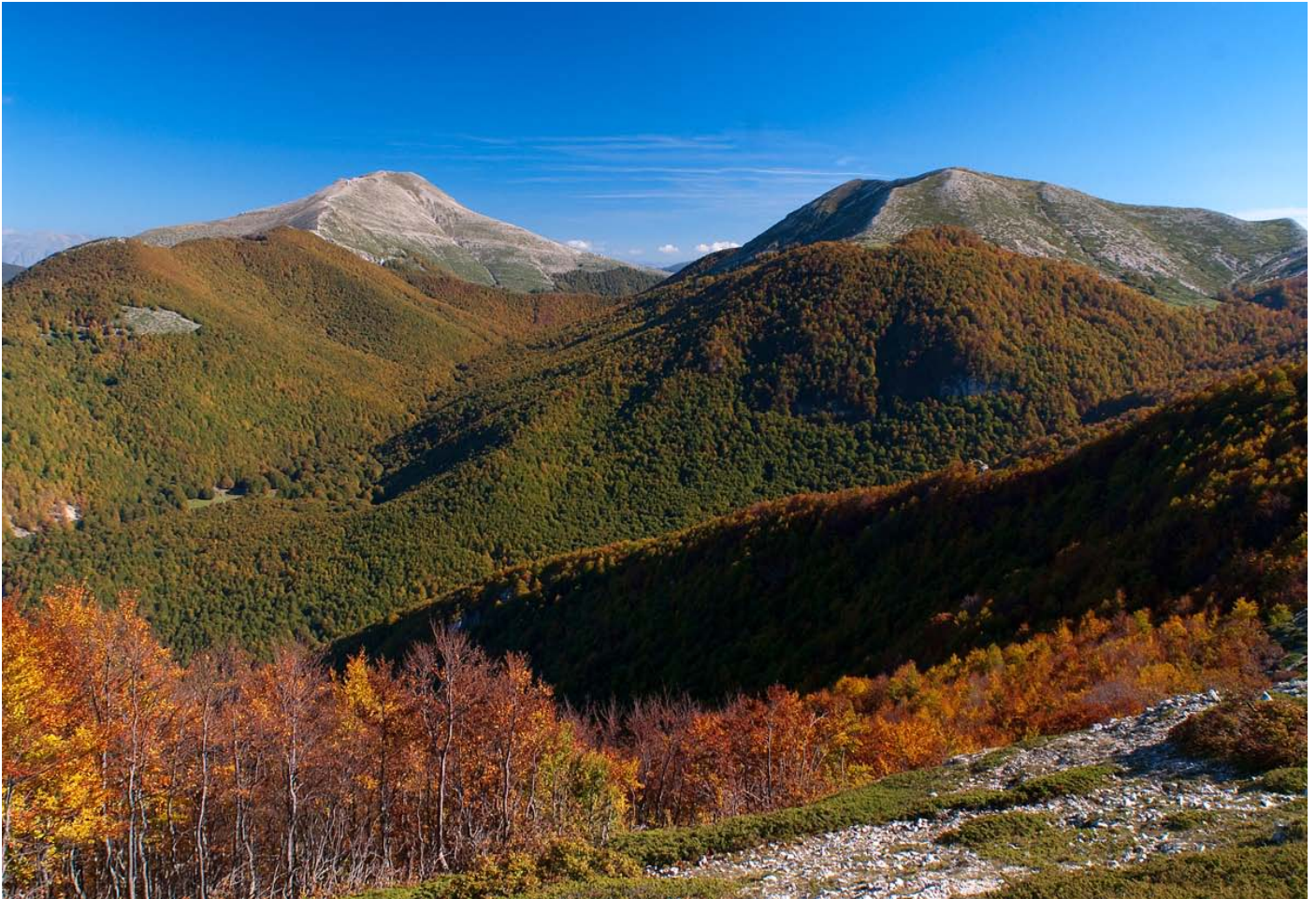
PREVIOUS PAGE: Ernico on a buckthorn bush (ph. Francesco Cullicelli)

He was already here? But if not, then we have to imagine his long pilgrimage, which, from the mountainous peaks of the Abruzzo National Park, where in the last century his ancestors found the last refuge, pushed him down the Valle Roveto, crossing a railway, a road, the Liri river and again a motorway to finally enter the steep and vast forests of Ernici, with valleys and gorges, peaks and plateaus: his “promised land”, whereto the ancestral instinct which governs his species led Him.

He walked again through an instinctive way of hope to the “old” territories inhabited by his ancestors: a mysterious and wonderful impulse to give “new” spaces for his own future and his precious kin’s one.

After being spotted twice by Enrico, a sturdy but gentle shepherd (he does not hate bears and wolves!), in the end of summer our Hernico began to descend again in search of wild fruits, but also guided by his unconscious desire to get to know the new territory in which He had ventured.

Wandering here, turning there, it came into the Sim-



Autumn view from Campo Catino towards north. Mt. Crepacuore on the right, Mt. Viglio on the left. (ph. Gaetano de Persiis)

bruini Park, adjacent to the territory of Ernici, where three different drivers (on three various occasions, two of which are documented by photos) met Him at night, not frightened at all, in the middle of the road.

His footprints, stamped in the mud, and excrements were found again in Ernici, near the bordering Simbruini Park, by the rangers and Max, the oldest of my “bear-lover” sons.

Ernico is familiar to the place now.

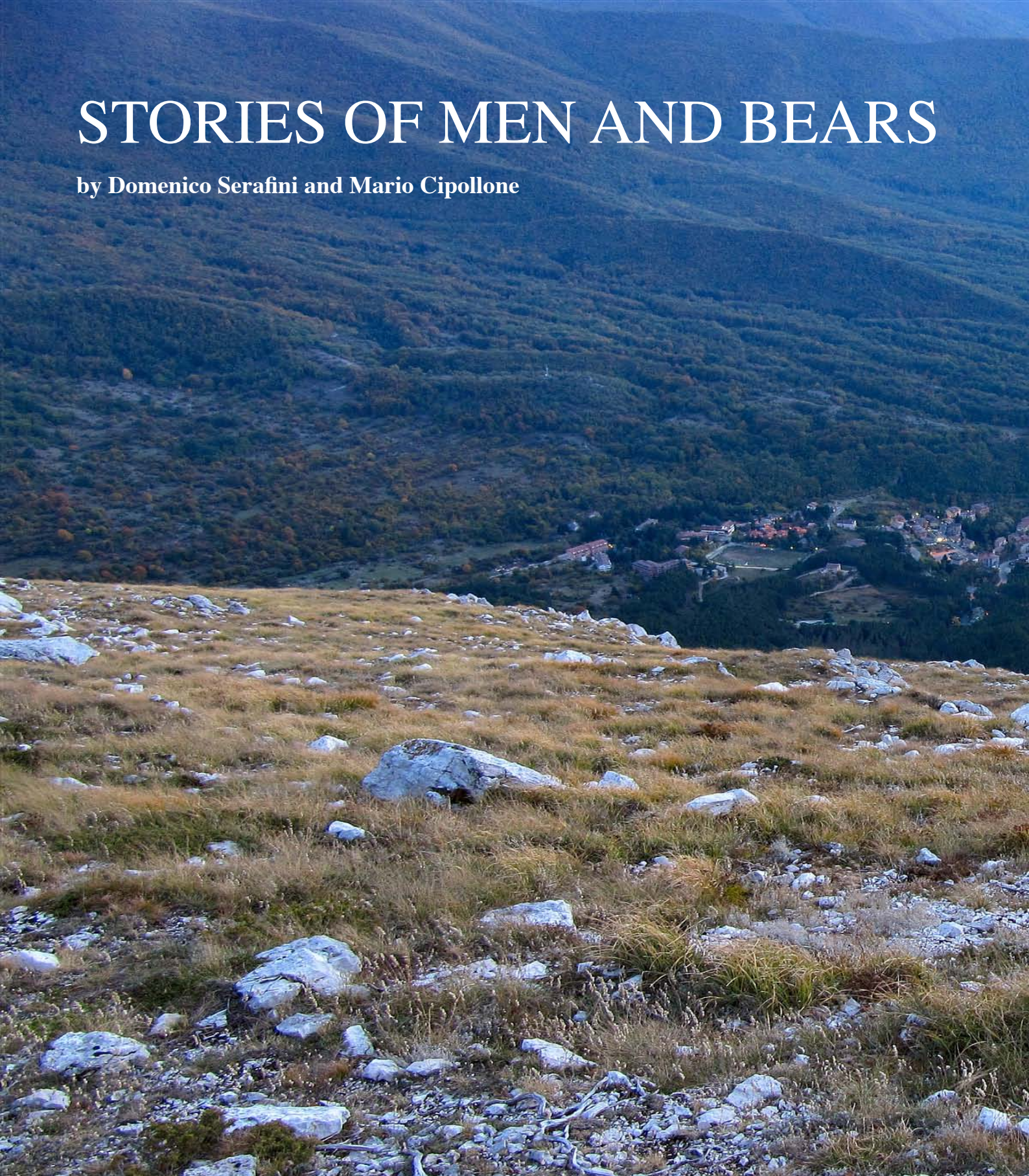
As I write this, the snow is falling heavily in the mountains and my thoughts go out to Him with the hope that the harshness of winter will find Him in the quiet of a safe and welcoming den. It might sound childish, but I am not ashamed to admit that I often feel as if I were at his side, as if I could comfort Him with my concern, the sympathy (συμπάθεια) I feel for his instinct, his strength ... for Him, simply and wonderfully my travel mate in this wonderful experience called Life.

Long live Ernico and his kin!

Gaetano de Persiis

STORIES OF MEN AND BEARS

by Domenico Serafini and Mario Cipollone



ABOVE: the village of Filettino (FR), lies at the feet of the most imponent summits of Simbruini: Mt. Viglio, Mt. Tarino, Mt. Contento (ph. Domenico Serafini)



On Thursday 6 December 2012, at 23.35, Roberto Petrivelli, driver for COTRAL bus company, has just left the bus to the deposit in Filettino and is returning home to Trevi nel Lazio by car when he notices a large animal on the right roadside, at *Ponte delle Tavole*.

It is a Marsican brown bear fixed to dismantle an old trunk, probably in search of insects or to feed on the acorns that the wind and the rain water accumulated in the ditch. Roberto stops the car, turns up the beams and reverses for a short stretch for a better look. Then the animal walks away slowly. It stops a little further to turn around and look. Roberto takes a picture with his mobile phone, but it is too dark and it fails. Roberto is a bears' friend and is really aware of the value and importance of the bears in Simbruini mountains. Anyhow, he cannot imagine that about seventy years ago, less than 500 metres from the place where he spotted the bear, something similar happened, unfortunately with tragic implications for the animal.

It was 1943, a time of war. Following the armistice of 8 September, in Italy a lot of confusion reigned: the friends became enemies and enemies friends. Only for the anti-fascists things did not change. Tito's partisans began to fight against the fascists in Istria starting the terrible page of foibe (sinkholes), while their equal Italians fled to the mountains and formed brigades, including the Maiella Brigade.

On the other side, Rodolfo Graziani was appointed minister of defense of the constituent Republic of Salò. Who knows whether the news of his newly appointment animated the village of Filettino, in Simbruini mountains, where the hierarch was born.

In the Fall of 1943 in Filettino happened something else: a vehicle-Marsican brown bear collision, as reported by Bernardino Olini, 87 years old, in this valuable record collected on November 22, 2012, by Domenico Serafini, a scientist for the Simbruini Regional Park.

Bernardino worked as a ticket boy on the coach. First, like many others in the area, he worked with milk.

"In '34-'35 we ran a dairy in Rome, I was 8. In '39 I was a delivery boy. I brought the milk to the families ... the donuts, the bombs in the morning, I ate them all! Once the milk was all from our lands, before there were the jugs, then the glass bottles. Once they were all shepherds, my father in law had 2000 sheep. In winter they led the flocks to Velletri. In summer, in June, they all returned to the mountains! Once there was a restaurant here. Its name was Campostaffi."

"There was no road to Filettino before '25. At that time it ended at Conabella. From there to get to the centre of Filettino you needed to walk up along Via Roma. After the '25 the road that connected Piazza Conabella and Piazza Arcangelo Caraffa, where the Aniene river rises, was paved. In '35, when the Marshal of Italy Rodolfo Graziani won the war in East Africa in Addis Ababa, Mussolini asked him what he wanted as a reward and Graziani said: I want the road to Abruzzo! From Piazza Arcangelo Caraffa (Aniene) to Abruzzo."



TOP: bus service in Filettino, in a historical image

The accident was caused by the coach running along the road no. 28, from Filettino to Trevi nel Lazio (FR). The collision occurred at 03:00 am.

"At Three daylight saving time ... Practically at two."

It happened near the junction of Fiumata, less than 500 metres from where, seventy years later, Roberto Petrivelli, bus driver of COTRAL, spotted the bear.

"Before the Saracen wall there was a vegetable garden on the left."

At that time the mountain was cultivated almost everywhere, along the Aniene the best soil. Giovanni Pesce drove the coach along the winding road, as winding as today. The coach beams were shielded up by cuffs as bird's nests upside down not to identify the vehicle by enemy aircraft from above.

"We travelled cuffs-on to avoid bombing. If you didn't wear them, they jailed you... There was no joke".

Bernardino Olini was just over 17 years. He was the ticket boy. The coach came to a turn and collided with something. The animal suddenly came out from the left edge, just around the bend. The impact was inevitable. The lights at night, at turns, deceive the animals, frighten them and push them right onto the road rather than send them away.

"Probably the bear saw the lights that have turned the corner. The lights went down to the river. When the bear saw the light, it escaped here and it came in the middle of the road. Turning by the coach we found it in front of us!"

I thought it was a domestic animal, so that Giovanni urged Bernardino to get off and see whether it was a donkey or a horse.

"Dino, get off! Go and see what is! I think we ran down a donkey! Giovanni couldn't imagine what kind of animal we had just run down!"

The animal lied on the ground. When Dino came closer holding a pocket light he saw the bear.

"When I got there, the boss was behind me. As I got closer, the bear uttered Auh!!"

Probably it fed on the few vegetable left in the gardens along the Aniene river in that season. There were still some corn ears in the underlying field.

"Maybe it was in the vegetable garden to eat some corn, the corn was dry. I was not scared. Bears and wolves do not attack the man, they do nothing to you!"

The bear had its belly open. It lied on the ground and was no longer moving, but it was still alive.

"It was a wreck. It didn't move... It screamed only!"

Then a soldier who was going to war, on the coach because returning from a leave, finished it off not to

make it suffer. It was a big male bear. He had huge paws. Four people with ropes made it difficult to lift the carcass onto the coach roof, where they put the suitcases, to bring it to Filettino. The police wanted to know more, but it was an accident.

"And then we had some troubles with the marshal. He gave us a hard time. Luckily there were some witnesses!"

The bear was turned into soap! The most lacking product in Filettino in those days.

"We turned it into soap. What a pity for those big hams!"

[Collected by Domenico Serafini, adapted by Mario Cipollone]

The “black and white” story by Bernardino Olini tells the tragic death of a bear at a time when the fortunes of humans and bears, unbeknownst to them, had returned to intertwine as perhaps it did not happen from prehistory, and not because of natural disasters, but the folly of war. In fact, as partisans and civilians took refuge in the most remote places and caves to escape bombings and reprisals, as well, at the dawn of civilization, our ancestors painted bears on their cave walls, ate their flesh and wore their furs. The words of Bernardino Olini transmit a fresh memory, seventy years later, of the state of emergency in autumn 1943: “We turned the bear into soap. What a pity for those big hams.” In the following years, with the invention of the atomic bomb, the danger for the humanity to return to the stone age would have seemed even more real.

The hard interview to which the driver and the ticket boy were subjected by the police of Filettino shows how the bear was still under the protection of the law, despite the wartime and the climate of anarchy in the aftermath of 8 September’s Armistice. Beyond today’s ideological prejudices, the sensitivity of the time on the issues of nature conservation and knowledge of wild animals proved by Olini is evident and it came from an agricultural-pastoral culture almost completely lost now: “I was not scared. Bears and wolves do not attack the man, they do nothing to you!”; while someone still continues to foment the fear of wolves and bears in the public imagination.

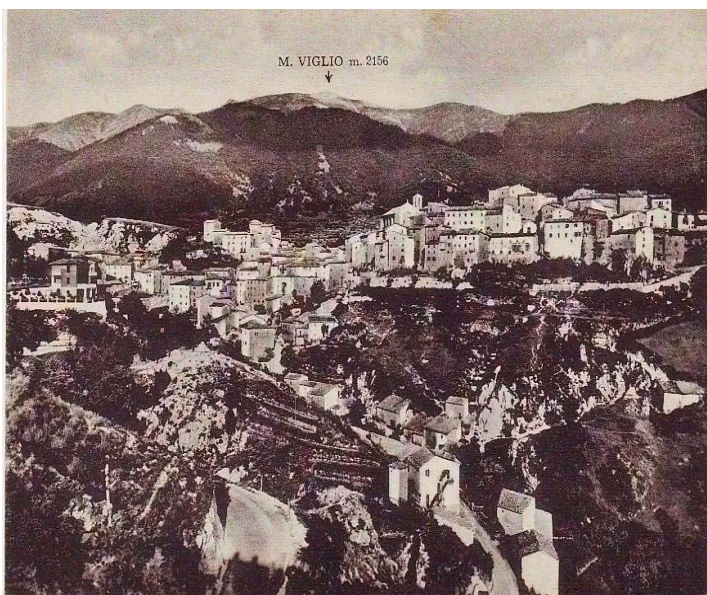
Mario Cipollone



LEFT: Bernardino Olini with Domenico Serafini in Filettino

BELOW LEFT: the village of Filettino in a historical image

BELOW RIGHT: Bernardino Olini in a historical image



TERRE DELL'ORSO

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

No. 01 / DECEMBER 2012

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