



Capraia/Toscana - Capraia and other small islands of the Tuscan Archipelago : biological diversity conservation

LIFE97 NAT/IT/004153

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Project description:

Background

Off the Tuscan coast an archipelago of little islands, on which nature is still very much unspoilt, marches away towards Corsica. The LIFE project in question targeted the biodiversity on Capraia island, a now-extinct volcano, 500 ha of which has been designated SPA, and on a dozen tiny islets, all distinguished by the presence of endemic species. These places are veritable evolutionary laboratories where, thanks to their isolation, plants and animals had - and still have - time and opportunity to differentiate themselves from their mainland ancestors. This isolation has also brought the Mediterranean shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii*) and Audouin's gull (*Larus audouinii*), both priority birds for LIFE funding, to pick these islets as refuges for nesting. However, the biodiversity on the islands was under attack from invading species like rats and the tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), and from tourism. There are also the yellow-legged gulls (*Larus cachinnans*), which compete against many other seabirds for nesting sites. All these pose real threats to the island species.

Objectives

The ultimate objective of the LIFE project was to have the entire surface area of Capraia and the 12 islets declared an SPA and to have the management plans, which would have been elaborated with EU co-finance, applied there.

While these management plans were being drawn up, ad hoc conservation measures would be carried out to eliminate the tree of heaven from Capraia and to bring the rat populations on the islets under control.

A series of actions for the benefit of the avifauna would also be undertaken, such

as scooping out cavities in the cliffs in order to create nesting opportunities for seabirds, experiments in removing yellow-legged gulls from the site most frequently used by Audouin's gull and installing artificial nests and platforms to encourage birds of passage which only rarely occur in the area, to stay and nest. Finally, action would be undertaken to preserve the biodiversity of the small lake on Capraia, the only body of freshwater on the island.

Results

The project has achieved the foreseen objectives, except for what concerns the elimination of the cat-tail *Typha* from one pond in Capraia, to be carried out without LIFE funds. The techniques used seem effective and could be exported to other similar situations, i.e. the creation of nesting cavities for shearwaters (this action has also an innovative value because never experimented until now). However it will take some years to verify the success of some actions (such as the increase of the breeding population of marine birds or the success of the *Quercus ilex* reforestation). **Main outcomes:**

- The enlargement of the perimeter of the proposed Site of Community Importance "Isole di Cerboli e Palmaiola", now including the islets surrounding the Elba islands, due to the presence of the European leaf-toed gecko *Phyllodactylus (Euleptes) europaeus*.
- The designation as Special Protection Areas of the pSCI "Formiche di Grosseto" and of the group of islets in front of Burano, named "Isolotti grossetani dell'Arcipelago Toscano", due to the presence of numerous species listed in the annexes of the Birds directive and object of the project.
- The elaboration of management plans and guidelines, which are of good quality and operative. The procedure for their official application by the National Park of the Tuscan Arcipel, where the sites lies in, was ongoing.
- The elimination of the exotic and invasive tree of heaven, *Ailanthus altissima*, from the Capraia island.
- The individuation of the factors influencing the presence/breeding success of marine birds.
- The increased awareness of the stakeholders (Park, Municipality of Capraia, local inhabitants, local press) on the threats (rats and gulls) that affect the area, on the presence of habitats of EU importance and on the importance of maintaining some traditional human activities (agriculture and stock raising) for conservation. The project contributed to implement the Natura 2000 network under diverse viewpoints: the conservation of the sites, of the species and of the habitats, described herewith in details: **1) Isola di Capraia pSCI/SPA**
- Elaboration of guidelines for the management of the site to be implemented through the Park plan.
- Removal of the exotic tree of heaven.
- Improved conditions for the two habitats of EU interest present.
- Creation of open areas for migratory birds' stop over.
- Increased availability of nesting sites for the osprey, owls and shearwaters.
- Increased awareness of the local population on the naturalistic aspects of the island. **2) Isole di Cerboli e Palmaiola pSCI/SPA**
- Elaboration of the management plan.

- *Improved breeding conditions (due to the removal of the rats) and increased availability of nesting sites for Shearwaters. 3) Isola di Pianosa pSCI/SPA*
- *Elaboration of guidelines for the management of the site to be implemented in the Park plan.*
- *Improved breeding conditions (due to the removal of the rats) for Shearwaters. 4) Formiche di Grosseto pSCI (new SPA)*
- *Elaboration of the management plan. 5) Isolotti grossetani dell'Arcipelago Toscano (new SPA)*
- *Elaboration of the management plan.*
- *Improved breeding conditions (due to the removal of the rats) and increased availability of nesting sites for shearwaters. **Bird Species:***
- *Larus audouinii: the monitoring activities permitted to increase the knowledge of the ecology and the ethology of this species. The inventory of colonies permitted to identify areas to be controlled to avoid accidental human disturbance. The results allowed also to identify the limiting factors (presence of yellow-legged gulls and feral cats and dogs) and to intervene against them. The monitoring activities allowed also the collection of new biological data (such as feeding habits).*
- *Calonectris diomedea: individuation of rats as the main threat for the breeding success of the species and eradication from some islets. The action undertaken is demonstrating a positive effect in a short term scale.*
- *Puffinus yelkouan, Hydrobates pelagicus and Phalacrocorax aristotelis: the removal of rats from the islets allows better breeding conditions for these species. Habitats:*
- *"*Mediterranean temporary ponds" and "*Pseudosteppe with grasses and annuals (Thero-Brachypodieta)" benefit from the recurring activities of control of the common vegetation that colonizes and reduces these habitats, in the past maintained by the agricultural/farming practices. The awareness of the local population on the value of these habitats and on the relationship to traditional human activities/habitats has increased. **The incentive/pump priming effects of the project can be summarized as follows:***
- *The realization of the Management plans will permit to the Park and to the Grosseto Province to carry out conservation strategies based on a good and operative instrument.*
- *In 2001 the Park financed the prosecution of the monitoring of Larus audouinii and Larus cachinnans started with the Life project.*
- *The Region committed itself to start a control plan for Larus cachinnans elaborated from the results of the project.*
- *In Capraia the municipality and private owners have undertaken cultivation of little deserted areas; incentives were foreseen by the municipality plan for the restoration of the traditional agriculture, declared important for the habitat conservation in the island by the Life nature project.*

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Environmental issues addressed:

Themes

Biodiversity issues - Invasive species

Keywords

pest control, natural park, coastal area, island, management plan

Target EU Legislation

- Nature protection and Biodiversity
- Directive 79/409 - Conservation of wild birds (02.04.1979)
- Directive 92/43 - Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora- Habitats Directiv ...

Target species

Calonectris diomedea Hydrobates pelagicus Larus audouinii Pandion
haliaetus Phalacrocorax aristotelis desmarestii Phylloclastus europaeus
Puffinus yelkouan

Target Habitat types

- 92D0 - Southern riparian galleries and thickets (Nerio-Tamaricetea and Securinegion tinctoriae)
- 1240 - Vegetated sea cliffs of the Mediterranean coasts with endemic Limonium spp.
- 3170 - Mediterranean temporary ponds
- 6220 - Pseudo-steppe with grasses and annuals of the Thero-Brachypodietea

Natura 2000 sites

SPA	IT5160007	Isola di Capraia - area terrestre e marina
SPA	IT51A0033	Lago di Burano
SCI	IT5160011	Isole di Cerboli e Palmaiola

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Beneficiaries:

Coordinator	Regione Toscana - Assessorato all'Ambiente
Type of organisation	Regional authority

Description The Toscana Region is at an intermediate level between the national government and the provinces. In Italy regions are responsible for environmental and landscape aspects, including protection of biodiversity.

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Administrative data:

Project reference	LIFE97 NAT/IT/004153
Duration	01-JAN-1998 to 30-APR -2001
Total budget	451,667.89 €
EU contribution	225,833.94 €
Project location	Toscana(Italia)

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Read more:

Brochure	Title: Leaflet on marine birds titled: "Gli uccelli marini" Author: Paolo Sposimo and Nicola Baccetti
Brochure	Title: Leaflet describing the LIFE project, titled: "Capraia e isole minori della Toscana: tutela della biodiversità" Author: Paolo Sposimo, Nicola Baccetti and Bruno Foggi
Brochure	Title: Leaflet on the habitats of EU interest present, titled: "Capraia e isole minori della Toscana: tutela della biodiversità" Author: Paolo Sposimo and Bruno Foggi

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