European Solidarity Corps goes green thanks to LIFE funding

The first three LIFE projects to support the European Solidarity Corps have started recruiting volunteers. In the next two years, 910 young people will help to protect birds, and habitats, and support the Natura 2000 network.

As a contribution to the European Solidarity Corps and to increase young European volunteers’ environmental awareness and responsibility, the European Commission launched a first call for LIFE preparatory actions for the deployment of ESC volunteers to support the conservation of Natura 2000 sites. Two projects from Spain and one from Italy have been selected.

The Italian project (Life CHOO-NA!) will recruit, train and lead 310 young volunteers from the European Solidarity Corps who will help tackle specific threats to 11 bird species and their habitats. This will include forming nest guarding and anti-poaching teams to safeguard protected wading birds, raptors and songbirds. One group of volunteers will operate a rapid reaction unit to respond to fuel spills and intervene to rescue affected birds. Another group will communicate the project’s work online. Participants in the project will be steered towards academic and professional paths related to the project’s issues.

Two Spanish projects concentrate on rising awareness about Natura 2000. The first one (NATURA 2000 FOLLOWERS) aims at mobilising at least 300 young volunteers committed to the network. Training will focus on increasing knowledge and understanding of Natura 2000; surveillance (e.g. monitoring of bird species); and direct conservation action. It will also help participants develop skills to get into work. The project beneficiary (SEO/BirdLife) will assess the suitability of continuing pilot actions developed during the project as new forms of volunteer activity afterwards.

The second Spanish project (LIFE IS EVERGREEN WITH VOLUNTEERS) focuses on reducing human impact on nature in Galicia. The region in north-west Spain has more than 60 protected areas within the Natura 2000 network. Qualified young Galicians often lack training and experience sought by employers. This project will help them get those vital skills doing voluntary work to protect the region’s unique natural heritage. The project will recruit 300 volunteers directly and expects to indirectly lead to a 15% increase in volunteering in
Galicia. Project actions will cover 17 protected areas, where volunteers will help conserve habitats, remove invasive alien species and catalogue flora and fauna. They will also help run a campaign to increase awareness of natural resources and reduce carbon footprints.