

SPOTLIGHT ON BIODIVERSITY IN ITALY



Halt the loss of biodiversity

Animals and plants are declining throughout the world; Italy is no exception. Within its borders, a plethora of species find refuge, be it animals and plants facing extinction or simply common or endemic species.

Representing an important part of our cultural and natural heritage, species are also a vital store of genetic diversity which allows us to remain adaptable to changing environmental conditions. Furthermore, biodiversity is central to social and economic development, as we rely completely on the ecosystems that provide us with clean air and water, defence against flooding, sources of food and building material, and fertile soil for our crops.

What is Biodiversity?

This is an all encompassing term to describe the variety of all life and natural processes on Earth.

There is a standard accepted definition that is used by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that states biodiversity is:

“the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.”

(Article 2, CBD)

Italy at a glance

- ❖ **Mammals:** 12 of the 39 threatened European species are in Italy.
- ❖ **Birds:** 15 of the 29 threatened European species are in Italy.
- ❖ **Reptiles:** 4 of the 14 threatened European species are in Italy.
- ❖ **Amphibians:** 5 of the 16 threatened European species are in Italy.
- ❖ **Fishes:** 17 of the 81 threatened European species are in Italy.
- ❖ **Molluscs:** 16 of the 174 threatened European species are in Italy.
- ❖ **Other Inverts:** 42 of the 164 threatened European species occur in Italy.
- ❖ **Plants:** 3 of the 53 threatened European plant species occur in Italy.

Sources: 2004 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and The European Topic Centre (ETC) May 2004 report on estimates of species numbers in Europe.

Threat estimates are the most accurate for birds and amphibians, since these two groups have been fully assessed. All others are rough estimates and, in most cases, are underestimates as they are not completely evaluated (for example, globally less than 6% of all known reptiles have been assessed).

On the brink

Several species are on the brink of extinction including:



Stellate Sturgeon

- the **Stellate Sturgeon** (*Acipenser stellatus*) is globally threatened but may possibly be found in Italy (unconfirmed distribution);
- the globally threatened **Baltic Sturgeon** (*Acipenser sturio*) may be regionally extinct in Italy, and
- the **Beluga** (*Huso huso*) which is also globally threatened but now regionally extinct in Italy.
- For birds, one example of a globally threatened species that is regionally extinct in Italy is the **Aquatic Warbler** (*Acrocephalus paludicola*).



Aquatic Warbler

What is so important about 2010?

The leaders and Environment Ministers of our countries have made several commitments to improve the current situation of biological diversity in Europe.

- In 2001, in Göteborg under the Swedish Presidency of the European Union they signed a commitment to **halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010**.
- In 2002, these leaders went to the 6th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Hague, Netherlands and later the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa and made the commitment on the global scale to cause **a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biodiversity**.
- In 2003, the Environment Ministers of the whole of pan-Europe agreed, as had been done within the EU in 2001, to **halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010**.

*If we are to meet these commitments, we have **5 years to make a difference**.*

What is Countdown 2010

Considerable effort is required to ensure that biodiversity is a key component of the national and international policies that govern all aspects of social and economic development. Principally this will involve transformations in sectors of natural resource use such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism.

Fulfilling the commitments to halt biodiversity loss will necessitate unprecedented efforts in adapting our activities to the needs of natural systems. Countdown 2010 is a consortium of partners, who share the common aspiration of stemming the decline of European fauna and flora by 2010. These partners recognize that for this to be a reality all sectors of society need to be mobilized and aware of biodiversity's importance.

The Countdown partners include major international non-governmental organizations, IUCN member organizations, the Presidency of the European Union, the European Commission, the European Environment Agency and the Council of Europe. Together they are working on tangible, action-oriented projects. The Countdown initiative catalyzes action between all stakeholders from the local to European level and from the public and private sectors.

The Countdown 2010 initiative seeks to:

- ✓ Inform European citizens on the commitments made by their governments;
- ✓ Keep pressure on stakeholders to achieve the 2010 biodiversity targets;
- ✓ Offer solutions to decision-makers on how to bridge development and conservation needs in light of the current rate of biodiversity loss;
- ✓ Help the conservation community prioritize its activities.

For more information:

If you would like to receive more information or participate in the Countdown, please contact:

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