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**BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE  
FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
IN THE FIELD OF BIOLOGICAL AND LANDSCAPE DIVERSITY**

**BU-DBP**

**Group of specialists - European Diploma**

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**The Abruzzi National Park**  
**(Italy)**

Category B

RENEWAL

*Expert report*  
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*(Switzerland)*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The European Diploma, Category B, was awarded to the Abruzzi National Park in 1967. It has regularly been renewed since then.

This on-site appraisal took place from 14 to 16 October 1996, with a view to deciding whether to renew the diploma in 1997, the 30th anniversary of the original award.

The expert was accompanied by Mr Hector Hacourt, of the Council of Europe Secretariat. Apart from a number of on-the-spot visits, meetings were held in particular with the local mayors and representatives of certain regions and mountain communities.

The visit went well thanks to the excellent arrangements, the hospitality and the helpfulness of local officials. We address our sincere thanks in particular to Mr Fulco Pratesi, Chairman of the Park Council, Mr Franco Tassi, the Director and all their staff.

## **II. LOCATION AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PARK**

Located at the heart of the Apennines, the Abruzzi National Park covers 44,000 hectares (central area) plus 60,000 hectares in the peripheral area. It includes a number of valleys separated by mainly limestone mountains whose highest point is Monte Greco (2,285 metres).

The location, altitude range and varied exposures of the park account for the great wealth of its flora and fauna.

Around 2,000 varieties of flowering plants, 60 species of mammal - including the wolf, bear, lynx and Abruzzi chamois - 230 species of bird, 16 reptiles, 12 amphibians and 16 species of fish have been found in the park. About 2,500 species of insects have also been counted.

The special success of the park stems in particular from the balance struck between the overriding need to protect wildlife, on one hand, and the presence of a local community and some 2 million visitors per annum, on the other hand.

The existing organisation and management methods applied in the park enable a viable population of large carnivores, such as wolves and bears, to live alongside the large number of inhabitants and tourists, without harming animal husbandry.

The positive and well-documented experiments conducted in the Abruzzi in respect of cohabitation with large carnivores are particularly instructive for other European countries to which the wolf has or may spread, such as France and Switzerland.

## **III. ADMINISTRATION**

The Abruzzi National Park is a self-governing body ("Ente"). The Chairman heads the Administrative Council, the park's highest authority and liaises with the "Park Community", where local interests are represented. A scientific committee delivers opinions to the Administrative Council on issues within its field of responsibility. Management is carried out by the Park Directorate.

The park headquarters are located in the middle of the park, at Pescasseroli, while the head office is in Rome, which facilitates contacts with central government and promotional activities. The Rome head office is expressly provided for in the framework legislation on protected areas but is contested by the Abruzzi region.

Most of the funding is met by central government. Recurring problems in this connection have not been resolved. In particular, grants earmarked in the budget are invariably paid very late. These delays create major management problems since the park is forced to borrow in order to honour its financial commitments, in particular the payment of wages and special compensation to municipalities. It is also difficult to plan ahead since the budget itself tends to be agreed upon late in the day. The 1997 budget still had to be finalised at the end of October 1996. Most information centres had to be closed for lack of funding.

In the case of specific, one-off projects and activities, funding may be topped up by the regions, sponsors and certain municipal funds.

#### **IV. MANAGEMENT**

##### **1. Zoning**

The zoning carried out in 1984 is proving quite satisfactory and its implementation has now met with full acceptance by all partners. The park is divided into the following zones:

- zone A, full reserve;
- zone B, general reserve;
- zone C, protection area;
- zone D, development area;
- peripheral area (outer park).

The park is in very satisfactory control of the situation in zones A and B. The only problem still to be remedied is the transfer of forestry reserves to the park, provided for in the framework legislation but yet to be carried out.

In zone C, wildlife protection is properly taken into account but the abandonment of traditional farming activities is continuing.

In zone D, the park's decisions are complied with; all applications for building permission must be made to the park authorities. Large-scale projects, especially tourism-related ones, are now virtually ruled out.

The problem of solid waste has now nearly been solved and only one or two dumps remain to be dealt with. The treatment of waste water, however, still leaves a lot to be desired.

In the peripheral zone, the park's opinions are complied with as a rule. At present, there are no development projects of an excessive nature or likely to harm the park.

## 2. Vegetation and flora

The vegetation includes upland meadows, large areas of beech forest, remnants of Corsican pinewood (*Pinus nigra*), several types of mountain and sub-mountain meadow, common-hornbeam woods (*Carpinus betulus* and *Carpinus orientalis*), hop-hornbeam woods (*Ostrya carpinifolia*) and flowering-ash woods (*Fraxinus ornus*), Turkey-oak woods (*Quercus cerris*), downy-oak woods (*Quercus pubescens*) and even some sparse Mediterranean vegetation, surprisingly high up, such as the holm oak (*Quercus ilex*).

The initial findings of the biodiversity project have confirmed the wealth of plant life possessed by the park, home to a third of all Italy's flora. The park's location at the crossroads of different floristic influences explains why so many endemic species have been observed.

The vegetation map, produced in the 1960s, is being revised. The new map will be more detailed and cover a wider area, including the zones added or about to be added to the park.

## 3. Fauna

The bear population (*Ursus arctos marsicanus*) has continued to increase and 1996 was particularly favourable. Measures had to be taken to deter one female bear from becoming too friendly with tourists.

The well-established wolf population in the Abruzzi (*Canis lupus italicus*) undoubtedly accounts for the wolf's extending its range both in Italy and into the south of France. Vandals unfortunately damaged the fences around the huge Civitella Alfedena enclosure where a pack of wolves was living at semi-liberty. All of the animals were recovered except for one which had to be destroyed.

The red deer (*Cervus elaphus hippelaphus*) is abundant, and there are satisfactory numbers of roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) and Abruzzi chamois (*Rupicapra ornata*). There is also an abundance of wild boar, large numbers of which are killed by the wolves.

Good news: there is now proof that lynx are naturally present in the park.

Hunting in the peripheral area is organised by local hunting associations. Fauna management is satisfactory and poaching effectively prevented by the local people. Wild boar hunts are only allowed in less sensitive areas and in the presence of park observers.

## 4. Forest and pasture

Much of the forest is fully protected. A few areas are still logged, according to park instructions and only for local use (firewood). The use of other energy forms, gas in particular, is encouraged by the park. This should further ease pressure on the forest.

The park continues to lease woodland and pasture to 10 municipalities and to compensate for the repudiation of user rights. This expenditure takes up a large share of the park budget (around 15% of its forestry budget).

Co-operation with the forestry department is still unsatisfactory. It is bound to improve when forestry reserves are transferred to park responsibility and after agreement on the status of forest rangers, who will continue to be officially in the forestry department but in practice will come under the park, in accordance with the rules in the framework legislation on protected areas.

## **5. Agriculture**

The traditional use of highland pasture continues but less extensively, either because of abandonment or because the park rents areas suited to the chamois.

Large areas of hay meadows and open land have been abandoned. The main reasons for this are the unprofitability of farming relatively marginal land, a lack of motivation among younger people and the lack of official support.

At present the areas which the forest is beginning to recolonise are suitable habitats for large mammals but overall diversity will be lost once the beech forest is re-established.

The "Programma Alimentazione Fauna", a scheme designed to encourage farmers to grow crops likely to attract bears, with compensation for any bear damage, has proved popular and useful. Unfortunately budgetary uncertainty means that it might not be continued in 1997.

A planned extension to include the Giovenco Valley would bring into the park an area where farming and fruit farming are still thriving. It is hoped that this measure will boost farming practices already found in the park as it stands.

## **6. Built heritage**

The beauty and harmony of the old villages make a large contribution to the park's landscape of the park and the maintenance of local traditions. The park continues to encourage the conservation and restoration of this cultural heritage. A book explaining how to build in the park using traditional styles and techniques is now being prepared.

## **V. EDUCATION AND INFORMATION**

The Abruzzi National Park is well-known for its advanced education and information programmes and the presence of an information centre in practically every village, including theme museums and enclosures where native mammals live at semi-liberty and can easily be observed.

The idea is that each local community should focus on one animal and one typical plant.

A major programme of publications and audiovisual shows assists information and educational activities. A botanical garden is being added to the Pescasseroli centre in response to the welcome success of the "Park in Bloom" programme.

Young, highly motivated, well-supervised teams have been making a precious and efficient contribution to park management as part of the "Volunteer for Wildlife Programme".

## **VI. RESEARCH**

The Centre for Scientific Study in the Apennines, in Pescasseroli, runs all research activities in the park. It is especially active in monitoring populations of large mammals. It now makes use of information obtained through a network of recently installed remote-control cameras.

The current biodiversity project is providing vital further information and supplementing the inventories of the park's flora and fauna.

Special care is always taken to apply findings of studies rapidly in the day-to-day management of the park.

## **VII. RELATIONS WITH THE LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES**

Relations are good to excellent to with 13 municipalities, passable with 6, poor with 2 and very bad with only 1 municipality.

Constructive relations have been established with the municipality of Ortona, directly affected by the planned enlargement of the park.

## **VIII. EXTENSION AND EXTENSION PROJECTS**

The incorporation of 4,500 hectares into the park from the region of Mainarde, to the south-east, which took place in 1990, has now been consolidated, despite delays in the payment of funds promised by the state.

The next extension will bring in 1,500 hectares of the Giovenco Valley, including the municipality of Ortona nei Marsi, which is interested not only in preserving its agricultural landscape and natural habitats but also in retaining its water resources, also coveted by farming municipalities in the plain.

The municipality of Lecce nei Marsi is also interested in an enlargement of the park in order to improve the protection of its water resources.

## **IX. CONTINUING PROBLEMS**

The main protection and management problems are as follows:

### **1. Finance**

The problems are of three types:

- uncertainty about the allocation of necessary funding;
- the level of funding, which has not kept pace with inflation, enlargement and the new responsibilities taken on by the park, in particular in the field of urban planning;
- virtually systematic delays in the payment of state funding.

It is obvious that only adequate funding, guaranteed in the long term and made available on time will enable the park to function normally and avoid the repetition of the problems observed this year (the closure of most visitors' centres, the halt to the bear food campaign, major difficulties in honouring pasture lease contracts and compensation for forestry use restrictions).

## **2. Legal framework**

The framework law on national parks has led to considerable progress for new protected areas but has failed to solve all the problems facing existing areas such as the Abruzzi Park.

Certain provisions still have to be clarified or implemented. In particular, the status of forest rangers must be cleared up, the responsibilities vis-à-vis forest rangers must be specified and the management of forestry reserves should be transferred to the park.

## **3. Tourism**

Major progress has been made over the closure of roads or forest paths crossing sensitive areas of the park. Questions still unresolved are the total closure of the (illegally built) Camosciara road, though the closure prospects seem good, and proper closure of the Pescasseroli-Bisegna road.

The installation of snow canons is still being prevented by the ban on pumping water from the Sangro.

## **4. Water supplies**

Drinking-water supplies are very much under pressure, especially in the high tourist season. They are also coveted by municipalities in the plain.

As far as quality is concerned, two water purification plants are located in park municipalities but do not function satisfactorily. Since there is a fairly large residential population and almost two million visitors each year, efficient measures really must be taken to tackle this problem.

As far as hydro-electric plants are concerned, a possibly acceptable solution in the offing is the standing project for a high-pressure conduit leading from Barrea Lake to Villa Sconone.

## **5. Agriculture**

The decline in farming is severe. In the medium-term, this puts the park's diversity at risk and could lead to considerable changes to the landscape.

## **6. The park head office**

In accordance with the framework law on protected areas, the head office of the Abruzzi National Park must remain in Rome to facilitate promotion activities and co-ordination with the national authorities and other protected areas (the Committee on National Parks and other Italian Reserves is in the same building). This situation is contested by the Abruzzi region.

## 7. Annual report

The annual reports do eventually reach the Council of Europe but the delays make it difficult for them to be examined in time by the group of experts.

## X. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Abruzzi National Park is still an area of outstanding value. Apart from the protection of high-quality sites, it is a remarkable example of the management of a protected zone near large urban centres, receiving large numbers of visitors and preserving a viable population of large mammals such as bears and wolves.

The park is also a very interesting model of maintaining a satisfactory equilibrium between wildlife protection and local development and provides a good example of how to devise information and education programmes.

Given the existing situation, the expert recommends that the European diploma be renewed for a further five-year period, attaching the following recommendations, designed mainly to support the efforts already made by the park's officials.

The following decision is therefore proposed:

The European Diploma, category B, awarded to the Abruzzi National Park, is to be renewed for five years.

The following recommendations are attached to the renewal:

### Recommendations

1. Ensure that a budget is agreed on time and sufficient funding is paid, taking into account the enlargement of the park's surface area, and that deadlines are met so that the park can be properly managed in the long term.
2. Take steps to clarify rangers' status and give them long-term security, and properly clarify the role and responsibilities of the forestry staff working in the park.
3. Actively seek an agreement with the forestry authorities concerned in respect of the management of forestry reserves, in accordance with the provisions of the framework law on protected areas.
4. Continue to apply planning laws and regulations (for building, camping sites, etc) strictly.
5. Ban traffic from roads, trails and paths wherever wildlife and fauna protection so requires, in particular on the Camosciara road, and properly ban traffic from the Pescasseroli-Bisegna road.
6. Guarantee the long-term protection of water supplies both in quantitative terms, avoiding excessive use, and in qualitative terms, by encouraging improvements to the treatment of waste water in villages located within the park.



7. Find solutions to the problems of revitalising and supporting traditional agriculture, particularly in the Giovenco Valley.
8. Retain and, if necessary, develop the role of the head office in Rome as a shop-window for the park and as a centre for promotion and co-ordination with the national authorities and other protected areas.
9. Strictly observe the conditions of the award of the European diploma, in particular that of sending annual reports on the park.

## APPENDIX I

# COUNCIL OF EUROPE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

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Resolution (92) 7

**ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA  
AWARDED TO THE ABRUZZI NATIONAL PARK  
(Italy)**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 19 October 1992  
at the 482nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to Resolution (67) 39 awarding the European Diploma to the Abruzzi National Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Steering Committee for the Conservation and Management of the Environment and Natural Habitats (CDPE);

Recalling the crucial importance of annual reporting in accordance with Article 7 of the regulations of the award of the European Diploma,

Renews the European Diploma, awarded to the Abruzzi National Park, in Category B, until 26 November 1997;

Attaches to the renewal the following conditions:

1. find a satisfactory formula for working with the forestry authorities with a view to harmonising the forest management with the management of the park;
2. give priority to the treatment of solid wastes and waste water, not granting building licences before such matters have been adequately settled;
3. enforce strictly planning laws and regulations concerning buildings, camping sites, etc.;

Attaches to the renewal the following recommendations:

1. apply strictly the obligation to provide the annual reports in due time;
2. prohibit traffic, except for agricultural and forestry purposes, on the park's secondary roads, in particular the road from Pescasseroli to Bisegna, the Monte Tranquillo road (with exceptions for the annual pilgrimage), and the Mainarde and Camosciara roads;
3. co-ordinate the landscape protection plans of the regions concerned with those for the zones of the park;
4. ensure the long-term conservation of water resources;
5. seek ways of revitalising and supporting traditional forms of agriculture;

6. adjust the number of wardens to the growing number of visitors and the expansion of the park ;
7. continue a general policy of consolidating all the park's achievements, so as wherever possible to avoid having to take action in an emergency.

APPENDIX II

DRAFT RESOLUTION (97) ...

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA  
AWARDED TO THE ABRUZZI NATIONAL PARK

(Italy)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.a of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Resolution (65) 6 instituting the European Diploma;

Having regard to Resolution (67) 39 awarding the European Diploma to the Abruzzi National Park;

Having regard to the proposals of the Bureau of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (BU-DBP);

Renews the European diploma, awarded to the Abruzzi National Park, in category B, until ..... 2002;

Attaches to the renewal the following recommendations:

1. ensure that a budget is agreed on time and sufficient funding is paid, taking into account the enlargement of the park's surface area, and that deadlines are met so that the park can be properly managed in the long term;
2. take steps to clarify rangers' status, and to give them long-term security, and properly clarify the role and responsibilities of the forestry staff working in the park;
3. actively seek an agreement with the authorities concerned in respect of the management of forestry reserves, in accordance with the provisions of the framework legislation on protected areas;
4. continue to apply planning laws and regulations (for building, camping sites, etc) strictly;
5. ban traffic from roads, trails and paths wherever wildlife and fauna protection so requires, in particular on the Camosciara road, and properly ban traffic from the Pescasseroli-Bisegna road;
6. guarantee the long-term protection of water supplies both in quantitative terms, avoiding excessive use, and in qualitative terms, by encouraging improvements to the treatment of waste water in villages located within the park;
7. find solutions to the problems of revitalising and supporting traditional agriculture, particularly in the Giovenco Valley;

8. retain and, if necessary, develop the role of the head office in Rome as a shop-window for the park and as a centre for promotion and co-ordination with the national authorities and other protected areas;
9. strictly observe the conditions of the award of the European diploma, in particular that of sending annual progress reports on the park.