



Strasbourg, 6 March 1998
[s:\de98\docs\de59E.98]

PE-S-DE (98) 59

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

CO-DBP

Group of specialists - European Diploma

Montecristo Island Nature Reserve
(Italy)

Category A

RENEWAL

*Expertise report
by Mr Joan MAYOL
(Spain)*

The Secretariat did not accompany the expert on his visit to the site.

Resolution (93) 17, awarding the European Diploma, is to be found at Appendix I; Appendix V contains the Secretariat's draft Resolution on possible renewal in 1998.

INTRODUCTION

The Montecristo Island Nature Reserve (Italy) received the European Diploma, Category A, on 13 June 1998, and was thus placed under the patronage of the Council of Europe until 1993, when the Diploma was first renewed.

The period of validity of the European Diploma being five years, and in view of the Regulations adopted by the Committee of Ministers [Resolution (91) 16], it is now necessary to examine whether the Diploma should be extended for a further period.

The Council of Europe Secretariat commissioned me to carry out an on-the-spot appraisal and to draw up this report for consideration by the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma.

THE VISIT TO THE SITE

I visited the island on 17 and 18 June 1997 with Dr. Umberto d'Autilia and his deputy, Dr. Francesco Pennaquini, of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Resources, which is responsible for the Reserve, forest wardens led by Marshal Guido Crudela, and Dr. Ferdinando Ciani (Pisa) and Dr. Marti Mayol (Palma), who accompanied us in order to assess the state of the seabed in the Reserve.

I should like to thank all these people, as well as Paolo, the warden of the island, and his family. Without his help, the visit would not have been possible because of the particular circumstances on Montecristo.

Elements of the appraisal

The structure of the report follows the points listed in Article 5 (4) of the present Regulations for the Diploma. I shall then review the recommendations made when the Diploma was renewed in 1993, and conclude with further proposals.

CHANGES SINCE 1992

As it was I who drew up the appraisal in 1992, I can compare the situation of the island with what it was five years ago.

The biggest changes are due to the storm of September 1992 (and to the less severe one of November 1994), which caused a lot of damage to the island. For more details, see the reports PE-S-ZP (94) 30 and (95) 30. Although I had read these documents in advance, I was not prepared for what I saw. Even from the sea, the ravines which the water cut from the island's summit to the rocky sea inlets are easily visible and wholly without vegetation. The appearance of Cala Maestra has completely changed, as the rocky terrain is now covered with sand, and a beach approximately 50 metres wide has formed at the upper end of the inlet. Much of the large stand of mature trees at the entrance to the Villa has been destroyed, and the pretty little road has disappeared. Large tree trunks are scattered across the hollowed-out watercourse bed. In short, thousands of tons of rock have been displaced, extreme erosion has occurred, and the landscape is still heavily scarred. I shall return to this subject later.

a. Protection of the site

a.1 Legal protection

There have been no changes since the Diploma was renewed. The Reserve is a protected area with non-regional status.

Although the Tuscan Archipelago National Park was set up as long as six years ago (Law 4/1991) and opened the very interesting possibility of placing the island's conservation in a wider context, the National Park has not got off the ground.

It seems likely that the role of the regional (Tuscan) authorities in managing the Reserve will become more important in the near future. Indeed, although Montecristo forms 1% of the national territory which the State retained under its direct management at the time of regionalisation, the referendum of 15 June 1997 has made it possible that the situation will change. It therefore seems to us that the legal framework needs to be amended in order to provide for change. I shall return to this issue when I consider the management plan.

a.2 Application of protective measures

The island is still continuously patrolled by two wardens who remain on duty throughout the year, as well as by two forest wardens and a corporal, who supervise and guide visitors. Since they have police status, the wardens have full authority on both land and sea.

No mining or other economic activity is being developed on Montecristo. Fishing is prohibited (by prior agreement with professional fishermen, which ensures the ban is effective), there is neither arable nor stock farming, no military activities and no construction. This situation guarantees an entirely spontaneous natural dynamic on the island. During our stay, four fishing boats called at Cala Maestra to spend the night.

b. Zoning

Zoning continues to be applied in a similar way as during our 1992 visit. It is not formally established, but public use is closely controlled and well-defined in practice.

c. Improvements

There have been various improvements in the Reserve, of which I shall mention only the most important.

c.1 Buildings

The "Villa reale", the wardens' houses, the museum, the laboratory and the other small buildings are now in good condition. Emergency work has been done to stop the risk of subsidence under the Villa, a small access road has been built and the heliport has been repaired. The little harbour suffered considerably in the storm and appears urgently to need rebuilding because at present the island cannot be approached in bad weather.

c.2 Eradication of *Ailanthus*

This project is continuing with a budget of 25 to 40 million lire per year. There is selective eradication of individuals capable of propagation. There does not seem to have been any spread since 1992, so the work would appear to be keeping the species in check.

c.3 Fencing around the oaks and replanting

The storm destroyed most of this work, which is still very necessary. Only the fencing at the Belvedere remains intact, and other sites will require future repairs.

c.4 Wild goats

Goats continue to be a key factor in the Reserve. In accordance with the Council's recommendations, 442 individuals have been slaughtered in recent years, and a head-count should lead to a further cull this autumn. A genetic study is in progress (see bibliography), and may help to determine the requisite selection criteria. The population is still large, as controls have only succeeded in stopping the expansion of grazing and marginally reducing the number of individuals. Dr. Ciani pointed out that the goats on Montecristo obtain the mineral salts they need from the droppings of sea birds.

Control measures on the island seem to be entirely suitable but could perhaps be stepped up.

d. *Ownership title*

The Italian State has long owned the island. There has thus been no change, although a future transfer to Tuscany Region is likely.

e. *Management plan*

Despite the Council of Europe recommendation, there is still no management plan for the Reserve. Preliminary studies reportedly exist, but little real progress seems to have been made in recent years.

The situation is thus the same as in 1992:

- the principle is that of non-intervention except for the improvements mentioned above. Any proposed intervention is first examined by the Scientific Research Council of the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Resources, which ensures that the principles of applied ecology are paramount in shaping the future of the Reserve;
- the regional (Tuscany) and municipal (Portoferraio) authorities are kept informed of the management of the island, and their views and those of the managers converge. There is no NGO participation;
- the need for a management plan must be stressed, especially if in future the Region becomes responsible for management.

f. Land use and land cover plans

The classification of the island as a reserve excludes any land use or cover. The proposed Tuscan Archipelago National Park should improve the planning of the area around (although at some distance from) the Reserve.

g. Budget

The ordinary budget of the Reserve (patrolling, fuel, communications etc) amounts to a total of some 200-250 million lire per year, which is the same as or perhaps slightly less than five years ago.

It should be noted that the Reserve has received no additional allocation for repairing storm damage, although the need is very obvious.

h. Administration and staff

The island is still administered by the "Corpo Forestale dello Stato". The administrator is the chief inspector of the Follonica office; his work for the Reserve is thus part-time, but this seems to be sufficient. The wardens have already been mentioned: they were part-time in 1992 but are now full-time.

i. Public access

Access is still limited to 1,000 people per year. The number of visitors (general public plus VIPs) has been as follows:

1993	289 (following the loss of the harbour)
1994	940
1995	940
815	

Visits are restricted to Sundays and public holidays in the summer. They take place during the day (overnight stays on the island are not permitted) at Cala Maestra only, with the possibility of reaching the Belvedere and the Saint's Grotto and convent on foot. There is a small picnic area at Cala Maestra. Visitors are given a talk and go to the museum, where they receive the excellent Corpo Forestale brochure mentioning the award and renewal of the Diploma.

We saw no negative effects of these visits, either at Cala Maestra or on the paths. In accordance with the 1993 recommendation, wooden supports and steps have been laid in places where the paths are significantly eroded. Steel cables have been attached at the most difficult points on the approach to the Saint's Grotto, an excellent measure for visitor safety.

j. Scientific studies

In addition to research on the goats as mentioned above, ornithological research and ringing are being carried out after an interruption due to the storm. The wardens collect meteorological data.

The growth of the well-protected Osprey population in Corsica has made possible a project to introduce nests on Montecristo in order to re-establish the species.

Here we would make two recommendations. The first, which we made back in 1992, is to update the catalogue of the island's biodiversity, both for its scientific interest and to see the effects of 25 years of strict conservation. The second recommendation is for a specific study of the marine biomes, on which very little data is currently available.

STATE OF CONSERVATION

In the sea

Our hosts organised a tour of the island. We took the opportunity to dive below the surface of the water on several occasions and were able to note the very good state of the in-shore fauna. The population of Echinodermata (sea urchins) is very dense, a fact which is doubtless explained by the absence of any kind of exploitation. The number of fish too is remarkable, as is the marine creatures' fearlessness, a result of the absence of harpoon fishing.

We came across a poachers' fishing net which allowed us to assess the impressive wealth of the Reserve. Park workers have in fact retrieved 280 metres of net. We ourselves came ashore with several kilos of lobster and crayfish, large scorpion fish and other species. In the Balearic Islands, the average catch of lobster is 100 grammes for every 100 metres of net. Only on the very rich seabed north of Minorca - which is famed for its lobsters - do catches rise as high as 250 grammes per 100 metres. This would mean that the density off Montecristo is six to ten times as high. Statistically speaking, our single catch was not representative, but it does clearly indicate the richness of the Reserve, which must be maintained.

As I pointed out in my 1992 appraisal, there is an urgent need for buoys. During our visit a tourist launch came closer to the island than is statutorily permitted, and its speakers were clearly audible from the Grotto, approximately 300 metres above sea level. There appear to be more boat tours round the island than previously, and it would be very useful to place at least one buoy on the Portoferraio side and one on the approach from the mainland.

ON LAND

The state of vegetation does not seem to have changed much since 1992. Ailanthus are still widespread, but very few specimens, many of them inaccessible, are reportedly flowering.

It seemed to us that the Yellow-legged gull colonies are growing. We counted more than 1,800 individuals during our tour round the island, so this population must be monitored and culled if it is seen to continue growing. According to our observations, the colony of Audouin's gull does not seem to have returned to the island this year. The Shag colony is 30-40 strong, including juveniles.

We observed two pairs of Peregrine falcon. One of these was on the south coast, and the other, indicated to us by Paolo (the permanent warden) and Marshal Crudela, was in a cliff-face crevice at the Saint's Grotto, just three metres off the ground. This is the most accessible falcon's nest we have ever seen - a very clear sign of the Reserve's tranquil and undisturbed natural environment.

There appear to be far fewer rats. This is the normal situation for an island population of rodents, which naturally tends to fluctuate widely.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE DIPLOMA

When the Diploma was renewed in 1993, certain recommendations were made (cf Appendix I).

As stated above, point 3, part of point 4, point 6 and the final part of point 7 have been met. However, the other recommendations have not been fulfilled.

There are still no signposts for boats approaching the island. It is recommended these be set up, at least at Cala Maestra and possibly also at other coastal access points.

CONCLUSION

After studying the documents relating to Montecristo and visiting the island, we can confirm that the Reserve remains unspoiled, but most of the Council of Europe's recommendations have not been implemented. In our opinion, the most important recommendation relates to the management plan. We suggest that the Group of Specialists consider whether this recommendation should be made a condition for renewing the Diploma, especially if it becomes probable that Montecristo will come under regional management.

With the above reservation, we recommend that the European Diploma, Category A, for the Montecristo Island Nature Reserve be renewed.

The general outline of the 1993 recommendations should be retained as follows:

1. a management plan should be drawn up as soon as possible as a basis for the future management of the Reserve (either as a condition or as a recommendation);
2. the catalogue of species living in the Reserve should be revised;
3. the work of eradicating *Ailanthus* should continue;
4. the wild goat population should be reduced as quickly as possible to some 150 animals, always basing selection on the island's characteristic phenotype and current genetic studies;
5. permanent signposts should be set up on the shores of the island to protect the approaches more effectively against pleasure boats, especially those coming from Elba or the mainland;
6. no guided tours should be authorised other than the present ones, ie those from Cala Maestra to the Belvedere, the Saint's Grotto (Grotta del Santo) and the convent; the number of visitors should be restricted to a figure compatible with the strict protection of the island's biological and cultural assets;
7. appropriate work should be done to conceal the existing overhead cables in order to maintain the aesthetic quality of the island and its character as a fully protected reserve.

In addition, we suggest adding the following points:

8. the damage caused by the 1992 storm should be repaired; this work should include the construction of a small harbour to enhance the effectiveness of the Reserve's marine patrols. The cost of such work would be approximately 500 million lire;
9. the scientific and conservation interest of the Reserve's marine habitats should be promoted more intensively.

APPENDICES

- I. Resolution (93) 17 on the renewal of the European Diploma awarded to the Montecristo Island Nature Reserve (Italy).
- II. Bibliography and references.
- III. Contact addresses.
- IV. Draft Resolution.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RESOLUTION (93) 17

ON THE RENEWAL OF THE EUROPEAN DIPLOMA AWARDED TO THE MONTECRISTO ISLAND NATURE RESERVE

(Italy)

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 3 May 1993
at the 493rd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, in accordance with 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 (88) 10 awarding the European Diploma to the Montecristo Island Nature Reserve;

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

Renews until 12 June 1998 the European Diploma, Category A, awarded to the Montecristo Island Nature Reserve;

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

1. draw up a management plan, as soon as possible, as a working document on which to base the future management of the reserve;
2. revise the catalogue of species living in the reserve and compile meteorological data;
3. continue the work of eradicating ailanthus;
4. reduce the number of wild goats as quickly as possible to some 150 animals, always basing selection on the phenotype characteristic of the island. Similarly, in view of the still large rat population, apply a resolute system of extermination;
5. set up permanent sign-posts on the shores of the island to protect the approaches more effectively against pleasure boats; these sign-posts should be integrated into the landscape as well as possible; similar action should be taken along the paths open to the public;
6. not to authorise guided tours other than the present ones, that is those from Cala Maestra to the Belvedere, the Saint's Grotto (Grotta del Santo) and the convent; the number of visitors should be limited to a figure compatible with the strict protection of the island's biological and cultural assets;
7. undertake appropriate work to conceal the existing overhead cables in order to maintain the aesthetic quality of the island and its character as a fully protected reserve. Particular attention should also be paid to the eroded parts of the paths open to visitors in order to check the present degradation.

APPENDIX II

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

CIANI,F. & MASSETI,M. 1991 Considerazioni sull'origine della popolazione ircine dell'isola di Montecristo, nel mar Tirreno Settentrionale. Elementi per un confronto cronologico-culturale con l'antica diffusione artificiale de l'egagro (Capra aegagrus Erxleben, 1777) nelle isole del Mediterraneo Orientale. Instituto nazionale di biologia della selvaggina Vol XVIII, 123- 133.

D'AUTILIA,H. s.d. Riserva naturale Isola di Montecristo Ministero dell'Agricoltura e delle Foreste-Corpo Forestale dello Stato. Gestione ex A.S.F.D. Follonica. 28 pgs.

MOORS,P.J & ATKINSON,I.A.E. 1984 Predation on Seabirds by introduced animals, and factors affecting its severity. ICBP Tech.Publ.2: 667-690.

PAVAN,M. 1988 Réserve naturelle de l'île de Montecristo. Italie. Série Diplôme Européen,30. Conseil de l'Europe. 24 pgs.

PAVAN,M. 1989 Isola di Montecristo. Riserva naturale. Collana Verde,77. Ministero dell'Agricoltura e delle Foreste. Corpo Forestale dello Stato. 125 pgs.

Documents of the Council of Europe

PE-S-ZP (94) 30

PE-S-ZP (95) 30

PE-S-DE (96) 30

PE-S-DE (97) 30

APPENDIX III

Addresses

Dr Umberto d'Autilia
Corpo Forestale dello Stato
Gestione ex A.S.F.D.
Ufficio Amministrazione di Follonica
Tel. 0566 40019 Fax. 0566 40611

Dr Francesco Pennaquini,
idem

Mar. Guido Crudela
Ufficio Amm.ne ex ASFA
Via d'Alihielri 39
52015 Pratovecchio (AR)
Tel 0575 / 58763 Fax " 504085

Prof Ferdinando CIANI
Via Sponpini 18, 51100 PISTOIA
Tel 0573-34864

APPENDIX IV

DRAFT RESOLUTION (98) ...

on the renewal of the European Diploma
to the Montecristo Island Nature Reserve

The Committee of Ministers, in accordance with 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 (88) 10 awarding the European Diploma, Category A, to the Montecristo Island Nature Reserve;

Having regard to the proposals of the Committee for the Activities of the Council of Europe in the Field of Biological and Landscape Diversity (CO-DBP),

Renews until 12 June 2003 the European Diploma awarded to the Montecristo Island Nature Reserve;

Attaches the following recommendations to the award:

- draw up a management plan as soon as possible as a working document on which to base the future management of the Reserve (either as a condition or as a recommendation);
- revise the catalogue of species living in the Reserve;
- continue the work of eradicating *Ailanthus*;
- reduce the number of wild goats as quickly as possible to some 150 animals, always basing selection on the phenotype characteristic of the island and ongoing genetic studies;
- set up permanent signposts on the shores of the island to protect the approaches more effectively against pleasure boats, especially those coming from Elba or the mainland;
- authorise no guided tours other than the present ones, that is those from Cala Maestra to the Belvedere, the Saint's Grotto (Grotta del Santo) and the convent; the number of visitors should be limited to a figure compatible with the strict protection of the island's biological and cultural assets;
- undertake appropriate work to conceal the existing overhead cables in order to maintain the aesthetic quality of the island and its character as a fully protected reserve;
- repair the damage caused by the 1992 storm, and construct a small harbour to enhance the effectiveness of the Reserve's marine patrols; the cost of this work would be approximately 500 million lire;
- promote the scientific and conservation interest of the Reserve's marine habitats more intensively.