



## APPEAL FOR THE APENNINE BROWN BEAR

Nowadays the Apennine brown bear (*Ursus arctos marsicanus*, Altobello 1921) is caught in a pincer: on one side the difficult cohabitation with human activities while, on the other side, the health issues that could be very serious, if non-fatal, for a small (30-40 individuals) and restricted-range population, this far since the 80s of the XX Century. Recent researches have all confirmed the distinctiveness of this taxon from other European brown bear populations.

The possibility of losing this valuable element of the typical fauna of the central Apennines, described almost a century ago by zoologist Giuseppe Altobello, could materialize in the short to medium term.

It therefore seems more pressing the need for pragmatic interventions directed to its long-term conservation.

Therefore, in acknowledging the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise and the resident populations for what has been achieved so far for the preservation of this priceless plantigrade, we believe that they should not be left alone to face a challenge that, for the near future, is very burdensome.

We therefore appeal to the Institutions concerned, in particular to the European Commission, to the Italian Ministry of the Environment, to interested Regions and Provinces and to relevant protected areas of the central Apennines, to researchers and environmental NGO's, that it is not let brought no prospect of intervention.

In the year that opens, the goal of Apennine brown bear protection must be a challenge in the field of conservation policies and this unique bear must represent for Italy what the giant panda has been for China.

It is time therefore to develop a conservation strategy even more effective than hitherto implemented.

In this sense we believe the time is ripe to evaluate and to concretely realize a breeding project, under controlled conditions, for the Apennine brown bear.

Taking advantage of the international network of zoos, and their expertise, it will be possible to build up a captive population useful to maintain genetic variability, as a gene-bank in case of collapse of the wild population and as a scientific resources to investigate health issues and medical treatments of relevance to the wild population.

Although the eco-ethology of our bear is certainly complex and delicate, we note that similar actions, including reintroduction of captive-bred individuals, have already been completed successfully enabling the successful reintroduction and conservation of plant and animal species otherwise destined to extinction. In Europe, such approach is being implemented for the highly endangered Iberian lynx (*Lynx pardina*).

Relying on newly gained awareness of the uniqueness of our bear and the urgency of action so far postponed, we hope that the institutions appointed to decision-making responsibilities will take in serious consideration this working hypothesis.

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