

EUROPARC

Activities' Report - Year 2024

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1. Introduction

EUROPARC is the umbrella organisation for Europe's protected areas. It unites national parks, regional parks, nature parks and biosphere reserves from 38 countries, all of which are committed to protecting Europe's unique wildlife, habitats and landscapes. The EUROPARC Federation encompasses a wide range of organisations and individuals involved in the policy and practice of managing parks and protected areas across Europe.

During its 27-year history, the Federation has played a key role in disseminating best practice and promoting a shared vision within the protected areas network. At the EUROPARC General Assembly in Zakopane, Poland, in 1999, the Federation's members adopted a strategic document outlining a framework for its future development. While this strategy focuses on the organisation's operational methods, its overarching purpose is to enable EUROPARC to play a leading role in establishing a coherent, effective and well-managed network of protected areas across Europe dedicated to conserving the continent's landscapes and biological diversity.

2. Main activities carried on by EUROPARC during 2024 relevant for Italy and for CNR

Throughout 2024, EUROPARC promoted several technical and scientific outreach activities, primarily through a series of webinars, often organized with the support of ongoing projects. The complete list of seminars is available on the organization's official website (<https://www.europarc.org/europarc-webinars/previous-webinars/>).

Among the webinars offered, several topics closely aligned with the activities carried out by the National Research Council of Italy (CNR). In particular, the seminar "Forest ecosystem services for human health" highlighted the role of nature in promoting human well-being and preventing disease, and included a contribution from CNR researchers.

Another notable webinar, "Balancing safety & ecology: management of dead & dying trees in Periurban Parks", explored the delicate balance between biodiversity conservation and public safety in the management of deadwood in periurban environments. This issue is of particular relevance to various CNR research groups, especially in the context of ecological restoration efforts initiated under Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), particularly through the NBFC and ITINERIS projects. These efforts include initiatives implemented within the Presidential Estate of Castelporziano.

EUROPARC's role in coordinating the efforts of multiple protected areas is also strategically important for the future. The organization is a key actor in the development of initiatives aimed at preserving and restoring high-biodiversity and high-carbon-stock areas, in line with EU policies on the Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the recently adopted Nature Restoration Law. These themes are of great interest to the CNR scientific community, across both terrestrial and marine sectors, and align with broader efforts such as the Nature-Based Solutions Italy Hub (NBS Hub), which promotes the use of nature-based solutions for the recovery of degraded ecosystems.

3. Activities carried on by Delegate within the Union during 2023 and impact on the Italian scientific community

During the reporting period, the main role performed as a representative involved facilitating communication and the exchange of information between EUROPARC and CNR colleagues, supporting the dissemination and sharing of ongoing activities.

In recent years, collaboration between CNR and Federparchi, the Italian section of EUROPARC, has significantly strengthened. In 2024, through a second funding call, NBFC allocated an additional €4 million to fund 24 projects, in addition to the 57 projects already supported by a previous call. These projects aim to monitor, conserve, restore, and enhance biodiversity in national parks and marine protected areas.

As part of these initiatives, CNR was among the promoters of a dedicated event focused on presenting the funded projects and highlighting the synergies created (<https://www.nbfc.it/news/incontro-nbfc-cnr-con-le-aree-marine-protette-e-gli-enti-parco>). The event, open to institutions and strategic NBFC partners, provided an important opportunity for exchange, learning, and mutual enrichment, with the goal of further fostering innovation and collaboration among all stakeholders involved.

It is also worth emphasizing the strong synergy that has developed between national parks, nature reserves, and numerous CNR researchers. Many of the activities take place within protected areas, addressing a wide range of topics, including post-fire ecological dynamics, the conservation of native forest and wildlife protection.

4. Evaluation of the participation in terms of benefits and membership cost

The annual membership fee is modest, yet it represents a high-return investment, both in terms of scientific opportunities and strategic positioning. Membership provides access to relevant international networks and enables active participation in lobbying initiatives on critical issues such as biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, and the promotion of environmental sustainability.

5. Evaluation of Italians' attendance and how to improve interest and involvement

Italy maintains an active and well-recognized presence within EUROPARC, with Italian representatives holding prominent positions in the association's governing bodies. This involvement strengthens the country's standing within European networks dedicated to the management and protection of protected areas.

Currently, EUROPARC does not have a formally established scientific advisory body. However, considering the critical mass of expertise and ongoing projects within Italian protected areas, CNR could position itself in the future as a scientific reference point for the association. Such a role would further enhance the contribution of Italian research to European policies on biodiversity, ecosystem resilience, and environmental sustainability.

6. Italian experts with important roles within the Union or within related Commissions and Programs (if known)

Dr. Federico Minozzi currently serves as the Director of the association, while Dr. Lidia Bai is a member of the Council. In addition, numerous Italian experts actively participate in EUROPARC's thematic working groups and commissions, bringing their expertise to the development of the organization's strategic activities:

- Riccardo Gini (Parco Nord Milano) is a member of the Commission on Periurban Parks;
- Anna Castelli contributes to the "Healthy Parks, Healthy People" Commission;
- Corrado Teofili (Federparchi), Guido Calvi (Parco dell'Adamello), and Maria Pia Sparla (Parco Agricolo Sud Milano) are part of the Commission on Sustainable Agriculture in Protected Areas;
- Daniele Piazza (Parco Naturale dell'Alpe Veglia e dell'Alpe Devero) and Stefano Santi (EUROPARC) take part in the Transboundary Cooperation Task Force;
- Fabrizio Santini (Parco Nazionale delle Colline Metallifere) is active in the framework of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST).

7. If Union with CNR Commission, short summary about the 2024 CNR Commission activities

Not relevant

8. Notes (if any)

9. Conclusions

The participation of CNR in EUROPARC and its initiatives represents a highly strategic opportunity, with significant potential returns for both the institution and the broader scientific community involved. This affiliation strengthens the European visibility and engagement of CNR's activities, facilitating the exchange of experiences and the dialogue between science and management. In particular, membership in EUROPARC provides a privileged platform to showcase at the European level the collaborative model developed within the NBFC, where researchers and protected area managers work in synergy to address the major challenges of the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and ecological transition.

Signature

Place and date