

THE HABITAT MONITORING UNDER ARTICLE 17 OF THE 92/43/EEC DIRECTIVE IN ITALY: THE CONTRIBUTION OF VEGETATION SCIENCE

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The 4th National Report ex Art. 17 of the 92/43/EEC Directive in Italy (period 2013-2018) will try to fill a number of gaps still affecting the former versions of the Italian Reports, where territorial data were still missing for large parts of the country and the assessment was mostly based on the use of the expert opinion. Similar inconsistencies also emerged in other European countries (State of nature in the EU, EEA 2015). In order to reach this aim, a nationally shared protocol for monitoring the vegetation-based Annex I Habitats is currently under development. The most prominent issues addressed by the ongoing project are: i) fixing standardized, updated and scientifically grounded methodological tools, on the basis of the European guidelines (Evans & Arvela 2011, ETC-BD); ii) providing comparable data at national and European level; iii) harmonizing the territorially fragmented knowledge and iv) supporting nationally standardized measures for the conservation of terrestrial, brackish and freshwater Habitats. Promoted by the Italian Ministry for Environment (MATTM) and coordinated by the environmental agency ISPRA, the development of such a tool is being carried out by the Italian Society for Vegetation Science, with the support of a large team of experts. Open issues, such as the favourable reference values and the optimal thresholds for each considered parameter (range, area, structure and function), have to be dealt with, in a condition of large uncertainty. Due to its centrality in the assessment process, especially the concept of "typical species" should be developed with care, trying to combine the need for synthetic indicators with the great floristic diversity of the Italian Habitats. A clear definition of the parameters is crucial for a correct application of the monitoring protocol, to successfully contribute to the whole process of halting biodiversity loss in Europe.

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