

ITALIAN HARES (*LEPUS CORSICANUS*) IN CILENTO AND VALLO
DI DIANO NATIONAL PARK: STATUS AND CONSERVATION

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Italian hare is an endemic species of central and southern Italy. At present, in Cilento and Vallo di Diano National Park lives a population showing the higher density among Italian peninsular ones, so to manage it represents a focal point of conservation strategy on the entire species. Park Managers start in the 1998 a conservation plan in collaboration with zoologists from Istituto di Gestione della Fauna and Universities of Naples. This contribution reports the results of population monitoring and shows the status of conservation activities carried out in the Park. In fact, during these years population density, habitat structure (with particular attention to the patchiness structure), foraging and population genetic have been studied. Nocturnal transects allowed us to estimate the hares density, founding individuals ranging from 2 to 12 /km². Habitat suitability was built using ENFA by means of software Biomapper. We considered eco-geographical variables in buffer areas of 300 m radius around each territory. A GIS software was used to select habitat structure in each buffer areas, by means of overlay functions among buffer areas and habitat maps. The eco-geographical variables were: land cover, elevation, slope, aspect, man-made structures. Moreover, food availability is described in each feeding habitat by means of phytosociological survey. Finally, we use microsatellite and mitochondrial markers in order to describe genetic variability within population. Genetic data suggest a recent bottleneck occurred to population in the Park: the levels of variability are worrying. Conservation activities, follow-on our study, concern direct habitat protection and a translocation program of hares in suitable areas where species is not else present.