

## **THE STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROBATS AGREEMENT IN ITALY**

Italy became a Party of the Eurobats Agreement in the last year. The instrument of ratification was deposited in October 2005. It was a big result for bat conservation in Italy.

Up to actual knowledge we have 37 bat taxa occurring on the Italian territory, but historical data seem to confirm a general decrease of cave species with some exceptions; however data are scarce and not-widely distributed. In Italy, bats are mainly threatened because of loss of habitat and roosting site; in addition the pollution and the use of pesticides in agricultural area generally contribute to reduce prey abundance for bats.

In Italy several bat conservation projects have been carried out at regional or smaller scale. They are very important to fill the lack of knowledge or to preserve some areas from actions that could damage bat population, breeding colonies or hibernacula. Moreover, a lot of projects deal with information and awareness actions.

We can estimate about 75 projects carried out from 1994 to 2006. Most of them have been carried out in northern and central part of Italy but, obviously, it has nothing to do with the pattern of bat distribution. A lot of projects have been funded by protected areas or by small local administrations.

Until now these projects have constituted the biggest source of information regarding the status or the trend of bats in Italy, but it was necessary a comprehensive national strategy.

At last, the EUROBATS subscription gave Italian Ministry for Environment the opportunity to promote and finance several initiatives and researches related to bat management and conservation.

The framework of EUROBATS Agreement made possible for the Italian Ministry for Environment to draw up an agreement that has two main purposes:

1. the protection of bats roosting in buildings of historical heritage;
2. setting up a system of permissions for bat captures and bat ringing, following the international standards and based on a centralized management of a new data base on bat captures.

The first point is a big challenge, indeed the lack of knowledge of some administrative offices that don't know how critic is the situation of bat species making difficult to plan a national strategy to protect bats. Moreover is very important to implement the collaboration between two different fields (biological conservation and heritage conservation) in order to gain a mutual benefit.

In fact, one of the most important aspects for bat conservation – involving several and different arguments and competences – is the presence of bats inside buildings. Nearly all of our species of bats dwell anthropic constructions less or more regularly. It is then problematic to conciliate bat conservation with human requirements, mainly when activities of upkeep and restoration of the buildings are carried out. The activities that are carrying out on this regard meet requirements of Bat Agreement and particularly of article III (Fundamental Obligations) and respond to the resolution no. 4.9 (Implementation of the Conservation and Management Plan (2003 - 2006), no. 4.3 (Guidelines for the Protection and Management of Important Underground Habitats) e n. 4.5 (Guidelines for the Use of Remedial Timber Treatment).

The Italian project aims to set a co-operation between the Ministry for Environment and the Ministry for Cultural Heritage, which has competence on historical monumental building. This co-operation will lead to agree common “guide-lines” for public works on historical building where bats dwell indeed the problem is considerable for monumental buildings being restored as these kind of buildings offer volumes greatly adapted as bats shelter. Building restoration is not a problem *per se* if it is made up taking opportune skills and competences, while these works could cause serious damages to bat survival, and it may cause local extinction of whole bat populations if they are carried out without any specific attentions.

The products /result we expect are:

- Guidelines for the Conservation of Bats in building;
- Database to collect data from the most important colonies roosting in buildings
- Setting a procedure for monumental buildings being restored where colonies of bats are present.
- Solution and/or mitigation of problems arise from lack of knowledge of some administrative offices that deal with Historical buildings

The second objective on the management of information coming from captured bats, its centralization and the setting up of some criteria to build a system of permissions is very important for Italian government in order to guarantee that laws and international rules regarding bat protection can be respected. Moreover it will give a better opportunity to implement transboundary co-operation among countries.

The project aims to define a reference text for bat ringing and to institute a national data bank that can be used, upon request, by operators of other member countries as well.

The concrete results of this work will be:

- A technical manual on Bats ringing in Italy
- A database that will be filled also with all the data on bat ringing that we collected in Italy
- A software “decision support system” as a support to realise permissions to ring
- A national workshop on the bats ringing

Finally, after accession to EUROBATS, the Italian Ministry of Environment will publish the English version of a work made a couple of years ago: “Guideline for bat monitoring” published by Ministry for Environment, GIRC and the National Institute for Wildlife (INFS). These guidelines constitute a comprehensive report on distribution and status of bats in Italy, with a complete description of several methods to study bat biology features in different situations. The English edition will enable to share the Italian experience with other EUROBATS member countries.

Besides those activities, the Italian Ministry for the Environment is preparing a preliminary database on the bats roosting sites based on the Natura 2000 data.