

Ninety Years of the Abruzzo National Park  
1922-2012



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1922-2012:  
Proceedings of the Conference  
held in Pescasseroli, May 18-20, 2012

Edited by

Luigi Piccioni

Translated by Simona Noce and Revised by Cheryl Chapman

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P U B L I S H I N G

Ninety Years of the Abruzzo National Park 1922-2012:  
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feeds three small bears in the Pescasseroli Zoo

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## PREFACE

GIUSEPPE ROSSI

PRESIDENT OF ABRUZZO, LAZIO AND MOLISE NATIONAL PARK

Erminio Sipari, in his *Relazione alla Commissione Amministratrice dell'Ente Autonomo del Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo del 17 maggio 1923*, on the day of his assignment as president, on November 25, 1921 said that “there was, in the presence of eminent representatives from public administrations and private institutions, a historical meeting” called by the Pro Montibus Association, “to bring about the creation of a dedicated entity intended to assume directly the task of intensifying the action to be undertaken to lead to a rapid fulfilment of the work”. That is to say, the work of establishing a national park in the land of the Apennine brown bear and the Apennine chamois, which “still hide, in ever-dwindling numbers, especially in the wild area of the mountains that divide the Sangro River and the Fucino Lake, from Pescasseroli to the Valle Longa and in the dense woods around and over Opi and Civitella Alfedena”.

At the November 25 meeting participated, among others, eminent exponents and representatives of cultural and touristic associations, of ministries and universities, and Sipari, who also represented the government as undersecretary of State. In this meeting

after wide and exhaustive discussion, which was attended by all attendees, it was declared constituted, by acclamation, the Abruzzo National Park, and the Statute of the Authority was approved and a provisional Directorate of nine members was appointed with the stringent mandate to accomplish, as soon as possible, the practical organization of the Park and provide the means to guarantee its regular running.

Nevertheless, the proper inauguration of the Park took place almost a year later, a period in which there was intense cultural and political debate. It concerned the meaning of national park and the differences with the Engadine Park, created a few years earlier, where nature conservation was integral. It was decided that the Park had to be divided in two different areas: one, the genuine national park, where nature was the uncontested and protected queen; another, called *Riserva* (reserve), where socioeconomic

development activities were possible and desirable, with “cultural modification, viability and habitability improvements”, and, at the same time, there were special regulations for hunting and fishing, and felling and the transformation of forests were banned in order to maintain “the wise balance arranged by nature”. The rules of the Park also concerned the damage of the fauna, the renting of forest and other activities. In the meanwhile, the Park Directorate resolved, on June 10, 1922, “to bring about the inauguration of the Park” on the occasion of a planned mountaineering excursion of the Crown Prince.

In the meanwhile, there was an improvement of the relationship between the Park and the Pro Montibus Association, which handed over to the Authority the acquired rights paying a regular lease, “for the amount of L. 7,500 per year”, not only to the Opi village council for the first 500 hectares in the Val Fondillo “the green and most precious gem of the Park”, but also to the villages of Civitella Alfedena, Pescasseroli, Villavallelonga, Lecce nei Marsi, Gioia dei Marsi and Bisegna, which made available other marvellously beautiful and interesting lands” for an overall surface of 12,000 hectares.

To obtain this result, it took many and patient negotiations to overcome “inveterate prejudices and subdue multiform interests safeguarded with desperate obstinacy”. The adoption of more than fifteen resolutions by the affected village councils were necessary and those who “know the life, the tantrums and the rivalries of small mountain villages” can imagine how many and which difficulties were overcome, to succeed in convincing the local administrations and councils about the effectiveness and usefulness to be derived from the creation of the protected area, not just for the payment of a fixed annual rent, but also for the opportunity offered to those places to develop the first touristic activities. In this direction went the multi-year administration and management program developed by Erminio Sipari, whose main points were the building and the improvement of touristic accommodation facilities, also with grants for the construction of refuges and small hotels, the development of “advertising”, the improvement of the road network and reforestation.

Thus the Park was solemnly inaugurated on September 9, 1922 in the presence of the political, governmental, cultural, religious and local authorities and all mayors and secretaries of the villages of the Park. There were also ministers, undersecretaries, members of Parliament, scholars, and academics. The ceremony is recorded by an inscription where it took place, near the fountain of Saint Rocco “at the first houses of Pescasseroli, toward Gioia”: “The Abruzzo National Park established for the protection

of sylvan beauties and nature's treasures here inaugurated on IX Sept. MCMXXII". This solemn ceremony, Erminio Sipari writes,

had great echo in the main daily press, which wrote about it with great sympathy and deep enthusiasm, attracting the interest of Italian and foreign public opinion towards the brilliant initiative.

At the end of this "constituent" path, there was the Royal Legislative Decree no. 257/1923 of January 11, converted into Law no. 1511/1923 of July 12.

In reconstructing the event of the Park's creation, we have to remember that the idea emerged at the beginning of the previous decade, thanks to eminent naturalists, including the zoologist Alessandro Ghigi and the botanist Romualdo Pirota, and developed in the proposal, made in 1917, of an ambitious project for a protected land in the Central Apennines, 173.000 hectares wide. The proposal of conservation of such a large area was accompanied by a thorough map with the habitats of the two most important and precious species to protect.

Nevertheless, the history of the Park could be dated back even to 1860, the Italian unification, and to the constitution of the first national park in the world, the Yellowstone National Park, in 1872. It was actually in 1860, when Leonardo Dorothea, mayor of Villetta Barrea, launching the idea of the creation of a royal hunting reserve exposed to the village council its purposes and utility, referring to the fauna and the re-introduction of some extinct species, the agro-sylvo-pastoral heritage, tourism, and public service facilities. In this simple proposal it is possible to see the way that it would develop in the following years, leading to the birth of the Abruzzo National Park. In 1872 the hunting reserve was established and, with alternate events—abolitions and rehabilitation—reached 1913, when the idea of establishing a national park, based on the proposal of 1907, really began to take shape.

In that period, following the example of the United States and Germany, also in Switzerland there was the proposal of the establishment of national parks. In 1909 was constituted the Ligue Suisse pour la Protection de la Nature, which leased, in the following years, lands in Zerneze and other villages, passing then the contracts from the League to the Swiss Confederation. In the meanwhile, also in Italy associations for the "Italian picturesque and natural" monuments were founded. Thus the idea of the Abruzzo National Park was born.

The first years of the park were distinguished by some territorial enlargement, important promotional initiatives, and considerable financial, administrative and political difficulties.

In 1923 the Park had 18,000 hectares. The following enlargement in 1925 and 1926 brought it to 30,000 hectares and remained so until 1976 when, after the historic extension to the Marsicano and Godi mountains and cruel struggles in the environmentalist world and in part, also local, of the most open-minded and farsighted political-administrative world, the Park gained another 10,000 hectares. Then, in 1990 arrived other measures for the Mainerde and in 1999 for the Giovenco Valley, which brought the Park to the present size of 50,000 hectares and a buffer zone of external protection (the *area contigua*, the adjoining area) of 130,000 hectares.

In 1933 the Authority was abolished and until 1950, when it was built up again, the efforts for nature conservation and the promotional and management activities regressed considerably. In 1951, on the impulse of a renewed institutional commitment, the Park began working normally, up to the 1960s, when deep local changes and brutal speculative aggressions put its existence seriously in danger.

From 1969, thanks to pivotal battles to defend the Park, marked by press campaigns, national and international motions, continuous demonstrations in support of it, and a renewed Directorate of the Authority, the revival of the Park began and the debate on nature conservation regained strength all over Italy, a debate that finally would lead to the approval of the 1991 framework law. The Abruzzo National Park, today the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (the law n. 93/2001 of March 29 changed the name), surely was, and in many ways still is, an important, sometimes almost exclusive, landmark of nature conservation in Italy, representing also one of the constituent elements of Italy's image abroad.

Thinking of the Park, we know we can refer to a land of extraordinary beauty, keeper of an incomparable natural and biodiversity heritage; to an innovative and farsighted commitment of citizens, institutions and the scientific community expressed, on a general level, in various circumstances and during years of intense activity, scientific and cultural debates, and controversies on conservation and local development: from 1922, when, in the overview of the European protected areas, after the first national parks in Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain, exclusive kingdoms of nature, a special park was born. A park rich in magnificent and luxuriant woods, rare animal species, including the majestic and fascinating Marsican brown bear and the Abruzzo chamois, and many other naturalistic preciousness, but that also represented a peculiar and unique entity, hosting in its territory so much human culture.

In recent years, as a kind of repetition of the history of the past decades, the life of the Park has been especially hard and difficult. And it

still is. But today the Park, gradually overcoming difficulties, thinking about the future and conscious of its role in the context of Italian, European and global protected areas, works on the basis of modern principles of conservation, of an aware local promotion, participation, and dialogue.

Entering its territory we can perceive the clear sensation of being in a different place, a place where *nature is protected*, where nature deserves a special respect and has to be free to develop spontaneously. But that is not all. It is a place where villages, perched on the slopes of the mountains, show to the visitor all their architectural beauty, the result of a long generative process that has defined their social and cultural identity, whose traces are in the activities and in the material and spiritual productions of the inhabitants.

But, as we said, the Park is mainly the reign of nature, the “natural heart of the Apennine”. The beech forests cover more than 60% of the land; woods of Turkey oak, maples, yews, European black pine and rare formations of birches alternate in the landscape softening the rocky peaks and the cliffs of the wildest zones. The fauna is the richest of Western Europe. The Abruzzo chamois, present with hundreds of specimens, is one of the most beautiful and rare animals of the world. However, the most fascinating presence is the Marsican brown bear. Unfortunately, very few specimens remain of this big, shy and pacific mammal (a survivor from the last glacial era, in this last strip of intact nature of the Apennine), a fact which renders it even more frail and precious. The risk of extinction is serious and the commitment of institutions to save it should be determined. In the quietest areas, it is easy to perceive the presence of the Italian wolf, the deer and roe deer, the hare, the European badger and many other animals.

The fauna of the sky is rich in fascinating protagonists such as the golden eagle, the sparrow hawk, the Common raven, the Eurasian eagle-owl, the white-backed woodpecker and many birds which have found their reign in the woods, along the streams and on the lake shores. In the undergrowth the rarest specimens of the gorgeous Lady’s-slipper orchid bloom, while the beds of creeks and rivers host salamanders, yellow-bellied toads, white-clawed crayfishes and brown trout. On the bright mountain cliffs, among yellow and white wood anemones and beautiful formations of junipers and mountain pines, live the rare *vipera ursinii* and small groups of rock partridge, hidden among the rocks, the wall creeper, the Alpine accentor, the peregrine falcon, the common rock thrush, and the Alpine and red-billed choughs.

Well, the Park works and will work to preserve all this, because its main purpose is to protect nature, but it works and will work also to achieve the best integration between human beings and environment, safeguarding the anthropological, historical, archaeological and architectural values and the compatible productive activities.

An integral part of this commitment of safeguarding regards the exploitation of the historical memory, as of the institutional events and activities of the Park as well as the social, political and cultural events of the territory. The publication of the proceedings of the Pescasseroli conference held in May 2012 for the ninety years of the reserve's institution represents a conscious effort towards the construction of a shared memory, to which the Park Authority intends to further contribute with passion and energy.

Thus it is with great honour and special delight that I present here these proceedings.

Obviously, I do this not just because I personally followed the development of the organisation and the course of this important opportunity for meeting and discussion, for which great credit goes to the efforts of Luigi Piccioni and the staff of employees and collaborators of the Authority, but also because I experience this event with real, even "personal" emotion. Especially because I have lived many of these ninety years of the Park's life. As a child, here, in these places, then as a boy, then as a man, I have worked in this territory and for the Authority for many years.

From Sipari's first intuition till now, many things have changed. Probably, more than anything the reasons for which we continue to support an organisation and an institution like our National Park have changed. Even if today's objectives may look like those of ninety years ago, that is the protection of an absolutely unique fauna and ecosystem in the Italian and European local and naturalistic overview, the historical context, however, makes thoroughly peculiar and different these intentions today. Furthermore, the public and general awareness of Italian people towards the subject and the issues relating to nature and biodiversity preservation has also deeply changed. In ninety years Italy has changed deeply, its social and economic, therefore also its territorial structure has changed. The Italian land was intensely exploited, used with more or less intelligence and honesty from the economic, rational, efficient point of view: there have been many wrong, inefficient, short-sighted choices and much waste. Surely the choice of the Abruzzo National Park— the protection of a place of unique naturalistic value—was strategically important. But today, if we can imagine, it is even more important. It is so

because places like this in Italy and Europe are getting rarer, more difficult to find and understand. But, perhaps, by virtue of this rarity, they are also easier places to love, from which to capture, I would say, the ethical as well as the economic, social and cultural value.

In 2012, the challenges for Italian biodiversity protection are more complex than ever. Still today, after ninety years of varying degrees of strictness, intensity and management activities, the issues and objectives that started the Abruzzo National Park experience in 1922 remain more or less the same, because the species and the habitats, which at the beginning of the 1920s started to be protected, are still endangered or at risk of degradation. While in the 1920s the danger came mainly from excessive hunting and practices of killing of the wild fauna extremely widespread even among the local populations, today the same danger comes from an excessive exploitation of the land, a diffused anthropic pressure, a pervasive fragmentation of the ecological and naturalistic homogeneity and continuity of the Park's habitats. This harms the territory. Wounds that maintain a certain level of danger for the protection of some very important species, first of all the Marsican brown bear.

Now, thus, on the occasion of this historical congress, the dialogue and the important debate among Italian and international colleagues, even friends of a lifetime, as well as among young scholars and technicians, which through these proceedings can be traced by readers, represent a fundamental and important opportunity to take stock of the challenges that have involved the Park in these decades and will continue to involve it. Some challenges have been taken on and won, others have been taken on and maybe lost; some challenges have not been adequately pursued and it is definitely the moment to face them. Certainly new challenges have emerged; interesting paths that an integrated management of the Park, both by the Authority and the other institutions involved will build up and pursue.

The management of this land, thanks also to an event like this and to the considerations and the evidence reported in these proceedings can begin to work out, we hope, a new, fundamental idea of rational planning, a complex and rich general idea on how to give coherence and impulse to local activities in a project that is linked to the key objective of nature and landscape preservation.

It is a necessary foresight, whose base is the indispensable dialogue between institutions and citizens: it is this element, for instance, that we have tried to best emphasise in the most recent years. Because without dialogue, without debate, it is impossible to design an effective plan, able to give results on the land. From my point of view, I think that a lack of

dialogue and debate would have the effect of reducing the most institutional needs of a protected area, needs with national and international impacts like the preservation and valorisation of a naturalistic heritage of huge importance on a European level, which the Park is called to pursue as its first requests.

This was also, from a historical point of view, the peculiarity of the pilot project of the Abruzzo National Park, the involvement of various institutions and the resident populations in the management and local strategic choices. But today perhaps this synergy is not yet sufficiently developed: it will have to increase, improve, especially culturally, because these lands have the opportunity to preserve and offer to the community an extraordinary heritage of international interest. Only in this way, with an opening to the world, working together, improving mutually, we might safeguard definitively our land and its biodiversity, which is the main aim of the Park.

Special thanks go to all the authors of the important speeches and contributions of the conference, and thus of these proceedings, hoping that they are a chance for useful considerations to be followed by brilliant operative choices.



# INTRODUCTION

LUIGI PICCIONI

To celebrate its ninetieth anniversary, the Authority of the National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise organised a calendar of events in which the historical dimension took on a leading role.

In these terms the international meeting at Pescasseroli from May 18 to 20, 2012, whose proceedings are published here, undoubtedly formed a major part.

Some fundamental principles were followed whilst planning and carrying out that meeting. First and foremost, to avoid the eventual contamination of excessively contingent worries, namely, to avert common topical matters, whether political or administrative, the choice was made to concentrate on re-construction and historiographical balance.

The two elements which mainly characterised the meeting evolved from this basic platform: on the one hand, the choice of scholars who have been important witnesses or of witnesses with a high degree of expertise concerning the past; on the other hand, its tripartite structure.

In fact, this meeting began with a session dedicated to its birth, that is, the re-construction of the various aspects of the genesis and first years of the Park's existence, entrusted to four scholars who, during the last 25 years, have made an indelible mark on the studies of this topic: Lorenzo Arnone Sipari, Corradino Guacci, Franco Pedrotti and James Sievert.

In comparison, the second session aimed at underlining two of the most important features of the Park's life, namely, its size and its international fame, inviting two names of prestige to contribute: Henri Jaffeux, a French high official who has devoted his long and prolific ministerial career to protected areas and who now writes about and promotes environmental history, and the Swiss François Walter, one of the major specialists worldwide on the history of conservation cultures.

Finally, the third session's target was to weigh up the entire parable of the Park's ninety years of existence, analysing its contribution to nature protection in Italy (Piccioni) and to the concept of protected areas (Graziani), the changeable relations between population and Park

(D'Orazio) and the connections between environmental rights and ethics (Ceruti).

From the speakers' analyses and the various testimonies that took place, the constant centrality of the Abruzzo reserve became more and more evident, in its stages of splendour as well as its moments of drama, in both its Italian and its international contexts. It is to be hoped that the wealth of the meeting at Pescasseroli may consolidate and strengthen an unabated authoritativeness.

**SESSION I:**

**THE BIRTH AND THE FIRST YEARS  
OF THE NATIONAL PARK**



# THE NOTABLES OF THE UPPER VAL DI SANGRO AND THEIR ROLE IN THE GENESIS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

LORENZO ARNONE SIPARI

The debate on the possible ways of nature conservation developed in Italy during the first two decades of the twentieth century was contained in the Law n. 778/1922 of June 11 “For the protection of natural beauty and properties representing a notable historical interest”. This normative provision that was also set as legal basis for the institution of the first protected areas largely drew on the bill introduced in the Senate, during the session of September 25, 1920, by Benedetto Croce as minister of Public Education. Croce, it should be noted, who in that period expressed the need to gather in a precise legislative framework the requests of the first composite movement for nature conservation, was studying the descending curve of his maternal ancestors, the Siparis, as an example of that new bourgeoisie that, during the nineteenth century, replaced, for wealth and social authority, the ancien régime lineages. The reference, obviously, is the monograph of Pescasseroli published by Laterza in February 1922, included, three years later, as is well-known, together with that of Montenerodomo, in the appendix of *Storia del Regno di Napoli*. The study of the native town of the philosopher, apart from the Crocian methodology involved to pinpoint in the historical outlines of a village the salient features of the more general history, fell expressly within an articulate series of propaganda activities in favour of establishing the Abruzzo National Park in the making.

It is not a coincidence that the upper Val di Sangro at the end of the Liberal Age witnessed a succession of initiatives of similar kind, useful to make known the peculiar natural and landscape beauty of the land outside the Apennine microcosm, through articles and photographic reports, which were published in many reviews both popular and scientific. In little more than one year, between the summer of 1921 and the autumn of 1922, the land of Abruzzo registered the organization of a national boy scout jamboree with more than six hundred young people (August 1921) and a

Marsican brown bear hunt with the participation of Prince Amedeo, Duke of Apulia (October 1921), besides, the first case in Italy, the establishment of a Park Authority, the Abruzzo National Park Authority (November 25, 1921), and the following inauguration of the protected area (September 9, 1922), in a ceremony where, to strengthen—if possible—the solemnity, the Great War memorial to the dead soldiers from Pescasseroli was unveiled. In the same circumstances, there was the establishment of the Condotta forestale marsicana (Marsican Forest Office) (October 1922), the first consortium of this sort in the Peninsula which preceded the mounting of a camp for the stay of over one hundred members of the Italian Touring Club. These events, alternated without continuous progress, soon before and after the establishment of the Park, and arranged with these purposes, sealed the fulfilment of a course begun, as we can see, more than fifty years earlier.

Thus, the cultural and local roots of the protected area of the upper Val di Sangro lay in the institution of a royal hunting reserve. Such an exclusive privilege had been proposed many times, between 1860 and 1861, by Doctor Leonardo Dorotea from Villetta Barrea. He was keen on hunting and published a “zoological compendium” entitled *Della caccia e della pesca nel Caraceno* which gave an accurate description of some of the main native animal species, whose presence, in the author’s opinion, guaranteed a local reserve to compete with the appeal and the charm of similar although older and more famous institutions. Moreover, only in Central-Southern Italy belonging to the former Kingdom of Naples were there more than twenty open and active places for the exclusive hunting of the royal family members. Dorotea’s efforts—launched by the municipal administration and aimed to unseat the anonymity of the area—collided with more or less insurmountable matters that hindered their realization.

A decade later, the program of the intellectual from Villetta, who in the meanwhile had died, was resumed by the two brothers Carmelo and Francesco Saverio Sipari, representatives of the sheep-owning bourgeoisie from Pescasseroli. Like Dorotea, they were hunters; however, to achieve the aim they used a different mean, which is private enterprise, donating to Vittorio Emanuele II, in June of 1872, the hunting rights over about 600 hectares, mainly high-mountain pastures, of which they were owners in the Villavallelonga village.

It stands to reason that that re-use of the pastures, with the change of function, in other words the exclusive bear hunting rights, had been suggested, at least in those families historically tied to the Apennine transhumance, by the definitive freeing of the Tavoliere (1865), which caused a considerable reduction of sheep stock. From that, the need for

diversifying interests, investing somewhere else in different economical and productive sectors, and, for those who had greater flexibility and dynamism, also towards symbolic choices. One of these was the so-called “gift of the bear” that represented the instance of the upper Val di Sangro. The gift of the most sought-after and mysterious wild beast in Europe met the logic of the present as a vehicle susceptible, in a possible but not owed reciprocity, of both social rising for the individual and benefits for the land. While the individual might gain the Royal House’s important gratitude, the designation to one of the various degrees of knighthood, or the opportunity of entering élite circles, on the other hand, for the land the presence of the king and his entourage could guarantee, as it actually did, a favourable repercussion in terms of repopulation of animal species, construction, road system improvement, and a more accurate monitoring, especially of the woodland heritage.

As a matter of fact, the King accepted the above mentioned gift and a few months later the act of the Sipari brothers was emulated by the villages of Opi, Pescasseroli, Lecce nei Marsi, Gioia dei Marsi, Villavallelonga, Collelongo, Balsorano, and Castellafume and on their land was established the first royal reserve in the upper Val di Sangro. It functioned until the beginning of 1878, when it was abolished after the accession of Umberto I, who was not keen on hunting. The local notables did not remain indifferent to such a loss, but, notwithstanding the controversies and the efforts of deferring the new king, they had to wait for more than two decades before another similar exclusive privilege would be realized again.

In this respect, the foundations were laid in 1899. In the autumn of that year, Carmelo Sipari, with the support of the Member of Parliament Mansueto De Amicis, organised a bear hunt with the participation of the Prince of Naples, who, shortly afterwards, as we know, would succeed to the throne of Italy with the name of Vittorio Emanuele III. The emotions offered by the landscape and the enchanting events of the hunt, whose purpose was to hunt a rare animal like the Marsican plantigrade, and the warm but attentive hospitality received in Pescasseroli persuaded the King to boost decisively the establishment of a second hunting reserve. As a matter of fact, it was promptly ratified in the early nineteenth century, affecting the area of eleven municipalities: Alfedena, Barrea, Civitella, Villetta, and Pizzone were part of it, while Balsorano and Castellafume did not repeat the experience. It functioned until the end of 1912, relentlessly undermined by the increasing costs to compensate for the damages of the wild fauna. It is established opinion, however, that the two institutions represented an example of a pioneering protected area. About

this, it is enough to indicate that, apart from their form of exclusive privilege, the even meagre sources survey the killing of eight bears in the over-all twenty years of existence, against the twenty-seven and twelve killings attested in the year after 1878 and in the two-year period 1913-14, respectively. It should not be overlooked, furthermore, that if, on the one hand, with the second of the two reserves, the features of the future Abruzzo National Park were outlined, thanks to private enterprise, that is the strategies planned by the notable; on the other hand, the full support given by the municipal administration and the populations allowed these peculiar exclusive privileges to insert themselves completely in the local social and economic fabric, moreover, contributing to reinforce it. Ultimately, it should be noted that before the last and definitive abolition of the reserve an attention to the promotion of the land had emerged. Erminio Sipari, creator and first president of the Abruzzo National Park, was the interpreter of this interest. Erminio, son and nephew of the above mentioned Carmelo and Francesco Saverio, respectively, and also cousin of Croce, who would dedicate to him the monograph of Pescasseroli, characterised his life for a continuing dialogue with the main European cultural and technological requests. With a degree in Engineering, discipline in which he specialized abroad, and member of Parliament of the Kingdom of Italy from 1913 to 1929, since 1909 he had advocated the construction of a hotel in the main town of the upper Val di Sangro district, anticipating its future as a health resort.

At the same time, he made friends and relatives aware of the need to spread abroad the beauty of the land, especially promoting press campaigns and focused publications. An example of the latter is Emidio Agostinone's volume *Altipiani d'Abruzzo*, published in 1912 in the prestigious collection "Italia Artistica" edited by Corrado Ricci. This work, enhanced by 206 illustrations, of which almost one fourth dedicated to the future protected land, presented for the first time the effective motto "*e l'orso c'è*" (and there is the bear) that would be found in some articles in the 1920s ratifying the change from a vision of the bear as prey to another in which the plantigrade was erected as a symbol of naturalistic protection.

However, in both visions, the gift of the bear was intended as a useful means to promote the image of the upper Val di Sangro. This lets us affirm that, at least a decade earlier than 1922, following the above-outlined path, that model that was in embryo, harmoniously weaving together nature protection and touristic development, would characterise the establishment and the development of the Abruzzo National Park. Thus, at its beginnings, it was crucial and on some occasions pioneering the role



played by the local notables who were able to perceive the opportunities of social and economic growth of the land, channelling them towards “sustainable” achievements.

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# THE ROLE OF THE ITALIAN SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

FRANCO PEDROTTI

At the beginning of the 1900s the subject of national parks was already set out due to the first Italian nature conservation organisations such as the Associazione nazionale per i paesaggi e per i monumenti pittoreschi d'Italia (National Association for Picturesque Landscapes and Monuments of Italy), the Lega nazionale per la protezione dei monumenti naturali (National League for the Protection of Natural Monuments), and the Società Pro Montibus et Sylvis (Association for Mountains and Forests), flanked by two scientific associations, the Società Botanica Italiana (Italian Botanical Society) and the Unione Zoologica Italiana (Italian Zoological Union). They were all animated by some enlightened pioneers, as is well and widely documented in Luigi Piccioni's work *Il volto amato della patria. Il primo movimento per la protezione della natura in Italia 1880-1934*.

There were many parks to think about, but two of them had, from the first moment, a particular importance: the Gran Paradiso and the Abruzzo Parks; both have a common history, because they have the same beginnings, originating from pre-existent royal hunting reserves, even if the paths for their effective establishment were different.

It is not a coincidence that both in Val d'Aosta and in the Sangro Valley—even if in different historical backgrounds—the naturalistic tradition is great due to the presence of a fauna which had disappeared in other places and to the royal hunting reserves; it is not a coincidence that in these valleys was born a widespread conservation culture not only among important local figures, but also in a part of the population.

From the Sangro Valley came Francesco Saverio and Carmelo Sipari from Pescasseroli, Leonardo Dorotea from Villetta Barrea, Alessandro Ursitti from Opi, Giovanni Di Pirro from Pescasseroli, Nestore and Nicola Tarolla from Civitella Alfedena; from the Comino Valley came Erminio Sipari of Alvito (but he was a native of Pescasseroli) and from the Marsica

Loreto Grande of Villavallelonga, all of them involved in nature conservation and Abruzzo National Park issues.

The two parks of Abruzzo and Gran Paradiso were born in the same period; in the 1930s the respective authorities were dissolved and taken over by the Milizia forestale (Forestry Militia); both were born again with great efforts in the post-war period and made huge progress in nature protection, but they also had to suffer environmental outrages with a heavy impact on the environment.

They represent a classic reference model for the national parks established in Italy in later years.

### **The land (geographic knowledge)**

The reference land for the establishment of a national park in Abruzzo includes the Marsica, the upper Val di Sangro, the Sagittario Valley, the Cinque Miglia and Quarto di Santa Chiara plateaux, the Comino Valley, and the group of the Mainarde.

It is an immense land, well-defined on the map enclosed in Professor Pietro Romualdo Pirota's 1917 proposal, extraordinarily appealing from the environmental point of view and of great scientific interest, but big, too big to establish a national park in Italy's economic and social conditions of that time. In effect, the park was necessarily founded in a smaller area than that originally proposed by Pirota.

This land had already been the subject of publications that illustrated the over-all geographic characteristics and the landscape attractions; it is enough to cite Agostinone's volume *Altipiani d'Abruzzo* of 1912. But, altogether, it was a quite isolated area, difficult to reach, almost unknown to the general public.

In all its valleys and plateaux there are towns rich in history and culture, built in the typical style of the Abruzzo architecture, with churches and palaces which are often real works of art: in the Marsica Villavallelonga, Collelongo, Gioia nei Marsi, and Lecce nei Marsi; in the upper Val di Sangro, Gioia Vecchia, Pescasseroli, Opi, Villetta Barrea, Civitella Alfedena, Barrea, and, lower, Alfedena, Scontrone, and Castel di Sangro; in the Sagittario Valley, Scanno and Anversa; on the Cinque Miglia and Quarto di Santa Chiara plateaux, Roccaraso, Pescostanzo, and Rivisondoli; on the Lazio side, Alvito, San Donato Val di Comino, Settefrati, Picinisco, and S. Biagio Saracinisco; on the slopes of the group of the Mainarde in Molise, Pizzone, Castelnuovo a Volturno, Rocchetta a Volturno, etc. Many books have been dedicated to these places, describing

their history, art, personalities, and architecture; some of them are cited in the enclosed bibliography.

The life of these towns was exclusively based on agro-sylvan-pastoral activities: mountain farming, forestry, and sheep farming. The long transhumance routes climbed down from Abruzzo to the Tavoliere of Foggia, in the middle of which there is a small residuary wood on the Cervaro river, called the Bosco dell’Incoronata. Pescasseroli was like the terminus of the shepherd’s track that came up from Puglia and at its two extremities there are two churches, both dedicated to the Madonna dell’Incoronata (Our Crowned Lady). The Siparis from Pescasseroli were one of the big sheep-owning families of the Sangro Valley; in addition to the big palaces of Pescasseroli and Alvito, they owned also a palace, lands and manor farms in Foggia.

Hunting was very common and practised against many species of mammals and birds, all listed and described in Luigi Dorotea’s book *Della caccia e della pesca nel Caraceno. Sommario Zoologico*; he was a native from Villetta Barrea, a doctor with widespread political, historical, and scientific interests. He was also a hunter and in his book describes the methods of hunting for the different species, including bear and chamois.

Dorotea also talks about wolves, animals “pernicious for their instinct to harm”, considered “public enemies by all peoples”, thus “persecuted everywhere”. As is known, during the first years of the park’s foundation, the wolf was considered harmful all over Italy and also in the park, where it was hunted; the pictures of Carlo Paolucci, at that time director of the park, with his *tableaux* of killed wolves, are well-known. Alessandro Ghigi himself wrote that the wolf was a species to eliminate from nature, but added

As a naturalist, I can wish too that the Italic wolf does not disappear completely, but in order to achieve this, there are two possible ways: reserves in an unpopulated land of the Central or Southern Apennine, allowing the wolves to live undisturbed and killing those that exit to go in the adjoining areas. (Ghigi 1947).

He then suggests that some families of wolves might stay in a big, well-made pit in the zoo of Rome or in Pescasseroli, to maintain the breed.

There were, however, other naturalists who thought in a different way, like Prof. Lino Vaccari, who wrote:

Even understanding the legitimate concern of the park’s administrative board in favouring the development of the species (bear, chamois, and roe deer) to which the park is dedicated; even approving with all my heart the attempt to save the “noble resident game”, as a naturalist and a friend of

nature, I cannot and will never be convinced that, to defend some species of animals, it is necessary to exterminate others. (Vaccari 1941).

Wolf protection arrived many years later, with the “St. Francis and the wolf” operation promoted by the WWF, followed by the law that declared the wolf a protected species.

## **Scientific research before the establishment of the park**

Scientific research in the described areas had begun before the establishment of the park due to some naturalists, including the botanist Loreto Grande, whose first publication is dated 1904 and concerns the flora of Villavallelonga, the zoologist Enrico Festa, who in 1914 organised some zoological excursions in the mountains of the Sangro Valley in collaboration with experts of the different groups of animal species, and the geographer Roberto Almagià, with his research in the Comino Valley and on the Marsican mountains.

The Abruzzo chamois was described by Neumann on the basis of a stuffed sample preserved in the Natural History Museum of Genoa which aroused great interest among faunists and hunters. It also interested exponents of the Abruzzo cultural circle such as Leonardo Dorotea and Nestore Tarolla with two faunal contributions, while Uberto D’Andrea published the photograph of a shot chamois on the cover of his book on the history of Villetta Barrea; the year in which the picture was taken is unknown and the caption says: “Chamois hunting in upper Sangro”.

The Marsican bear was described in 1921 by Giuseppe Altobello, doctor and zoologist from Campobasso. The bear too was at the centre of local interest, as shown by the many studies and articles on it from the historical and wildlife point of view. It has to be remembered that Erminio Sipari always gave great attention to the fauna of the park in his works (Sipari 1926) and Orano published a photograph of Sipari between a chamois and a bear with this caption: “Erminio Sipari between his protected”.

At an international level, the Abruzzo chamois was well-known in the scientific ambit, as witnessed by the French zoologist Marcel Couturier’s monograph, published a few years after the foundation of the park, in which the systematic and biogeographic significance of the subspecies *ornata* was emphasised. About the bear, it is enough to remember Couturier’s other monograph on the brown bear that talks amply about the Abruzzo National Park and its importance for the protection of the “Altobello bear”.