



Tuscany Environment Foundation

Part of the Conservation Collective

Introduction

The Tuscany Environment Foundation (TEF) is a new charitable entity, aimed at raising funds from people and businesses who have a strong connection to Tuscany, to be then distributed among the best local organisations working to protect and restore the diverse natural assets of the region. The foundation will look to support projects which bring both economic, and social renewal to local communities.

With a focus on the restoration and regeneration of Tuscany's marine environment, boosting protection measures for its extensive forests and natural habitats as well as its incredibly diverse species, alongside promoting wide-ranging sustainable practices across the region, we hope to make our first grants this year.

TEF will be part of the Conservation Collective, a global network of eleven locally focused environment foundations, emerging from mankind's innate instinct to protect what it loves. The Conservation Collective facilitates funding for the most effective grassroots environmental initiatives, with world-class oversight, management and programme aid. Currently there are six other Mediterranean members of the network, from Ibiza, to the Aeolian Islands.

The TEF will follow the Conservation Collective's proven model of environmental grant giving that is nimble, non-bureaucratic, and highly effective. Please click this link to read the AIPF's five-year report to get a feel for the kind of projects we would look to support.

An initial scoping report for Tuscany was commissioned by Edward Cutler (environmentalist and Tuscany resident) & Ben Goldsmith (Conservation Collective Chair and founder) and was undertaken by Dr. Flavio Monti of the University of Siena and Dr. Andrea Sforzi, Director of the Natural History museum in Grosseto, between September and December of 2020. The aim was to identify the key environmental threats and opportunities facing Tuscany today. The report outlines the active Tuscan environmental organisations, their ongoing initiatives and where a fund with c€100k per year could make a significant impact. Please let us know if you would like to read the full version.

This document is an Executive Summary of the report and identifies five potential early actions.





Executive Summary

Why Tuscany?

- Tuscany is one of the largest and most bio-diverse regions of Italy. With an area of 23,000km² (the same size as Belize), its land mass is spread over hills (67%), mountains (25 %) and plains (8%) which arrive at 633 km of coastline (including the 7 main islands of the Tuscan Archipelago).
- Tuscany's environment is often characterised by its hilly landscape, shaped over many centuries by the cypresses, olives and vineyards of traditional agriculture, but beyond this there are a multitude of ecological hotspots found in diverse habitats, from coastal wetlands to spectacular hot springs, uninterrupted rivers, through uninhabited island refuges to the ancient beech forests of the Apennines.
- Tuscany has a large network of protected areas, covering almost 10% of its territory. The entire Tuscan area of of the Tyrrhenian sea is within the Pelagos Sanctuary for the Conservation of Marine Mammals.
- Many areas of Tuscany suffer from the typical evils of more developed areas: poor air quality in the most inhabited areas, unsustainable agricultural and forest management practices, illegal fishing, as well as the impact of mass tourism on coastal areas in the summer. Together with the global challenges of the climate crisis and changing weather patterns, these pose a significant threat to the Tuscan environment and require urgent action.

How?

- There are many excellent grass-roots initiatives led by a plethora of regional institutions and environmental groups, however they often lack the critical funds to achieve and sustain their long-term goals. There is huge potential to boost these initiatives and enable them to make a far greater impact.
- ***The principle aim of the Tuscany Environment Foundation is to recognise the most pressing environmental threats, identify and sustain the best grass-roots initiatives to combat them, and facilitate the creation of future initiatives that bring long-term net benefits to Tuscany's environment and biodiversity.***
- Drawing on the enormous passion for the Tuscan environment from both the national and international community, through private donations and fundraising events, the aim is to raise a minimum of €100,000 per annum to go directly to the most effective local initiatives, chosen by way of an independent scientific advisory board and a donor-advised steering committee. A little funding can go a very long way to help these groups realise their goals, often enabling them to expand or share best practice in order to replicate their success in neighbouring areas.





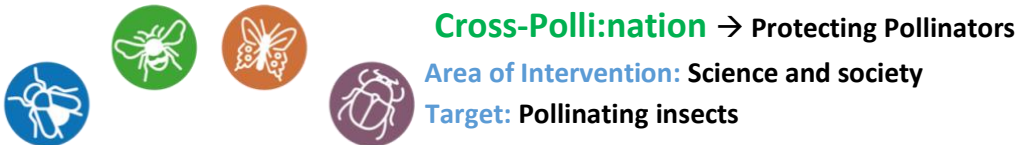
What?

- The Tuscany Environment Foundation will actively try to support projects and initiatives in three broad areas of interest: **Biodiversity & Wildlife Conservation (including Marine Preservation); Restoration & Rewilding of Natural Landscapes; Local food systems and the sustainable use of resources.**
- Examples of work the TEF will support are:
 - **Biodiversity:** monitoring key wildlife species in their natural habitat, using technology to produce real-time maps and video evidence of animal movements (satellite tracking and camera-traps), as well as protecting nesting sites of birds and reptiles and enhancing the protection for pollinating insects;
 - **Rewilding:** increased data gathering on protected species undergoing spontaneous recolonisation of both historical and new ranges; restoration of natural ecosystems or sustainable management practices (e.g. wildlife corridors and passages to cross roads, land use changes to enhance habitat quality);
 - **Regenerative Agriculture:** including projects that encourage farmers to adopt sustainable agro-ecological practices, resulting in both healthier landscapes and soils, and better produce; promoting the sustainable markets needed for them to thrive; and to rediscover, multiply and distribute seeds of ancient and freely pollinated varieties, thus increasing genetic diversity and resilience.
 - **Plastics and sea-tourism:** including educational campaigns and projects that engage local citizens to both raise awareness and prevent the problems of marine litter, deprivation of resources and illegal or excessive fishing. At the same time promoting more sustainable forms of tourism, fishing, green mobility and recycling.
 - **Sustainable forestry management** - Tuscany has some of the best-preserved forests in Europe, including the ancient beech forests of the Apennines. However, illegal logging and unsustainable management threaten many of these vital habitats. TEF will actively work to highlight these threats and develop ways to ensure the forests' long-term protection.
- Key factors for success in these initiatives will be harnessing the enthusiasm of young generations and increasing science-based support and direct citizen participation on the ground, reconnecting people with nature in the process.



Potential projects

The full scoping report contains a more comprehensive 360° overview of the active organisations in Tuscany. Here, five initiatives that could immediately benefit from further financial support have been selected. Overall, these initiatives will address the drivers and consequences of biodiversity loss and habitat degradation in several fields of action - marine life, wildlife conservation, and ecosystem services.

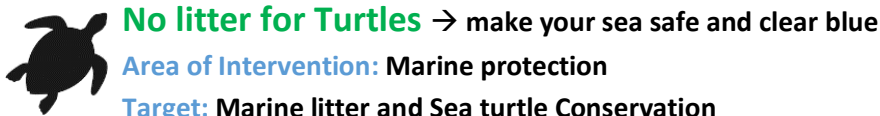


Pollinating insects (bees, bumblebees, hover-flies and butterflies) are essential for ensuring plant reproduction, global food production, functioning ecosystems and human well-being. Their decline, mainly caused by the use of pesticides and unsustainable agricultural practices, represents a global emergency. A pilot citizen science project (X-Polli:nation) was recently launched for gathering evidence to address these issues with the help of schools. Funded by National Geographic USA, X-Polli:nation has been developed by the Maremma Natural History Museum together with Imperial College, Open University and University of Aberdeen (GB). In Tuscany all the three main Universities (Siena, Florence and Pisa) are involved together with botanical gardens.

Action: To collect data on pollinating insects; to promote a sowing action of selected flowering plants to attract pollinators; to help reducing or eliminating pesticide use locally to deliver a Cross-Pollination Kit for monitoring; to further expand the project in all of Tuscany and broadening the number and variety of users.

Reason for funding: Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, only a small portion of the initiative will be realised before the deadline of June 2021, and the range of activities that has been set needs to be both supported and strengthened.

Expected outcomes: A consistent regional network of people collecting data on pollinators through citizen science activities, in the framework of an EU-approved monitoring scheme; improved knowledge on pollinating insects for more efficient conservation; empowering younger generations.



The Tuscan sea is part of the Pelagos Sanctuary for the Conservation of Marine Mammals and is home to incredible biodiversity, both in terms of habitat and species. Despite this, there are grave threats from intense fishing and marine litter, with severe impacts on marine life. Sea turtles (Caretta caretta), a key target species, have recently returned to nest along the Tuscan beaches. Tourist pressure during summer puts the nesting sites at high risk of failure, while marine litter and by-catch further increase mortality rates.

Action: To improve monitoring and protection of nesting sites along much of the Tuscan coasts; to foster new awareness campaigns on marine litter and sustainable fishing; to promote the adoption of NO-TAKE marine zones in correspondence with protected areas on land.

Reason for funding: A pilot regional initiative called Arcipelago Pulito aims to encourage local fishermen to clean up and remove plastic from the Tuscan sea, but it is still in its infancy. Similarly, local associations are struggling to effectively





monitor nesting sites due to insufficient means and limited human resources thus reducing the impact of their valuable work.

Expected outcomes: All Tuscan sea turtle nests will be mapped, monitored and protected every year in the framework of a coordinated network. Attention will be brought to the marine litter problem and contribute to halt its spread in Tuscany. Campaigns to promote NO-TAKE zones in sensitive areas will be launched, as well as promoting the clean-up of beaches and the contributions to citizen science projects like Marine litter watch.



2ndChance4Wildlife → give a second chance to injured animals and track them in their new life

Area of Intervention: Wildlife conservation

Target: Wild Fauna and Rehabilitation Centres

Every year hundreds of wild animals are injured because of anthropogenic threats. Wildlife rehabilitation centres represent a unique opportunity for animals to get a second chance of survival and return to the wild. However, there is a lack of knowledge on a crucial aspect: the fate of each animal released.

Action: To coordinate and strengthen collaboration between SOS ANIMAL networks and regional rehabilitation centres; to help in the resolution of management, rescue and welfare issues concerning local wildlife; to monitor wild target species through satellite telemetry and gather evidence on the efficacy of care provided in support of wildlife rescue, eventually developing specific protocols.

Reason for funding: The rescue centres and the network of volunteers that daily act for the rehabilitation of injured wildlife and reintroduction of cured individuals into the wild, are struggling for the scarcity of funds and for the heavy workload. Often attention is concentrated on the cure, with little time or energy available to look after the release protocols and projects for evaluating survival after release.

Expected outcomes: Release protocols and databases of injured wildlife will be harmonised and shared among centres. Some individuals belonging to target species will be equipped with satellite transmitters and monitored in real time after release. This will provide Interactive maps of animal movements; tracking data will be made readily available. This will ultimately reveal whether the provided care effectively improves the medium-long term survival of released fauna.



The European Wildcat in Tuscany → Gathering insight on the natural rewilding process of a highly elusive species

Area of Intervention: Wildlife conservation

Target: Rewilding processes

*The wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) is an elusive species living at very low population densities, making it very difficult to observe in nature. In Tuscany they are found in the southernmost area (after successful reintroduction into Maremma national park the 1990's), as well as the Central Apennines, where they were first reported twenty years ago in Casentino Forests National Park, and where a natural rewilding process is underway. There remain many biogeographical questions regarding its historical range, as it was considered absent from Tuscany and Liguria until very recent times.*

Action: To improve understanding of the population of wildcats in the Maremma Regional Park, through the coordination of people and institutions along the Apennine chain, and harvesting data through extensive camera trapping to understand the population's full range of expansion.

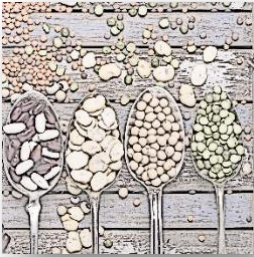
Reason for funding: The wildcat is a poorly known predator that is undergoing crucial expansions and contractions of its range in different parts of the country. The Tuscan Apennines represent an ecological bridge that could potentially enable this species to reach an unprecedented range expansion. This process need to be understood and supported by gathering information that might be relevant to its conservation.

Expected outcomes: A crucial update of the current wildcat population in the Maremma Regional Park, with insights on habitat use and interactions with other small carnivores; an updated picture on the distribution of the species in





Tuscany, suitable for conservation purposes; a network of people and institutions committed to wildcat monitoring and conservation.



Traditional crops → Promoting the use of Under-utilised and Neglected Crops
Area of Intervention: Sustainable agriculture and local food systems
Target: Ancient seed varieties

Tuscany is home of a millenarian tradition of agriculture. The vineyards and the olive groves characterise the classical Tuscan landscape. At a regional scale, farming is not very extensive and uninhabited farmhouses and uncultivated land still exist. However, in many other areas of the region, modern agricultural activities such as intensive mechanisation, agrochemical use and a reduction of crop rotations, have caused a marked biodiversity decline of farmland habitats, with negative effects on food quality and ecosystem health. A possible solution to this problem is to convert local systems to a more sustainable model and support local organisations focused on the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices.

Action: To promote a conscious and respectful agriculture, aimed at conciliating environmental heterogeneity with the production of genuine products; to favour the adoption of this approach at the local level by motivating small producers, through sharing information about specific ancient seed varieties and their eventual marketplace, and for guiding best agro-ecological practices.

Reason for funding: In the face of a changing planet, the trend for globalised processes of intense productivity and homogenisation need to be reversed, at least locally. It's time to help and support farmers as well as agricultural entrepreneurs to adopt innovative and sustainable agricultural practices; to rediscover, multiply and distribute seeds of ancient and freely pollinated varieties which have been under-utilised due to modern agricultural practices.

Expected outcomes: A requalification of agricultural habitats through the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices, which take into consideration the quality of farmland habitats and related biodiversity. A consistent regional network of people active in the research, conservation and reproduction of food plants from local, ancient and freely pollinated varieties that are freely exchanged among members with the aim of stemming the genetic and cultural erosion to which they are exposed.





Conclusion & next steps

How you can help preserve environment and biodiversity in Tuscany

You can help preserve Tuscany's beautiful natural environment and conserve key wildlife by contributing to the Tuscany Conservation and/or supporting its projects by supporting with an annual donation and/or making introductions to those in a position to do so.

How will it work?

The governance structure will be fairly straightforward - we will hire one full-time local executive director (who will combine a grant-making and fund-raising role), a steering committee (who will review and decide on grant recommendations and contribute to the fund-raising effort) and an advisory board (who will support the ED in sourcing and assessing grant proposals). Steering committee members pledge to donate c€10,000 per year, for a minimum of three years.

Next steps?

At this stage we're looking for donors, projects, lovers of Tuscany and cheerleaders! We're aiming to raise a minimum of €100,000 per year and are about half-way there, with Ben Goldsmith (the founder of Conservation Collective), and a further group of five who have committed funds so far.

A group of 5-10 founding donors will join the steering committee.

Anyone interested should get in touch with Ed or Jade:

- Ed Cutler: edcutz@yahoo.com (Founder)
- Jade Brudenell: jade@conservation-collective.org (Executive Director, the Conservation Collective)

www.conservation-collective.org

