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CONSERVATION OF THE RARE *DICTAMNUS ALBUS* L.: FIRST RESULTS OF THE PP-ICON LIFE+ PROJECT (LIFE09/NAT/IT/000212)

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“PP-ICON” (Plant Pollinator Integrated CONservation approach: a demonstrative proposal, www.pp-icon.eu) is a 4-year LIFE+ Biodiversity project focusing on the conservation of the locally rare plant *Dictamnus albus* L. (dittany) and the community of its pollinators. Major threats for european populations of dittany are represented by land-use change, habitat fragmentation and limited pollination service.

The main objectives are to ensure the persistence of an isolated population of *D. albus*, located in a protected area (Parco Regionale dei Gessi Bolognesi e Calanchi dell'Abbadessa, SIC-SPA IT4050001), and to enhance the community of its natural pollinators.

Actions focus on habitat management, pollinators safeguard, stakeholders awareness and dissemination. Habitat has been restored in order to establish the best environmental conditions for the persistence of the target population. At the same time, effective pollinators of dittany have been identified in order to artificially rear and re-introduce them in the area, and suitable nesting sites have been provided. The maintenance of pollinators is favoured by the cultivation and introduction of other autochthonous nectariferous plant species in the area. Through periodic monitoring of plant fitness and pollinator diversity we can assess the success of concrete actions and evaluate the possible need of redirections.

After two years of project implementation it is possible to appreciate a positive response by the wood management, with an increase of incident light and a consequent recovery of flowering in the newly restored sites.

Pollination tests did not highlight deficit in pollination service.

Among the diverse spectrum of flower visitors, only few species behave as efficient pollinators (*Habropoda tarsata*, *Xylocopa violacea*, *Bombus* spp.). By contrast, despite their high frequency of visit, small halictid bees do not contribute to effective pollen transfer and have to be regarded as nectar and pollen thieves. Based on these results, conservation actions have been redirected. Small nesting holes have been excluded in the artificial nests placed in the area, and species visited exclusively by large bees (e.g., *Lathyrus latifolius*) have been added to the list of nectariferous plants with scalar flowering periods to be planted in the area.

Monitoring data still indicate a general scarcity of pollinating fauna in the area, with a positive relation between pollinator abundance and flowered species diversity.

The present communication illustrates the results of the first two years of the project.