

THE LIFE PROGRAMME



The LIFE programme is the European Union's funding instrument for the environment and climate actions. Since 1992 it has co-financed thousands of projects within the member states. The Life Insubricus project falls under the sub-programme "Nature and Biodiversity" 2014-2020.

THE NATURA 2000 NETWORK

The Natura 2000 Network is an ecological network covering the entire territory of the European Union, established in accordance with the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC to ensure the long-term maintenance of biodiversity, natural habitats and threatened or rare species of flora and fauna at EU level.

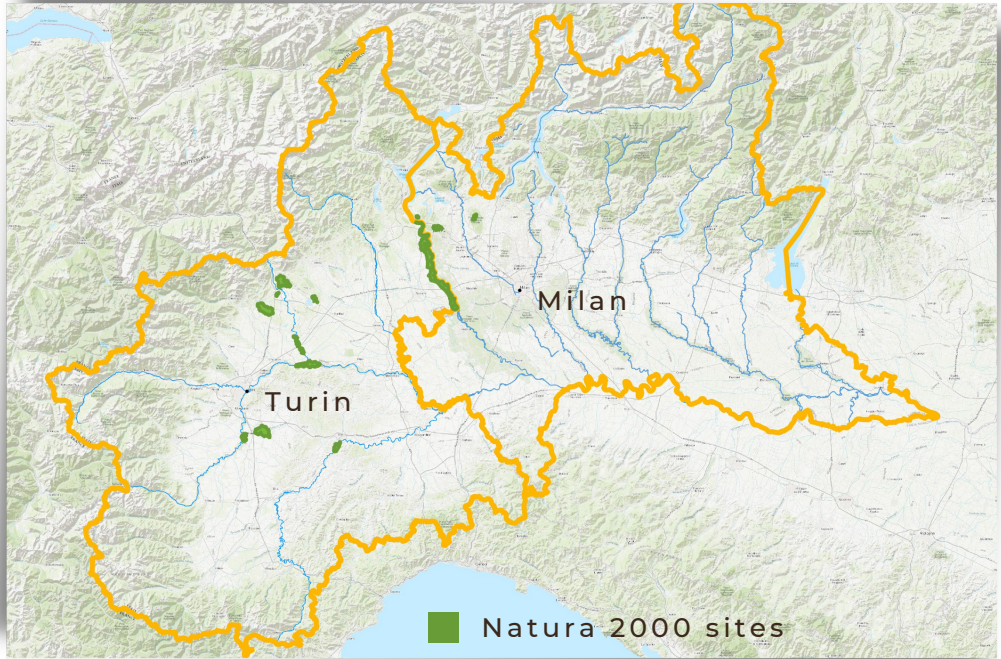


THE LIFE INSUBRICUS PROJECT

Titled "*Urgent actions for long-term conservation of Pelobates fuscus insubricus in the distribution area*", the project provides interventions in favor of *Pelobates fuscus insubricus*, an endemic toad of the Po Valley in danger of extinction. The actions will also have positive effects on its habitat, aiming to significantly improve its conservation status.

The project actions, implemented between the Lombardy and Piedmont regions, started on October 1st 2020 and will end on December 31st 2026.

INTERVENTION AREAS



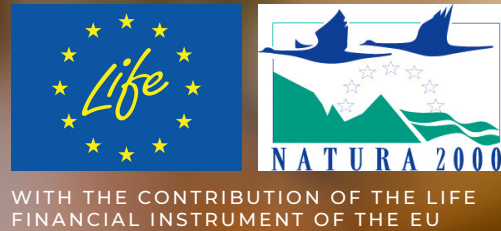
The intervention areas of the Life Insubricus project are located within 14 Natura 2000 sites in the regions of Lombardy and Piedmont. The selected areas play a fundamental role in the protection of the Pelobate fosco. Their restoration and the creation of new wetlands will not only increase the functionality of the regional ecological networks, but will also have positive effects on the fauna and flora of these valuable habitats.

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PELOBATE FOSCO

Pelobates fuscus insubricus



Nickname: Spade Toad, Garlic Toad

Length ♂ : 6.5 cm
Length ♀ : 8 cm
Tadpole length: up to 17 cm

Coloration: Whitish-grey or brown, with brown or reddish spots.

Environments: Pelobate fosco prefers woods and fields with soft soil. Difficult to observe because of its fossorial habits, in fact it spends a lot of time underground. For reproduction it uses wetlands, generally of high extension, which dry up in summer.

Curiosity: Smells like garlic

Conservation status: Bad

LIFE INSUBRICUS ACTIONS

MONITORING

The current data on the distribution of the species, the population size and the habitat status before and after the interventions will be updated and evaluated. Furthermore, socio-economic impact of the project on ecosystem services will be evaluated.



INCREASE IN THE FUNCTIONALITY OF WETLANDS

Through actions of enlargement and excavation of new ponds, installation of locks for water regulation and a better management of the bank vegetation, the connectivity of isolated cores and the genetic exchange of the Pelobate fosco will be favored. The areas will be therefore suitable for reproduction and larval development of the amphibian.



NEW BREEDING CAGES AND STRENGTHENING OF EXISTING POPULATIONS

In some areas of intervention breeding cages will be installed to allow Pelobate fosco to perform part of the life cycle, without any danger, decreasing the probability of being predated and optimizing the reproductive success.



REPOPULATION AND REINTRODUCTION OF PELOBATE FOSCO

From the breeding cages, part of the tadpoles will be released in other areas assigned to restocking, in order to increase the population and ensure its survival in the long term.

INVASIVE SPECIES CONTAINMENT

The objective is to reduce the population density of the Louisiana crayfish (*Procambarus clarkii*), an Invasive Alien Species (IAS) widespread in Italy, a direct predator of amphibian eggs and larvae. Action is taken either through direct removal or through the total draining of some basins; this species, unlike pelobate, although it tolerates dry periods, is more frequent in perennial environments.



TRAINING , DISSEMINATION AND AWARENESS

Primary school students, university trainees, volunteers, landowners and stakeholders are expected to be involved in the project. Training and awareness-raising on project issues will have an effect not only in the immediate term, through the help they will provide during monitoring activities, but also in After-Life period in maintaining the conservation status of the species in the long term.