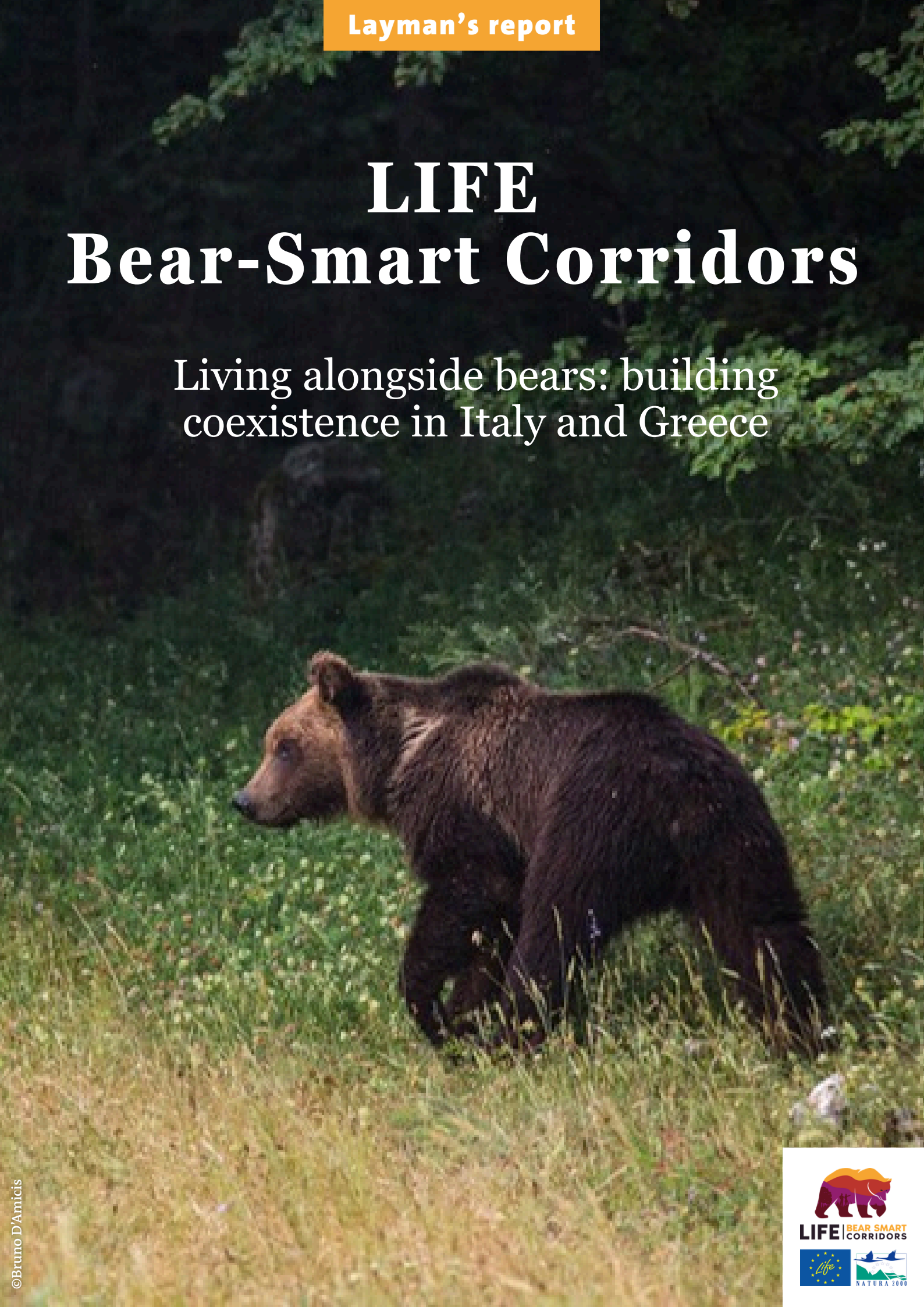
Layman's report

LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors

Living alongside bears: building coexistence in Italy and Greece



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Introduction

Living together again

For thousands of years, people and brown bears shared European landscapes. Forests, mountains and river valleys provided space for both wildlife and local communities to thrive. But over time, changes in land use, habitat fragmentation and growing human pressure reduced opportunities for coexistence. Encounters with bears became less familiar, and often more challenging.

Today, the recovery of brown bear populations in parts of Europe is an important conservation success. Yet it also raises an important question: how can people and bears live alongside each other in ways that are safe, practical and beneficial for both?

Bears are highly adaptable animals that move across large territories in search of food and suitable habitat. As their routes increasingly overlap with villages, farms, roads and other human activities, conflicts can arise. Easy access to food near settlements, damage to crops or property, and concerns for safety can affect local livelihoods and reduce acceptance of wildlife.

The LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors project was created to address this challenge.

Working in important bear landscapes in Italy and Greece, focused on implementing practical solutions to help people and bears coexist. Rather than reacting only when problems occur, the project introduced a proactive approach: reducing attractants, improving habitat conditions, supporting local livelihoods and helping communities become better prepared to live alongside wildlife.

At the centre of this approach is the idea of Bear-Smart Communities: places where residents, local authorities, protected areas, businesses and conservation organisations work together to reduce conflict and strengthen coexistence.

Coordinated by Rewilding Europe and implemented by a partnership of twelve organisations from Italy and Greece, the project brought together conservation expertise, local knowledge and community action. From protected area managers and municipalities to NGOs, researchers, volunteers and local residents, many people contributed to building landscapes where both bears and people can thrive.

LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors shows that coexistence is not only possible: it can become a foundation for healthier ecosystems and more resilient rural communities.



©James Shooter

Meet the brown bear

A symbol of wild Europe



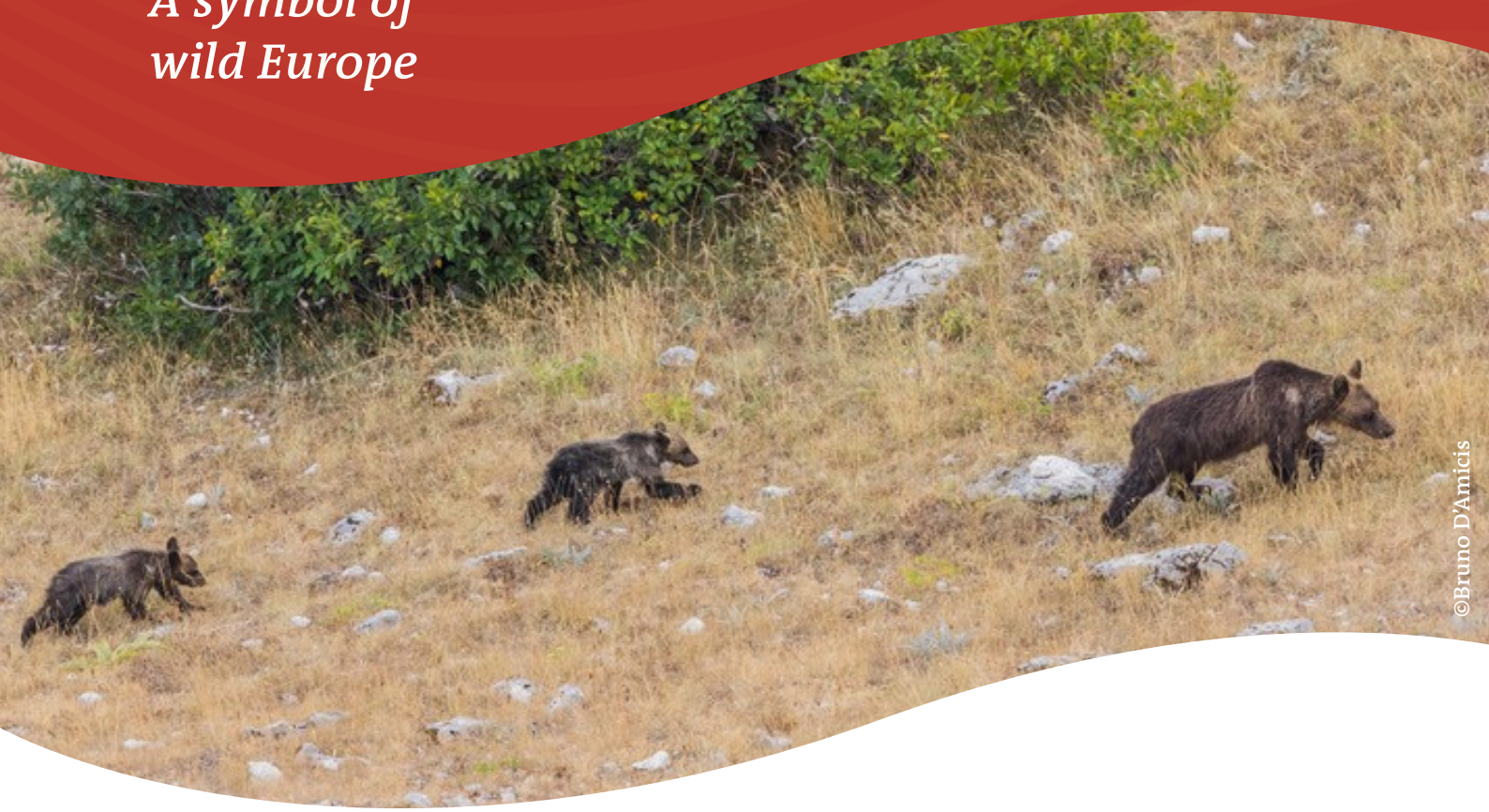
The brown bear is one of Europe's largest land mammals and one of its most recognisable symbols of wilderness. Adult males can weigh more than 200 kilograms, yet despite their size, bears are generally quiet, intelligent and surprisingly elusive animals. With an excellent sense of smell and large home ranges, they move across forests, mountains and river valleys in search of food, shelter and opportunities to avoid disturbance.

Brown bears are omnivores. Most of their diet consists of plants, berries, fruits, roots, insects and other naturally available foods, with only a small proportion coming from animal sources. They play an important ecological role by dispersing seeds, shaping vegetation dynamics and helping maintain healthy and connected ecosystems.

Once widespread across Europe, brown bears declined dramatically because of habitat loss, fragmentation and persecution. Today, populations are recovering in some regions, but many remain vulnerable and fragmented. Across Europe, brown bears are listed in Annexes II and IV of the EU Habitats Directive and subject to strict protection across most of its European range.

Meet the brown bear

A symbol of wild Europe



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Greece hosts Europe's southernmost brown bear population, with an estimated 760 (range: 565–870) individuals living mainly in the Pindos and Rhodope Mountain ranges.

In **Italy** lives an even rarer treasure: the Marsican (Apennine) brown bear: a unique subspecies found nowhere else in the world. Isolated in the Central Apennines for thousands of years, it developed distinct genetic and physical characteristics. Today, around 81 individuals remain (the estimate ranges between 73 and 88), with 43 females and 38 males, making it one of Europe's rarest mammals. It is listed as Critically Endangered in Italy and protected under both Italian national legislation and European conservation law. Because bears reproduce slowly and occupy large territories, even a small increase in mortality can affect entire populations.

Despite their reputation, bears rarely seek contact with people. Most conflicts emerge when human food sources become easily accessible.
Protecting bears means creating landscapes where wild animals remain wild and where people can live and thrive alongside them.


©Bruno D'Amicis
Protecting bears means creating landscapes where wild animals remain wild and where people can live and thrive alongside them.

The project in NUMBERS

18 **BEAR-SMART COMMUNITIES ESTABLISHED**

INVOLVING AROUND **15,000** INHABITANTS IN CENTRAL APENNINES OF ITALY AND AROUND **97,800** IN GREECE

37 **BUSINESSES AND ENTREPRENEURS ENGAGED IN CENTRAL APENNINES**

THROUGH COEXISTENCE AND NATURE-BASED ECONOMY INITIATIVES

2 COUNTRIES WORKING TOGETHER: ITALY AND GREECE

12 PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

NATURA 2000 SITES CONNECTED AND SUPPORTED

6 IN GREECE **22** IN CENTRAL APENNINES

MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING AT MUNICIPAL LEVEL TO DEVELOP BSC

12 IN GREECE **16** IN CENTRAL APENNINES

PREVENTIVE MEASURES TO REDUCE CONFLICT

670 ELECTRIC FENCES

650 IN CENTRAL APENNINES
20 IN GREECE

63 BEAR-PROOF CHICKEN COOPS AND REINFORCED DOORS

TO PROTECT SMALL FARMS AND APIARIES IN CENTRAL APENNINES

130 BEAR-PROOF WASTE BINS

110 IN THE APENNINES
20 IN GREECE

BEAR CORRIDORS IMPROVED FOR SAFER COEXISTENCE

AROUND **100.000** HECTARES IN ITALY AND **286.700** IN GREECE

37

DANGEROUS WATER WELLS SECURED

27 IN ITALY
10 IN GREECE

5379

ABANDONED MOUNTAIN FRUIT TREES PRUNED ON **624** HA IN CENTRAL APENNINES OF ITALY

600

ANTI-POISON KITS DISTRIBUTED IN GREECE

1250

SCHOOL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

AROUND **400**

VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED IN CENTRAL APENNINES

~1000 PEOPLE

DIRECTLY INVOLVED THROUGH WORKSHOPS, EVENTS AND LOCAL ACTIVITIES - 7,000 IN ITALY AND 4,000 IN GREECE.

81 ESTIMATED MARSICAN BROWN BEARS IN ITALY
73-88

760 ESTIMATED BROWN BEARS IN GREECE
565-870

7 BEAR INTERVENTION UNITS

5 IN ITALY
2 IN GREECE

BEAR TRAILS

200 KM OF "IL CAMMINO PER L'ORSO" - IN CENTRAL APENNINES AND 8 KM IN GREECE WITH RELATED VISITOR EXPERIENCES DEVELOPED

MONITORING BEARS

	CAMERA TRAPS ISTALLED	RECORDS FROM CAMERA TRAPS	DIRECT SIGHTINGS	SIGNS OF PRESENCE
ITALY	289	112	77	480
TRIKALA METEORA	109	180	Moreover, cameras were placed to monitor water wells and selected garbage bins, before and after intervention, to assess effectiveness.	
AMYNTAIO	64	1.666	77 GENETIC STATIONS	560 GENETIC SAMPLES ~50 BEARS



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Where we work

Connecting landscapes for people and bears

LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors worked in some of Europe's most important bear landscapes: from the mountains of Central Italy to the forested corridors of northern and central Greece.

The project focused not only on isolated protected areas, but on the spaces in between: ecological corridors. These are landscapes that allow bears to move safely between habitat areas, find food, establish new territories and maintain healthy populations over time.



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Italy

Helping the Marsican bear expand its range

In Central Italy, actions focused on four priority corridors in the Apennines for the expansion of the Marsican brown bear and within its core area, the Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise National Park (ALMNP).

ALMNP – Monte Genzana corridor
A key connection supporting bear movement beyond the historical core area.
ALMNP – Sirente Velino corridor
An important corridor connecting protected mountain landscapes to suitable, underutilized habitats that would benefit from greater protection.
PNALM – Gran Sasso corridor
Supporting natural recolonisation towards Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga National Park, where bears have recently returned.
Gran Sasso internal expansion area
Creating safer conditions for bears already exploring and establishing new territories.

Together, these corridors connect a wider network of protected landscapes with the potential to support future bear expansion.


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Greece

Strengthening connections across mountain landscapes

In Greece, the project worked in two important coexistence corridors:

Amyntaio corridor
Connecting the Vitsi–Varnoundas bear population with newer bear areas in Mount Vermio and Mount Voras. Recently, on 4 June 2026, the Greek Ministry of Environment and Energy signed and published the Official Government Gazette (FEK) designating the Mount Vernon–Vitsi area as a Protected Landscape. This important achievement was made possible through the study prepared primarily by the Callisto project team in collaboration with three external consultants from Amyntaio and Florina.

Trikala – Meteora corridor
Supporting movement between southern and central Pindos populations and strengthening connectivity across the wider landscape.

Across both countries, Bear-Smart Communities became the social link within ecological corridors, helping people and bears share landscapes more successfully.

The Bear-Smart idea

From conflict to coexistence

People and bears have shared landscapes for centuries, but coexistence does not happen by chance. It requires practical solutions, shared responsibility and communities that feel confident living alongside wildlife.

This is the idea behind a Bear-Smart Community.

Originally developed in British Columbia, Canada, the Bear-Smart approach helps communities prevent conflicts before they happen. Rather than reacting to individual incidents, it focuses on reducing the root causes that attract bears into human spaces: unsecured waste, easily accessible food, vulnerable livestock areas and limited awareness of bear behaviour.

At the start of LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors, project partners travelled to Canada to experience this approach first-hand and learn directly from communities already putting it into practice. The visit showed how local authorities, residents and conservation organisations can work together to create safer conditions for both people and wildlife.

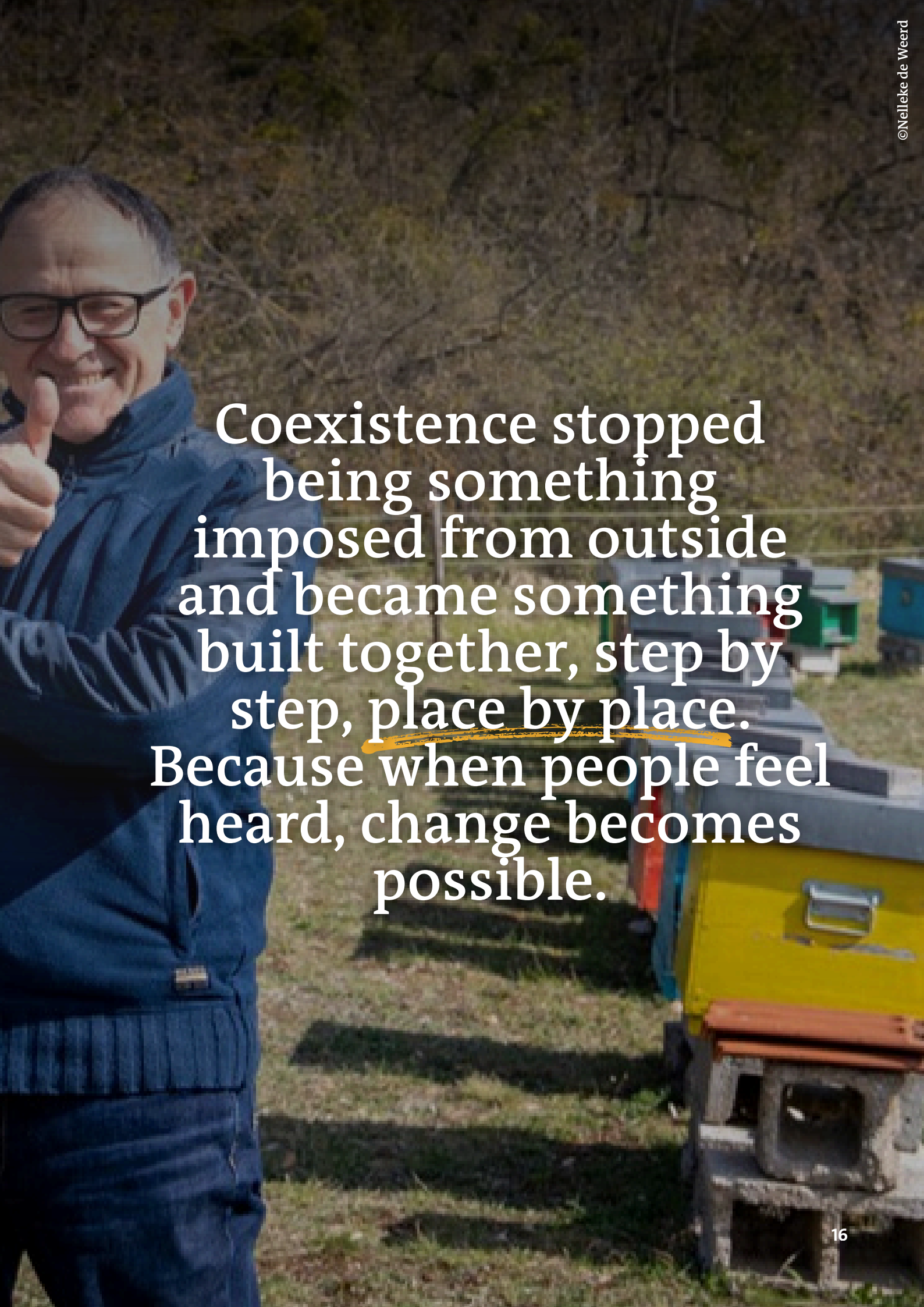
The concept was then adapted to European realities and introduced in Italy and Greece for the first time at a landscape scale.

But successful coexistence starts with understanding people.

Many communities in project areas already live close to bears. While support for conservation is often strong, everyday concerns remain real — damage to crops and beehives, livestock losses, bears approaching villages, or uncertainty about how to respond to encounters.

That is why the project began by listening.

Through interviews, surveys, community meetings, workshops and ongoing dialogue, residents, farmers, businesses, authorities and local groups helped identify concerns, priorities and practical solutions that fit local realities. Bear-Smart Communities are built around a simple principle: everyone has a role to play. Residents, schools, municipalities, businesses, protected areas and volunteers work together to reduce attractants, improve preparedness and create a positive relationship with wildlife. This means practical measures, but also trust-building, education and local ownership.



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Activities and Results

Making communities Bear-Smart

At the heart of LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors was the idea that long-term coexistence between people and bears can only succeed when local communities become active partners in conservation.

To put this into practice, the project supported the establishment and operation of **18 Bear-Smart Communities** (BSCs) across project areas in Italy and Greece. These brought together municipalities, protected area managers, residents, farmers, businesses, researchers and civil society around a shared approach to coexistence.

The Bear-Smart Community concept and **guidelines** were developed jointly by project partners, inspired by international experience and adapted to European realities.

Each Bear-Smart Community followed a structured **participatory process**. First, project teams worked with local stakeholders to understand local realities. They assessed conflict drivers, mapped attractants such as unsecured waste, fruit trees and vulnerable farms, and collected local knowledge on bear presence and interactions. Surveys and interviews helped capture public perceptions, attitudes and concerns.

Next, dedicated **Bear-Smart Community Committees** were established at municipal level as the core governance mechanism. Bringing together local authorities, community representatives and technical experts, these committees became the main platform for dialogue, decision-making and coordination.

Through committee meetings and workshops, communities then co-designed **local solutions**: mapping conflict hotspots, discussing priorities and identifying practical actions that fit local needs and opportunities.

The process resulted in the development of **Coexistence Plans**: locally tailored roadmaps combining conflict prevention measures, attractant management, awareness and education activities, stakeholder responsibilities, monitoring approaches and opportunities for longer-term coexistence-based implementation.

BEAR- SMART COMMUNITIES APPROACH AND TOOLS	ACTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES
UNDERSTANDING LOCAL REALITIES	Conflict drivers, attractants, perceptions
COMMUNITY COMMITTEES	Co-designing solutions: coexistence planning
COEXISTENCE PLANS	Locally tailored roadmaps: hotspot mapping, shared priorities
ONGOING GOVERNANCE	Governance and dialogue. Continuous review.

By the final phase of the project, coexistence planning had become embedded in local governance. Numerous committee meetings helped review conflict maps, validate priorities and refine local action plans through continuous feedback.

Residents remained at the centre of the process, while volunteers supported selected field activities and strengthened connections between conservation teams and local communities.

Bear-Smart Communities show that coexistence is not a one-off intervention, but an ongoing process of listening, planning and acting together.


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Reducing conflict, protecting livelihoods

Reducing conflict does not mean separating people and bears: it means making communities better prepared to live alongside wildlife.

Across project areas in Italy and Greece, LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors worked directly with residents, farmers and local authorities to prevent situations that most often lead to conflict and economic loss. The project focused on practical, tested measures that reduce opportunities for bears to access human-related food sources and discourage them from approaching settlements.

Protecting farms and rural livelihoods was a key priority. **670 electric fences**, together with **63 bear-proof chicken coops and reinforced doors**, were installed to protect livestock, poultry, beehives and small agricultural activities. These measures helped reduce damage while allowing people to continue traditional land use practices in bear landscapes.

Waste management was another essential part of prevention. Bears are intelligent and quickly learn where food can be found. Once animals become accustomed to human food sources, conflicts become more likely.

To reduce this risk, the project supported the installation of **130 bear-proof waste** bins across target communities. Combined with awareness activities and local engagement, these interventions helped make settlements less attractive to bears and reduced the likelihood of repeated visits.

Prevention measures were accompanied by technical advice, field visits and direct cooperation with residents to adapt solutions to local conditions and build confidence in their use.

The project also showed that coexistence becomes easier when communities are not left alone to respond to challenges.

By investing in prevention instead of reacting to conflict, LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors helped create safer conditions for people, protect livelihoods and support healthier relationships between communities and wildlife.



Small changes on the ground can make a big difference for coexistence.

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Creating more suitable and safer habitat for bears

Coexistence is not only about making communities safer, it is also about making nature work better. When wild areas provide what bears need, and remove unnecessary risks, bears are more likely to remain wild.

Brown bears naturally spend most of their time away from settlements when wild habitats provide enough food, shelter and opportunities to move safely across the landscape. That is why LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors invested in improving habitat quality across key ecological corridors.

One focus was increasing the availability of natural food sources.
In the Italian project area, the teams restored abandoned mountain orchards by pruning **more than 5300 fruit trees** and improved habitat conditions across **624 hectares**. Traditional fruit trees, including apple, pear and cherry, provide valuable seasonal food for bears and many other wildlife species. Restoring them helps keep resources for bears and other wildlife in natural areas.

The project also improved habitat connectivity and reduced hidden risks in the landscape.

More than **78 kilometres of obsolete barbed wire** fencing were removed, allowing bears and other wildlife to move more freely while reducing the risk of injury. At the same time, **37 mountain water troughs and wells were made safe** for bears and other wildlife. While important for livestock and water collection, these structures can become deadly traps when animals fall in and are unable to escape. The project teams worked with local authorities and land managers to identify risk locations and apply practical solutions such as closing the ditches, installing escape ramps, protective fencing and structural adaptations.

These actions were implemented together with local partners, land managers and volunteers, combining ecological restoration with practical stewardship.

Although each intervention may seem small on its own, together they create landscapes that function better for wildlife.



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People ready to act: Building local capacity for coexistence

Successful coexistence depends not only on infrastructure and habitat, but also on people who are prepared to act.

LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors helped strengthen local capacity to prevent, respond to and reduce human–bear conflicts through practical tools, training and cooperation.

In Italy and Greece, **Bear Intervention Units** (BIUs) brought together local teams capable of responding quickly to emerging situations. Their role ranged from supporting communities after bear incidents and helping prevent damage by providing advice on coexistence measures and promoting safe practices. Rapid response helped address problems early and reduce the risk of escalation.

At the same time, the project invested in building longer-term preparedness among communities and land users. Through **capacity-building workshops, practical training sessions and knowledge exchange activities**, local stakeholders strengthened their understanding of bear behaviour, conflict prevention measures and appropriate responses to wildlife-related incidents. These activities helped build confidence, improve coordination and create stronger local networks for coexistence.

In Greece, a dedicated action addressed a less visible but important challenge linked to coexistence: the illegal use of poisoned bait. While poison poses a threat to wildlife, it also affects livestock guarding dogs: one of the most effective and affordable non-lethal tools for protecting herds from wildlife damage.

To strengthen this first line of coexistence, the project developed and distributed around **600 anti-poison first aid kits** to livestock farmers and supported them with practical training and veterinary guidance. Farmers learned how to recognise signs of poisoning, provide immediate support to affected dogs and seek professional assistance.

By protecting livestock guarding dogs, the project helped communities maintain effective non-lethal livestock protection and reduce pressures that can lead to conflict with wildlife.

Together, rapid response, practical support and local capacity-building helped communities become more confident and better prepared to live alongside bears. Because coexistence works best when people have the tools to respond.



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Building coexistence is not a one-time effort: it requires listening, learning and adapting over time.

Monitoring change together

Throughout LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors, monitoring and research played a central role in understanding both bear ecology and people's experiences of living alongside wildlife.

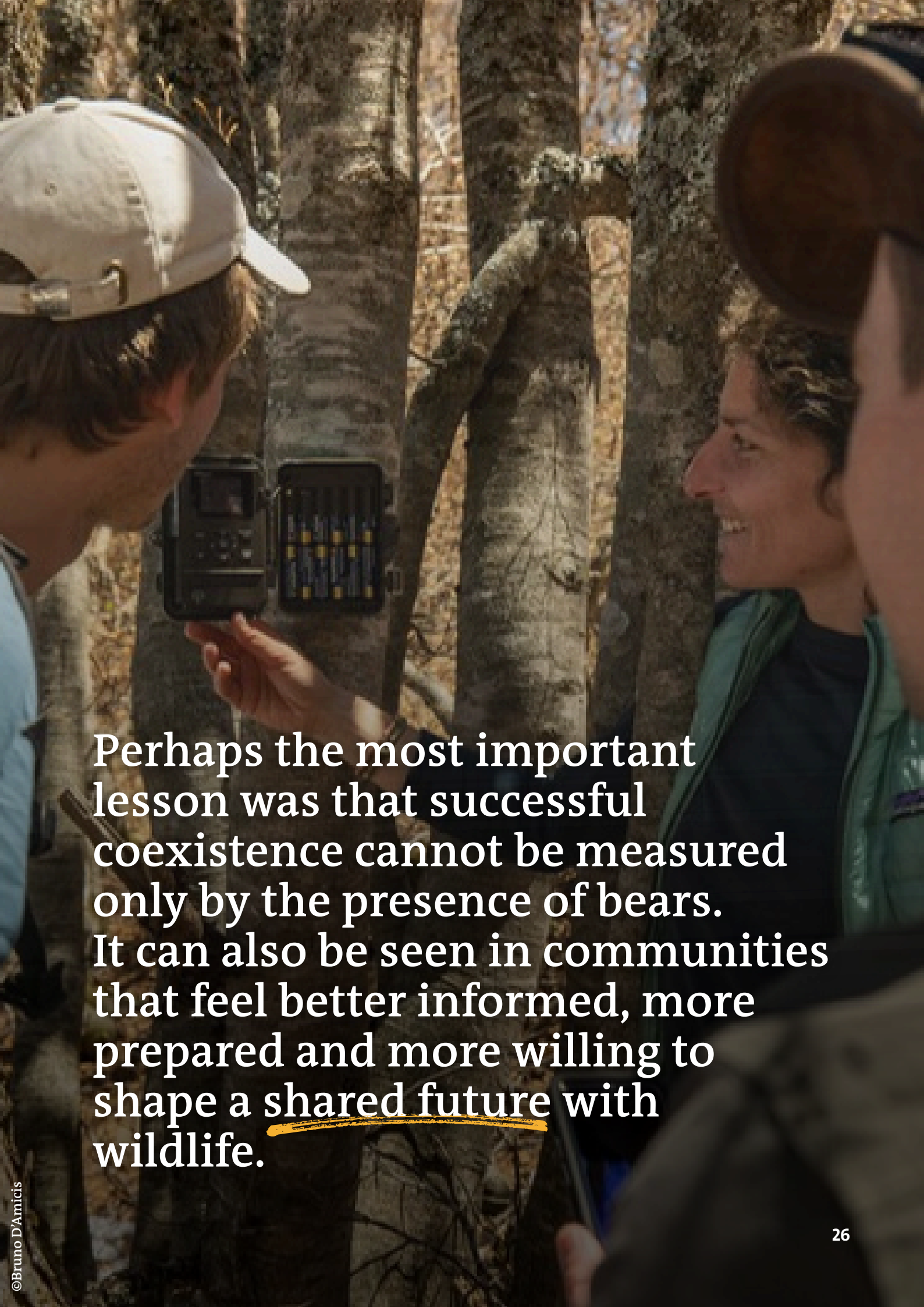
The project combined scientific methods with local knowledge and community participation to track change and guide decisions. Across project areas, teams monitored bear presence, habitat use and corridor functionality using methods such as camera traps, hair traps, field observations and the collection of biological evidence, in collaboration with the existing bear monitoring network. In Greece, this included the deployment of monitoring stations and genetic sampling to better understand how bears move across landscapes and use ecological corridors.

At the same time, communities themselves became part of the process. Citizen science approaches encouraged residents, local stakeholders and volunteers to contribute observations, report challenges and support field activities. Local knowledge helped identify attractants, understand conflict patterns and improve the design of coexistence measures.

Monitoring also focused on people.

Interviews, surveys and participatory workshops carried out at different stages of the project helped assess public attitudes, understand concerns and measure how perceptions evolved over time. Community meetings and feedback from Bear-Smart Community Committees were continuously analysed to improve actions and strengthen local ownership.

The effectiveness of practical interventions - from prevention measures to awareness activities - was also evaluated. Monitoring showed strong engagement from participants, positive feedback from communities and growing understanding of coexistence approaches.



Perhaps the most important lesson was that successful coexistence cannot be measured only by the presence of bears. It can also be seen in communities that feel better informed, more prepared and more willing to shape a shared future with wildlife.

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Bears supporting local economies

Living alongside wildlife can bring challenges, but it can also create new opportunities.

LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors worked to show that coexistence with bears can support local development by strengthening nature-based economies and helping communities' benefit from healthy, functioning landscapes.

A key part of this work was the creation of an Enterprise Network for Coexistence, a group of 37 local entrepreneurs and businesses committed to promoting coexistence and developing economic activities connected to nature and local identity.

The network brought together people from different sectors, including hospitality, local food production, guiding, outdoor experiences and rural tourism. Through training, exchanges and collaboration, participants explored how coexistence with wildlife can become part of a stronger local economy rather than a barrier to development.

The project teams worked with businesses to identify opportunities linked to bear landscapes and support the development of experiences and services that encourage responsible visitation and strengthen local value chains.

This included work on local tourism concepts and visitor experiences designed to connect people with nature while promoting good coexistence practices. The approach recognised that communities are more likely to support conservation when they can see tangible social and economic benefits.

At the same time, visitors increasingly seek authentic experiences in landscapes where nature remains dynamic and wildlife still has space.

By linking local livelihoods with healthy ecosystems, the project helped demonstrate that bears are not only a species to protect: they can also become part of a positive story of regional identity, local pride and economic resilience.



When nature thrives, communities can thrive too.

©Andrea Boccini

Changing perceptions

Long-term coexistence begins with how people see and understand wildlife. That is why LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors invested strongly in education, awareness and communication, helping turn coexistence from an abstract idea into something people could experience, discuss and take part in.

Across Italy and Greece, the project reached thousands of people through educational programmes, community events, media outreach and public campaigns. Schools, local communities and visitors were invited to explore not only how bears live, but also what people can do to share landscapes more successfully.

Children and young people became a special focus.



©ARCTUROS

Among the highlights in Italy was **“Wild Condominium”**, an original theatre production created to explore coexistence between people and wildlife in an engaging and accessible way. Staged 10 times during the project, the performances reached young audiences and local communities, proving that theatre can open conversations about wildlife in ways that facts and data alone often cannot.

Also, a specific **educational programme** carried out in the whole project area involved hundreds of students from 3 to 13 years old: through games, animations, storytelling, creative hands-on work, exploration experiences in nature and a contest called **“Humans and bears: a daily coexistence”**, pupils and teenagers learned more about bears and their habits, as well as the interactions between bears and humans.

In Greece, the educational puppet theatre performance **“Hush… the Brown Bear Will Wake Up”** introduced schoolchildren to the world of bears through storytelling and participation. The performance later inspired an illustrated children’s book, helping schools and families continue the conversation beyond project activities.

Educational materials, interpretive panels and nature trails further encouraged people to discover bear landscapes directly and understand their role in coexistence. In Trikala-Meteora two **thematic trails of 8 km** in total were created, orientation and interpretation boards along the routes were installed, and dedicated teachers' guide and student leaflets were produced and distributed to local schools and visitors.

The project also maintained an active presence through its website, social **media** channels, documentaries, media stories and local communication campaigns, sharing experiences from the field with wider audiences.

Festivals, public events and exchanges in both countries created spaces where communities, visitors and experts could meet, celebrate local identity and discuss coexistence. Networking with other LIFE projects and conservation initiatives helped spread lessons learned and strengthen a growing European community working on human–wildlife coexistence.



©CALLISTO

Changing perceptions takes time, but every experience helps build future generations that are better prepared to live alongside wildlife



©Filippo Castellucci

Stories from the field

Behind every fence installed, orchard restored or community meeting held there are people learning what coexistence means in everyday life.
Because coexistence is not created by projects alone. It is created by people: one decision, one conversation and one community at a time.



©Bruno D'Amicis

The farmer

Protecting livelihoods, staying open to wildlife

For many livestock farmers and small producers, living near bears means balancing uncertainty with adaptation. Across the project areas, prevention measures such as electric fences, improved infrastructure and practical support helped reduce risks and strengthen confidence. For some, coexistence became less about reacting to wildlife and more about preventing problems before they happen.

«The mountains belong to everyone, to us, to wolves and to bears alike. But coexistence is not a romantic fairy tale: it is daily work built on prevention, respect and sacrifice. Those who live and work in these areas cannot be left alone to bear the burden of a choice that concerns society as a whole: institutions, communities and citizens must each play their part.»

Pietro & Italia
Zooristur farm
Central Apennines



©Zooristur

«When we first went there, we were told there was no bear presence. This is why they didn't have any electric fences. After the first few damages to beehives by bears, the challenge was where to find reliable fencing. But the people organized themselves. If this had been handled at a community level, or whatever you want to call it, and there had been better organization and coordination, things would have been even better.»

Beekeeper, Bear-Smart Community of Trikala-Meteora



©Nelleke de Weerd

The entrepreneur

Creating value from coexistence

Through the Enterprise Network for Coexistence, local businesses explored how healthy landscapes and wildlife can support local economies. From accommodation providers and guides to food producers and tourism initiatives, entrepreneurs began connecting their work more closely to local identity and nature-based opportunities.

«The Bear-Smart Community has become a necessity. We need to start thinking about the way we live differently, especially in these territories. Individualism has to be set aside a little, precisely because we are very small. So, building a network to create critical mass. We need to start thinking as cooperating territories rather than as individual, disconnected entities in the landscape.»

Pierdomenico - TrippinMolise
Central Apennines

©Andrea Boccini

The volunteer & community members

Becoming part of the solution

Volunteers and residents contributed in many ways: supporting field activities, participating in workshops, restoring habitats and helping create dialogue around coexistence.
Bear-Smart Communities showed that local knowledge and participation are essential ingredients of long-term change.

«Field activities were a great way to develop practical skills in a completely different environment. Coming from a flat and highly developed country, working in wild and mountainous terrain was a very valuable experience that taught me a great deal, both on a professional and personal level. Living in a community where people are confronted with wildlife on a daily basis left a strong impression on me. It was inspiring to see that it is possible for people and wildlife to live in close proximity when the right precautions are taken. Staying here made me realize that the people who coexist with wildlife are one of, if not the most, important keys to the conservation and protection of nature.»

Noah, 23 years old
Central Apennines

©Filippo Castellucci

The next generation

Changing perceptions through experience

Children and young people became active participants through educational programmes, theatre performances, outdoor learning and creative activities. Whether discovering bears through the “Wild Condominium” theatre experience and the educational programmes in Italy and Greece, many encountered coexistence not as a problem to solve, but as a relationship to build.



«I liked the whole educational programme through different activities: nature exploration, watching documentaries, playing outdoors and interpreting a bear. But I liked the most the participation in the contest “Human-bear: a daily coexistence” through a theatre performance and playing it several times with my classmates. It was very enthusiastic and we won one of the first prizes!»

Luigi, 8 years old
Central Apennines

©Bruno D'Amicis

Results that last

LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors showed that coexistence between people and bears is not only possible: it can become part of everyday life.

Over five years, the project introduced and tested the Bear-Smart approach in Europe, bringing together communities, protected areas, municipalities, researchers and businesses across Italy and Greece.

Together, they established **18 Bear-Smart Communities**, implemented practical prevention measures, restored habitats, strengthened local capacity and created new opportunities linked to nature-based development.
One of the project's strongest lessons is that coexistence cannot rely on individual actions alone. Lasting change comes from combining community participation, prevention, habitat improvement, education and local ownership.

Many of the structures and tools created through the project - local committees, coexistence plans, educational materials, partnerships and practical measures - are designed to continue beyond the LIFE funding period and support long-term coexistence in project areas.

The experience gained and lessons learned also create opportunities for replication in other regions across Europe, helping more communities build a future where people and wildlife thrive together.

Therefore, beyond the end of the LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors project the local partners and protected areas will continue to support **coexistence** measures, the local governance of the Bear-Smart Communities, the monitoring in key expansion areas as well as engagement building activities.

This is a key requirement in order to make coexistence sustainable in the long term, and it will be the core of the After-LIFE Conservation plan.

Acknowledgements

The achievements of LIFE Bear-Smart Corridors were made possible through the commitment, collaboration and enthusiasm of many people and organisations across Europe.

We sincerely thank the LIFE Programme of the European Union for supporting this initiative and helping demonstrate new approaches to coexistence between people and wildlife.

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A special thank you goes to the members of the Bear-Smart Communities and local committees whose trust and engagement helped shape practical solutions on the ground.

We also thank partner initiatives, networks and organisations across Europe and beyond for sharing knowledge and inspiring collaboration.

Most importantly, this project reminds us that coexistence is not created by a single organisation: it is built together. Thank you for helping create landscapes where both people and bears can thrive.



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