



EC-SQUARE Eradication and control of grey squirrel: actions for preservation of biodiversity in forest ecosystems

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Task Force LIFE EC-SQUARE



The LIFE EC-SQUARE project in brief

Duration: From 01 September 2010 to 31 March 2015

Total budget: € 2.001.113,00 (EC co-financing 45.43%)

Coordinating beneficiary: Regione Lombardia (Italy)

Other partners: Regione Piemonte, Regione Liguria, Università degli Studi dell'Insubria, Università degli Studi di Torino, Università degli Studi di Genova, Istituto Oikos (Italy)

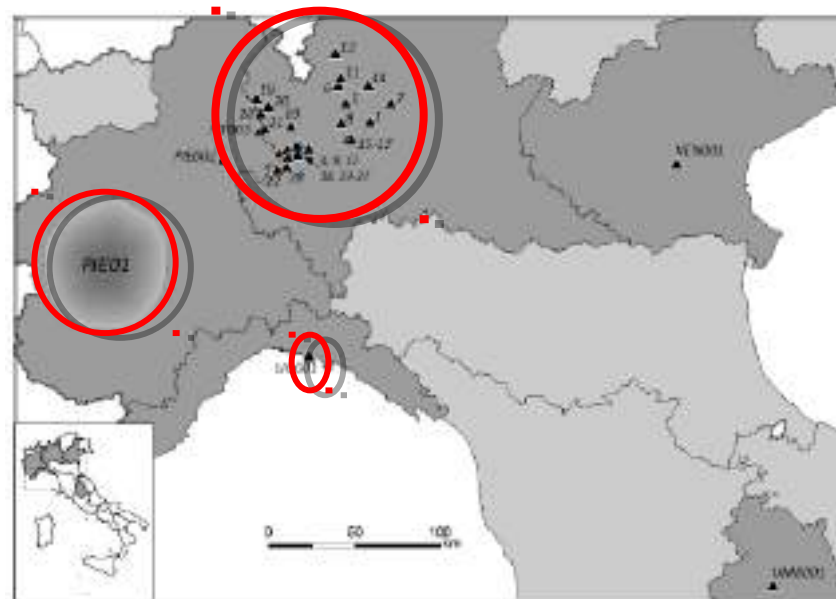
Target species: *Sciurus carolinensis* and *Callosciurus erythraeus* (Mammalia, Rodentia, Sciuridae) - now both included in the Regulation (EU) 1143/2014 [Regulation (EU) 1141/2016 of 13 July 2016]

More info on web site: www.rossoscoiattolo.eu



Background (before 2010)...

Our areas of intervention are located in a geographical context with high anthropic presence in Northern Italy: **high tendency to an aesthetic approach to species (rather than a functional one)** – the importance of communication and public opinion involvement



Background (before 2010)...

Psychological block of public administrations,
consequence of the Saluzzo Justice Court intervention in
1997 to stop the first trial (evaluation of techniques) to
eradicate the grey squirrel in Piedmont – **the importance
of technical training**

what are other
words for
psychological block?



hang-up, inhibition,
mental block, block, difficulty,
repression, reservation,
neurosis, phobia, preoccupation



During the early stages of the project...

Attempts to stop the project, a record (for a LIFE project...):

- 3 appeals to the Administrative Regional Court (TAR) of Piedmont and Liguria
- 2 appeals to the State Council and interpellations to the Government (Senate and Chamber)
- Questions to the Regional Councils of Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria
- discussions with the Environment Commission of the Province of Milan with public audition
- Documentation (deeds) access requests to the three Regions, Provinces, Parks, Università dell'Insubria
- Local and national petitions and various mail-bombing campaigns
- A petition to the European Parliament

In addition, acts of widespread vandalism and intimidation (e.g. photos of members of the Task Force and other operators on web with indication of the role of “squirrel killers”)...

Do they want to kill the Nervi squirrels?

Empathetic vs. functional perception: an animal species can induce profound and different attitudes in the public opinion.



During the final stages of the project...

...thanks to a careful strategy that made it possible to analyze all the possible criticalities in advance, every attempt to stop the project failed and consequently strengthened it...

The 1997 psychological block has finally been removed... perhaps it is one of the greatest achievements of the EC-SQUARE LIFE Project



Main results achieved...

Now we can... talk about alien species eradication without being censored, thanks to:

- 88 meetings with stakeholders
- 57.000 visit to the web site (131.000 as of today)
- 100.000 contacts on facebook
- More than 200 articles on newspapers and magazines
- 30.000 copies of a brochure
- More than 3.000 students involved

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

SQUIRREL



ERADICATION

Main results achieved...

Ministerial Decree banning grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) and Pallas's squirrel (*Callosciurus erythraeus*) from pet trade, issued also thanks to the technical support of the EC-SQUARE project

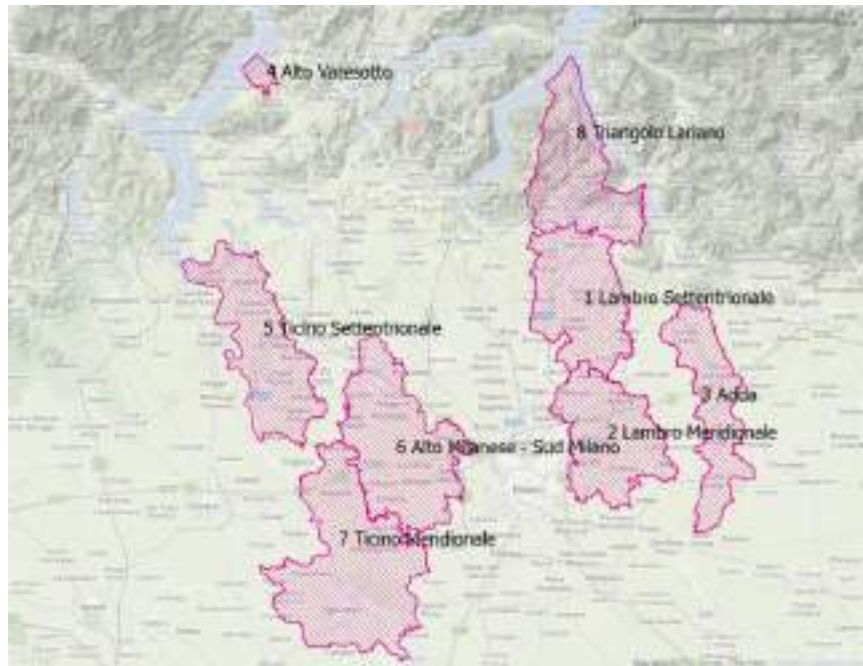


**Decreto interministeriale 24
dicembre 2012 - Detenzione e
commercio di alcune specie**

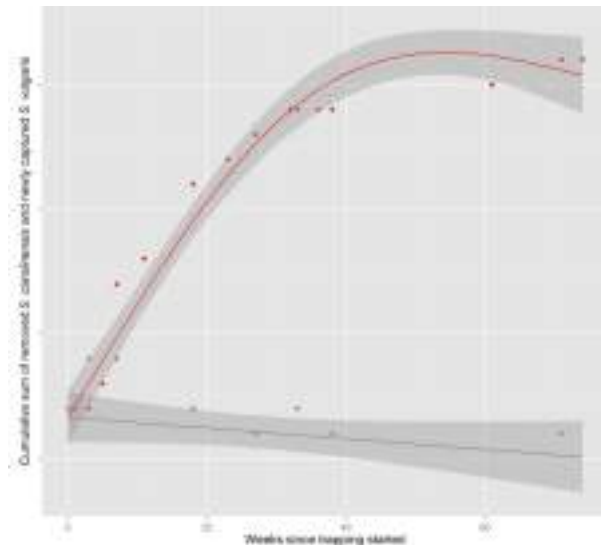
Main results achieved...

Some nuclei of alien squirrels have been removed in Lombardy.

The *Callosciurus erythraeus* population (at about 5 km from Switzerland) is strongly reduced (and shortly will be completely eradicated)

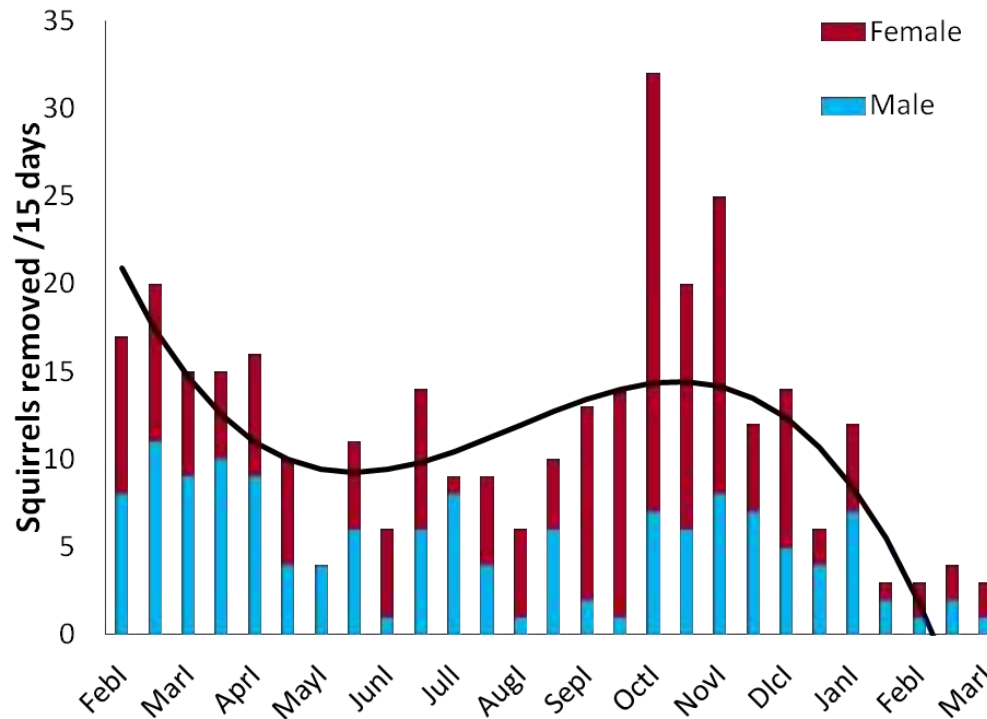


Good news! Where grey squirrels are removed **red squirrels** are coming back!



Main results achieved...

The grey squirrel urban population in Genoa Nervi Park is almost eradicated and activities are ongoing (by surgical sterilization as a mediation with local public opinion... possibly the first case in the world of "postponed" eradication through sterilization)



The main criticisms...

Eradication activities should be transformed into **routine activities**, involving not only trappers but also other staff and stakeholders, also by increasing the interest of private sectors (e.g. pest control companies etc.).

What to do in case of an emergency according to Scaredy Squirrel:



- 1: Panic
- 2: Run
- 3: Get kit

↑
Generalization

The main criticisms...

In the case of very small populations living in urban parks, for which euthanasia could induce hostility due to the strong affection feelings towards squirrels, the “removal” could be made by **surgical sterilization**, much more expensive and complicate to organize, but more easily acceptable by citizens. **Animal welfare groups must participate in the financing of these activities** which, in terms of costs / benefits, are less beneficial for the communities.

You can't have your cake and eat it too....

[In italiano: “non si può avere la botte piena e la moglie ubriaca”. Antico detto popolare]



The main criticisms...

Resources are currently too scarce.

Need to search for possible uses of trapped animals and not just consider them as a cost (e.g. disposal), to reduce eradication cost.

Need to involve more people in trapping with recognized professionalism.



The main criticisms...

Interventions are expensive and resource demanding.

New technical solutions are needed. A possible short-term solution would be the use of automatic traps (in areas of exclusive IAS presence) such as the New-Zealand model; the possibility for correct and safe use of rodenticides (in areas of exclusive IAS presence) must be considered.



LIFE project also as a tool for deepening knowledge...

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Thank you all for your attention!

