



UNIVERSITÀ
degli STUDI
di CATANIA

SiMuA



Museo dei Saperi e delle Mirabilia Siciliane

Mammals collection – Museum of Zoology and House of Butterflies

Dipartimento di Scienze Biologiche Geologiche e Ambientali

Palazzo Centrale Università di Catania

Sicily and circumsicilian Islands host the highest number of mammal species among all mediterranean islands, with 23 taxa excluding bats. Many of them colonized the island together with prehistoric man, while others, including rabbit and dormouse, were introduced in historical periods and are now regarded as parautochthonous. The proximity of Sicily to the continent, its extension and the large volume of trades, has brought over time to faunal modifications, and voluntary or involuntary introductions of mammals.



Hystrix cristata (Porcupine)

Porcupine is a Rodent distributed in North Africa and in Italy. It was probably introduced in the Italian peninsula in Roman times. It has a vegetarian diet and, in spite of its clumsy appearance, is very fast. Though protected, it is still illegally killed. It still remains a widespread, wrong, belief about the ability to launch its spines at distance.



Felis silvestris (Wild cat)

Wild cat is very wary of man. The appearance is reminiscent of domestic cat, but compared to this, wild cat is larger and sturdy; its tail is characterized by the presence of dark rings. The main risk factor for wild cat is represented by hybridization with domestic cats.



Vulpes vulpes (Fox)

Fox is the carnivore with the world's widest range and represents the most widespread carnivorous species in Sicily. It is an opportunistic and ecologically very adaptable species. In Sicily it is present from the sea level up to 2000 a.s.l. The improper use of poisoned mouthfuls to limit its diffusion caused the extinction of the last colony of griffon vultures.



Loxia curvirostra (Red crossbill)

It is a passerine, measuring between 14 and 23 cm. With a robust appearance, it has a peculiar beak with crossed tips. Males and females show evident sexual dichromatism, with plumage more reddish in males, more gray in females. Feeding consists almost exclusively of pine nuts. The only sedentary populations in Sicily can be found on Etna and Peloritani mounts.



Himantopus himantopus (Black-winged stilt)

It is an aquatic bird measuring up to 40 cm as adult. It has black beak and dorsal body portion, contrasting with white and shiny head, neck and underpart of the body. It feeds on small invertebrates, but sometimes also on tadpoles. As many other birds, hatching females simulate having a broken wing at the sight of a predator, trying to divert attention from the nest.



Caretta caretta (Loggerhead sea turtle)

It is the most widespread sea turtle in the Mediterranean. Adults can be found up to 140 cm long and about 150 kg heavy. They are omnivorous animals feeding mostly on marine invertebrates, but everything can be found in their stomacal content: even hooks and plastic bags. Oviposition takes place on sandy beaches in holes about 15 m from the seaside and about 60 cm deep, where females lay about 100-150 eggs, hatching in 50-70 days. It is a species classified as EN (endangered) by the IUCN, so that there are plans of action aimed at its preservation.