

# CREATION AND ADAPTATION OF STEPPING STONES IN FOREST HABITATS IN *STEPS FOR LIFE* PROJECT

The objective of SFL is to transform the tourist and cultural infrastructure of two routes into multifunctional green infrastructure (GI) that serves as a tool for the enhancement of biodiversity, ecological connectivity and ecosystem services. Efforts are being made to improve various types of habitats (forests, countryside, aquatic, and estuarine) along these routes, with the goal of improving the conservation status of several underpopulated fauna species, including insects, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

## Actions

### Plantations & Forestry Management in Habitats of Community Interest



OAK WOODLANDS (9160, 9230)



CHESTNUT GROVES (9260)



HOLM & CORK OAK GROOVES (9330, 9340)



RIPARIAN FORESTS (91E0\*)

Replanting (plantations, cuttings, sowing); treatments to improve the structure of existing stands and to promote the growth of future plants and target species (selective thinning and clearing, pruning and trimming); treatments to reduce fire risk (clearing of scrub and trees); enhancing the condition of old trees as key habitats for insects, birds and bats.

### Restoring traditional agroforestry practices to enhance biodiversity

Traditional land uses created a mosaic of agricultural landscapes that are crucial for biodiversity. Restoring these practices brings clear benefits for both the environment and society.



Optimal grassland management – such as delaying mowing until flowering – allows butterflies and other pollinators to deliver essential ecosystem services. Grasslands also benefit from the removal of tree sprouts, scrub clearing, and pruning of hedges and forest edges in meadows undergoing shrub growth.



Planting a diverse mix of flower-rich species supports pollinator populations.



The restoration of traditional dry-stone walls provides important habitat for reptiles



Planting shrub hedges creates effective ecological corridors for invertebrates, birds, and small mammals.



The grey partridge depends on patches of successional habitats – scrub-grassland mosaics – maintained by grazing (by cattle and deer). However, many less accessible highland pastures have been abandoned and are increasingly overgrown with dense scrub, making them unsuitable for this species. Clearing parts of this scrub is essential to support the conservation of grey partridge populations.

### Other concrete conservation actions:

Creation of ponds and the restoration of livestock drinking troughs as habitats for amphibians; installation of perches and nesting platforms for ospreys; construction of areas for terns and seagulls; installation of rockeries to benefit reptiles and small mammals; creation of deadwood piles as key habitats for xylophagous insects; placement of bird and bat nest boxes; control of IAS...

## Goals, achievements and highlights of the project

### ECTN: EUROPEAN GREEN TRAILS NETWORK

SFL is promoting the expansion of GI across Europe by encouraging similar initiatives along other Trails. The project focuses on improving microhabitats, creating ecological corridors, and enhancing the conservation status of habitats and species. The ultimate goal is to make environmental conservation compatible with human activities such as culture, tourism, livestock farming, and health-related uses. More info: <https://stepsforliferoles.org/en/>

### ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY

The creation of "stepping stones" – small biodiversity-rich microhabitats along the GI – significantly improves the ecological connectivity of the region.

### HEALTH & ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

The project fosters a connection between people, culture, and the environment, aiming to link biodiversity conservation with improved quality of life and well-being for both residents and visitors.

### ENGAGING LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

Many local residents have benefited from the project and have gained awareness of the importance of biodiversity conservation, as well as the advantages it can bring to their communities.

## Target Species



<https://stepsforlifeproject.org/> Email: [life@caminolebaniego.com](mailto:life@caminolebaniego.com)