

BIODIVERSITY PROJECT 2013/2014

VISIT TO THE VILLAGE OF BEARS IN STUPIZZA

On 18th November 2013 the class 2C LSA visited the village of Bears in Stupizza, for the project "Biodiversity: the importance of being different". Two partner classes from Koper and Trieste came along.

From the scientific point of view, biodiversity is the variety of flora and fauna in the environment. We chose the environmental niche of the "valley", and in particular the valley of the river Natisone, which presents a micro-environment physically isolated, with unique climatic characteristics responsible for a typical plant and animal population.



The visit to the village of the bears began from the museum on the fauna of the valley. The focus was on the brown bear.

1 The bear lives in Slovenia and only male bears cross the border in search of new territories and food. Female bears along with their puppies are more fearful and avoid crossing the highway that divides Friuli from Slovenia.

2 The diet of a bear is varied: honey, chocolate, corn, leaves, but also oil and plastic.

3 The footprints of the bear are unique: four fingers and a claw toe and the heel, called the bearing. Unlike those of the felines, they are not retractable claws and the toes are four.

The Faculty of Natural and Environmental Sciences of the University of Udine is working on a project of bears. Researchers have placed traps and food baits in the Stupizza valley. Samples of fur and hairs left on barbed wires by bears in search of food are analyzed and the DNA reveals a lot of interesting information on the bear species such as age, size, sex, and history of the animal family.



The visit included a movie on the capture of a male bear by researchers. At night a bear is attracted by a bait and enters a cage. Thanks to sensors, the cage closes down immediately and an SMS informs researchers of the trapped bear.

The team of experts, hidden at a distance, reaches the spot and the animal is drugged by an injection and falls asleep. At this point the scientists start their work: they measure the bear's size, its teeth, its weight and take samples of fur, blood without cause him harm.

Before releasing the bear, a radio collar is put around its neck to track and monitor its free movements in the territory. Finally the cage is left open so that the animal, once awoken, can return to freedom.



After watching the video of another bear and a lynx living in the same valley, we went for a walk in the woods to see the footprint of a bear stuck in the mold on a rock. The trail was quite slippery, due to the heavy rain and humid atmosphere of the season. Yet we were able to reach the spot where the bear had left its mark, and also the caves where the bears find refuge in winter.

There we noticed a plant that acts as a laxative, to help the animal to excrete waste accumulated during hibernation. We also observed that the entry to the cave was extremely small, a smart choice for bears to defend their privacy!



The environment of the forest is a unique micro-climate for the growth of typical plants and animals. For this reason Stupizza Valley and Mount Mia are regarded as a Regional Protected Area.



It was a great experience to see where the bears take shelter in winter. It was amazing to realize the parallelism between bears and humans: both curious to cross borders to meet others that are similar and yet with a difference!