



WILD ORCHIDS AT PIOVERA CASTLE (ITALY): A CONSERVATION AND EDUCATIONAL PROJECT OF ALAO

ALAO

ASSOCIAZIONE
LOMBARDA
AMATORI
ORCHIDEE

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Wild orchids represent one of the botanical groups most sensitive to habitat alteration, climate change, and land-use intensification. Italy hosts nearly 230 native orchid species, a richness largely driven by its geomorphological and bioclimatic diversity. However, many of these species are undergoing rapid decline, particularly in dry grasslands and wetland environments, which are extremely vulnerable to the abandonment of traditional land management, urbanisation, and hydrological fluctuations. In this context, the “Wild Orchids at Piovera Castle” project was launched in 2024 by the Lombard Association of Orchid Enthusiasts (ALAO), in collaboration with Piovera Castle, with the aim of restoring a selected area of the castle grounds and raising public awareness – especially among young people and children – about the conservation of threatened species.

All orchids introduced into the project area derive from *in vitro* propagation, ensuring full compliance with conservation regulations and avoiding any removal of plants from natural habitats. *Orchis purpurea*, already present on site, was complemented by newly planted individuals of *Anacamptis morio*, *Ophrys sphegodes*, *Ophrys apifera* and *Anacamptis coriophora* subsp. *fragrans*. The project uses orchids as effective bioindicators, highlighting their dependence on specific habitats, mycorrhizal fungi, and highly specialised pollination systems.



Project area within the Piovera Castle park



Orchis purpurea



Serapias vomeracea

The Piovera initiative is part of a broader framework of collaboration and shared conservation goals active in regions such as Piedmont, Liguria and Lombardy. For example, ALAO collaborates with the LIFEorchids project – an Italian initiative co-funded by the European Union’s LIFE Programme – and in 2022 received from it the formal designation as an “Orchid Guardian”, in recognition of its commitment to protecting wild orchids typical of high-biodiversity grasslands, now evolved into the LIFE NatConnect2030 project.

The conservation and educational project developed at Piovera Castle demonstrates how small-scale interventions and targeted communication can significantly contribute to safeguarding the most vulnerable orchids, while promoting public engagement and greater environmental responsibility.

Piovera Castle is also home to the “Piovera Orchidea” exhibition, now in its tenth edition, which serves as ALAO’s official spring orchid show. In the last years, the exhibition has adopted the DOG judging system, helping to enhance the quality evaluation of the collections on display and to disseminate orchid culture to a wider audience.



DOG judges Bernd Treder and Giselher Cramer, together with Johnny Allegra, President of ALAO, and Francesca Castiglione, Vice-President of ALAO

