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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT CAUSED BY WILD UNGULATES IN PROTECTED AREAS

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*Abstract: Protected areas play a crucial role for conservation of natural habitats and ecosystems. Protecting biodiversity means maintaining in good condition ecological process in order to ensure a good state of harmony between natural resources and environmental conservation. It is known that one of the major threats of the Conservation is the presence of alien or invasive species, especially if they are introduced in protected areas. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) writes in the list of the 100 invasive species the wild boar (*Sus scrofa* L.) and the goat (*Capra hircus* L.). These ungulates represent a serious threat for natural ecosystems because they are able to alter natural habitats reducing biodiversity. The primary aim of this study is to evaluate some aspects connected with environmental relationships mainly between flora and fauna in protected areas, focusing on wild boars and feral goats. Secondly, it is analysed "Human dimension" aspect caused by presence and damage of wild animals linked to damage to crops and to dry stone wall supporting the typical cultivated terraces. To reach our goal we use as a case study the Portofino Natural Park in North-West Italy, because it houses one of the largest biodiversity concentration in the Mediterranean area. In this protected area the wild boar is the most invasive between the two studied animal species, because of soil damages that influence hydro-geological balance of territory. Finally, this species can quickly increase its population for the high prolificacy and low biological and predator mortality.*

Keywords: Environmental impact, plants biodiversity, protected areas, feral goat, wild boar