

Snakes: a disaster due to negligence

The insidiousness of the Balearic Government for two decades enabled the expansion of snakes throughout Ibiza

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Editorial

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The colonization of the island of Ibiza by snakes is the consequence of the negligence and passivity of the Balearic Government, as it did not adopt measures to avoid the environmental disaster that the introduction of snakes represents for the Pitiusics. The first snake was found in Ibiza in 2003 and even then environmentalists warned that precautions had to be taken to prevent them from reaching the islands hibernating in the trunks of olive trees. The main victim of the expansion of snakes is the endemic Pitiusic lizard, *Podarcis pityusensis*, which has 22 cataloged subspecies that are not found anywhere else in the world.

Throughout these more than twenty years that have passed since the first snake was discovered, parties of different political stripes have been at the head of the Government - and the Ministry of the Environment - but the ineptitude when it comes to avoiding a catastrophe ecological situation like the one we now suffer has been common to all. It is possible that the Mallorcan vision and distance from the problems of the smaller islands that traditionally characterizes the Government explains the inaction that politicians and senior officials have shown regarding the serious problem of the expansion of snakes through Ibiza, Formentera and their islets. They cannot claim that they did not know: throughout these years we have had precise and permanent information on how the snakes were spreading to places where they did not exist before, and even swimming to the islets, whose ecological balance is extremely fragile, and where a predator like this is a danger for lizards but also for the birds that nest on them.

The towel has been thrown in for years: on the island of Ibiza it is now impossible to eradicate snakes and the only hope is to contain them with the distribution of traps. In Formentera the plague is more localized in the Mola area, but it is a matter of time before it spreads throughout the island. The latest data is very alarming, although it has not surprised anyone: in just four months almost as many snakes have been captured in Ibiza as in all of last year, a figure that measures the progression of this unstoppable invasive species that is decimating the population of lizards to the point of putting them in serious danger and, as it does not have any natural predator, it has developed gigantism (they are larger than the specimens from the peninsula). The notable increase in the number of captures is not explained solely by the greater number of traps distributed throughout the island: it is due to the fact that the snake population is growing exponentially, and will become larger, as the manager of the Consortium for the Recovery of the Fauna of the Balearic Islands (Cofib), Miquel Puig.

The person in charge of Cofib himself maintains that it is possible that on some of the islets the endemic subspecies of lizard has already disappeared due to the arrival of snakes. Now, the only thing left to do is try to contain with traps an invasive species that has become a pest that threatens the survival of an ecological jewel such as the Pitiusic lizard with its 22 subspecies. The disastrous and irresponsible environmental management by politicians and technicians has led us in just twenty years to a disaster that is no less terrible because it was announced by environmentalists and scientists.