



Whenever we think of lakes high up in the mountains, we envisage the classic small bodies of water set in green conifer woodland or glinting in sunny valleys surrounded by rocks and high peaks.

However, reality goes beyond this commonplace. Mountain lakes display a whole series of complex geomorphological and biological characteristics.



Animal and plant species, which colonised these environments after the retreat of the Quaternary glaciers, found refuge - and were sometimes "trapped" - in these areas as relicts. They therefore had to cope with the harsh environmental conditions of the mountains, such as the cold climate, high UV radiation and lack of nutrients. Only a few species have made the necessary adaptations to survive, and this is why glacial relicts are extremely interesting from the scientific and conservation viewpoints.



Unfortunately, mountain lakes are now far from being remote and pristine. Their exploitation by mass tourism, for hydro-electrical purposes and as sources of drinking water, the indiscriminate



introduction of fish species, acidification and pollution by rain, increased UV radiation due to ozone reduction in the atmosphere, and the rising temperatures caused by global climatic changes are all factors jeopardising the survival of these ecosystems.



This book is an emergency message, an SOS that the Habitat series is sending out in defence of some of the most fascinating and breathtakingly beautiful Italian environments.

