



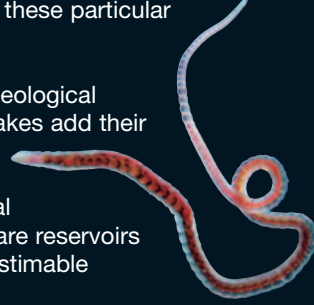
Flying above the Italian peninsula, the attention of even the most unobservant traveller is attracted by the unexpected sight of round, bright blue bodies of water, with very steep shores. These unique environments have a singular origin: they are volcanic lakes. They have always accompanied man in his socio-cultural development in a very beautiful natural context, ranging from Neolithic settlements to Roman aqueducts, and tiny hilltop Medieval towns.



Years of research have highlighted the features which make volcanic lakes such interesting environments for science. The first is their origin – the Quaternary volcanism which created the craters and calderas which today contain these particular bodies of water.



Together with their geological peculiarities, these lakes add their precious natural features, composed of animal and vegetal communities which are reservoirs of biodiversity of inestimable naturalistic value.



All these unique environments are in areas under conservation and protection. Unfortunately, however, many of the results of man's activities - changes in coastlines, intensive agriculture, over-grazing, deforestation, over-exploitation of water, tourism, and the introduction of alien species - have led to a deterioration in the quality of the water in these special sites and inflicted great damage on their flora and fauna.



This new Habitat volume aims at contributing to improved knowledge and protection of these lakes. Man has lived with them for millennia; they are now deteriorating irreversibly.

