



Restoration of dry-acidic Continental grasslands and heathlands in Natura2000 sites in Piemonte and Lombardia.

*Calluna vulgaris* L.

Habitat 4030

# CALLUNA, QUEEN OF THE HEATHS AND MOORS

NAME: *Calluna vulgaris* (L.) Hull

Common name: common heather, ling, or simply heather

**Habitat:** H4030 - European drylands

**Distribution:** north central Italy, on acidic and siliceous soils; it can be found from the Po Plain up to 2,000 m (sometimes as high as 2,700 m).

**Identification:** it differs from *Erica* in that the petaloid calyx is much longer than the corolla; it is opposite-leaved, with leaves on non-flowering branches closely imbricated. In comparison, in *Erica*, the calyx is half the length of the petals, and the leaves are spiralled and spread outwards.

### Facts

> A keystone species in heaths and moors, *Calluna* is important to the conservation of biodiversity, especially in plain areas where heathland habitat has been substantially reduced in the last 50-70 years.

> Heather confers high aesthetic-landscape value: in autumn it colours its habitat with an intense shade of pink.

> It is an important plant for pollinators: 57 different species of insects have been identified visiting its flowers.

### Did you know?

> Moorland is the setting for Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

> In the past, heather was often used for brooms because of the strength and flexibility of its thin branches.

**Mutual species:** insects contributing to its pollination and reproduction (*Apis mellifera*, bumblebees, syrphids and other hymenopterans).

**Competitors:** invasive allochthonous woody species (*Robinia pseudoacacia*, *Prunus serotina*, *Quercus rubra*) which compete against heather and can rapidly colonise habitats in the absence of heathland management.

### Uses

> it is a medicinal species with diuretic, antirheumatic, antiseptic, astringent, and anti-inflammatory actions. It is useful in treating urinary tract inflammation, cystitis, urethritis, and urinary tract stones.

> it is an ornamental species with countless cultivated varieties available on the market. However, to favour biodiversity conservation, wild species should be preferred.

> it is a melliferous species: while heather honey is very rare in Italy with production being limited to small areas, it is an important product in northern Europe. Heather honey is known for its curious physical characteristics: it is thixotropic, that is, it presents in a gelatinous state, becoming fluid when shaken or subject to vibration. If left to settle, it returns to a gelatinous state.

**Siti di intervento:** Baraggia di Rovasenda (VC), Brughiera del Viganò (VA), Brughiera del Dosso (VA).

- > Structural improvement (mowing of herbaceous plants, cutting of autochthonous and allochthonous woody plants);
- > Floristic enrichment (planting heather and other species typically found in habitat 4030).

In some areas that lack heath cover, habitat 4030 will be restored ex-novo by mowing herbaceous plants, uprooting woody plants, inverting top-soil (burying surface soil under a layer of subsoil, usually a 40 cm layer of surface soil buried under a 40 cm layer of subsoil), and scattering *Calluna* cuttings taken from existing habitats.

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