

# Six Years of cave biodiversity conservation campaign: Cave Animal of the Year

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The "Cave Animal of the Year" initiative, inaugurated in Germany in 2008, seeks to enhance knowledge and awareness of subterranean fauna. Each year, a specific cave animal is spotlighted through a range of activities and awareness campaigns Fig. 1, aimed at promoting the conservation of cave ecosystems and their unique inhabitants. This initiative, which was honored with the France HABE prize in 2014 by the International Union of Speleology (UIS), has expanded internationally with the support of the Italian Speleological Society ETS.

Fig. 2



Fig.1

SSI CAVE ANIMAL WEB PAGE

In 2019, *Limonia nubeculosa* (Common cave Limonid) Fig.2, was chosen for its ecological significance. The following year, *Plectogona sanfilippo* (millipede) was highlighted for its role in decomposition processes within caves. The campaign took a significant leap in 2021, marking the start of the "International Cave Animal of the Year" with *Italodytes stammeri* (cave beetle) being the focus. In 2022, *Miniopterus schreibersii* (bat) was selected to emphasize the importance of preserving cave ecosystems, while in 2023, the genus *Niphargus* (small crustaceans) was chosen to highlight the conservation of life in underground waters.

Fig.3



### Azioni di comunicazione ADG



Website: <https://animalidigrotta.speleo.it>  
Campaign with Biodiversity day Fig. 4



Fig. 4

- 2020: Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the campaign adapted with online events and webinars.
- 2021: Focused on the International Year of Caves and Karst, with *Italodytes stammeri* as the featured species.
- 2022: Extended the International Year of Caves and Karst, highlighting the importance of cave ecosystems.
- 2023: Focus on *Niphargus* species, small crustaceans living in caves and aquifers.
- 2024: The *Speleomantes* (Cave Salamander), amphibians living near cave entrances, will be the featured species.

Key elements of the Cave Animal of the Year Campaign in Italy :  
Emphasis on **protecting cave biodiversity through public education and scientific research.**

Collaboration with **various organizations** to promote sustainable management of cave ecosystems.

Workshops, webinars, and interactive activities to engage the public and educate about cave biodiversity. (Fig. 3)

Special events on International Biodiversity Day to raise awareness a winning twin **cave and biodiversity**.

For 2024, the genus **Speleomantes (cave salamanders)** has been designated as the Cave Animal of the Year. These amphibians, known for their reflective eyes and respiratory skin, inhabit areas near cave entrances and are particularly cherished by Italian speleologists. **Despite their ecological significance, they face threats such as chytridiomycosis, a devastating fungal infection.** To address this, careful handling and hygiene practices are essential to prevent the spread of this fungus.

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