

Italian community hopes to save fire-ravaged ancient tree

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"The Patriarch", as it is known in the west of the Italian island region, was a massive wild olive tree with a trunk about 10 metres (33 feet) around and 16.5 metres (54 feet) high.

Scientists in Sardinia are hoping a thousand-year-old olive tree nearly

destroyed by recent fires can be saved, mobilising volunteers to stand guard around the remains of the ancient tree.

"The Patriarch", as it is known in the west of the Italian island region, was a massive wild olive tree with a trunk about 10 metres (33 feet) around and 16.5 metres (54 feet) high.

But it was nearly completely devoured by flames that ripped through the area last weekend when over 20,000 hectares (50,000 acres) burned in the worst fires seen on the island in decades.

The blaze destroyed homes and killed livestock as it ravaged thousands of Sardinia's [olive trees](#), along with juniper groves, cork [trees](#), oaks and pines.

After an examination of the tree earlier this week, experts said they hoped there might be signs of life in the [root system](#) and the side of the trunk that was spared the worst burns.

The community of Cuglieri has organised volunteers to stand guard to prevent people from walking on its fragile root systems on the advice of experts, including botanist Gianluigi Bacchetta of Cagliari University.

"Keeping this tree alive means keeping everyone's hope alive," he said of the specimen, which registered on Italy's list of monumental trees.

Bacchetta said after an examination of the area Wednesday that water added to the soil around the tree had helped lower its temperature.

Another scientist who surveyed the damage, University of Sassari botany professor Ignazio Camarda, wrote on Facebook that all that was left of the mighty tree were "miserable remains that lie on the ground and a few blackened stumps, as well as a section of the base".

But he also noted "a glimmer of life from which a new sapling could emerge".

Firefighters were still on the ground in western Sardinia Friday, extinguishing new outbreaks and clearing areas, even as scorching temperatures of over 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) and winds mean that the risk of fire remains high.

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