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### *Parks and nature reserves in The Marche region*

This initiative is promoted by  
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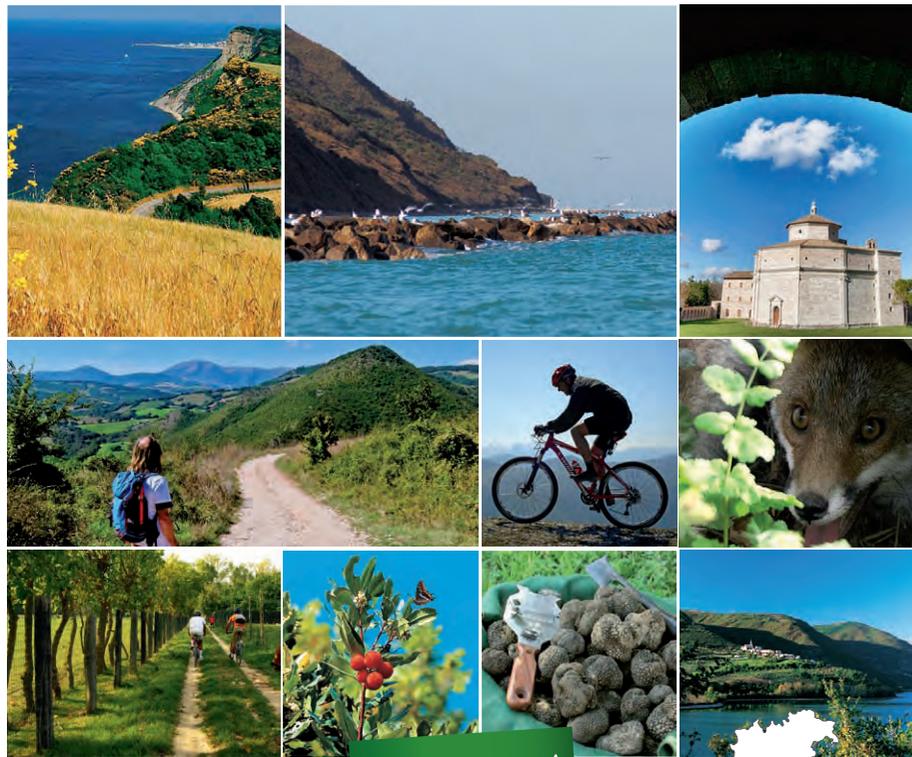


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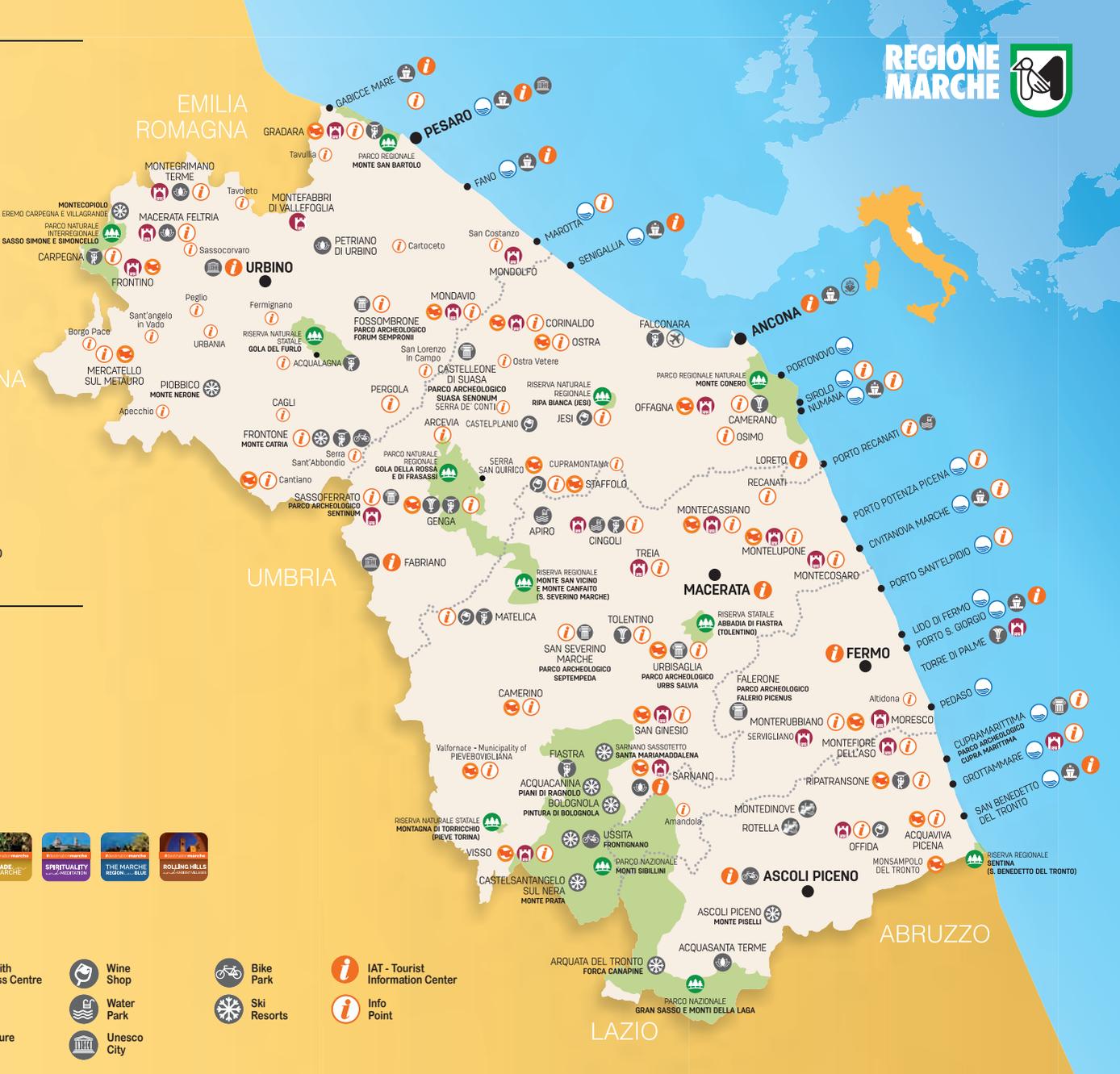
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*Parks and nature reserves in  
The Marche region*



## PARKS AND NATURE RESERVES IN THE MARCHE REGION



In the collective imagination, the territory of the Marche region is usually linked to hills and to a rural landscape, but we must not forget that 30% of this region's surface area is characterized by mountains, offering visitors an environment that is still intact and one of outstanding natural beauty. An experience in the mountains of the Marche region is much

more than merely losing yourself in the unspoiled nature of the great summits, wild gorges, spectacular caves, wooded slopes and snow-capped peaks. You will also discover traces left by monks and hermits as well as ancient Picentine, Roman, Lombard and Byzantine settlements and you will relive the experience of a journey into the memory and the roots of this land, where the work of man is perfectly integrated with nature.

In the Marche around 90,000 hectares of land, almost 10% of the regional area, are protected by the regional system of parks and nature reserves: there are **two national parks** (Monti Sibillini and Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga), **an interregional park** (Sasso Simone and Simoncello), **three regional parks** (Monte Conero, Monte San Bartolo and Gola della Rossa and Frasassi), **six nature reserves**, three of which are state reserves (Abbadia di Fiastra, Torricchio, Gola del Furlo) and **three regional reserves** (Ripa Bianca, Sentina, and Monte San Vicino and Monte Canfai).

Furthermore there are over **100 floristic areas**, **104 sites included in the European network Natura 2000**, 76 of which are Special Areas of Conservation, 2 Special Protection Areas and 1 new Site of Community Importance.

In the regional territory there are **107** centers of environment education, some falling within the above mentioned protected areas, others outside them.

The vegetation in the nature reserves along the coastal areas, such as that of Mount Conero, is Mediterranean shrub, featuring, in particular, the Holm oak, the strawberry tree, the Mediterranean buckthorn, the Phillyrea and the Mastic. In the hilly area, the Downy oak is the dominant species, although



in some areas, such as the Park of Sasso Simone e Simoncello, you will see vast forests of Turkey oak, while the Manna ash is dominant in the calcareous substrates.

At higher elevations you will come across beech woods, first mixed, then single-species and then the high-altitude grasslands. As for the wildlife, numerous species are still present today, including the wolf, the deer, the roe deer, the porcupine and, in the heart of the Monti Sibillini, also the chamois, which was reintroduced in 2008. Among the birds, you will find the golden eagle, the Lanner falcon, the Peregrine falcon, the red-billed chough and the eagle owl. In the protected areas, it is possible to go hiking on foot, on horseback or by mountain-bike, with itineraries organized by the numerous Centres of Environmental Education (CEE). You can also engage in other sporting activities, like climbing and free flight, as well as

some more adventurous water sports in the mountain streams, such as rafting, canoeing, kayaking and canyoning. The museums and various Visitor Centres in the protected areas throughout the territory (Abbadia di Fiastra, Amandola, Apecchio, Ascoli, Fermo, Genga, Ostra, Piobbico, Serra San Quirico, Pioraco, Smerillo; the Earth Science Museum of Pindimeleto, the Avifauna Museum of Sarnano and Montefortino), meet the demands of the most demanding scholars.

But the tourist attractions do not end here: How can we forget the rich variety of food and wine featuring dishes and specialities handed down by rural tradition, not to mention numerous possibilities to visit exhibitions, attend festivals, see entertaining shows and evocative historical re-enactments or take part in sports, such as horse-riding, mountain bike riding, hiking, climbing, skiing, canoeing and hang gliding?





## MONTI SIBILLINI NATIONAL PARK

In the heart of Italy, between Marche and Umbria, stand the towering Monti Sibillini mountains with over twenty peaks exceeding 2,000 metres and reaching a height of 2,476 m with Monte Vettore. Established in 1993, the park covers a territory of almost 70,000 hectares, shaped by the forces of nature and painted intermittently by thousands of years of history and local culture. Here, you can still perceive the magical presence of the legendary Sybil and the memories of ancient necromantic rites that linger, in this place where fascinating legends are handed down.

### THE TERRITORY

The Monti Sibillini is a mountain range of mainly calcareous origin that has been deeply shaped by the action of glaciers in the Quaternary Period, traces of which are recognizable in the beautiful glacial cirques of Monte Vettore, Monte Bove, the upper Ambro Valley, the Val di Tela (Monte Rondino) and the U-shaped valleys below. Beneath the summit of Monte Vettore, at 1,940 m, is Lago di Pilato, the only natural lake in Marche and one of the few alpine glacial lakes in the Apennines.

Particularly evident are the karst formations in the plains of Castelluccio and in the numerous sinkholes located in the upper Val di Panico, in the Ambro valley, at Palazzo Borghese and also in the furrows and crevices of the rocky walls of the main valleys where solid limestone emerges, such as in the valleys of Tenna and Ambro.

The Fiastrone Valley is also impressive from a scenic point of view. It is a gorge formed

by the waters in which the Grotta dei Frati is located, an ancient and evocative hermitage of the Clareni monks, dating back to the year 1000. Moving along the river, upstream of Lake Fiastra, you will reach the Acquasanta valley with its beautiful waterfalls and Grotta dell'Orso (Cave of the Bear), the name of which also signifies the presence of this species in the Sibillini mountains.

### FLORA

The vegetation tends, as if by magic, to change gradually as you move from the basement rise, located at an average altitude of 500 m, to the higher peaks. Up to approximately 1,000 m, Downy oak, Hop hornbeam and Manna ash woods are predominant, after which there are beech woods, first mixed and then pure. Above the treeline that reaches as far up as 1,700 m, there are natural pastures where you can find very rare and precious species like the Martagon lily, Viola Eugeniae, white Dryas, Apennine Edelweiss, Artemisia, anemone, Apennine Gentiana, Bearberry and the Dwarf willow, which is considered the smallest tree in the world. On the „flowering side“ of the park, the Ragnolo meadows stand out for their wealth of flora and here, in summer, you can see beautiful orchids, Liliaceae and other interesting species in bloom, such as the Fritillaria dell'Orsini, Narcissus or the Asster Alpinus.

### WILDLIFE

The Park's wildlife is very rich and varied: among the mammals, there is the wolf, the





elusive wild cat, the porcupine, which has only become common for a few decades and occupies the most thermophile areas, and the roe deer, re-introduced for the first time at the beginning of the '50s and has now permanently settled throughout the entire area. Thanks to specific reintroduction projects, today even the deer and the chamois have returned to live in the park. Among the birds, there is the golden eagle which, ever since the park was first established, has nested even in areas that had been abandoned for years. Then there are the Northern goshawk, the sparrow hawk, typical inhabitants of the forest, and the Peregrine falcon. Among the owls, there is the Eagle owl, while among the galliformes, there is the Rock partridge. Also frequently seen are the Alpine chough and the Red-billed chough. It is also interesting to see the Dotterel, the Common rock thrush, the Alpine Accentor, the white-winged snow finch and the wall creeper. Among the reptiles, there is the Ursini's viper that reaches its northern-most boundary in Italy, in the

Sibillini Mountains. As for the invertebrates, an extraordinary presence is that of the *Chirocephalus Marchesonii*, a small anostraca with a bright reddish colour, endemic to the Lake of Pilato.

#### HISTORY AND CULTURE

In the middle ages, the Sibillini mountains were known throughout Europe as a realm of demons, necromancers and fairies. There are numerous legends in this area, the most famous being that of the Sibyl, the „Illustrious prophetess“ who lived in a cave on the mountain of the same name and that of Pilate, according to which the lifeless body of the famous Roman Procurator was dragged by some buffaloes into the red waters of the „demonic“ lake, considered a place of witches and wizards since the 13th century. Not far away is the Gola dell'„infernaccio“, or the Gorge of Hell, in which the memories of ancient necromantic rites still linger. Not to be forgotten is the area's historical and cultural heritage: the territory is particularly rich in castles, look-out towers, historic villages,

churches, Romanesque parish churches, frescoes and works of art. Also worth visiting are the sacred places: sanctuaries and monasteries built in areas of great beauty and profound spirituality, like the Sanctuary of Macereto or the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Ambro in Montefortino.

#### TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

A network of hiking trails cross these mountains, guaranteeing you the opportunity to make invigorating discoveries in the natural, cultural and historical environments, from spring to autumn. The wintertime, when the highest peaks are abundantly covered in snow, gives you a new chance to get some exercise on your skis, moving between the forests and valleys, in absolute silence.

Other opportunities offered to visitors of the park include horseback riding, mountain biking, hang gliding, paragliding and rock and ice climbing. The area also offers a countless variety of possibilities for those who want to move around on foot, to discover all its treasures in every season. If you are seeking closer contact with the wilderness and the magical world of the peaks, you can also go on more challenging trips, which often require experience, training and the appropriate equipment.

An unforgettable experience can be lived along the Grande Anello dei Sibillini (GAS) mountain range, on a 120 Km hiking trail, completely marked out. Divided into nine stages, it allows you to discover a variety of landscapes and natural beauty, as well as the invaluable cultural heritage of this territory. To allow for the best use of the Grande Anello, the Park has taken care to restructure the hiking shelters, which, along with traditional accommodation facilities, can be used in total harmony with the territory and the environment. The nature trails also represent a

#### INFO

Due to the earthquake occurred in 2016, the offices of the National Park Authority are temporarily located in:

VISSO – Swimming pool, locality Palombare.  
Tel. 0737 961563 - 3357226283.

TOLENTINO – Institute of Prevention of animal disease Marche and Umbria,  
Via Maestri del Lavoro 06029 Tolentino.  
Tel. 0733 961946.

parco@sibillini.net  
PEC: parcosibillini@emarche.it  
www.sibillini.net  
www.sibilliniwilderness.it

#### Park Municipalities in Marche

Fiastra, Bolognola, Visso, Ussita, Castelsantangelo sul Nera, Amandola, Arquata del Tronto, Montefortino, Montegalzo, Montemonaco, Cessapalombo, San Ginesio, Pievetorina, Val Fornace.

unique opportunity for less experienced hikers or anyone with limited time to discover the Sibillini mountains. Two of the 18 nature trails are „for everyone“, meaning that they are even accessible to strollers or wheelchairs. Exploring the park on a mountain bike allows you to travel along roads and paths that were originally built for the log sledges of peasants, the mules of lumberjacks, the boots of shepherds and the sandals of pilgrims. The guidebook entitled „Cycling in the Park“ describes the paths in detail and also contains the relative maps, offering 14 ring routes, each of which can be accomplished in a day, in addition to the Grande Anello by mountain-bike, which is 160 km long and takes at least 5 days to cover. You can also discover the Sibillini mountains by camper van, motorbike or car, thanks to the Grande Via Del Parco (the Great Road of the Park) and the 6 ring routes that have been identified and which form a network of about 450 km. The Grande Via Del Parco is a route of over 190 km, created on exist-



ing roads, on which you can travel by car, motorcycle or camper van and makes for a rewarding journey lasting several days. It is divided into four stages. There are also a further six ring routes connected to the Grande Via, which allow for a visit of entire territory. Discovering the Park means experiencing and understanding nature and an extremely original territory, the result of thousands of years of harmonious rapport between man and the environment, both of which have been able to adapt to each other in a fragile and delicate evolutionary parallelism. Visiting the Park's municipalities is, therefore, an unforgettable opportunity to relive the charm of yesteryear to the full and to discover the treasures of man, so skilfully embedded in nature. All this amounts to a truly refreshing and unforgettable experience for every visitor, also on a cultural level. A visit to the museums in the area is a must. Among these, there is the Sibyl's Cave (Grotta della Sibilla) in Montemonaco, The Duranti Art Museum in Montefortino and the Leopardian Manuscript Museum in Visso. These, along with the Park's Visitor Centres are important places for documentation and tourist information as they offer visitors a more general learning experience relative to the entire territory of the Park. The Deer Wildlife Centre at Castelsantangelo sul Nera and the Chamois Wildlife Centre at Bolognola are both worth a visit, where you can observe several specimens of these two species, recently reintroduced by the Park. Inside each Centre, there is a park house (casa del parco), in which there are tourist reception activities and which provides visitors with essential information for

the correct and adequate fruition of the protected area. Inside the park, there are also 8 Centres of Environmental Education, which are officially recognized by the Regional Authorities of both Marche and Umbria. These Centres perform the important task of providing information to visitors, especially schools, and raising their awareness about the special values of the territory while, at the same time, allocating them shared responsibility with regard to greater respect for the environment. Experiencing the Monti Sibillini National Park also means „tasting“ the numerous typical and traditional products of the area. These are the result of agriculture that has become a culture of tradition. Its ancient wisdom has been able to pass down and also to update its uses, customs and methods, along a path of environmental sustainability, tradition and quality. The best known products are pink apples, tasty chestnuts, extra fine honey, incomparable lentils, Roveja peas, excellent for making excellent polenta with a typical intense colour green, chickling peas or spelt, without forgetting the exquisite, delicious truffle. We must also remember the beef and lamb meats and their authenticity and origin in this territory, providing the buyer a guarantee also in terms of food.





## GRAN SASSO E MONTI DELLA LAGA NATIONAL PARK



Further south than the Sibillini Mountains, beyond the gorges shaped by the river Tronto, stand the Monti della Laga mountains, forming the northernmost sector of the National Park, which includes the Gran Sasso massif. Established in 1995, the Park has a surface area of 150,000 hectares, of which 9,900 in Marche.

### THE TERRITORY

The Monti della Laga mountains, with the presence of Monte Gorzano, reach a height of 2,458 m and consist mainly of sandstone and marl. Geological nature influences the morphology of these mountains, the peaks of which are more rounded and there are numerous deeply etched valleys and impressive glacial cirques. The marl-sandstone formation ensures that water flows rapidly on the surface, collecting in streams, ravines and rivers, which run downwards, forming dozens of stunning, beautiful waterfalls such as that of the Volpara or that of the Barche in the valley of Selva Grande.

### FLORA

There are more than 2,000 plant species in the territory of the park, including the Martagon lily, the Apennine Edelweiss and several rare orchids such as the Epipogium. One of the most important species is the blueberry, more common here than in any other part of the Central Apennines, which, with extensive high-altitude grassy surfaces, is a true moorland amidst the mountain pastures. The great wealth and diversity of the flora and vegetation can be sought both at high altitudes, above 2,000 m, and in the different geological substratum of the main massifs. While the Gran Sasso is characterized by its extensive pastures, particularly on the L'Aquila side, the Monti della Laga mountains are mostly covered by forests. At lower altitudes there are oak woods and chestnut groves, planted during the Roman era, while the beech forest is the largest wooded area and extends for 1,000 to 1,800 m. Other types of tree are often present together with the beech tree, such as the Taxus or the Holly, residual species from

### INFO

#### Center for Environment Education Due Parchi

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#### Park Municipalities in Marche

Acquasanta Terme, Arquata del Tronto

eras characterized by a hot, humid climate; the maple, the linden, the ash and the Wych elm cover the mountain ravines. Also worth mentioning are the rare Silver fir forests – one of its only two sites in Marche is right here - and several groups of birch, which are living evidence of past weather events that impacted the current vegetation heavily.

### WILDLIFE

The most interesting wildlife species in the Park is the chamois, an ungulate exclusive to the Apennine mountains, which has returned to live in the park, after one hundred years, thanks to a successful reintroduction operation. Other large herbivores also living in the territory include the deer, the roe deer and their predator par excellence,

the Italian wolf, which is beginning to build small packs again. For some time now, the Marsican brown bear has also been making sporadic appearances. Numerous birds of prey can be found here, including the golden eagle, the Northern goshawk, the Peregrine falcon, the Lanner falcon, the red-billed chough and the eagle owl. Between the leaves, in the cooler areas where water flows or collects, live the spectacled salamander, a rather rare amphibian, and the common frog.

### TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

Until a few years ago, the Monti della Laga were almost unknown to mountain enthusiasts and, because of their relative proximity to the Gran Sasso, Terminillo and the Sibillini



mountains, they were infrequently visited. But anyone who visits them even once cannot resist returning to them, to go on great excursions all year round or for mountaineering, back country skiing or alpine skiing. In winter, when the water is replaced by thick ice, the Laga waterfalls offer unusual and challenging routes for mountaineers. The ancient cultural tradition of the park's populations is evident in the abundant, elaborate craftsmanship, in the tasty typical food products and the typical local folkloristic events that still survive today, important both culturally and as tourist attractions. The latest examples of sixteenth century stone houses are worth a visit. These can be found in the numerous villages set amidst the mountains, like Arquata del Tronto or Castel di Luco located in the Paggese district of Acquasanta Terme, characterized by its circular shape; there is also Umito, a typical mountain village, unforgettable for its splendid, centuries-old chestnut woods and a good starting point for fascinating excursions into the lush woods. Charcoal is still produced in the district of Colle di Arquata del Tronto, using the ancient method of the Apennine charcoal kilns. Also worth visiting are Acquasanta Terme and Arquata del Tronto, which was an important „statio“ on the Via Salaria, in Roman times. The village

gets its name from the imposing thirteenth century Fortress (arx) that crowns the hill and which, according to tradition, was rebuilt by Giovanna II of Naples and has been renovated in recent times.

There are various cultural and folkloristic events, among which one of the oldest historical re-enactments of the area: the “Festa Bella”, in which the community of Spelonga di Arquata brings to life the battle of Lepanto, which took place in 1751. In fact, about a hundred inhabitants of Spelonga participated in the battle and managed to conquer the Turkish flag, which is still preserved in the village's parish church. The re-enactment takes place every three years, on 14 August. In the first decade of the month, 150 young people go into the Bosco Martese woods and cut down a 25-metre long tree trunk. This is used as the main mast of the ship that will be rebuilt in the village square, in a laborious operation that requires great physical effort, while also celebrating the cohesion of the community. On 19 August, another celebration takes place: “Alla corte della regina” (At the queen's court), which is the re-enactment of life at court and takes place in the fortress built by Giovanna II of Naples.

A visit to the Park can begin at the Centre of the Two Parks, Centro Due Parchi, at Arquata del Tronto, which is the only Municipality in Europe to be part of two National Parks: that of Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga and that of Monti Sibillini. The Centre is, in fact, a Country House, a Park House and a Centre for Environmental Education. Numerous activities take place at the centre. For example, “green” holidays, educational trips for schools and nature weekends. Moreover, equipment and maps are also available for orienteering, as well as an artificial wall for climbing.



## MONTE SAN BARTOLO REGIONAL NATURE PARK

The Monte San Bartolo Regional Nature Park, established in 1996, has a surface area of 1,586 hectares and stretches along the coast, between Pesaro and Gabicce.

### THE TERRITORY

Its main characteristic is the stretch of high coastline with bare cliffs, rare along the Adriatic. The rest of the protected area consists of an interesting and distinctive rural landscape that, until the 1950s, was actively cultivated even in places that would be unthinkable today, up to the limits of the sea. Thus, the San Bartolo has two distinct areas: the cliff above the sea and the internal area. The cliffs rise up from the low beaches of Marche like a succession of undulating spurs and valleys, punctuated by sheer walls displaying geological aspects of great interest, with precious fossil fish and rare gypsum crystals. Sandstone, marl and clay banks alternate with each other, sloping gently towards the sea and blending with ancient landslides dotted along the cliffs. The highest peaks on the side near the sea, like Mount Castellaro



or Brisighella, have altitudes lower than 200 metres. However, they allow a broad view of the „painted landscapes“ (as Tonino Guerra called them) of Montefeltro, San Marino, Romagna and of the coastline and the sea, where the Park's sheer cliffs create a seascape that is unusual for the typically sandy coasts of the Romagna and Marche regions. At the base of the cliff, there is a narrow beach of gravel and pebbles, resulting from the demolition and landslide of the walls above. In the past, it was used as a convenient quarry for paving stones that were directly loaded onto boats and exported to other coastal towns. Examples include the old cobbled streets of the town of Pesaro and the villages within the territory of the park. The rural Landscape that can be seen in the stretch that slopes gently towards the Adriatic trunk road, conveys a sense of harmony, a sort of vital and pleasant interweaving of cultivated fields, abandoned re-naturalised fields and rows of trees and hedges.

### FLORA

An area like this one, greatly affected by human activity, would be expected to be extremely poor, but this is not so. In fact, the flora of the San Bartolo Park offers its visitors pleasant and suggestive emotions. For example, in the „Baia Flaminia“ area above, you can observe a very rare plant known as maritime - this is the only place in the region in which you will find it.

Equally significant are the rush and the wild carrot, found in just a few other places along the Marche coast. Among the pioneer



vegetation, present on the steepest slopes, are the *Arundo Plinii*, while on the drier and firmer lands, there is the Weaver's broom that, when in flower, provides unforgettable, contrasting yellow colours that emerge from the blue of the sky and the green of the sea. Where the slope is gentler and where a certain amount of organic debris accumulate, you may encounter the Madder, the Etruscan honeysuckle and young Aleppo pines, originating from the spontaneous dissemination of reforestation. In the moist areas, white poplars, black poplars and white willows can be found. Here too, as in the hinterland, you can observe the same associations of mixed forests with oak and Hop hornbeam, where the Turkey oak is increasingly rare, while the Downy oak, the Manna ash, the maple and the Field elm are far more common.

The presence of several species of conifers, such as the Stone pine, the Maritime pine and the Cypress can be attributed to the historic Renaissance villas.

Subsequent reforestation in the 1960s added several species to the flora of the Park, including the sycamore, the Aleppo pine, the Black pine, the Siberian elm and other allochthonous species. The rest of the vegetation is typical of an agricultural environment, intensely cultivated until the 1950s, where the tree species include the olive, the vine, the



fig, the cherry, the mulberry, the service tree and the almond, with the presence of rows of vines and isolated specimens of large Downy oak interspersed along the tamarisk and Jerusalem thorn hedges. Therefore, the overall appearance of the inner belt of the park is also very evocative and harmonious, especially where some large hedges adorn the edge of the cultivated fields that extend right up to edge of the cliff.

#### WILDLIFE

Particularly in winter, when there is less interference from recreational activities and fishing, the park is home to a large number of species of seabirds. The area was designated a wetland of national importance for wintering birds, such as the red-breasted merganser and the common merganser, the common gull, the Mediterranean gull, the black-legged Kittiwake, the black-headed gull and the yellow-legged gull, the common eider, the lesser black-backed gull, the great cormorant, the manx shearwater, the great crested grebe and the black-necked grebe, the black-throated loon, the grey heron, the little egret and sometimes mute swans, as well as cranes and white and black storks. The San Bartolo Nature Park of is a preferred route for migrating birds of prey, like Euro-

pean honey buzzards, western marsh harriers and a very rare species: the pallid harrier, plus many other soaring birds (herons and storks). This is due both to its location along the Adriatic coast and to its unusual morphology, as it is a peninsula used as a directional reference point for birds. Among the resident birds, we must remember the Peregrine falcon that, after decades of absence, has returned permanently to the cliffs, nesting on the walls overlooking the sea. Additionally, there is also the long-eared owl, as well as the little owl, the Eurasian scops owl and the Barn Owl, which takes advantage of the constant degradation of the abandoned farmhouses to settle here. Among the mammals present, are the fox, the badger, the porcupine, the weasel, the hare and the dormouse.

#### TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to its naturalistic value, the Monte San Bartolo Park has a considerable archaeological and historical content, ranging from Neolithic finds in the area of Monte Castellaro to the archaeological site of Colombarone on the ancient Via Flaminia road, as well as Santa Marina and Vallugola, the Roman ports of the past. Between Gabicce Mare and Pesaro, a charming scenic road unwinds for about 20 km, crossing or touching the picturesque fishing villages, overlooking the blue sea. A series of ancient offshore towns, from Santa Marina to Gabicce Monte, dominate the cliffs from above.

The alleyways inside the castle walls display a strong medieval influence, concealing small marvels, like those around the little square of Casteldimezzo or at the foot of the bell tower in Fiorenzuola di Focara, at the base of which there is an open gateway overlooking the sea.

In the rural areas you can follow trails amidst a

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##### Park Municipalities

Pesaro e Gabicce Mare

traditional rural landscape, with its numerous farmhouses (some of which have been turned into holiday cottages) and numerous intertwining country roads that form a vast network of green itineraries, in the shade of the great oak trees in the cultivated countryside.

A guided trail is also available and is easily accessible to everyone. It stretches from Pesaro, alongside the Villa Imperiale woods, which are rich in indigenous and naturalized species, and across the mountain, to an observation point that sweeps from the hinterlands to the infinite horizon of the sea.

There are numerous religious sites inside the protected area, including the Jewish cemetery near Pesaro, small country cemeteries, the Suore Servite cloistered convent, that of Girolamino of San Bartolo (which gives its name to the entire hill) and the Sanctuary of Casteldimezzo. The artistic treasures in these locations (such as the Crucifix of Jacobello del Fiore and the paintings of Viviani) herald the large noble villas near Pesaro, which descends from the 15th-century Villa Imperiale, with its hidden gardens and its frescoed halls, to the 18th-century Villa Caprile and its famous fountains, to Villa Victoria.



## SASSO SIMONE E SIMONCELLO INTERREGIONAL NATURE PARK

The Sasso Simone e Simoncello Nature Park was established in 1994 and covers a total surface area of 4,991 hectares, in the heart of ancient Montefeltro, on the border between the regions of Marche and Emilia Romagna.

### THE TERRITORY – HISTORY AND CULTURE

The hilly-mountainous landscape is impacted by the Sassi Simone (1,204 m) and Simoncello (1,221 m) mountains, with altitudes ranging from 670 m and 1,415 m of mount Carpegna, the highest peak in the park and a divide between the Valle del Foglia and Valle del Marecchia.

The Sasso Simone e Simoncello Park is the result of gentle and unobtrusive human history, which has allowed nature to remain undisturbed for thousands of years and to carry out its silent work. The hilly landscape is covered in dense vegetation, interrupted by steep cliffs and rocky outcrops on which „impenetrable“ fortresses were built for defence against enemies. It is, therefore, an area rich in castles, fortresses, churches, convents and parish churches. The Park gets its name from two huge rocks, Simone and Simoncello, which were inhabited by humans from the Bronze Age. Some legends tell us about Roman priests, the „Semoni“, who worshiped their gods there, and others about a hermit, Simone, who established his dwelling there. It was probably a place of refuge for the populations during the Lombard and Byzantine raids, but the harshness of the climate did not make it easy to create a permanent human settlement on the rock. In fact, it was basically the strategic vocation of the site that motivated the main „urbanizers“ of the Sasso Simone: these were the Benedictines in the 12th century, the Malatesta family in the 15th century and the Medici family at the end of the 16th century. The first were responsible for building an abbey dedicated to Sant'Angelo, probably on the site of a chapel from the Lombard era. The arrival of particularly harsh winters and the opening of new and more convenient pilgrimage routes contributed to the decline of this site, which saw a major and almost definitive collapse with the plague of 1348. When the

lords of this land realized the strategic military importance of this place, the Sasso was fortified with towers and walls until, in the second half of the 16th century, the Medici family built a fortress-city there, to assert their own power in an area that was difficult to govern. You can still see the remains of that „ideal city“, abandoned in 1673, the symbol of which was the sun - today the symbol of the park.

Geologically, the entire area of the Sasso Simone e Simoncello Nature Park consists a vast mantle of chaotic heterogeneous terrain, called the „Colata della Val Marecchia“. The territory in question is composed primarily of malleable clay and clay-marl soils, which are highly deformable and contain blocks that are composed mostly of limestone and are compact, rigid and of varying sizes. The selective erosion of the mantle by water, wind and snow, impacts and wears away the softer clay-marl materials much more rapidly, bringing out raised blocks made from harder rocks: this is how the “Sassi” (Rocks) originated and are the typical, characteristic morphologies of Montefeltro.

## FLORA

There is a wide variety of flora in the park, which varies depending on the altitude. The vegetation at altitudes lower than 800 m features woods with a good mixture of tree



species. The Downy oak, the Turkey oak, the Hop hornbeam, the Manna ash, the field maple and the Neapolitan maple are the most common trees, while the shrubs include the common dogwood, the Cornelian cherry and the common hazel.

Together with the common hornbeam, the Turkey oak dominates the vast Mediterranean-mountain forest that, from Passo della Cantoniera, extends for over 800 hectares, as far as the Sassi Simone e Simoncello and Valpiano. Also present are holly, various types of maple, the European ash and the beech. Numerous herbaceous species, typical of the forest, grow in the underbrush, such as the European wild ginger and the Martagon lily, while the mountain cornflower prospers at the edge of the forest. On the Sunny slopes, used primarily for grazing, the landscape is dotted with shrubs like the common juniper, the dog rose, the common hawthorn, the blackthorn and the wild blackberry.

In the woods, at altitudes higher than 1,000 m, where the climate is cooler, the beech is predominant, as is the sycamore and sometimes the yew, the Norway maple and the common laburnum, while ferns emerge from the dense carpet of leaves. On the Eastern slope of Mount Carpegna, some reforestation was accomplished in the first half of the twentieth century, mainly using the black pine. The pastures of Monte Carpegna, located at altitudes of around 1,200 to 1,400 m, originate from ancient forests of beech and probably also of fir. In early spring, the green of these meadows is tinged with the colours of the crocus, followed by colourful orchids and lastly by the colchicum, in late summer.

In the woods and meadows, during the spring and autumn seasons, various species of mushroom appear, true delicacies that make these places the destination of enthusiastic researchers and lovers of the flavours of the

undergrowth. The Simoncello, the woods of the Cantoniera and the Costa dei Salti are Protected Floristic Areas, while Monte Carpegna is also included in the state forest of the same name and is owned by the regional authorities.

## WILDLIFE

The Park is home to numerous species of wild animals, including wolves, badgers, weasels, beech martens and skunks. The smallest and the most common of the ungulates is the roe deer. In the evening, at dusk, or early in the morning, it is easy to see them emerge from the thicket to feed in the clearings and in the uncultivated fields. The wild boar is now present throughout most of the Apennines, following the introduction of several specimens from Central Europe, decades ago, for hunting purposes. Among the amphibians, there is the great crested newt and the spotted newt, the tree frog, the common toad and the salamander. The reptiles include the common viper, the green whip snake, the Aesculapian snake, the grass snake, the common wall lizard and the Italian wall lizard, the three-toed skink and the slow worm.

Various species of birds of prey can be observed in different periods and environments: among these, there is the Eurasian sparrow hawk and the Northern goshawk, both characterized by a relatively long tail, giving them a greater ability to fly safely in the woods of the area. Buzzards and Kestrels are easier to spot because they are more confident and also more common; the first can be seen while it skilfully hovers in the air like a „holy spirit“, hunting over meadows and pastures; the second can be spotted as it draws large circles in the sky, letting out its distinctive cry. If you are lucky and alert, you will also see the golden eagle, the Peregrine falcon and the Lanner falcon, even though they do not

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### Park Municipalities in Marche

Carpegna, Frontino, Montecosaro, Piandimeleto, Pietrarubbia.

nest in the area, nor do they frequent open areas when hunting. With the arrival of warmer weather, you can observe numerous migratory birds that, after spending the winter in Africa, return to occupy the territories of the park and the surrounding areas. You may then come across the short-toed snake eagle, the hobby, the European honey buzzard and the Montagu's harrier. Other birds of prey, like the Western marsh harrier, will just be passing through during migration, while others, such as the hen harrier, can be observed in winter over meadows and pastures. The nocturnal birds of prey include the barn owl, the little owl, the long-eared owl and the tawny owl.

## TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

Among its numerous activities, the Park has also undertaken operational strategies aimed not only to protect and enhance the whole area, but also to improve the structures available for use over the territory. Therefore, rest areas have been equipped, from which you can set out on pleasant walks or on challenging excursions. It is also possible to take guided tours or go orienteering and Nordic walking.



Itineraries suitable for mountain bikes or horseback riding have also been marked out. Visits accompanied by Park Guides are held throughout the year. There are also numerous environmental education offers for schools, also promoted by the Park, through its own CEE.

The Wildlife Park of Pian dei Prati is ideal for school visits and for families: in an area of 5.5 hectares you can follow a trail with the aim of getting to know farmyard pets like goats, sheep and mules, as well as observing unusual wild animals like birds of prey, roe deer, wild boars, frogs, toads and newts. The Wildlife Park is available for lectures, guided tours, camps, etc., also for people with disabilities, thanks to a specially structured specific trail. There is a Visitor Centre attached to the head office of the park, located in Carpegna, as well as at Ponte Cappuccini in the municipality of Pietrarubbia, while in the ancient Town of

Pennabilli, headquarters of the Episcopal Diocese, the Park has set up an interesting nature museum in an old renovated building. Guest rooms are available at Frontino, in the Multi-purpose Centre of Montefeltro, as well as at Calvillano di Pietrarubbia. In this latter location, there is also an operative CEE, while at San Sisto in Piandimeleto, there is the Environmental Services Computer Centre of Montefeltro and the Museo del Fungo (Mushroom Museum).

A visit to the Park is made even more enjoyable by the exceptional local produce and by the local cuisine. In fact, you can enjoy numerous delicacies here, made with mushrooms and truffles (both black and white), Carpegna ham, which boasts PDO recognition, various types of Pecorino cheese, both fresh and mature and numerous culinary specialities typical of Marche, Romagna and Tuscany regional traditions.





## MONTE CONERO REGIONAL NATURE PARK

A mountain overlooking the sea, with enchanting views. A place with generous, warm atmospheres. Hiking trails that seem to wink at sustainable tourism. An offer of local traditions in the pursuit of quality. So much history revealed in every corner of the territory. All this is the Parco del Conero, a work of art created by nature, a gem set in the Marche region, on the shores of the Adriatic. Established in 1987 to protect nature and cultural treasures, the Conero Regional Park, which stretches for 6,011 hectares, includes most of the territory of Ancona and of the little towns of Camerano, Sirolo and Numana.

### TERRITORY – HISTORY AND CULTURE

This protected coastal area offers varied and fascinating surroundings, in which Mount Conero (572 m) stands out. Its origin dates back to a long process of sedimentation that began in the Jurassic era and emerged in the Pliocene era, five million years ago. From the Gargano to the coast of Trieste, Mount Conero is the only rocky bastion consisting of limestone formations with majolica rock lithotypes and red and white scagliola stone. For this reason it has been a place of stone extraction since ancient times. In the 4th century BC, it was a landing place for the Greeks, who travelled up the southern coastline of Italy in search of towns to be founded. It was here that the Dorians cast their anchor and made it their permanent abode, calling the promontory Komaros (from „strawberry tree“, a common plant on the mountain) and its northern curve Ancon (elbow), from which the name of the city of Ancona originates. The pres-

ence of man here has been confirmed at least 100,000 years ago and left numerous traces of the Picentine people (9th-3rd century BC) in particular. Tombs were discovered, providing rich grave goods, including the famous tomb of the Queen of Numana and Sirolo, which was preserved in the area of pine trees. The finds are exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Ancona and in the Antiquarium of Numana. Further evidence ranges from rock carvings to Roman caves, Benedictine and Franciscan monasteries and defensive structures such as the Napoleonic Fort and the Torre Clementina in Portonovo. Not to be forgotten are the beautiful Romanesque church of Santa Maria di Portonovo and the Monastery of San Pietro al Conero, in which various religious orders (Benedictines, Camaldolese and Gonzagites) established themselves, in turn, after the year 1000).

### FLORA

The diversity of the environments, such as the steep limestone cliffs, the hills, the valley floors, the Musone River, the wetlands, the coastal dunes and the brackish ponds of Portonovo, are a guarantee of a high level of biodiversity. The northeastern slopes of the Mountain are covered with sclerophyllous evergreen and deciduous trees (Downy oak, Hop hornbeam, Neapolitan maple, and Manna ash), while on the sunnier slopes and those facing south, there is Mediterranean shrub, featuring thermophile species such as, in particular, the Holm oak, the strawberry tree, the mastic and the terebinth. In addition, extensive pine forests are also found here,



resulting from reforestation carried out with Aleppo pine, Austrian black pine, the cypress and other species from the „Forest Militia“. With regard to the cultivated areas, the Park has, over time, promoted projects directed solely at quality and encouraging organic farming, breeding and production of certified foods (grains, vegetables, legumes and fruit) in accordance with the QM brand (Qualità Marche), a mark of quality of the Marche region. This is all done in agreement with the farmers, with the goal of experimenting a renewed relationship between man and environment. The Park's most ambitious project, carried out with the agricultural enterprises, united in a cooperative called 'Conero Agricoltura e Ambiente' (Conero Agriculture and Environment), gave rise to a brand of supply chain products, in 2012, which is, quite rightly, moving along the same path as the already widely recognized Rosso Conero DOC wine, from the wineries located in the protected area and in the surrounding territories.

### WILDLIFE

In terms of wildlife, the presence of more than 200 species of birds has been recorded, including 76 nesting species. In April and May each year about 10,000 transiting birds of prey are counted. This is why Mount Conero is a very popular location for birdwatching. There are strategic sighting points, including Gradina del Poggio, Pian Grande, Monte dei Corvi, Monte Colombo, Belvedere Nord and the Piani dei Raggetti. 467 types of butterfly have also been counted. In the fine weather, these fly around searching for nectar from the flowers, for mating and for laying their eggs. As for the mammals, the presence of the wolf is certain, albeit sporadic, as well as the badger, the fox, the hedgehog, the beech marten and the weasel. Furthermore, a small, extremely rare freshwater crustace-



an, the *Dyaciclops bicuspidatus odessanu*, can be found in the Portonovo ponds. The marine environment is now protected, with a proposal to establish a Site of Community interest (SCI), and it contains an incredible number of crab species, many of which are extremely mimetic, like the European spider crab and the timid anemone crab, feather duster worms, splendid nudibranchs (small colourful snails), the spiny dye-murex (so-called „sea snails“), cuttlefish, shrimps, a large number of combtooth blennies, scorpion-fish, sea bream and saddled sea bream. The Conero muscle, or wild Mediterranean 'Mosciolo' muscle of Portonovo, deserves a special mention, having become a Slow Food Presidium, and can be found on the tables of good food connoisseurs.

### TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

For those who wish to discover the heart of the Conero area, not only is there a dense network of trails, created by man over the centuries, but the Park has identified 18 particular routes of particular environmental and scenic interest, which can be covered by bicycle, on foot or on horseback. The Park has also launched numerous other actions in the field of sustainable tourism, and, in 2013, it obtained the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST).

This certification provides, among other things, the incentive for local components in the territory to work in partnership, in order to increase the offer and quality of services in the area, in a context of full respect for the environment. After all, tourism is the main economy of the area, as the Riviera del Conero is well-known not only in Italy, but also throughout Europe. In fact, endless surprises are generously donated by the park and the little towns that compose it. In short, departing from Ancona, the capital of the Marche region, a walk along what is familiarly called the 'strada del Monte', or Mountain road, will give you a good idea of what is being jealously preserved inside the Conero area. This will lead you to the bay of Portonovo and its beaches, at Vela and at Mezzavalle, which are a must and can be reached only by sea or on foot, along a narrow road with a spectacular view. Culture and environment meet in the bay, where you will find the Watchtower built by Pope Clement XI, the Napoleonic Fort, built in 1808 to stop the approach of British ships and now a hotel, the little Romanesque church of Santa Maria and the brackish



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#### Park Municipalities

Ancona, Camerano, Numana, Sirolo

ponds behind the dunes. A few kilometres after Portonovo, the road climbs up to the peak of the Mountain, to the Abbey of San Pietro and to the northern panoramic viewpoint. The presence of disused quarries makes the Park an 'open book' of the area's geological history and of the entire stratigraphic sequence, typical of the Umbria-Marche Apennine area. The Massignano quarry is particularly important. It has become the world's best example of the Eocene/Oligocene eras and is now equipped for visits. Continuing south, you will see the

splendid Sirolo, the 'Pearl of Conero' and a balcony over the beaches of Due Sorelle, Urbani and San Michele-Sassi Neri. Walking on, we come across the medieval town of Numana, after which you will reach the long, fine pebbled beach of Marcelli, a tourist centre where most of the accommodation in the Riviera del Conero can be found. Then there is Camerano, with its ancient origins and its subsoil that is marked by a complex underground path.



## GOLA DELLA ROSSA E FRASASSI REGIONAL NATURE PARK



The Gola della Rossa e di Frasassi Regional Nature Park represents the “green colour” of the Marche Region.

Created in September 1997, its 10,026 hectares make it the largest protected area of the region and it includes three different biotopes: the canyon of the Gola di Frasassi, that of the Gola della Rossa and the Scappuccia Valley. A trip into the Park is a „journey into the heart of the Marche region“, to discover historical and artistic treasures that are hidden by the charming, harmonious landscapes and surrounded by untouched, thriving nature.

### THE TERRITORY

The geology of the area is very distinctive: approximately one million years ago, a sharp orogenic rise created an increase in the potential energy of the watercourses that, by deeply affecting the ridges, unearthed a limestone massif, compact and rigid enough to preserve itself in imposing vertical blocks. Today, the ridge of Frasassi is carved out of the Gola di Frasassi, while the structure of Monte Pietrosa-Monte Murano is cut out of the Gola della Rossa. The basins and hilly areas, however, correspond to tectonic depressions and marl or clay-sandstone rocks, mainly found in the northern area of the park where the high grounds are evident.

The penetration of meteoritic water and groundwater inside the rock, widening the fractures (thanks to chemical corrosion favoured by the presence of dissolved car-

bon dioxide) in the eastern area of Gola di Frasassi, causes the deep sulphurous waters to rise, generating a fluid that is extremely aggressive against the limestone. These processes, intervalled by local collapses, made the dimensions of the many underground spaces gigantic and these appear as highly articulated karstic complexes with an extraordinary environmental scenic value, like in the case of the famous Frasassi Caves (Grotte di Frasassi).

On a silent journey of about an hour, you will be amazed as you admire the small lakes, stalactites and stalagmites, until you reach the majestic cave of the Abisso Ancona (240 m high) (Ancona Abyss), the Sala delle Candeline (Hall of Candles), Sala dell'Orsa (Hall of the Bear) and the Sala dell'Infinito (Hall of Infinity). Water catchment has been carried out for some time now, for the sulphurous water pools to be used at the San Vittore Spa, where they are used for therapies against respiratory and rheumatic disorders. The Gola della Rossa is similar in appearance to that of Frasassi and contains vast karstic caves, such as the Grotta del Vernino, where several interesting fossils of mammals were found, like that of the cave bear.

The Scappuccia Valley, which is crossed by the Scappuccia river that forms a rather narrow, winding gorge, features a wide variety of surroundings and, thus, vegetation that is conditioned by the substrate, by light exposure, by altitude and the presence of water.



## NATURE

Some of the species found in the park are of significant naturalistic value. It is a true jewel of biodiversity, thanks to its 105 species of nest-building birds, 40 species of mammals, 29 species of reptiles and amphibians and over 1,250 species of plants.

Among the birds, the golden eagle is an important presence and is at the top of a food network consisting of mammals, birds, amphibians, and crustaceans. The only couple of golden eagles in the province of Ancona nest in this park, specifically in the Gola di Frasassi. There is also a significant presence of other birds of prey, such as the Northern goshawk, the short-toed snake eagle, the red kite, the Lanner falcon and the Peregrine

falcon, of which at least 3 couples nest in the area.

The nocturnal birds of prey include the little owl, the barn owl, the tawny owl and the long-eared owl; the presence of the Eurasian eagle owl was also recently confirmed in a neighbouring area of the park. Of the mammals, the wolf is a significant presence and, in recent decades, has recolonized the mountainous ridge of the Marche region, thanks to demographic expansion of prey species, like the wild boar, fallow deer, roe deer and the deer. The presence of the wildcat and the skunk has been confirmed, as well as the more common fox, the weasel, the beech marten and the badger.

The numerous underground caves present

in this area are home to at least 12 different species of bat. The colonies of the common bent-winged bat in the park are among the largest in Europe, with over 12,000 specimens, both in wintering sites and in breeding nurseries. Among the cave-dwelling species, as well as the Italian salamander, a species endemic to the caves of central and northern Italy, there is also a considerable presence of the *Niphargus ictus*, a small endemic crustacean that populates the ponds in the caves, as well as other invertebrates such as the *Nesticus eremita*, the *Meriania*, etc.

With respect to flora, Hop hornbeams woods are common in the calcareous areas of the hilly plain, while the downy oak prevails in the marl-sandstone areas.

Beech woods grow on the mountain plain and in particularly damp areas, while on the warmer slopes of the rocky gorges the vegetation is typically Mediterranean and includes the Holm oak, the wild madder, the terebinth, the phillyrea, the strawberry tree, the asparagus and the rough bindweed. In the summit areas of the territory, there are extensive grassland formations of secondary origin, representing an ecosystem of great naturalistic interest, due to the presence of rare species or species protected by current national and international regulations.

This habitat is rich with different species of the orchid family and originates from the wood-cutting carried out by man since ancient times, to create useful spaces for the breeding and grazing of livestock, for hay-making and for growing herbaceous plants and trees for food. To underline its importance from a conservationist viewpoint, in the light of the trend towards abandonment leading to its gradual disappearance resulting from natural evolutionary processes, the European Union recognizes that the second-

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#### Park Municipalities

Arcevia, Cerreto d'Esi, Fabriano  
Genga, Serra San Quirico

ary grasslands hold the highest level of conservationist importance, identifying them as a „priority“ environment under the Habitats Directive.

Numerous rare botanic species grow in the Park. Among these, there is the *Moehringia papulosa*, an endemic species of the Apennines: the only places in the world in which it can be found are the gorges of Frasassi, Rossa and Furlo. Then there is the *Potentilla caulescens*, the *Saxifraga australis*, endemic to the central and southern Apennines, and the *Ephedra major*, a relic from the Tertiary Era, found on the rocks of the Scappuccia Valley.



### TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

Today, the Park can offer a network of at least 35 hiking trails, all marked out, totaling over 170 km, with varying durations and various levels of difficulty, suitable for tourists and also for experienced hikers.

The trails allow you to admire a wealth of flora and wildlife typical of the pre-Apennine environment. You can also practice other sports in contact with nature: mountain biking on dirt roads and cart tracks over tens of kilometres, both at high altitudes and in the valley, horseback riding along the dense network of mule trails, mountaineering and sport climbing on the vertical limestone walls of the gorges and of the main mountains, speleology and, in certain periods of the year, canoeing and rafting too.

The territory is rich in history and art left by man, since time immemorial. In the area of Frasassi, there are some of the oldest traces of human presence (the Grotta del Prete in Pianello di Genga). But the most abundant evidence dates back to the middle ages: there is a dense network of castles, churches and monasteries of exceptional historical and artistic value. These include the Abbey of San Vittore alle Chiuse, founded at the end of the 10th century and among the richest religious settlements in the area, as well as being one of the most important examples of Romanesque architecture in the Marche region. There is also the sanctuary of Santa Maria infra Saxa and the Tempietto, a domed octagonal building, commissioned by Pope Leo XII to Giuseppe Valadier and located inside an immense cave; the abbey of St. Elena, in Romanesque style, located downstream of the Gola della Rossa, founded by St. Romualdo at the beginning of the 11th century; the Abbey of Val di Castro, built in the early 11th century by St. Romualdo, who died there in 1027, which contains interesting frescoes.

Fabriano deserves a visit, with its churches rich in works of art, the Art gallery and the Museum of Paper and Watermarks, as does Arcevia with its beautiful medieval town centre. In the Park, next to the small castle villages of Avacelli, Castelletta and Piero-sara, are the towns of Serra San Quirico with its „copertelle“ or covered roads that served as patrol routes, and Genga, which still preserves its medieval urban structure, boundary walls and Palace of the Counts of Genga, still intact.





## ABBADIA DI FIASTRA NATURE RESERVE

The Abbazia di Fiastra Nature Reserve is a real treasure trove of history, culture, nature and traditions, offering visitors a unique environment in which they can discover the evolution of the natural environment and the „signs“ left by man over the centuries. The Reserve was established in 1984 and subsequently, in 1985, it was recognized, by Decree of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, as a „State Nature Reserve“. It includes 1,825 hectares of land surrounding the Abbey of Chiaravalle di Fiastra and today you can still see traces of the long presence and the work of the Cistercian monks.

### THE TERRITORY – HISTORY AND CULTURE

The territory of the Nature Reserve, owned by the Giustiniani Bandini Foundation, is in the municipalities of Urbisaglia and Tolentino and falls in the middle-hills in the Province of Macerata, ranging from 130 to 306 m, and more exactly, between the Valley of the Chienti River and the Fiastra River, which is its largest tributary.

In addition to the abbey complex, there is also large area devoted to agriculture in the territory, which retains many typical elements of the rural landscape of Marche, a vision that has disappeared elsewhere. There is also a „forest“ of over 100 hectares - the last example of the ancient forests that once covered the hills of the Marche region. In the Abbazia di Fiastra Nature Reserve, created to protect the lands belonging to the Cistercian monks and shaped by them over the centuries, you can enjoy an envi-

ronment that is welcoming, harmonious and the expression of a balanced relationship between man and nature.

The value of this area is, therefore, directly linked to its history. In fact, in 1142, the Cistercian Abbey of Santa Maria di Chiaravalle di Fiastra was built, when Guarnerio II, Duke of Spoleto and Marquis of the March of Ancona, donated a vast area near the Fiastra River to the Cistercian monks of the Abbey of Chiaravalle in Milan. For its construction, the monks „obtained“ building materials from the nearby Roman town of Urbs Salvia, which had been looted and destroyed by Alaric between 408 and 410. At the same time, the monks started the reclamation of the surrounding land.

The Abbazia di Fiastra was one of the most important and powerful monastic settlements in Central Italy. For over three centuries, it was the centre of fervent economic, social and cultural activities, promoting the development of the entire area. In 1773, the entire property was given up to the noble family of Giustiniani Bandini. In 1918, the last male heir, Sigismund, died, leaving all properties to a foundation named after himself.

The Cistercian-Lombard Borgognone-style church has three naves and occupies the north side of the cloister. The Abbey overlooks it, as does the Palazzo Giustiniani Bandini on the south side.

In March 1985, invited by the Foundation, the Cistercian monks, again coming from Milan, returned to live in the Abbey of Chiaravalle di Fiastra.

Their presence brought new life to the an-

cient monastery, once more making it a spiritual reference point for many people.

The premises of the Abbey and of Palazzo Giustiniani Bandini contain an interesting Archaeological Collection, with artefacts, sculptures and epigraphs from the town of Urbs Salvia; there is also a Wine Museum, where instruments and objects used in the past for processing grapes are on display, and a Museum of country civilization, with agricultural tools and utensils from the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Abbey complex also includes a Conference Centre.

The territory of the nature reserve is divided into three areas, with homogeneous environmental characteristics and differentiated management criteria: Special Protected Nature Reserve that includes a wood, an Anthropological Reserve, including the entire Abbey complex and a Protected Area with all the farming areas.

## NATURE

The Forest, which extends over about 100 hectares, is the heart of the Nature Reserve. It still has a considerable surface area, making it the latest example of a large forest that, until 1700, covered the entire area of the hills in the province of Macerata. The Turkey oak is predominant in this forest, which is inhabited by numerous wild animals including the roe deer. Like the Forest, the „Le Vene“ pond and the Entogge and Fiastra waterways, important and evocative wetlands, are protected areas, due to the fact that they are rich in vegetation and wildlife. As well as the Turkey oak, there are also the downy oak, the English oak, the Manna ash and the field maple In the territory of the reserve. Among the mammals, as well as the roe deer, reintroduced in 1957, there are also beech martens, badgers, weasels, porcupines and foxes, while the bird popu-



lation includes the Eurasian sparrow hawk, the little owl, the tawny owl, the European green woodpecker, the Eurasian nuthatch, the short-toed tree creeper, the hoopoe and many other passerines, typical of the of forest environment.

The cultivated fields and their relative farmhouses, located in the Protected Area, are the result of centuries of farming activities carried out with love and respect for the rhythms of nature: the widespread housing stock, consisting of 79 settlements, has been preserved in its original beauty thanks to the continuity of ownership and to the care determined by an ancient tenant farming-type relationship.

## TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

Visiting and living the Natural Reserve is a unique and unforgettable experience, thanks to the harmony and balance of the landscape, the soft sounds that waft through the air and the colours that characterize every season. There are a variety of opportunities for enjoying contact with the different natural environments: in fact, a recent reorganization of the trails took place, including spaces for pedestrians, cyclists and those who love horse riding.

The „Forest“ (La Selva) trail leads into the woods; the „Le Vene lake“ trail crosses the

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### Giustiniani Bandini Foundation Offices and Conference Centre

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### Information Office

### Meridiana srl Guided tour bookings

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### Municipalities of the Reserve

Tolentino, Urbisaglia

Following the seismic events of 2016, it is advisable to contact the Information center to verify the possibility of visiting the Palazzo Giustiniani Bandini, the museums and the abbey complex.

agricultural territory between the forest and the river Fiastra, allowing you to observe the migratory birds and roe deer; the sensory trail „the woods and the river“ (il bosco e il fiume) is accessible to all and allows you to discover the reserve using „all of your senses“, or rather, not just your eyes.

Nearby there is also a Center for Environment Education, that can arrange activities to discover the environment and the historical sites with qualified tour and nature guides. A variety of interesting guided tours and educational workshops are offered to school groups and are specifically designed for students of different age groups. There are also picnic areas in the Nature Reserve, as well as a camper service, ample parking, toilet facilities, bars, pizzerias, restaurants, shops selling local products and various accommodation facilities.



## GOLA DEL FURLO STATE NATURE RESERVE

Established in 2001, the Gola del Furlo State Nature Reserve, located within the territory of the municipalities of Acqualagna, Cagli, Fermignano, Fossombrone and Urbino, features 3,627 hectares of woods, pastures and unspoilt peaks; an authentic paradise, crossed by the Candigliano River that winds between the imposing rocky walls of the Gola (Gorge), where evocative landscape combines with lavish naturalistic wealth.

### THE TERRITORY – HISTORY AND CULTURE

The walls of the Furlo, between Mount Pietralata (889 m) and Mount Paganuccio (976 m), are a display of impressive, majestic scenery. Squeezed in between the rock, a dam crosses the valley floor, forming a picturesque artificial lake. It is here that the consular Via Flaminia road once passed, linking Rome to Fano, on the Adriatic Sea. As the commemorative inscription reminds us, in 76-77 AD, the Emperor Vespasian, had a tunnel dug in the narrowest point of the gorge, to facilitate passage through it. The tunnel, called *petra pertusa* or *forulus* – which is where the name Furlo originated - is 38.30 m long in the ancient part, with its widest point measuring 5.47 m and 5.95 m high. At the mouth of the passage, there is a stretch of flat road that was travelled along before it was excavated. Two entrances to a second tunnel open up onto it, which was perhaps built by the Roman Consul, Flaminius, in 217 BC, and on which old ruts from the frequent passage of vehicles wheels are visible.

The landscape and the morphology of the Gola del Furlo allow us to reconstruct the

geological history of Italy of more than 200 million years ago. Its rocks illustrate the main formations of the Umbria-Marche Apennines: solid limestone, carnelian, rosso ammonitico limestone (inside which there are various types of fossil), nodular limestones and scagliola stone.

### FLORA

It is because of these unusual characteristics that the Monti del Furlo are home to a wide variety of flora, where common plants alternate with rare specimens.

For example, there is the *campanula di tanfanii* Podlech, the *Edraianthus graminifolius*, the dwarf hawkweed, the rare and endemic *Moehringia papulosa* with its small, white flowers that have four petals, the maidenhair spleenwort, the Apennine Bermuda grass, the Rock buckthorn, the Dwarf buckthorn, the *Leopoldia comosa*, the St. Bernard's lily, the Heath leaved rock rose, the German-madwort, the strawberry tree, the *Piptatherum*



virescens, the Grassy leaved iris, the bitter-sweet nightshade, the bittercress, the Northern hollyfern, the Sand crocus and numerous orchids, among which the military orchid and the and Roman Dactylorhiza. Among the tree species, there is the Holm oak that, along with the strawberry tree, can be found in the south-facing limestone areas, the Manna ash, the Rowan, the Hop hornbeam, the Turkey oak and, at higher elevations, the beech.

## WILDLIFE

There is a wealth of very diverse wildlife in the park: the species of mammals include, in particular, the wolf, the porcupine and the roe deer, as well as other more common species such as the skunk, the fox, the weasel, the beech marten, the badger and the wild boar. There are also numerous birds of prey that use the walls of the gorge for nesting and the meadows at the summit for hunting. Among the most interesting ones to observe, there

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### Nature Reserve Management Authority

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### Municipalities of the Reserve

Acqualagna, Cagli, Fermignano,  
Fossombrone e Urbino

is the golden eagle, as well as the Eurasian sparrow hawk and the Peregrine falcon. Other noteworthy birds, typical inhabitants of the rocky areas, are the swift, the Crag martin,

the blue rock thrush and the delicate and charming wall creeper. Other nesting species, both passing through and wintering, include the Great cormorant, the Montagu's Harrier, the Northern goshawk, the buzzard, the short-toed snake eagle, the Kestrel, the hobby, the Alpine swift and, occasionally, also the Griffon vulture. The reptiles present in the park include the dice snake, the four-lined snake, the coronella girondica and the three-toed skink, while the amphibian species include the great crested newt, the Italian stream frog and the Italian cave salamander; among the fish, there is the eel, the bleak, the common barbel, the chub, the South European nase and the Padanian goby, etc.

## TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

Walks and excursions are organized in the reserve, with expert guides, allowing each visitor to fully appreciate the values and the distinctive historical and naturalistic features

of the area. In the Territory's "Lorenzo Manozzi Torini" Museum you can also get other useful information about the natural environment and the historical events that have characterized the area. The Benedictine Abbey of San Vincenzo al Furlo (8th century) is worth visiting. It was renovated in 1271 and was here that St. Romualdo (1011) and St. Pier Damiani (1042) once stayed. Another place to see is the Sanctuary of Pelingo, inside which there is a fifteenth-century fresco depicting the Madonna and Child. In 1922, Mussolini passed through and, in 1936, the forestry militia decided to immortalize the image of Il Duce, creating the famous profile that is still partially visible on the south-eastern side of Mount Paganuccio. Inside the reserve, there are two protected floristic areas, specifically in the Gola del Furlo and on Mount Paganuccio. Furthermore, the area lies within a Site of Community Importance (SCI) and inside a Special Protected Area (SPA).



## MONTAGNA DI TORRICCHIO NATURE RESERVE



The Torricchio Nature Reserve was established in 1970 by Decree of the Dean of the University of Camerino, who obtained this land as a donation made by Marquis Mario Incisa della Rocchetta, then President of the Italian WWF Association. It was then recognised as a State Nature Reserve by a Ministerial Decree, dated 7 April, 1977, and later, in 1979, it was also

recognized as a Council of Europe Biogenetic Reserve. The Reserve, which extends over an area of 317.12 hectares, is located in the municipalities of Pievetorina and Monte Cavallo in the province of Macerata, with heights from 820 to 1,491 m in the Val di Tazza valley, between the mountains of Cetrognola (1,575 m) and Torricchio (1,444 m), on the

Umbria-Marche Apennines, a short distance from Monti Sibillini National Park.

### THE TERRITORY

Most of the territory is covered with pastures and a small part consists of mowable meadows, while the forest is mainly limited to the sides of the Val di Tazza valley, which feature copses and groups of tall trees.

The area was originally used as a supply of timber and as a pasture for sheep, which came there from the countryside around Rome. Today the area is protected as an integral nature reserve and, by Statute, it is intended primarily for activities of scientific research. Geologically, the area features limestone, limestone-marl and marl formations.

### NATURE

For its size, the reserve contains a remarkable number of plant species. This is due to the fact that there are two altitudinal belts of vegetation in the reserve (hills and mountains), diversity of environments (pastures, fertile meadows, woods, ravines, canyons, etc.) and widespread dynamic processes that were triggered following the protective measures that were taken. The most common tree species is the beech, which forms the



woods above 850-900 metres; the Holm oak is also common, found in small groups in the rocky areas, as well as the holly, the sycamore, the yew, which is rarer and more localized, the Hop hornbeam, the manna ash and the downy oak. The numerous habitats provide niches suitable for a wealth of flora (652 catalogued entities), among which several endemic species stand out, including the *Viola eugeniae* ssp. *eugeniae*, the *Gentianella columnae*, the *Campanula tanfani*, the *Campanula apennina* and the *Trisetum villosum*.

With regard to wildlife, the species of mammals present include wolves, which transit in the area and whose images have been repeatedly captured by photo-traps. Deer from the Sibillini mountains also go in the reserve, along with other species like

the squirrel, the wildcat, the roe deer, the weasel, the badger, the marten and the porcupine. The presence of bears, albeit sporadic, has also been documented.

The Avifauna is represented by steppe species, such as the grey partridge and the rock partridge, as well as several birds of prey, like the European honey buzzard, the Eurasian sparrow hawk and the kestrel. Also present are the hoopoe, the European green woodpecker, the lesser spotted woodpecker, the common redstart and the tawny pipit. At 1,126 m above sea level, on a terrace next to the valley floor, stands Casale Piscini, a building constructed as far back as 1874, which served as a shelter for shepherds in the summer grazing period. Currently, since 1970, it is used as a facility for the reserve's management authority.

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Municipalities of the Reserve  
Pievetorina, Monte Cavallo



## MONTE SAN VICINO AND MONTE CANFAITO REGIONAL NATURE RESERVE

This is the newest regional nature reserve in Marche: in fact, it was established in 2009. The protected area extends for 1,452.13 hectares, between the municipalities of San Severino, Matelica, Apiro and Gagliole.

### THE TERRITORY

The area of the reserve, located in the pre-Appennine strip, is a mountainous-hilltop area, with altitudes ranging from 450 to 1,479 m, corresponding to the summit of Monte San Vicino.

It is the most visible and recognizable peak in the Marche Apennine chain, not only because it is the highest, but also because it is visible from almost any point in the surrounding area, showing its somewhat rocky shape soaring above all the surrounding hills and mountains. This makes it a very distinguishable and easily recognizable (even from different angles) and, for this reason, it has always been the main reference point for the whole territory.

The territory of the reserve is characterized by solid limestone formations from the Late Triassic period and, in addition to Monte San Vicino, it also includes the Canfaito plateau, located on its slopes.

The rocks that make up the San Vicino and Canfaito mountain range are mostly solid limestone formations from the Jurassic period. Deposited more than 200 million years ago, they were followed by the formation of the Bugarone (the Canfaito plains), with marl outcrops (Rosso Ammonitico) and flint limestones (jasper limestones), rich in fossils. The formation of majolica, which is very common (the mountains of Canfaito, Ar-

gentaro, Pereta and Puro), took place in the Cretaceous period, with deposits of about 120 million years old. For millions of years, under different conditions, the formation of deposits continued in what geologists call the “Umbria-Marche succession” up until the great tectonic movement of the continental plates that then caused the emergence of mountain ranges.

The particular orography of the territory, with large stretches of lowland alternating with deeply formed dales, has created unique and evocative places, crossed by narrow canyons similar to small gorges (Gola di Jana, Bocca de Pecu, Fosso del Crino) or adventurous tunnel passages (hollow stone). A dense network of hiking routes allows you to gain detailed knowledge of the nature and landscape of the territory.

The impressive scenery can be linked to the flat area of the ridge and the relatively large areas of woodland, alternating with pastures, together making a particularly gentle and harmonious landscape, even though its origin is anthropic. The boundaries of the reserve also encompass two areas, recognized by European protocols as having significant naturalistic value (SCI and SPA).

### FLORA

The vegetation is formed by large beech woods reduced to copse, in which there are, however, some centuries-old specimens (up to 6 m in circumference). These veritable patriarchs of nature were saved from being chopped down because, during the warm summer months, shepherds would take refuge in the shelter of their large foli-



age (known as merigge - resting in the afternoon).

The area has interesting flora, thanks to the presence of the saffron crocus, the two-leaf squill, the yellow anemone, the coralroot bittercress, the drooping bittercress, various types of orchid, the snowdrop, the wild peony, the common Turk's cap lily, the purple thymelaea passerina, the viola eugeniae and the asphodelus.

#### WILDLIFE

As for the wildlife, the wolf is an important presence, as is the roe deer and the wildcat. There are also numerous bird species: the golden eagle, the eagle owl, the Peregrine falcon, the spotted woodpecker, the Lanner falcon, the Eurasian sparrow hawk, the hen harrier, the buzzard, the kestrel and the European nightjar.

#### HISTORY AND CULTURE

There are abundant traces of history, art and religion throughout the territory: human presence has, in fact, been documented since

prehistoric times: the caves, gorges and shelters below the rocks, inhabited since prehistoric times, have brought us ancient tools and stone utensils.

There is important evidence of the medieval religious past in this area: in particular, the territory of San Vicino had the privilege of „hosting“ St. Romualdo, a Benedictine monk and founder of the Camaldolese order. It is here that the Saint left his earthly life behind (1027). He was buried in the monastery of Val di Castro, revered as a new St. Benedict, and the place immediately became a destination for pilgrims. For several centuries, his remains were kept buried in the Abbey of Valdicastro, beneath the San Vicino (now kept in the Cathedral of Fabriano). A visit to the village of Elcito is a must, with the unyielding solitude of the few stone houses there, it is a jewel surrounded by defensive walls and concentrated around the church of San Rocco, a true unassailable bastion protecting the trail that led from the St. Clemente valley towards the abbey of Val Fucina, defending its integrity and riches.

Of the nearby Abbey of Santa Maria in Val Fucina, probably dating back to the 10th and 11th centuries, the capitals of the crypt still remain, with geometric and zoomorphic designs and symbols of the four evangelists, the only evidence remaining of the ancient Benedictine coenobitic complex. Another monastic settlement that arose first as a Benedictine monastery, then reformed by St. Romualdo, is that of Santa Maria de Rotis, “Roti”, going up the Franciscan trail from Braccano.

The first news of an abbot at Santa Maria de Rotis dates back to 1195, but its Foundation took place in earlier centuries, probably because, at that time, the monastery was already at its finest glory. This destination and place of transit for pilgrims, on the road between Matelica and Cingoli, which is now in poor condition, is located in an area of poignant beauty and is dedicated to prayer and asceticism. At the top of the Valley, known as the “Gola di Jana”, it links the slopes that descend from Canfaieto and Monte Pagliano and is near a fortuitous pure water spring. It can be reached on foot in about 30 minutes, by leaving your car a short distance after Braccano. This is one of the places in Marche where the total absence



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##### Municipalities of the Reserve

San Severino, Matelica, Apiro, Gagliole

of human habitation and beautiful natural surroundings give you the impression that time has been standing still since the earliest monastic settlements. From Roti, some important hiking trails branch out and find the ideal conditions for a quiet „base camp“. Braccano and Chigiano are two of the places linked to the history of the Italian Resistance Movement, the Nazi-Fascist massacres and the sacrifice of the partisans.

#### TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

The locations most frequented by tourists are Pian dell'Elmo and Apiro, which are well-equipped with accommodation facilities, and the Canfaieto Plains, a popular destination for picnics, walking and horseback riding. A dense network of trails, all marked out on the ground, make it possible to go on easy hikes with moderate slopes. Only a few paths, intended for the more experienced walkers, require more time and usually lead to the peaks of the highest mountains, like the San Vicino. The greater effort required will be rewarded with unique views and landscapes, stretching as far as the horizon, across the Apennine ridge and down to the sea.



## “RIPA BIANCA DI JESI” REGIONAL NATURE RESERVE

The Ripa Bianca di Jesi nature reserve was formerly (from 1997) a WWF oasis. The reserve was established in January 2003 and extends over 310.86 hectares; inside it, there is the „Sergio Romagnoli“ didactic-naturalistic area, named after this naturalist from Jesi who undertook the battle for its protection.

### THE TERRITORY

Located in the town of Jesi (AN), midway between the regional parks of Monte Conero and Gola della Rossa e Frasassi, it is crossed by the river Esino, and is one of the most important wetlands in the Marche region.

Up until the 1980s, the site was a long way from being an area of natural interest: near the rocky inlet area, there was the landfill of the municipality of Jesi and, not far away, there was also the active quarry of San Biagio, where gravel was extracted, which meant the continuous transit of lorries and bulldozers; the remaining landscape was made up of farmlands that extended as far as the river.

Today, a visit to the reserve is a tangible example of how strongly anthropogenic places can be restored to nature and can, therefore, ensure that important „ecosystem services“ are performed, which are also fundamental for the social and economic well-being of the surrounding areas.

The territory extends from the banks of the Esino River up to the slopes of the hills, situated on the right bank, characterized by unusual forms of soil erosion called „calanques“ (rocky inlets). Inside the reserve,

there are four different types of environment: lake, river, agricultural and calanque.

### FLORA

The riparian vegetation of the Esino River, running through the area today, is composed of a narrow band of trees and shrubs. The conservation and restoration of the riparian woods are indispensable, not only for the wildlife that finds shelter and food there, but also for the purification and regulation of the waters. The vegetation on the river banks consists of a strip of land containing willows in the innermost area and a tree belt in the outermost area, with white willows and black and white poplars. Allocthonous species, introduced by man, are widespread here, including the black locust, the tree of heaven and the aspen. The type of vegetation growing on the banks is typical of wetlands and watercourses, with the presence of domestic cane reeds, colonized by climbing species like the hop, the field bindweed, the bittersweet nightshade and the white vine.

Living conditions are very difficult for the vegetation in the calanque area. In fact, the plants in these rocky inlets or calanque areas are true “colonizing” pioneers, thanks to their special morphological and biological ability to adapt. On the walls, the most typical species is the wormwood of the calanques, which is resistant to the harsh environmental conditions, the corn sow thistle and the hawkweed oxtongue, while on the borders, woody species can be found, like common hawthorn, broom, sloe bushes and tamarisk.

Species often present in the basal, wettest area, include the great horsetail, the Canna of Pliny, the Festuca arundinacea and the common coltsfoot.

The vegetation that colonizes the stagnant or slightly flowing water is characterized by Jacobaea paludos, tall grasses with their base immersed in water, and by submerged rooted vegetation and floating vegetation. The quarry of San Biagio was a deep injury to the landscape, caused by man in order to extract gravel. This mining activity came to an end about twenty years ago, leaving nature to take over. The great depression that the bulldozers had created is now covered by water. The picturesque little lake takes up more than 2 hectares and reaches a maximum depth of just over 4 m. As well as having great naturalistic importance, the basin and the banks that surround it also have a significant educational value, because they show how nature is able to heal the wounds caused by man. Hedges were planted in the agricultural part of the educational area and along the trails, performing important functions: acting as screens and windbreakers, aiding feeding and nesting and providing shelter for wildlife. Tree and shrub species were planted according to a functional criterion that is also useful for teaching purposes: this is how hedges of lesser fruits, hedges of staining plants, hedges for avifauna and hedges for butterflies were created.

#### WILDLIFE

The basin of the Esino River is a nesting, wintering and aestivation site for numerous bird species, with suitable areas for migratory birds to stop over and feed. The nesting species that have been identified include the kestrel, the hobby, the common pheasant, the cuckoo, the barn owl, the tawny

owl, the Eurasian scops owl, the kingfisher and others.

The Ripabianca reserve is, above all, an environment truly favoured by herons: The only heronry in the region of Marche is here, where night herons, egrets, white herons and little bitterns nest, making it a site of great naturalistic interest. In recent years, as well as these bird species, other birds have started to nest in the area, representing a place of unique naturalistic value in the Marche region. These include the squacco heron, the cattle egret and the pigmy cormorant. Normally noisy, the heronry resembles a large apartment building, an extraordinary place in which more than 100 couples of breeding herons nest in the spring, between the trees in the canebrake. From comfortable observation huts, you can admire them as they build their nests, during courtship and mating or while they prompt the young birds to take their first flight.

As for the reptiles and amphibians, as well as the most common species, it is particularly interesting to discover the slow worm, the dice snake and the spotted newt. Inside the „Sergio Romagnoli“ educational area, there are some specimens of the common tortoise (Testudo hermanni), to which a wildlife area has been dedicated, with the educational and conservational goal of acquainting visitors with this interesting species and thus contributing to its preservation: in fact, the capture and captive breeding of all European species of tortoises is prohibited by law.

#### TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

The Ripa Bianca di Jesi Nature Centre in the Regional Nature Reserve has its head office based in the farmhouse complex, located within the „Sergio Romagnoli“ educational

area, which has been completely renovated according to modern ecological architectural criteria. The Nature Centre offers a wide range of services aimed at preservation, education, environmental information and sustainable living.

It is also home to the „Sergio Romagnoli“ CEE (Centre of Environmental Education) with a conference room, an Entomological laboratory, a workshop for hands-on experience, a room dedicated to teaching about the fluvial environment, an aquarium and a remote camera system positioned over the heronry, as well as other interesting facilities and services. The „Ripa Bianca“ Ornithological Institute is dedicated to the study of the avifauna in the middle and low areas of the Vallesina. In fact, it is here that the monitoring and census of birds is carried out, both for migratory and wintering birds, also by using the technique of ringing. The “Ripa Bianca” Entomological Institute, on the other hand, deals with study, distribution and education relative to the important world of insects and other arthropods. The Microcosm Teaching Area is an integral part of the Institute. Ripa Bianca is also an educational farm and, through the teaching



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#### Municipality of the Reserve

Jesi

of sustainable agriculture, itineraries and thematic workshops linked to work, habits and rural memories are offered. In it, there is an organic vineyard, an orchard of forgotten flavours, a field of perfumes for the cultivation of medicinal and aromatic herbs, a teaching chicken coop and an area of arable land dedicated to organic cultivation of traditional cereals and pulses. The plots are interspersed by rows of olive trees, thus recovering the ancient „tree-lined“ Marche landscape. The area used as a vegetable garden is tended by people who have joined the intergenerational integration and spatial continuity project (Reserve - Town) „grandfather cultivates: adopt an organic garden“ aiming at passing on knowledge and rural culture and offering the opportunity to cultivate an organic family vegetable garden for the residents of Jesi.

The „Ripa Bianca di Jesi“ Nature Reserve is therefore a story with a happy ending. Here, the commitment and efforts of the WWF Italy, which is currently the management authority of the protected area, along with the public administrations and the ecological regeneration of nature, have made it possible, in just over two decades, to turn a landfill into a treasure chest of protected biodiversity.



## SENTINA NATURE RESERVE

Established on 14 December 2004, la Sentina Regional Nature Reserve is the smallest protected area in the Marche region, but one of great environmental significance.

### THE TERRITORY

A landscape of water and sand that stretches for about 180 hectares, inside the Municipality of San Benedetto del Tronto, between the village of Porto d'Ascoli in the North and the Tronto River in the South. Along the Adriatic coast, which appears as a succession of urbanized areas with almost no interruption, the Sentina Reserve is a veritable „reminder“ of the past — that is, how the coastline appeared before the economic boom of the '60s.

The name „Sentina“ comes from its most distinctive feature, namely that of being a natural extended detention pond of the River Tronto (the main river in the Marche region), which flows here. Numerous historical documents testify to the presence of lakes and ponds, which have been drained and cleaned up over time, but that today are present once more, thanks to environmental recovery interventions carried out by the protected area.

The Sentina consists of unique environments including sand bars, wetlands behind the dunes and brackish grasslands, which are home to a rich, unique flora that has disappeared almost entirely along the Adriatic coast.

Despite its small size, over 400 plant species exist here, making this area one of exceptional floristic and bio-geographical

significance in the whole of the central and southern Adriatic area of Italy.

### FLORA

The location, as well as being singled out by the Marche Regional Authority as a „Floristic Area“, is part of the European Union's Natura 2000 network; in fact, it is recognized both as a SCI - Site of Community Importance (IT5340001 „Porto d'Ascoli Coastline“) and as a SPA - Special Protection Area (IT5340022 „Porto d'Ascoli Coastline, La Sentina“) in accordance with the Habitats and Birds Directives.

The most important species of flora include the *Salicornia patula*, the *Euphorbia terrac-*



ina, the *Atriplex portulacoides*, the *Salsola soda*, the *Suaeda maritima* and the *Aster tripolium*.

In winter, along the gulleys, banks and on the flooded clay soils, the common reed appears, while on the banks of the river Tronto, several species of willow and white poplar can be found.

## WILDLIFE

In addition to the vegetation, the Sentina Reserve is also of great importance due to its avifauna, representing one of the rare resting places for migratory birds, located between the Gargano and the delta of the river Po. It was also identified as an IBA (Important Bird Area) by BirdLife International. Here, over 180 species of birds have been counted, both migratory and wintering species, many of which are of Community interest. There are also several species of amphibians, reptiles, mammals and fish.

The most interesting birds, which also have a high symbolic value, include the black-winged stilt (symbol of the reserve), the Kentish plover, the kingfisher, the coot, the crane, the little egret, the Northern lapwing, the Western marsh harrier and the short-toed lark.

The number of mammals living in the reserve is smaller, due to the strong anthropic pressure and the ecological isolation of the area; however, several species of bats are present, fundamental for the biological control of insects like mosquitoes, and there are also hedgehogs, moles, musk shrews, weasels, beech martens and European water voles. There are 5 amphibian species and 7 reptile species present. Among the most important, there is the European green toad, located along the gulleys and in the area behind the dunes, in both fresh and brackish waters. Along the shoreline of the



reserve, there have been episodes of sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*) getting stranded and in difficulty (due to the cold or injuries caused by fishing activities).

## TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

There are numerous interesting traces of history dating back to the Bronze Age, between the 13th and 14th centuries BC, documenting the existence of commercial and cultural exchanges between the Mycenaeans and the local populations. Ancient Roman remains are represented by structures that can most likely be attributed to buildings and roads of the town of Truentum. The construction of the „Torre sul Porto“ (Tower on the Port) can be traced back to a relatively recent period (1543). It has been recently restored and was originally used for spotting pirates. The rural architectural

heritage, built in 1800 and the early 1900s, is also remarkable.

The reserve, which can be visited via a network of pedestrian and cyclist trails, lies on the crossroads between the Adriatic bike lane and the Salaria bike lane, which begins here and leads towards Rome and the Tyrrhenian Sea. Inside the reserve, there are also numerous educational bulletin boards and 6 turrets for bird-watching activities, which are particularly useful especially during bird migration (spring and autumn).

The reserve undertakes a number of interesting initiatives aimed at a diverse audience, from children, adults and experts in the naturalistic sector to anyone who wants to discover this new world for the first time. These activities, coordinated by the „Torre sul Porto“ Centre of Environmental Education (C.E.E.), see the participation and the essential support of environmental associations that operate locally.

Among the activities that take place, there are lectures in schools and guided tours for adults, children and the disabled; bird-watching excursions, at sea and at the



## INFO

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63074 San Benedetto del Tronto (AP)  
Tel. 0735 794278/279  
Fax 0735 794277  
info@riservasentina.it  
[www.riservasentina.it](http://www.riservasentina.it)  
Facebook: Naturschutzgebiet Sentina

**Management Authority**  
Municipality of San Benedetto del Tronto  
Viale De Gasperi, 124  
63074 San Benedetto del Tronto (AP)  
Tel. 0735 7941  
[www.comunesbt.it](http://www.comunesbt.it)

**Municipality of the Reserve**  
San Benedetto del Tronto

mouth of the river Tronto using kayaks; events for raising awareness on the theme of the sea and sea turtles; development of educational publications; creation of ongoing educational projects for every type and level of school, as well as scientific research. It is also possible to arrange specific activities at the request of users.



# CENTRES OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



In the Marche there is a system of training and environment education (INFEA Marche), based on 44 Centres for Environment Education (CEA), 17 of which fall within the parks and the nature reserves.

The CEAs, that can rely on 8 territorial networks, offer information service and perform a wide range of awareness-raising activities mainly among young people about the environment and its influence on human activities. Lectures, meetings, events, workshops and excursions are often organized in direct contact with nature so as to encourage sustainable practices. Thanks to licensed and knowledgeable guides (tour, nature and medium-mountain guides, etc.), you can learn about the environment, the historic art treasures and discover the local and regional food and wines.



## CEE (CENTRES OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION) IN THE PARKS AND NATURE RESERVES

### In the Monti Sibillini area:

#### Sibilla CEE

Monte Sibillini National Park  
Via Trieste, 15 - c/o Villa Curi  
63088 Montemonaco (AP)  
Tel. 338 6904069  
ceachiro@montisibillini.it

#### Due Parchi CEE

Monti Sibillini and Gran Sasso and  
Monti della Laga National Parks  
Fraz. Borgo  
63096 Arquata del Tronto (AP)  
Tel. 071 9330066  
info@forestalp.it

#### Legambiente Fillide CEE

Monti Sibillini National Park  
Via Indipendenza, 73  
63857 Amandola (FM)  
Tel. 338 6904069  
ceachiro@montisibillini.it

#### Gaia CEE

Monti Sibillini National Park  
Via Piana, 1 - Loc. Cupi di Visso  
62039 Visso (MC)  
Tel. 347 7356565  
prenota@asgaia.it

#### Credia WWF CEE

Monti Sibillini National Park  
C.da Vallato snc  
62026 San Ginesio (MC)  
Tel. 0733 694125  
crediawwf@gmail.com

#### Montegallo CEE

Monti Sibillini National Park  
Fraz. Balzo snc  
c/o Centro multifunzionale  
63094 Montegallo (AP)  
Tel. 0736 806122  
infoposta@comune.montegallo.ap.it

### Vallenatura di Cessapalombo CEE

Monti Sibillini National Park  
C.da Fonte Girata, 3  
62020 Cessapalombo (MC)  
Tel. 340 2522383  
fabiana.tassoni@gmail.com

### Valle del Fiastrone CEE

Monti Sibillini National Park  
Via Del Lago, 5  
62035 Fiastra (MC)  
Tel. 0737 52185  
alcina@libero.it

### In the other protected areas:

#### Sasso Simone e Simoncello park CEE

Sasso Simone and Simoncello  
Regional Natural Park  
Via Montefeltresca, 157 - Loc.  
Ponte Cappuccini  
61023 Pietrarubbia (PU)  
Tel. 0722 75350  
centroviste@libero.it

#### Parco del Conero CEE

Monte Conero Regional Natural  
Park  
Via Peschiera, 30  
60020 Sirolo (AN)  
Tel. 071 9331161  
segreteria@parcodelconero.eu

#### Conero CEE

Monte Conero Regional Natural  
Park  
Via del Porto, 22 - c/o Sea Wolf  
60026 Numana (AN)  
Tel. 071 933066  
info@forestalp.it

### Gola della Rossa park CEE

Gola della Rossa and Frasassi  
Regional Natural Park  
Via Marcellini, 5  
60048 Serra San Quirico (AN)  
Tel. 0731 86122  
cea@parcogolarossa.it

### Abbadia di Fiastra nature reserve CEE

Abbadia di Fiastra State Natural  
Reserve  
C.da Abbadia di Fiastra  
62010 Urbisaglia (MC)  
Tel. 0733 202942  
meridiana.mc@gmail.com

### Furlo and Valle del Metauro CEE

Gola del Furlo State Natural  
Reserve  
Via Pianacce, 1  
61041 Acqualagna (PU)  
Tel. 0721 700226  
ceafurlo@lamacina.it

### Valle dei Grilli e dell'Elce CEE

Monte San Vicino and Monte  
Canfaieto Natura Reserve  
Via Casetre, 19  
62022 Gagliole (MC)  
Tel. 0737 641184  
m.storianaturale@libero.it

### Sergio Romagnoli CEE

Ripa Bianca Nature Reserve  
Via Zanibelli, 3 bis  
60035 Jesi (AN)  
Tel. 0731 619213  
info@riservaripabianca.it

### Torre sul Porto CEE

Sentina Natura Reserve  
Viale De Gasperi, 124  
63074 San Benedetto del Tronto (AP)  
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