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Abruzzo: Europe's greenest region



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Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park



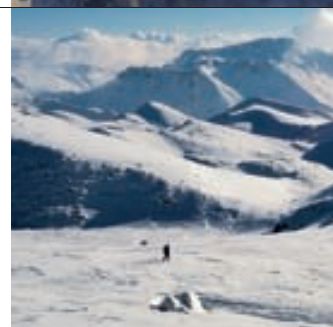
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Majella National Park



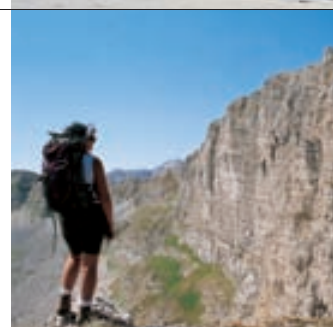
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# ABRUZZO



**In Abruzzo nature is a protected resource. With a third of its territory set aside as Park, the region not only holds a cultural and civil record for protection of the environment, but also stands as the biggest nature area in Europe: the real green heart of the Mediterranean.**



# Europe's greenest region

In Abruzzo, a third of the territory is set aside in protected areas: three National Parks, a Regional Park and more than 30 Nature Reserves. A visionary and tough decision by those who have made the environment their resource and will project Abruzzo into a major and leading role in "green tourism". Overall most of this legacy – but not all – is to be found in the mountains, where the landscapes and ecosystems change according to altitude, shifting from typically Mediterranean milieus to outright alpine scenarios, with mugo pine groves and high-altitude steppe.

Of all the Apennine regions, Abruzzo is distinctive for its prevalently mountainous nature, with two thirds of its territory found at over 750 metres in altitude. This is due to the unique way that the Apennine develops in its central section, where it continues to proceed along the peninsula's midline, but also expands transversally and creates a complex system of parallel mountain ridges, surrounding vast tablelands. This great knot of mountains lies wholly in Abruzzo and boasts the tallest peaks in the Apennine: Corno Grande (2,912m) on the Gran Sasso range, Mount Amaro (2,794m) on the Majella range, Mount Velino (2,486m). The main points of the vast system of interior basins and highlands include: the Fucino plateau, in Marsica, derived from the

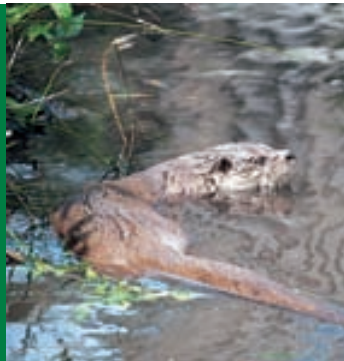


**It would be difficult to underestimate the national and international importance of the Abruzzo Parks in the protection of the environment and of biodiversity, bearing in mind that 75% of all Europe's flora and fauna species are represented in this region!**





**The sheer range of Abruzzo's natural habitats (marine, river and lake, woods, mountain, high altitude) means that today, more than ever, the region is a sort of wonderful biolaboratory that protects nature and ecosystems.**



draining of what was Italy's second biggest lake in 1877, and is now one of the most specialized market gardening territories in Central Italy; two extensive intramountain basins – L'Aquila and the Peligna, as well as many others that are smaller; a complex system of highlands, including the boundless karstic plain of Campo Imperatore, a pseudo "Tibet" in the heart of the Mediterranean, the Rocche plateau, the northern slopes of Velino and Sirente, not to mention the enormous and articulated great plateaux system known as the Altipiani Maggiori, southwest of Majella. This mighty mountain bed reaches down to just a few kilometres from the coast, with the taller peaks ranged behind like a spectacular balcony; the rest of the territory is occupied by the stalwart hills, sloping gently down to the sea. The narrow coastal strip, with the terminals of the river valleys, are the only low-altitude plains in the region.

This tormented territory and forceful nature, with whom it is necessary to coexist, has allowed the survival – in its multiple habitats – of a huge number of flora and fauna, configuring Abruzzo as a "green" region, the Italian treasure chest of Italian biodiversity.

A huge number of animals and plants, once widespread on the entire Apennine, have found a final natural refuge in Abruzzo, thus avoiding extinction. Several such cases, and emblems of the region, are the *chamois*, the *wolf*, the *Marisca brown bear*: three species whose survival has depended totally on the local mountains; then we might mention the *eagle*, the *lynx*, the *otter*, which still resides in the waters of the Orfento, in Majella National Park, the *griffon*, a vulture recently brought back to the Sirente-Velino Regional Nature Park. Another unique trait of Abruzzo is to be able to preserve today species typical of northern tundras, like the tiny rodent *snow vole*, the charming bird called the *dotterel*, or the groves of *mugo pine*: all species that biologists define as "glacial relics", residue of the flora and fauna that lived in Mediterranean territory during the last glacial era, and which Abruzzo's mountains have successfully preserved to the modern day.

The region's integrated network of Parks and Nature Reserves, with the incredible variety of its typical complementary natural environments, have allowed the conservation and protection of a huge number of resident and migrant species. The overall size of



the system and the connections amongst the various protected areas, which are not only often in close proximity, but also assured by biological corridors, also offer a habitat to very mobile and ubiquitous species, who need and are able to undertake lengthy journeys, even hundreds kilometres in a few days (a typical example is the wolf, a predator at the top of European natural food chain).

A concise description of nature in Abruzzo would be most correct with a definition of it as an anthology of the Euro-Mediterranean landscape, since its boundaries embrace a concentration of natural environments that have no paragon in the rest of Europe if we consider any other equally limited territory. There is a Mediterranean coast with the most varied habitat (sandy shores, dunes, marshes, pine groves, shoreline maquis, cliffs, stacks, low pebbly shores); a hill strip with every level of human settlement, precious wetlands (river and lake oases) and fascinating geological features; a vast mountain zone, often with untouched nature, also with a wide variety of habitats (forests, prairies, mountain lakes, enormous karstic highlands, canyons, cascades, grottoes, peaks and high-altitude environments that are

quite alpine in nature, glaciers, volcanisms). This astonishing variety of unspoiled and often wild habitats are the home to rare and precious species that Abruzzo's Parks are committed to protect, making the region an extraordinary biolaboratory for the preservation of nature and ecosystems, far ahead of the rest of the world for the courage and determination of its decisions. In Abruzzo, the protected nature system today is not only a crucial tool for an efficient environmental protection policy, but also a marvellous chance for economic development, a pioneer of that ecological changeover of the economy that opens the way to really sustainable development. In point of fact, the system also derived from the need to experiment with and circulate forms of sustainable development and territorial management that focus on a natural and environmental dimension, but also on social and cultural aspects of the various territorial contexts. A decision to direct development not just towards tourism, but also towards the valorization of quality productions in farming and crafts, cutting the path to the generation of new services, structures and infrastructures lying on this horizon.

# Gran Sasso

NATIONAL  
PARK



**Park territory is typically mountainous and its scenarios frequently verge on alpine. It comprises two distinct mountain groups: the Gran Sasso d'Italia massif and the group above it, the Laga Mountains.**



# e Monti della Laga

The Park, established in 1995, has a surface of 148,935 hectares and marginally includes parts of Latium and the Marches. The Abruzzo section takes up nine tenths of the total area, and takes in the provinces of Teramo, L'Aquila, Pescara and 41 municipalities (Arsita, Barete, Barisciano, Brittolli, Bussi sul Tirino, Cagnano Amiterno, Calascio, Campli, Campotosto, Capestrano, Capitignano, Cappelle Calvisio, Carpineto della Nora, Castel del Monte, Castelli, Castelvechio Calvisio, Castiglione a Casauria, Civitella Casanova, Civitella del Tronto, Cortino, Corvara, Crognaleto, Fano Adriano, Farindola, Isola del Gran Sasso, L'Aquila, Montebello di Bertona, Montereale, Montorio al Vomano, Ofena, Pescosansonesco, Pietracamela, Pizzoli, Rocca Santa Maria, Santo Stefano di Sessanio, Teramo, Torricella Sicura, Tossicia, Valle Castellana, Villa Celiera and Villa Santa Lucia).

Gran Sasso is the quintessential mountain of Abruzzo, with the grandeur of its dolomitic rock summits, the highest of the Apennine, which peak at Corno Grande (2,912m in altitude), Corno Piccolo, Pizzo d'Intermesoli and Mount Camicia. It is the home of the Apennine's only glacier, Calderone, the southernmost of all Europe, and is flanked to the south by the Campo Imperatore highland, an immense high-altitude karstic heath (1,600-2,000 plus metres above sea level) of breathtaking beauty, as close as we can get to a Tibetan landscape in Europe. In the north-west Gran Sasso links to the Laga Mountains, geologically different because they are formed by marls and sandstones; they are situated in the Park's northern sector, straddling three regions (Abruzzo, Latium and the Marches). The orographies of the slopes are different – rough on the Marches

side, steep and sheer in Latium, more rolling and gentler in Abruzzo, where we find the Morricana, Volpara and Barche waterfalls, and east, the Fiori and Campli mountains, separated by the Salinello ravines – they outline a mountain chain that at times is difficult and tortuous, with a crest line rising from Mount Comunitore towards the Macera della Morte summit, the border of the regions at 2,022 metres, and culminates in Mount Gorzano at 2,458 metres.

Park territory covers very different natural environments and consequently, diversified flora and fauna. The range of milieus is also fostered by the different compositions of the two massifs that constitute it: the Laga, marly-arenaceous with a rounder morphology; the Gran Sasso, fundamentally calcareous and therefore decidedly more irregular. If we add to these peculiarities a varied orography, dissimilar exposures and last, but not least, the different use of the territories made by human settlers, we can fully comprehend the origin of the diversities. Gran Sasso has



vertical faces, moraines, glacial cirques, ravines, crags, the vast Campo Imperatore plateau, boundless karstic fields and numerous small lakes that are also of karstic origin, not to mention the Calderone glacier, Europe's southernmost; together they tell the story of this mountain and differentiate it significantly from the neighbouring Laga range, although the two massifs, literally wedged into the tall Vomano valley, are in perfect ecological continuity. Human use of these mountains can be surmised from the different density of forests: continuous and compact on the Teramo side of Gran Sasso and Laga, with a visible preponderance of meadows and pastures on the Aquilan slope of Gran Sasso and the Latium side of Laga, showing the prevalently pasturing use of the southern sectors, leaning to forestry purposes to the north and the east.

Vegetation includes beech woods on Laga (with silver fir) and the Teramo slopes of Gran Sasso, pastures at Campo Imperatore, and magnificent high-altitude flowers on Voltigno. Mammals residing here include the wolf, chamois, boar, wild cat, snow vole and, perhaps, the bear. Birdlife includes the golden eagle, the peregrine falcon, eagle-owl and the Greek partridge. Grebes, herons and various duck species converge on lake Campotosto. The appeal of the Parks does not lie only in these natural features: on the

contrary, it is characterized by a mutual exchange, an entwining of nature and human presence in its landscapes. This is witnessed by the countless ancient and splendidly-preserved towns and castles scattered over its slopes, and dominating the intramountain basins: on the Teramo side, first there are the small Medieval villages lost amongst the Laga woods and the Fiori Mountain hermitages; the splendid Renaissance town of Campoli; Civitella del Tronto with its mighty fortress; the spectacular ruins of Castel Manfrino overlooking the Salinello gorges; the Medieval castles of Castel di Luco and Piano di Roseto; Castelli with the workshops of its famous, valued ceramics and San Donato church (called "the Sistine Chapel of majolica"); the charming old town centres of Isola del Gran Sasso, Cortino, Valle Castellana, Tossicia, Pietracamela; on the L'Aquila side, Campotosto with its huge lake, L'Aquila's splendid museums and monuments, the ancient old town centres on Gran Sasso, with their Medieval atmosphere intact: Assergi, Barisciano, Santo Stefano di Sessanio, Calascio with its splendid fort, Castelvecchio Calvisio and Carapelle Calvisio, Castel del Monte, Ofena, Bussi sul Tirino; on the steeply sloping Pescara side, on the way to the hills and sea, the Forca di Penne tower, dominating both sea and mountain; Farindola, at its foot, famous for its *pecorino* cheese.







CAMPOTOSTO produces one of the most prized and popular cured meats in Abruzzo: marvellous *mortadellina di Campotosto*, manually processed pork, finely ground and with its distinctive "lardello" or finger of lard inserted in the centre. They have an oval shape and are sold in pairs, so are also known by the colourful expression "mule balls". In the CASTEL DEL MONTE area (one of the Abruzzo "capitals" of shepherding, a splendid Medieval town whose name is clear confirmation of the close bond and exchanges between Abruzzo and Apulia, developed on the ancient transhumance routes that linked them, from the Tavoliere plains to the Campo Imperatore pastures), the typical *pecorinos* are called *canestrato* and *marcetto*. Castel del Monte Canestrato is a hard-paste cheese of mid to long ageing, whose intense aroma is rich in fragrances linked to the wild plants that grow in the pastures and found in the forage used to feed the ewes; it can be mildly piquant. Marcetto (meaning "mouldy" in Italian) owes its name and sensorial traits to the development of *Piophil* casei fly larvae in the cheese as it ages, which activate a

rotting process in the cheese so it becomes creamy. So this is a spreading cheese and is quite piquant: a product for the true connoisseur. More generally *pecorino*, an iconic product of Abruzzo, is produced in all transhumance territories. It is a hard/semi-hard paste cheese, the typical product of ancient land management methods applied in Southern Italy. Alongside *giuncata* and *ricotta*, consumed fresh, until a few years ago, this was one of the economic and nutritional staples for the shepherd who travelled with their flocks between Apulia and Abruzzo, in rhythm with the natural cycle of the seasons, seeking pastures that diversified the food given to the animals and thus conferred unique aromas and fragrances on all produce made. A very high quality and original *pecorino* is produced in the agricultural district of Farindola, using pork rennet, which gives the cheese its typical taste and aroma. Some fruits of the earth worth mentioning are Santo Stefano di Sessanio lentils, grown in a small area that embraces the territories of the municipalities of S. Stefano di Sessanio, Calascio, Barisciano, Castelvecchio Calvisio and Castel del Monte, all on the slopes of Gran Sasso. These lentils differ from other ecotypes mainly in size (they are only 3-5mm in diameter), in the darker colour, rapid cooking and because they retain their shape. They have a higher iron content than common lentils. These lentils are especially tasty and are used to make hot, delicious soups and served with various types of homemade pasta. The Park also has chestnut woods, which have been tended and their fruit gathered, since the 18th century. Since that time the chestnut, a staple of popular diet, is stored in leaf-covered mounds until the fruit emerges from the husk, then "cured" by soaking in water, so that they can be stored for a longer time. The *marrone di Valle Castellana*, of the Florentine chestnut family of which it retains the typical traits, grows and is picked here in the municipal territory of the same name. The Valle Castellana chestnut varies in size, since it is now grown by organic methods.

# SPORTS AND PASTIMES



The sheer size of the territory and the variety of milieus and landscapes here offer lots of possibilities for practicing sport in contact with nature: excursions on foot or mountain bike, along the Park's countless paths (well-marked and well-kept); interesting guided learning excursions, but also more challenging trekking, thanks to the large number of mountain and mid-mountain guides, and nature operators; excursions and trekking on horseback, thanks to the extraordinary *Ippovia del Gran Sasso*, a circuit of over 300 kilometres, that assures fans of country horseriding a unique infrastructure both in quality and in size.

Fans of wildlife and landscape photography will find that the Park has some memorable settings and scenarios, not to mention the chance for animal-watching in dedicated wildlife areas including the chamois at Pietracamela and Farindola, the roe deer at Cortino. Birdwatching is well-established in the Forca di Penne and lake Campotosto areas, the latter also offering canoeing and windsurfing. The many watercourses are perfect for canyoning, and one of the most interesting makes its way along the upper branch of the Vomano, in the province of Teramo. This certainly is not the Colorado River, but it is definitely very

popular with Italian canoeists; the upper branch, in particular common is a real "black run", and should only be attempted by someone who has plenty of experience. Mountaineering has a prestigious tradition on Gran Sasso (the first documented ascent of Gran Sasso was actually in 1573!) and has an important school based at Assergi, with the faces of Corno Grande, Corno Piccolo, Mount Camicia and Pizzo d'Intermesoli available for sport climbing. For skiers the Park offers downhill facilities at San Giacomo - Monte Piselli, Prati di Tivo, Prato Selva and Campo Imperatore - Monte Cristo. Cross-country skiing finds one of the loveliest and most original scenarios in Italy on the karstic plain of Campo Imperatore, with countless circuits mapped out there, but similarly plenty of off-track crossings can be made on the immaculate snow; cross-country skiing excursions explore locations of breathtaking beauty including the Castel del Monte and Santo Stefano di Sessanio territories, in the system of karstic flatlands and vales that slope in terraces down to the southern edge of Campo Imperatore. Pietracamela is a great departure point for ski touring and winter climbing, while the many watercourses that furrow the mountainsides are great slopes for ice cascade climbing when they freeze over.

**INFORMATION**

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**Rugged, mighty Majella, its western slopes sheer and compact, rolls upwards into the Femmina Morta plateau, and on the east is furrowed by Abruzzo's wildest canyons.**

# Majella



Uninterrupted human presence on its slopes since the dawn of time is testified by the Prehistoric relics that date back to the Palaeolithic era: a presence that is the very essence of the Park, part of its unique identity, and making it an inseparable custodian of humankind and nature. Palaeolithic remains, Neolithic caves and villages, Metal Age settlements, Italic and Roman towns and sanctuaries, sanctuaries and places of worship sacred since the dawn of time, shepherd and brigand grottoes and inscriptions, *tholos* huts scattered everywhere amongst high-altitude fields and pastures; its gentle wooded slopes, its mountain pastures, its deep valleys eternally present. Majella's magic lies somewhere in the fact that it has always been considered a sacred mountain, a mother's embrace for its inhabitants, maternal and aboriginal even in the name, derived from *Maja*, the goddess and mother of the crops, adored by the first farmers. From the first human presences here, the mountain has been a refuge and source of life for hunters, farmers, hermits and shepherds, soldiers, brigands, charcoal-burners, miners, local folk and travellers. The gratitude and continuing sense of maternal dependence shown still by the people of Abruzzo today, are therefore understandable and justified.



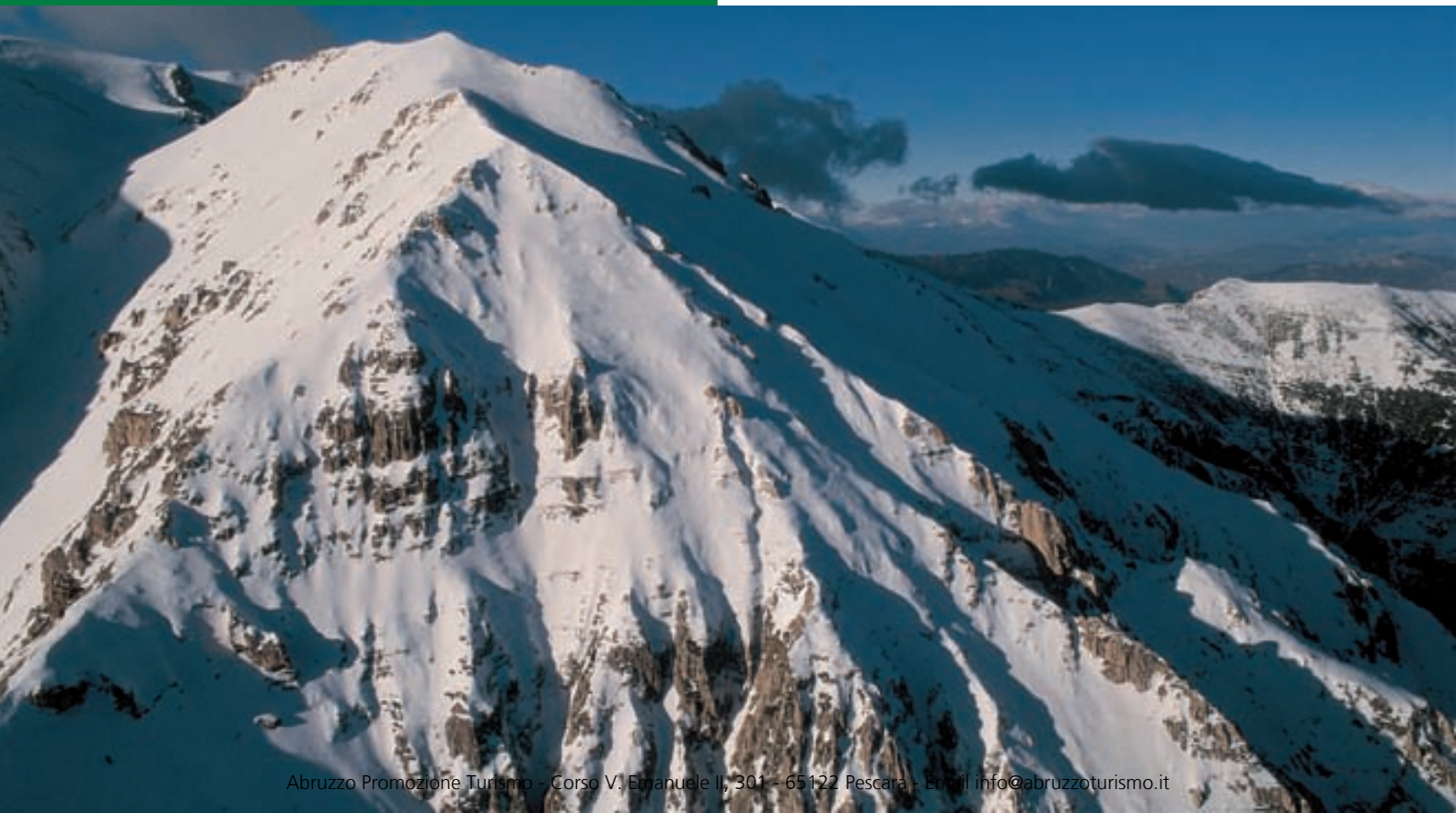
# National Park



**The Park also includes Mount Morrone and the Pizi Mountains, and it continues, as always, to be one of the most significant containers of wildlife in Italy and in Europe.**

The Park was established in 1995 and has an area of 74,095 hectares; it includes 39 municipalities in the provinces of L'Aquila, Chieti and Pescara (Abbateggio, Ateleta, Bolognano, Campo di Giove, Cansano, Caramanico Terme, Civitella Messer Raimondo, Corfinio, Fara San Martino, Gamberale, Guardiagrele, Lama dei Peligni, Lettomanoppello, Lettopalena, Manoppello, Montenerodomo, Pacentro, Palena, Palombaro, Pennapiedimonte, Pescocostanzo, Pettorano sul Gizio, Pizzoferrato, Popoli, Pratola Peligna, Pretoro, Rapino, Rivisondoli, Roccasale, Roccamorice, Rocca Pia, Roccaraso, Salle, San Valentino in Abruzzo Citeriore, Sant'Eufemia a Majella, Serramonacesca, Sulmona, Taranta Peligna and Tocco da Casauria). The Park Authority head offices are in Guardiagrele, and there is a branch office at Campo di Giove. From a geomorphological standpoint, Mount Majella is a mighty limestone slab, gibbous and rounded, deeply scored by plunging canyons, soaring up to Mount Amaro at its 2,793 metres. The geographical position, deep in the Mediterranean, the height characteristics (at least 30 peaks over 2,000 metres), the tormented orogeny, the severe mutability of the climate, all make this mountain unique in its genre and custodian of one of the most important biological diversities in Europe, which embraces the presence of Mediterranean, Alpine, Balkan, Pontic, Illyrian, Pyrenean and Arctic floral species of enormous biogeographical value; the fauna here is equally prestigious, with many rare and precious examples.

Majella is home to the wolf, the bear, the chamois, the otter, the roe deer and the deer. There are 130 bird species, including the golden eagle, the peregrine falcon, the eagle-owl, the Lanner falcon, the goshawk and the Greek partridge. The beech woods cover slopes from 1,000 to 1,800 metres, while the crests are covered with rare mugo pine, so typical of far northern scenarios. Vegetation includes over 1,700 species of which many are endemic. Flowers and other vegetation now found on the mountain are also the result of human presence, which has existed





for thousands of years, from the invention of agriculture itself, and as can be seen in the numerous rock paintings found in the Neolithic sanctuaries.

In the past humans here destroyed the oak and hop-hornbeam woods that encircled the lower mountain slopes, in order to create farmland: higher up they cut back the beech woods to extend secondary pastures for their flocks – and in some periods of history – for farming also, and which was undertaken even at very high altitudes in some parts of Majella (1,500-1,600m). This is the only Apennine mountain that still has gnarled mugo pine groves. This tree initially survived in the most impervious areas, inaccessible to flocks; following the crisis in sheep rearing, they recovered their own phytoclimatic sector; at between 1,700 and 2,300 metres. The *mugo pine* develops very extensive and intricate formations, especially in the northern sector: It is flanked by other shrub species like the *dwarf juniper*, the rare *false medlar*, *bearberries* and more. One striking species is the *savin* which, like the mugo pine, was destroyed in other mountain areas, and

survived on the sun-kissed slopes where it often grows out into the void. There is another rare species here: the local variety of *Austrian pine*, which human activity has shouldered up into the most inaccessible rocks of Cima della Stretta, the Macchialunga canyon and valle dell'Orfento. The last, colossal examples cling to the rocks, defying gravity and passing time, witnesses to a silent and tenacious heritage alive on the Majella massif.

The Park is also the location of some very interesting historical settlements like ancient Pacentro, Caramanico and its spa, Guardiagrele and its rich applied arts heritage, splendid Pescocostanzo, with its Renaissance and Baroque old centre. The sanctuaries and places of worship are also very interesting, like the abbey of San Liberatore a Majella, the Celestinian hermitages on Morrone (Sant'Onofrio and San Pietro) and on Majella (San Bartolomeo di Legio, Santo Spirito a Majella, San Giovanni all'Orfento, Sant'Onofrio di Serramonacesca, Madonna dell'Altare), the Ercole Curino sanctuary and the church of San Tommaso, in Salle.



# DRY STONE HUTS



Since ancient times, farmers and shepherds have shared this mountain's stone-covered slopes and high pastures. Seasonal farming activities at quite low altitudes as well as the grazing higher up, were the cause of continuous, habitual removal of stones from the mountain slopes over thousands of years, proved by the countless heaps of stones studded all across the landscape.

This sea of stones was the source of material for the long dry walls that delimit fields, make terrace walls to snatch more arable land from the mountain, and even out its slopes, as well as for the hundreds and hundreds of *pajare*, dry stone huts with a *tholos* structure, typical of Mediterranean construction culture, numerous on the mountain's northern slope.

The characteristics of these huts vary according to their use (farming or livestock) and location. Just out of the villages, near the houses, they are used as barns for animals and hay. Further up, in the arable area, they are smaller in size and used seasonally by farmers for shelter and tools storage. Higher up even, on the border between the crops areas and pastures, the agro-pastoral complexes finally come into view:

huge, all-round seasonal farms, often primitively massive, where farming is paired with rearing of sheep that graze on higher slopes where they can be watched. Various sheds (for milking, one or more for sleeping, another for produce storage) are connected together and enclosed by a high wall that surrounds the fold where the flock is sheltered overnight, a reminded of the presence of wolves. Only shepherds advance to greater heights, finding refuge with their flocks in the numerous grottoes and erosive ledges on the fringes of the deep valleys. In spring they begin to occupy lower altitudes and then as the snow slowly melts, they start to climb higher. Hollows are closed with stones and mugo pine, both where the shepherd sleeps and where the sheep are penned. Sadly, hardly anyone rears in this way now, but proof of the passage and presence of large numbers of people on the ledges of this mountain is still visible in the many inscriptions cut on its rocks: names, dates, places of origin, sometimes a few grammatically incorrect sentences, and many crosses, carved by a simple, devout people, accustomed to considering nature as the most powerful and tangible manifestation of God.





Majella National Park is the guardian of a significant number of traditional Abruzzo foods. First of all it is home to the capital of Italian pasta production, Fara San Martino, a town at the foot of Majella's eastern slope, where the presence of ultra pure mountain water fostered the development of a flourishing pasta industry from the 1800s onwards: nowadays its products are exported worldwide. The charcuterie includes *salsicciotto di Pennapedimonte*, a cured sausage made from lean pork, covered in a salt crust and pork fat aromatized with ground black pepper and chopped local herbs (thyme, juniper, rosemary, bay leaf, chives, spicy chilli pepper, fennel and sage). The cheeses to try are *pecorino*, produced in many of the Park's mountain localities; a magnificent *caciocavallo* from the Altipiani Maggiori, made in this enclave of exquisite farming tradition with delicate aromatic raw milk from local cows that graze freely on the endless mountain pastures of the municipalities of Pescocostanzo, Rivisondoli, Roccaraso, Rocca Pia and Palena. There are many types of bread (each country, each bakery, has its own recipe and starter yeast), generally sturdy and long-lasting, produced with local wheat; one very tasty type

is known as *pane nobile di Guardiagrele*, whose recipe (based on a complex blend of superfine, whole, maize, oats, barley, millet and rye flours, with sesame seeds, extra-virgin olive oil, cheese, water, salt, starter yeast and a small amount of brewer's yeast) is rooted firmly in the Middle Ages. Its typical trait is its sturdy richness and lengthy shelf life, combined with the typical spicy scent.

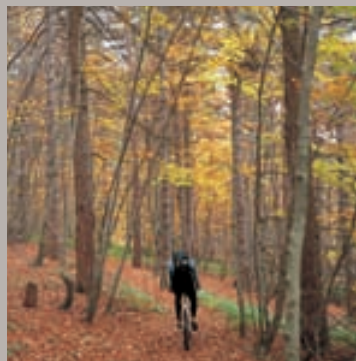
There are a great many different items of patisserie: the highly renowned *Sulmona comfit*, with a whole almond dipped and coated in layers of sugar. It is also typical to find brightly coloured and creative packs, often made into intricate, elaborate "bouquets". Then there is the delicate *sfogliatella* from *Lama dei Peligni*, with its oval shape and melting layers that embrace an exquisite filling of grape and sour cherry jams, must syrup, walnuts and cocoa.

Another particularly splendid cake is the *sise delle Monache*, whose typical allusive shape has three peaks (breast-shaped to be precise) that form a triangle, and sometimes called *Tre Monti* or "three peaks" for the puritans who balk at the cheeky humour of the more common name. This recipe is typical of Guardiagrele and is made up of two layers of melt-in-the-mouth sponge cake filled with confectioner's custard.

*Rapino pasticci* are another typical delicacy worth sampling, and are served traditionally at ceremonies and parties: these are tartlets filled with a creamy mixture of milk, dark chocolate, lemon and chopped almonds, sprinkled with ground cinnamon.

Then there are liqueurs, of which *Tocco Casauria Centerbe* is the most famous, for personality and originality. The product has an unmistakable emerald green colour and is very alcoholic (over 70°!), with an intense aroma of herbs picked in the district, brought fresh to the distillery where they are left to dry out and are trimmed until only the tender leaves remain. The recipe has very ancient origins and even now is a closely guarded secret that only the manufacturer's family knows.

# SPORTS AND PASTIMES



Park territory is ideal for an active holiday in contact with nature. The massif's size and hunchback outline, the absence of rocky peaks to scale and the many paths crossing it, make Majella a paradise for mountain walkers: all types of excursions are possible, from a mere ramble to a challenging climb. In particular, the Alta Via della Majella circuit is quite stunning, but never underestimate how large the mountain peak areas are, because they are enormous and therefore require long and tiring walks to ascend and cross the summits.

The same features on Majella that make it a good place to walk, also make it a good place for mountain bikes: the routes are truly infinite and excursion paths can be added to the hundreds of kilometres of cart-roads, mule tracks, farm and forest paths, dirt tracks, ancient roadbeds, weaving a fine web across the entire massif, which has always been inhabited and explored by humanity.

Guided excursions not to be missed are those into the splendid wilderness of the Orfento ravine, with its spectacular Celestine sanctuaries, setting off from Caramanico. The large number and great expertise of mountain and mid-mountain guides active in the Park also mean that any type of excursion

can be taken in total safety.

There is also a wide range of horseback excursion and trekking on offer, for off-country horse riding, above all on the southern slope, where mountain reliefs look out over the enormous spaces of the highlands called the Altipiani Maggiori d'Abruzzo, which included the Cinquemiglia, Roccaraso, Rivisondoli, Pescocostanzo, Palena, Aremogna plateaux.

Sport climbing fans will find an excellent dedicated practice face at Abbateggio-Roccamorice, while the upper course of the Aventino will accommodate canyoning and canoeing. In winter the area is unbeatable for downhill and cross-country skiing. In fact, the Park is connected with numerous prestigious ski resorts: the Alto Sangro, Pizzoferrato e Gamberale, Passolanciano-La Majelletta, Campo di Giove, Pacentro-Passo San Leonardo ski district. The most important resort in Abruzzo is the Alto Sangro-Altipiani Maggiori d'Abruzzo ski district, on the boundary of Abruzzo National Park, which is the biggest in the centre-south of Italy, and actually ranked seventh at national level for the number and quality of slopes and services overall. This district includes the municipalities of Roccaraso, with its elegant boutiques and the largest sports facilities; Rivisondoli, famous for a celebrated Nativity Tableau; and Pescocostanzo whose historical centre is an extraordinary treasure of Renaissance and Baroque monuments. For cross-country skiing scenarios, check out the splendid Sant'Antonio woods and the high-altitude Aremogna plain.

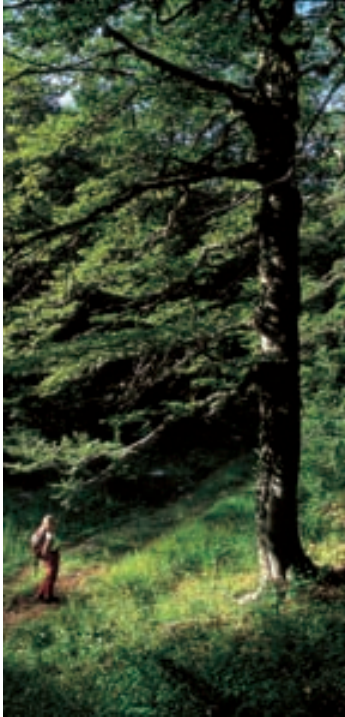


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# Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise



Founded in 1922, it is Italy's oldest and most important Park. Almost all of the Central Apennine's distinctive features are concentrated here: flora and fauna, unique in the world or extinct on the rest of the chain. More than a million people visit every year, drawn by the rare beauty of its scenic nature.



# National Park

The Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park is 50,000-hectare area that touches on Molise and Latium also. The Abruzzo areas, which accounts for three quarters of the total surface, is in the province of L'Aquila and takes in the municipalities of Alfedena, Barrea, Bisegna, Civitella Alfedena, Gioia dei Marsi, Lecce dei Marsi, Opi, Ortona dei Marsi, Pescasseroli (where Park Authority offices are located), Scanno, Villavallelonga and Villetta Barrea.

Park mountains have an untamed look to them and are characterized by gorges, karstic fields and plateaux, flanked by the lakes Vivo, Scanno and Barrea. From a geomorphological point of view, we are in the heart of the great calcareous kingdom which descends, with few interruptions, from the Sibillini Mountains in the Marche, down to the Pollino massif. Vast, rounded mountaintops; deep open ravines; steep faces and impenetrable gorges like the Foce di Barrea; hypnotic rock amphitheatres like the Camosciara; grassy plateaux embraced by wooded sloped like those at Forme and Campitelli; sprawling screes that echo incoherent; specimens of Austrian pine clinging to light-coloured stratified rocks: these are the varied, mutable environments of the Park. A great number of springs, generally rare in barren calcareous areas, flow through the white boulders and austere beech woods. The sequence of Park environments ends eastwards with the vast artificial lake Barrea, now perfectly integrated into the landscape. This is a backdrop to



**These mountains are an unbelievable spectacle of warm, brilliant colours in autumn: purple-violet manna ash, fiery sycamores, bright orange Montpellier maple, golden poplar, scarlet wild cherry and pear, vermilion of prickwood.**





parallel stretches of vegetation, rolling up from the valley floors to the peaks. A thick wood of field maples, manna ash, hop-hornbeams and durmast oak, grows in the lower sunlit areas; in the sunnier rocky areas, ilex with evergreen crowns loom over undergrowth of terebinth, blackthorns, hawthorn, Montpellier maple, wild roses and brambles. Ground-level vegetation includes lady-slippers, Marsica irises, pond lily and various kinds of wild orchids, setterworts, cyclamen, butcher's broom, wild hyacinth, anemones, foxgloves and many other species that become an endless carpet, interrupted occasionally by a jutting rock. Further up there are woods of turkey oak, the impressive soaring species with acorns partially covered by a bristly cupule, and which form extensive populations alongside crab apple, sorbs and other mid-mountain deciduous trees.

Climbing up towards the summits the beech wood rules supreme: from an altitude of 1,800-2,000 metres, it gives way to low, pulvinated juniper and mugo pine which then surrender to mountain grasslands that cloak the tall slopes and ridges in areas not dominated by rock and gravel. In some of the higher Sangro valley sites there are beeches, rare sycamores and groups of birches. But also dense, aromatic banks of Austrian pine, of so unique and native a variety that it cannot be called a simple Austrian pine, so has been given its own name, borrowed from

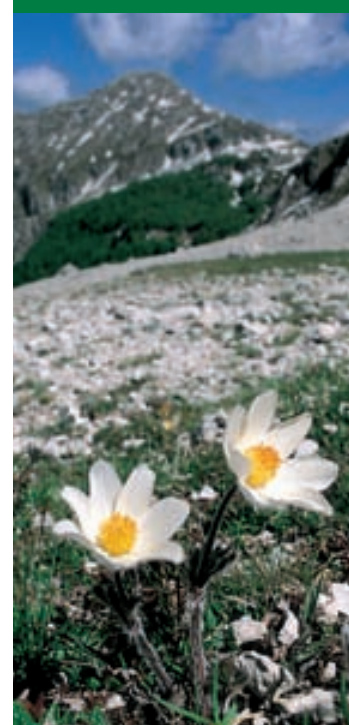
one of the Park villages located on the left bank of the Sangro: Villetta Barrea Austrian pine.

The biodiversity of Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park, whose flora is so rich and varied, is echoed in its fauna. Almost 6,000 species of insects populate its territory, which is quite a record. The insects include beautiful coleopterans like the long-horned beetle or the *Chrysochloa sipari* beetle, which are very rare and localized. Besides the quintessential bear, now the symbol of Italy's oldest National Park, the mammals that have made the Park famous include the Apennine wolf, solid and sturdy with distinctive reddish ears, whose presence is important for the Park because it helps control a herbivore population that would otherwise reach huge proportions and damage vegetation; the Abruzzo chamois whose horn size and coat colour make it a separate species of approximately 500 specimens; boar, deer, lynx, fox, badger, beech-marten, weasel and the red squirrel. Worthy of note amongst the birds, besides the eagle, are the buzzard, kestrel, peregrine falcon, eagle-owl, owl, griffon vulture, and the extremely rare white-backed woodpecker, typical of the forest. The Greek partridge and the red-billed chough can be sighted on the pastures, whilst grey heron, great crested grebe, crane and various species of duck, find their habitat on the lakes. Lake Barrea fauna boasts a great number of wild ducks and baldcoots, together with



noteworthy amphibians like the spotted salamander, the spectacled salamander and the yellow-bellied toad, considered the most rare and typical elements of Apennine amphibian fauna.

Pescasseroli is in the heart of the territory, offering excellent tourist facilities and surrounded by peaks that verge on 2,000 metres, meadows, valleys, watercourses, the Italic necropolises of Barrea and Amplero, the Samnite acropolis of Alfedena, and inviting villages like Bisegna, San Sebastiano, Gioia Vecchio, Opi, Villetta Barrea and Barrea with the lake, Civitella Alfedena, solitary Scontrone, superb Scanno with its splendid old town centre and applied goldsmith and pillow lace arts. As the area has been under Park protection for almost a century, accommodation and visiting facilities to the territory are well-established and extremely well-organized. More than 150 excursion itineraries and ten or so nature trails, endless trekking and excursions possibilities on foot, horseback and mountain bike. It is worth mentioning places that are now well-established mountain tourism destinations, like the Camosciara, Val Fondillo, lake Vivo and Forca Resuni, the Diavolo pass with the river Sangro springs, and Montagna Spaccata lake, to name but the most renowned. Lake Barrea is excellent for canoeing and windsurfing just as it is an ideal place for birdwatching and other pastimes. The



# THE MARSICA BEAR



Surviving periods of hunting, poaching, fires, indiscriminate tree-felling, the lord of the Abruzzo forests is one of a unique subspecies with approximately 100 specimens still living within Park boundaries. This magnificent and massive plantigrade (males can exceed 300kg in weight; females are slightly smaller) builds his den in the hidden depths of beech woods and goes into hibernation from December to March. During the rest of the year bears can be seen wandering nonchalantly in the recesses of the wood, grazing peacefully in the glades, often advancing towards valley floor fields to pilfer strawberries and gooseberries, raspberries and crab apples. Although the bear is prevalently vegetarian, 25% of their diet is meat, so they actually attack sheep not far away from their folds. Two thirds of the bear population is concentrated in the Park, but others live on Majella, around the Cinquemiglia plain, on Sirente and on Gran Sasso. The Marsica bear has grown in confidence and in visibility over recent years, so much so that it is no longer unusual to meet them face to face.

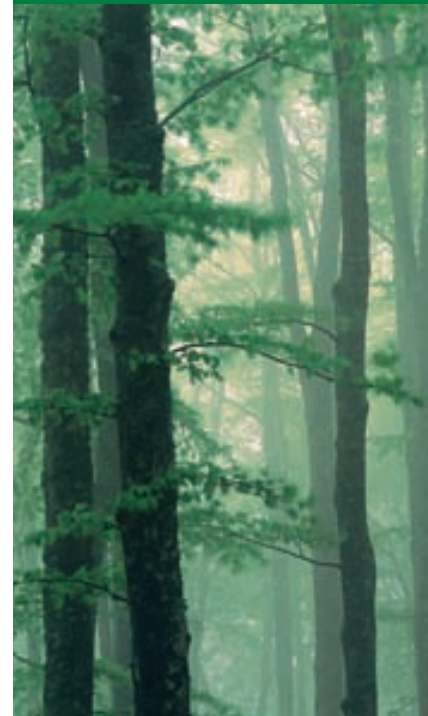
wide connecting roads offer some good opportunities for safe cycling tourism. The Park's teaching facilities include Pescasseroli Museum and Zoo; a birds of prey centre at Barrea; wildlife areas for the chamois at Opi, the wolf and lynx at Civitella Alfedena, the chamois at Bisegna; an insect museum; a roe-deer wildlife area at San Sebastiano.

From Villetta Barrea, we can climb the Godi pass's hairpin bends and stop over at the refuge-hotel, take a delightful stroll along the plateau, then make the descent on the opposite side, down to Scanno, the main village of a small but interesting mountain district. The village is known worldwide because of its splendid old town centre, photographed by important international names including Cartier Bresson and Giacomelli, but also for its lake, which divides the mountains of the Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise National Park from the wild Mount Genzana massif. Scanno has no lack of tourist facilities and interesting catering, with typical foods including *polenta* and wild spring spinach used as a dressing for homemade pasta. Lake Scanno is ideal for canoes and windsurfers, and the shoreline road is excellent for cycling excursions.





# SPORTS AND PASTIMES



## INFORMATION

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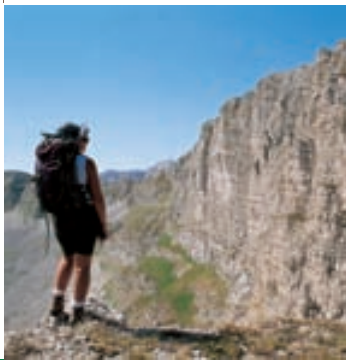
The Park has many well-marked paths and these are ideal for splendid, well-known excursions on foot, possibly hiring a guide, on horseback or on a mountain bike. It is also possible to spend time taking wildlife photography, watching animals in the wild in their habitat, birdwatching on the lakes, where the largest, lake Barrea, is also excellent for canoeing and windsurfing.

The Park offers 150 excursion itineraries and about ten nature trails.

In winter downhill skiing is available in the smart, pretty ski resorts of Pescasseroli and Scanno-Passo Godi, whereas cross-country skiing stretches into the suggestive localities of Forca d'Acero and Macchiarvana, with their lovely circuits meandering through beech woods an huge clearings.



**The Velino and Sirente massifs are just over an hour from Rome and can be reached easily from anywhere in Abruzzo. Even though they are not as high as Majella and Gran Sasso, they offer the visitor just as many points of interest as the greater massifs.**

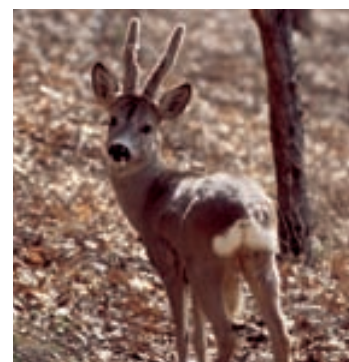


The Sirente-Velino Regional Nature Park was instituted in 1989, and covers 50,288 hectares in the province of L'Aquila; its head offices are in Rocca di Mezzo and the Park involves the municipalities of Acciano, Aielli, Castel di Ieri, Castelvechio Subequo, Celano, Cerchio, Collarmele, Fagnano Alto, Fontecchio, Gagliano Aterno, Goriano Sicoli, L'Aquila, Magliano dei Marsi, Massa d'Albe, Molina Aterno, Ocre, Ovindoli, Pescina, Rocca di Cambio, Rocca di Mezzo, Secinaro and Tione degli Abruzzi.

# Sirente-Velino

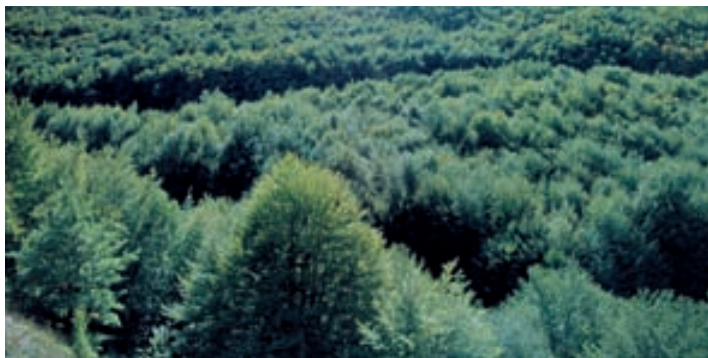


The rock faces protect the peaks towering above and the screes are rich in rare botanical species. These mountains are well-known to skiers, thanks to the ski runs at Ovindoli and Campo Felice, and are also popular with excursionists. From a geomorphological standpoint, the two calcareous massifs, with the Rocche, Pezza and Prati del Sirente highlands opening in between, are characterized by karstic fields and rock faces, the Celano and San Venanzio gorges and the Stiffe grottoes. Sirente, valle Cerchiata and Cerasolo tower amongst the beech woods. There are oak woods further down on the Aterno side, with ilex appear in the gorges. Park plant life is remarkably different on each of the two massifs and lower areas. The flora comprises rare species such as the Apennine cinquefoil, linnean diripide, campanula Cavolini and allium lineare. The Park is the home of the Apennine wolf, the brown Marsica bear, roe deer, deer, porcupine, fox, wild cat and boar, as well as many other small mammals. Birdlife includes the golden eagle, buzzard, brown kite, sparrow-hawk, kestrel, raven, griffon vulture, the peregrine and lanner falcons, eagle-owl and the rainbird. The large number of amphibians there include the spotted salamander and the newt, reptiles like the green lizard and various viper species.



# Regional Park

**The historical, cultural and artistic heritage protected by the Park, its important old town centres, and the contribution made by this central area of mountain Abruzzo to the history and establishment of the region's identity are outstanding.**



For a historical-geographical profile of the Park, it would be useful to break down its territory – which has been inhabited constantly since remote times – into three territorial contexts: the Velino area, overlooking the Fucino basin, linked historically to the basin; the mid-Subequana valley, conversely drawn to the Aquilan basin; the Rocche highlands in between, linked to stock-rearing and populated permanently only since the Middle Ages.

The history and peopling of the territory and settlements in the Velino area were conditioned chiefly by their belonging to the Fucino area, which had a prominent role both in Prehistory (with extremely important archaeological sites discovered along the whole perimeter of the ancient Fucino lake) and in the Italic-Roman era, as shown by the presence near Massa d'Albe of one of the most important cities of ancient Abruzzo, *Alba Fucens*. The Subequana valley, on the other hand, was connected naturally and historically to the events of the Aquilan basin, both in its ancient settlement phase in the Italic era (as witnessed by the extraordinary necropolis at Fossa), and in the Medieval period. This area of the Park, thanks to the beauty and state of preservation of its castles, convent monasteries, abbeys, towns and actual landscape, is considered to be one of the finest testimonies and representations of Medieval Abruzzo.

Sheep farming on the Rocche highlands was already active in the Protohistoric age, as in all the rest of mountain Abruzzo. Nonetheless, its towns are of Medieval origin as in that period the plateau acquired military importance, initially as a connection area between the Fucino and L'Aquila basins (testified by Rovere castle, theatre of many battles, and its interesting museum), and then economically, with its high pastures and seasonal farming at altitude; a worthwhile visit is to the seasonal agricultural villages of Pagliare di Tione, Fontecchio and Fagnano, located on the eastern edge of the highland: unusual places connected with integrated mountain farming and transhumance economy.





The extent of the territory and the varied environments and landscapes allow all kinds of excursions, from short walks in the flowery meadows of the Rocche, Piano di Pezza and Prati del Sirente highlands, to demanding ascents to the summits of wooded Sirente or stark Velino.

Alpine and mid-mountain guides, as well as nature operators, are available to tourists for guided or didactic excursions and trekking.

As always, any of the Park's walkable trails can also be covered on a mountain bike or on horseback. Apart from the Parks marked routes, there are countless routes to be explored along ancient tracks, dirt roads, cartways, mule tracks, farm and forest roads, which abound on the territory. Numerous local roads (well-surfaced, with little traffic and extremely panoramic) are also good for quality cycle tourism, served by the many villages scattered across the Park territory. The territory's changeableness and the frequent differences in altitude as well as the panoramic viewing points and perspectives offer exciting opportunities to wildlife and landscape photographers too. Fans of mountaineering and sport climbing will enjoy the challenge of the Velino and Sirente peaks, while the river Aterno and its gorges await canyoning, kayak and canoeing enthusiasts. During winter, the ski runs at Ovindoli and Campo Felice offer skiers excellent opportunities for downhill skiing, with cross-country skiers able to exploit the spectacular circuits in a scenario of rare beauty at Piano di Pezza.



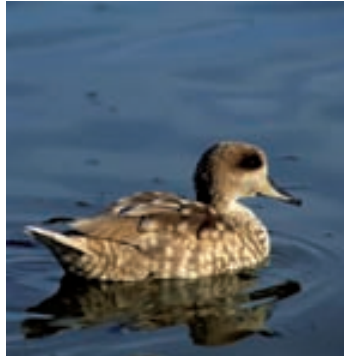
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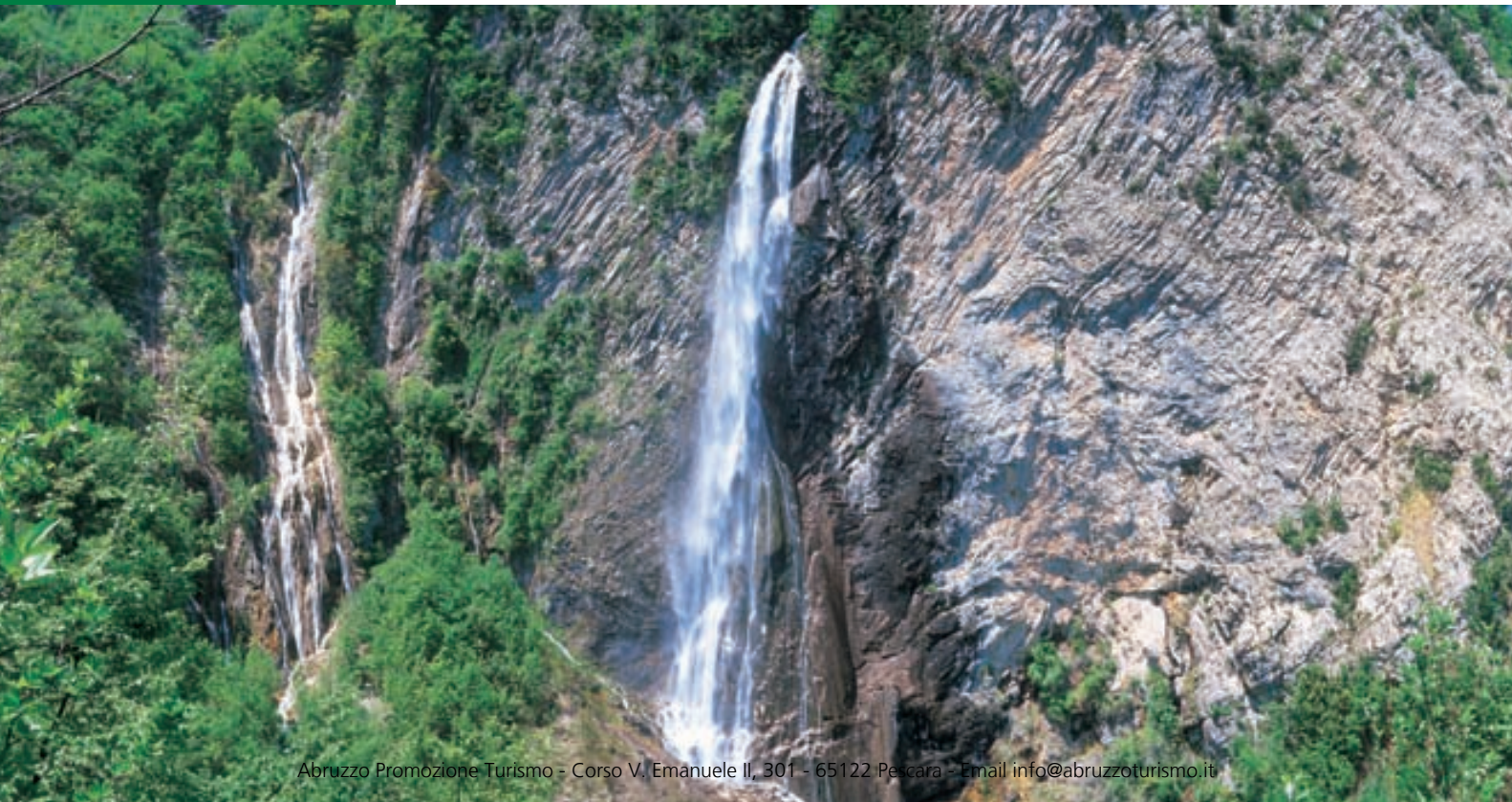
# Regional

**The region's protected areas system also comprises more than 30 Oases and Nature Reserves – a few inside the Parks, but many outside their boundaries.**



## **Other protected areas in the province of Chieti**

In the province of Chieti we find the *Lago di Serranella Nature Reserve and WWF Oasis*, which is located at the confluence of the rivers Sangro and Aventino, at an altitude of approximately 90m. The main core comprises an artificial basin of shallow water, remarkably rich in birdlife (more than 200 species have been recorded there!); it is the haven of rarities such as the egret, black stork and flamingo. At Rosello and Agnone, Molise municipalities, there is the *Abetina di Rosello WWF Oasis*, which safeguards one of the last woods mixed with silver fir still remaining in Abruzzo, populated by wolves, wild cats, roe deer and the great black woodpecker. The small *Annunziata Territorial Park*, in the municipality of Orsogna, at less than a kilometre from the town and its altitude varies approximately between 300 and 400 metres, protecting a deep valley with a thick ilex, durmast oak and bay trees wood, populated by birds and small mammals. At Torino di Sangro the *Biotopo delle Iccete litoranee* preserves the spontaneous woods on the Abruzzo coast that contain durmast and turkey oak, yeddo hombeam, elm, ilex and species of Mediterranean maquis. The nearby *Biotopo del bosco di Don Venanzio*, in the municipality of Pollutri, protects a charming shoreline wood of ash, poplar and common oak, as well as butcher's broom and some interesting herbs.



# Reserves and Oases

## Other protected areas in the province of L'Aquila

Morino in valle Roveto is home to the spectacular *Zompo lo Schioppo Nature Reserve* with more than 1,000 hectares of beech forest, and Abruzzo's most beautiful waterfall, plunging from an 80-metre cliff, in a scenario of rare beauty. Fauna includes bears, wolves, eagle-owls and peregrine falcons. There is a small but spectacular and very interesting Museum/Visitor Centre, which attracts thousands of tourists and scholars annually. The *Grotte di Pietrasecca Nature Reserve*, in the municipality of Carsoli, protects the special, and in some ways unique, local karstic environment, which includes the Pietrasecca and the large Cervo grottoes, famous for archaeological and palaeontological findings, as well as the extraordinary beauty of the white concretions of different forms and structures that cover the 400-metre tunnel. Anversa degli Abruzzi houses the marvellous *WWF Gole del Sagittario Oasis*, which protects the long, spectacular V-shaped ravines, worn and modelled over millions of years by the river Cavuto's eroding waters. Mammals of all kinds (apart from the chamois) and typical Apennine birds can be found in the Oasis, in particular the golden eagle, peregrine falcon, the wallcreeper and the red-billed chough. Finally, the *Sorgenti del Vera Territorial Park*, on the outskirts of Tempèra, a hamlet of L'Aquila, was founded to protect a crystal-clear spring that contains rare species of algae. The waters, surrounded by age-old poplars and willows, are visited by the kingfisher, the grey heron and dipper.

## Other protected areas in the province of Pescara

The *Pescara Springs Nature Reserve*, near Popoli, safeguards extraordinary and striking springs that form a small, crystal-clear lake, surrounded by woods and reedbeds. Along the path that skirts the lake there are a surprising number of springheads that surface, more than 60, in fact. The waters arrive directly from the great Campo Imperatore aquifer on Gran Sasso and after an underground course of approximately 30 kilometres, they resurface in the Reserve. More than 100 species of resident and migratory waterfowl (including the grey heron, baldicoot, waterhen and kingfisher) live in approximately 50 hectares, amidst dense reedbeds; many aquatic flora like common water crowfoot, broad-leaved pondweed, yellow iris and water lilies. The *Lago di Penne Nature Reserve and WWF Oasis*, a few kilometres away from the old town centre of Penne, was founded on the artificial lake created in the Sixties for irrigation purposes. It is one of the

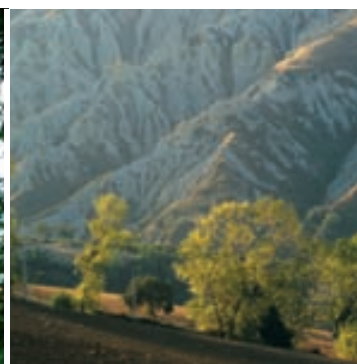




most popular wetlands with migrating birds during the migration period. The Reserve has durmast oak woods on the basin's slopes, and willow and poplar groves along the banks, offering shelter to the night heron, purple heron and osprey. Moving on towards the coast between the municipalities of Pescara and Montesilvano (where the Reserve lies), we find a small coastal strip of pines (mostly Aleppo), three kilometres long and 50 metres wide, a Reserve designated, after the assault of concrete, to preserve what remained of the ancient pinewood that looked directly onto the sea, and used to be much bigger. A similar protection measure established the *Pineta Dannunziana Nature Reserve*, a green lung in the heart of the city. One of River Fino's loops, a few kilometres before it joins the Tavo, constitutes the *Città Sant'Angelo Territorial Theme Park*: a small wetland visited by a great number of bird species. The *Vicoli Territorial Theme Park* safeguards the slopes between the old town centre and the course of the river Nora, site of a durmast oak, field maple, robinia wood, with various rare bird species. Finally, at Scafa, between Majella and Morrone, the *Sorgenti Sulfuree del Lavino Territorial Theme Park*, which protects a really special environment. The poplars and willows encircle spectacular, resurging, sulphur springs that are turquoise in colour, thanks to the peculiar green and sky-blue algae that cover the depths. The interesting wildlife to be found here includes: waterhens, Cetti's warblers, rainbirds, yellow wagtails and kingfishers, as well as small mammals like hedgehogs, weasels, beech-martens and badgers.

#### Other protected areas in the province of Teramo

The *Castel Cerreto Nature Reserve*, in the municipality of Penna Sant'Andrea, safeguards a turkey oak, durmast oak and hop-hornbeam wood, as well as many kinds of shrubs like broom, juniper, hawthorn and butcher's broom. Wildlife includes rare birds like the barn owl, sparrow-hawk and the green woodpecker. Common mammals here are weasels, beech-martens, foxes, hares,



dormice, wild boar, squirrels and hedgehogs. The striking scenario of Atri's badlands, created by the erosion of certain types of clay, is protected by the *Calanchi di Atri Nature Reserve*. The scant vegetation includes species that are typically found in desert climates, such as the caper, wild artichoke and liquorice. The river crab and the polecat are common along the small watercourses, and of course the ever-present fox, although a special presence on the badlands is without doubt the porcupine. The *Fiume Fiumetto Territorial Theme Park*, in the municipality of Colledara, protects a riverbed characterized by cascades and riverside vegetation, set in durmast, common oak, willow, poplar woods, frequented by polecats, badgers and many bird species. Finally, the most extensive protected area of its kind in Abruzzo, the *Fiume Vomano Territorial Theme Park* is located in the mid section of the river Vomano, in the Montorio al Vomano municipality, and it protects one of the most important rivers in the province of Teramo, fed by the waters of Gran Sasso and Laga. The river here flows between tall sandstone faces – hollowed by the slow corrosive action of the waters – and ilex woods. The peregrine falcon nests on the faces, and the nightjar, the fiscal and the hoopoe all nest there.