

The Nature Reserve

Created in 1997 to protect the biodiversity of the Matese Mountains, the Guardiaregia-Campochiaro nature reserve covers an area of 3.135 hectares. It is today the second largest nature reserve of the WWF Italy network of protected areas. In 2010 the Oasis was designated as a regional nature reserve. The protected area lies on the eastern side of the Matese Mountains in the Molise region between 600 and 1823 m.a.s.l. It is a mosaic of mountainous and forest habitats. The nature reserve is characterized by spectacular karst phenomena such as the Quirino stream canyon and the San Nicola waterfall (height: 100 m). Within the reserve are also some of the deepest abysses of Italy: the caves named “Pozzo della Neve” with a depth of 1048 m. and “Cul di Bove” with a depth -913 m. Mount Mutria, the highest peak of the nature reserve, is dominated by high altitude pastures where the mountain cowslip and the *Androsace villosa* grow; at lower altitudes beech woodlands with century-old trees dominate the landscape. Holm oaks grow along the Quirino gorges while century-old common yew dominates the valley of the canyon. Noteworthy is the presence of the strawberry tree, an isolated element of the Mediterranean maquis located only on the eastern side of the Matese Mountains. The nature reserve is home to a varied and interesting fauna: among mammals the wolf is the most noteworthy presence along with the wild-cat and the badger. Among amphibians the spectacled salamander (symbol of the nature reserve), the fire salamander and the yellow-bellied toad are by far the most interesting species found. The bird population includes lanner falcons, red kites, common buzzards, peregrine falcons, and white-throated dippers. Among insects the most noteworthy species is the southern festoon.

Visits

The tour takes visitors along the ring of the “San Nicola” nature trail and takes approximately one hour and a half to complete. The nature path follows the natural trail, climbing the slope in the first part and then running flat along the remaining part. The views from the trail are spectacular as the path unfolds along the edges of the Quirino gorges and San Nicola waterfall. With a bit of luck visitors can get a glimpse of the birds of prey that live in the nature reserve. Other trails in the nature reserve: a) The “Tre Frati” path (about 2-3 hours) of mount Mutria which leads visitors to discover the century-old beech trees that grow along the slopes; b) “Sentiero delle grotte” leads down to the abysses of Pozzo della Neve and of Cul di Bove (about 2-3 hours).

Tours begin at the visitor centre in Guardiaregia.

Guided visits need to be booked in advance by contacting staff.

Email: guardiaregia-campochiaro@wwf.it.