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## Natura 2000: The European Ecological Network

Natura 2000 is a network of protected areas that aims to safeguard biodiversity in the territory of the European Union, with particular attention to habitats and species of flora and fauna that are rare and endangered. The network derives from two directives: 92/43/CEE "Birds" and 2009/147/CEE "Habitats".

The Natura 2000 network consists of the following sites:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) that are currently Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) according to the Habitats Directive.
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs) according to the Birds Directive

The two directives include a number of annexes regarding lists of species and habitats that need varying degrees of protection. The three most relevant of these annexes are:

**Annex I of the Habitats Directive:** lists the natural habitats of interest to the Community that need specially designated areas if their conservation is to be ensured. Some of these environments risk disappearing completely in Europe and need to be carefully protected; they are called habitats of "priority interest".

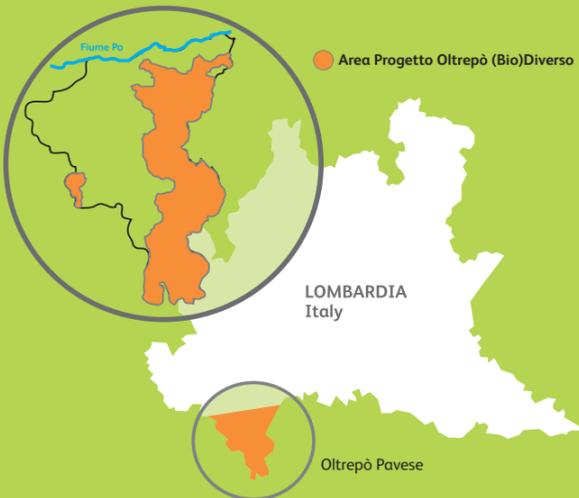
**Annex II of the Habitats Directive:** lists species of fauna (mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, arthropods, molluscs) and flora of interest to the Community that need specially designated areas if their conservation is to be ensured. "priority" species have been identified here too.

**Annex I of the Birds Directive:** identifies species of birds that need special measures to be taken to conserve their habit if their survival is to be ensured.

[www.minambiente.it/pagina/rete-natura-2000](http://www.minambiente.it/pagina/rete-natura-2000)



## Sites of Interest to the European Community in the Oltrepò Pavese: Nature and Biodiversity



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## Monte Alpe: Nature Reserve and Site of Community Importance

(text: Giuliana Cavalli, Paolo Ballardini; images: Paolo Ballardini)

The "Monte Alpi" regional nature reserve is in the Menconico district of the Oltrepò Pavese in the upper Staffora Valley. It was created in 1985 as the basis for a bioenergetics reserve to protect the population of red wood ants that had been introduced as a biological way to fight the pine processionary moths. At that time, these were causing considerable damage to conifers in the area. The reserve covers 328 hectares and ranges from 762mt to Monte Alpe at 1254mt.

In 2004, the Monte Alpe area was classified as Site of Community Importance number IT2080021. ERSAF is the authority managing both the nature reserve and the European site. The SCI covers an area of 320 hectares, which is slightly different in size from the area of the nature reserve, which also has different borders. The SCI also includes small areas in the districts of Varzi and Romagnese.

Most of the western part of the area is covered with broad-leaf coppice-wood consisting mainly of European, hop-hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*) and manna ash (*Fraxinus ornus*) as well as downy oak (*Quercus pubescens*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), Austrian oak (*Quercus cerris*), and chestnut (*Castanea sativa*). Chestnut trees dominate the eastern part of the reserve and are evidence of an ancient, cultivated sweet chestnut wood. Alongside the broad-leaf trees, tall conifers can be found. These originally belonged to artificial plantations of Scotch pines (*Pinus sylvestris*) and above all Austrian pines (*Pinus nigra*). The protected area can be visited all year round and is equipped with numerous rest areas and information panels positioned by ERSAF that allow visitors to gain a better knowledge of the territory. There are many accessible paths to explore:

### Flora and Fauna

#### Avifauna

- Honey buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*)
- Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*)
- Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*)
- Red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*)
- Ortolan bunting (*Emberiza hortulana*)
- Red-billed chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*)

#### Mammals

- Wolf (*Canis lupus italicus*)
- Roe-Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)
- Stag (*Cervus elaphus*)
- Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*)
- Fallow Deer (*Dama dama*)
- Badger (*Meles meles*)
- Porcupine (*Hystrix cristata*)
- Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

#### Lepidoptera

- Alcon large blue
- Large blue

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01\_Mount Alpe in winter  
02\_Monte Alpe in summer

03\_*Equisetum arvense*  
(field horsetail)  
04\_Hordes of wood ants among  
the conifers  
05\_*Lilium bulbiferum*  
*ssp.croceum* (orange lily)  
06\_*Castanea sativa*  
(sweet chestnut)



### Le Torraie - Monte Lesima

(text and photos: Provincia di Pavia)

The Le Torraie – Mount Lesima nature reserve and SCI (Site of Community Importance) covers 598 hectares in the Torraie Valley in the Brallo di Pregola district, from the Avagnone and Trebbia torrents to the 1,724mt summit of Mount Lesima, which is the highest peak in the Ligurian- Piedmont-Pavese Apennines. From a geological point of view, the site is characterised by the limestone of Mount Antola and the escarpment of Corbesassi. The reserve is home to hundreds of hectares of beech wood at higher altitudes, and hop-hornbeams lower down. The ridge is covered with extensive, mostly arid meadows. These are of significant naturalistic value thanks to the wide variety of species they are home to (there are a vast number of orchids) and their interactive role with visiting pollinators. The most northerly instance of *Astragalus sirinicus* on the Italian peninsula can also be found there.

In fact, thanks to its geographical location, Mount Lesima (whose summit is less than 40km as the crow flies from the Tigullio Gulf and the Paradise Gulf) is affected not only by the continental climate but also considerably by Mediterranean weather conditions. The fauna includes river crawfish, numerous night predator birds such as the golden eagle, the short-toed eagle and mammals including stags and wolves. Thanks to over 80 species known to be present, the Mount Lesima area is one of the richest in Europe for butterflies. Mount Lesima can be recognised by the aviation radar station and large cross on its summit. The western side of the mountain is steep and grassy while the east is precipitous and craggy. It dominates the Trebbia and Avagnone valleys, the Avagnone flows into the Trebbia on the left. On clear days you can glimpse a strip of the Ligurian Sea. According to legend, the name “Lesima” dates back to Hannibal. It is said that the Carthaginian general climbed to the top of the mountain and hurt his hand there (*lesa manus*).

#### Useful information for your visit

The nature reserve/SCI can be explored either on foot or by mountain bike via an extensive network paths. The following starting points are recommended:  
 Prodongo – Piani di Lesima  
 The brallo – Giovà road (accessible to vehicles)  
 Rovaiolo Vecchio  
 Piani di Cavanna

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 Comune di Brallo di Pregola: 0383 550040  
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- 01\_A butterfly in the meadows on Mount Lesima
- 02\_A view of Mount Lesima with globeflowers in the foreground
- 03\_*Fritillaria montana*: the species that symbolises the Botanical Gardens
- 04\_A wolf (*Canis lupus italicus*)
- 05\_5 A roe-deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)

- 06\_The Pietra Corva Botanical Garden (foto: M. Garavana)
- 07\_*Alyssum bertoloni*
- 08\_*Rosa pimpinellifolia*
- 09\_Red Rhododendrons outside the entrance to the Botanical Garden.



### Sassi Neri – Pietra Corva

(text and photos: Provincia di Pavia)

The Sassi Neri – Pietra Corva SCI (Site of Community Importance) covers 667 hectares in the Romagnese district on the right bank of the Tidone. It extends from the river to Pietra di Corvo, Pan Perduto, and Sassi Neri: mountains that are over 1000mt high. These are outcrops of ophiolitic serpentinite rocks that originated as magma in the Earth's crust and solidified on an ancient ocean bed about 150 million years ago. Calcareous flysh marlstone-clay sediments can also be found within the area defined as the SCI.

At lower altitudes, hop hornbeam is widespread, and there are sometimes small woods of downy oak. From 850mt upwards, there are beech trees, either pure or mixed with Austrian oak. At the highest altitudes there are dry meadows rich in wild roses and orchids and species typical of ophiolitic areas (including *alisso*, *armeria fritillaria*).

Calcium carbonate infiltrating mosses can be found along the river. In the damp and marshy parts of the area, the northern crested newt and the spectacled salamander can be seen, while the golden eagle and the short-toed eagle wheel in the sky.

#### The Botanical Garden

The Pietra Corva Alpine Botanical Garden was established in by Antonio Ridella in 1967. It is located in the heart of the Sassi Neri – Pietra Corva SCI at 950mt on the side of Mount Pietra di Corvo. It consists of a maze of small paths between flower beds and rockeries where it is possible to admire the plants that grow among the recesses and crevices. The garden's beauty, aesthetic impact and wealth of forms and colours make it the ideal place for trips and excursions. The garden is also a study centre for the Northern Apennines and serves as a place for observation, study, teaching and research.

#### Useful information for your visit

The Botanical Garden is located beyond the hamlet of Grazzi Superiore. It is open from 1st April to 30th September, from Tuesday to Sunday (and on holiday Mondays or Mondays before holiday Tuesdays). There is also a comfortable refreshment area.

Visits to the SCI must be requested in advance.

We recommend starting your tour at the Botanical Garden (Information Point).

From the garden, you can choose from a large number of paths (on foot or by mountain bike):

- the Mount Pietra di Corvo circular path, 1hr 30mins on foot, including reaching the summit;
- Sassi Neri, 1hr; Pan Perduto, 40mins;
- The source of the Tidone: the “Tidone-Po” path as far as Casa Matti in the Romagnese district, 1 hr 30mins;
- The Penice Pass, a two-hour walk.

While climbing Mount Pietra di Corvo is technically simple, caution is required due to the exposure of the peak.

#### Contact

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