

The best experiences you can have when visiting the Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System, discovering the Great Po River.

Natural Experiences

- 1 Walk through the woods to discover the forests which once covered the Mantuan Oltrepò area and the whole of the Po Plain.
- 2 See how the willow groves colonised the new terrain created by the river and mankind, giving rise to the long process which led to the formation of the Mantuan Oltrepò woods.
- 3 Walk along the sandy beaches which form when the river is low, looking at the different kinds of plants which take root there – they will only survive for a season, until the Po swells once again.
- 4 Move around the marshlands, along the canals, in the abandoned quarries, look out from a hut to watch and listen to ducks, herons, hawks and the myriad of small birds which live there.

- 5 Walk along the canals and ditches in the marshland and listen to the croaking of the frogs; if you are lucky you might even come across the Italian agile frog – a red frog which lives only on the Po Plain – European pond turtle, or the viviparous lizard.
- 6 Take a walk through the woods to discover the extraordinarily rich range of wildlife in the Mantuan Oltrepò – you will hear the song of the great tit and the nightingale, the hammering of the red woodpecker and the laughing call of the green woodpecker.
- 7 Enter a reed thicket and feel the soft ground under your feet, like a trampoline. Touch the rough, sharp leaves of the reeds and the sedge, plants which the inhabitants of this area have used for centuries to make many products.

- 8 Discover the signs of life left by great and small animals – fox, hedgehog and heron tracks imprinted in the dried out silt, gastropod trails, insect holes in decaying tree stumps, raptor regurgitations, fallen feathers, birdsong among the branches...
- 9 Walk around a "bugno" or an oxbow lake and discover the biodiversity contained in these small areas of still water.
- 10 Linger in front of the monumental trees which punctuate the landscape and wonder at their magnificence, trying to guess their age and their history.

As well as these experiences, you can also:

- Walk through the poplar woods and notice their regular layout – they are not true woods, but rather plantations destined to be felled after a decade or so. In spring you can witness the snowfall as their cotton-wool-like seeds fall.
- Look out on the river shallows from an observation point (●), with dozens of terns and gulls on the foreshore, rows of old willows on the banks with cormorants perched on top drying their feathers, the sandy banks where bee-eaters, sand martins and kingfishers have dug out their nests.

Cultural Experiences

- 1 Stop and chat with the local fishermen and hear stories of the legendary sturgeons which used to live in the Po and the new "monster", the wels catfish.
- 2 Cross the Po in a boat to feel its strength, to grasp its majesty.
- 3 Enjoy traditional local dishes, such as squash tortelli (*i turtei ad suca* in the local language), agnoli (*i caplet*) – like Bolognese tortellini, the exquisite white truffle (*la trifula*), tirotto (*al tiròt*) – an onion foccacia, tortelli guazzarotti (*turtei sguasaròt*) – pasta stuffed with chestnuts and beans and served in a wine sauce, and the innumerable pig (*al guget*) products, all washed down by a good Mantuan lambrusco (*al lambrusch*). Buy local products at the numerous stores and delicatessens or at food festivals and farmers' markets.

- 4 Visit a drainage plant and see the syphons, drainage systems, the network of canals, the banks, groynes, waterways, locks and docks, to take in the extraordinary complexity of drainage, water management and navigation of the rivers and canals.
- 5 Get to know the history of the Mantuan Oltrepò by visiting the pievi matildiche (Matildic churches), the Polirone Abbey, the *Santuario della Comuna* sanctuary, the museums, mansions, courts and castles.
- 6 Learn about the centuries-old relationship between man and the land by discovering the agricultural lifestyle and ancient crafts, visiting the agricultural courts, material culture museums and ship mills on the Po.
- 7 Relax by the river – sunbathe on the beaches, go for a river cruise, fish, stroll through the flood plains, ride along the embankments bathed in sun or fog.
- 8 Stop at the visitors' centre of a nature reserve, in a town square, at a rest point on the Parks Cycle Route, a farm holiday centre or a restaurant; take refreshments, get information packs, talk with the locals and learn about their lifestyles and language.

As well as these experiences, you can also:

- Ride along the Mantuan Oltrepò Parks Cycle Route, enjoying the silence, the smells and the colours in order to fully appreciate the countryside of the Po plain and meet the hospitable locals.
- Look around from up on the river embankments, gazing over the river, the flood plains, the fields, the courts and villages, taking in the scale of this network of dykes which the inhabitants of the Mantuan Oltrepò trust to keep them safe.

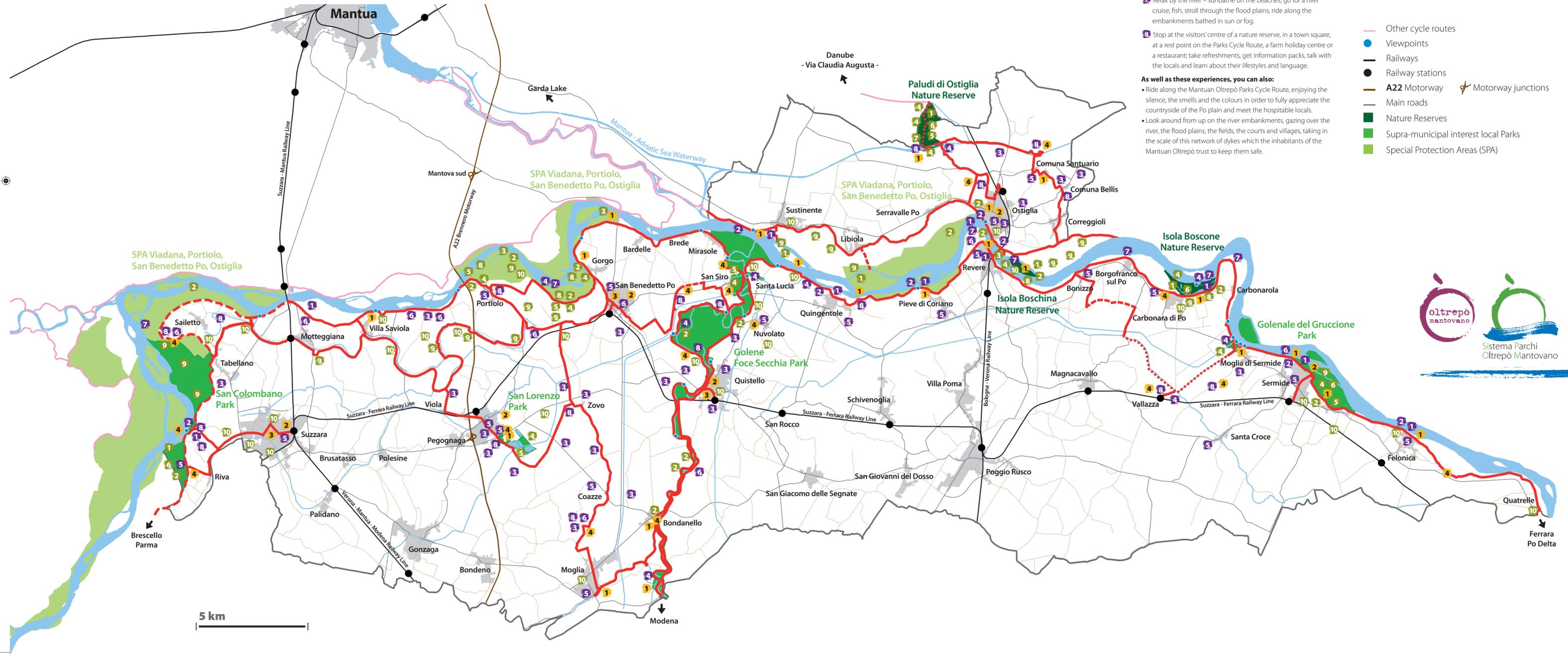
Parks Cycle Route Network

- 1 Rest Areas
- 2 Infopoints
- 3 Mechanics
- 4 Bike point - Rest area - Infopoint

Park System bikes are available at the Bike Points

- PATH TYPE**
- Paved routes
 - - Gravel routes
 - ... Dirt routes

- Other cycle routes
- Viewpoints
- Railways
- Railway stations
- A22 Motorway
- ✂ Motorway junctions
- Main roads
- Nature Reserves
- Supra-municipal interest local Parks
- Special Protection Areas (SPA)



5 km



Isola Boschina Nature Reserve

"A world of history and nature on the Great Po River"

Isola Boschina, located in the Po river between Ostiglia and Revere, covers an area of 37 hectares and is part of the Natura 2000 European ecological network. It is the **only island in the Po whose presence can be traced back to the second half of the 17th century** and which was continuously inhabited up until the late 20th century.

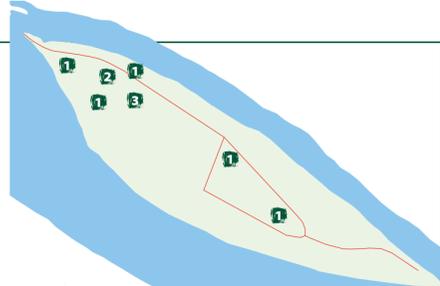
The nature reserve was formed to protect the areas of lowland forest present inside it which were threatened by the progressive expansion of poplar cultivation. As well as the lowland woods, there are also woods replanted from the 1990s onwards, **willow groves**, and an **example poplar wood** which gathers together the 20 most common clones used in poplar growing on the Po plain. When the river is low, large **sandy areas** also emerge.

The fauna is mainly composed of birds native to woodland and river environments, such as the **black kite**, the **sparrow hawk**, the **red and green woodpecker** and the **little ringed plover**.

The island also contains an interesting **group of buildings**, composed of a **villa and a farmhouse**, with two **superb monumental trees**: a *Populus deltoides* (eastern cottonwood) near the villa, and a white poplar overlooking a clearing in the eastern part of the reserve. The reserve is freely accessible on foot or by bike all year long, but is dependent on the water level of the river – with low water levels the island can be reached on foot, otherwise a boat must be taken. It contains a convenient self-guided tour, composed of information boards which accompany visitors in learning about the natural heritage of the nature reserve.

Isola Boschina is connected to the other nature reserves in the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** by the **Parks Cycle Route**. It is also on the **Eurovelo EV8** cycle itinerary and the **Province of Mantua cycle route 2s**.

Managing institution:
ERSAF - Ente Regionale per i Servizi all'Agricoltura e alle Foreste
Established in: 1985
Area: 37 hectares
Protection status: Regional nature reserve, Site of Community Importance, Special Protection Area
Year of joining Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System: 2007



Experiences

You can enjoy the following surprising experiences on Isola Boschina:

- 1 Walk through the only mature river woodland in the whole Oltrepò area and admire its monumental trees.
- 2 Admire the buildings and the park on the oldest island in the Oltrepò, the only to be continuously inhabited for centuries.
- 3 See an example of poplar wood and learn more about the issues of poplar cultivation on the Po Plain.

Information
ERSAF - Lombardy Region • T 0376 457321
www.forestedilombardia.it
WWF Basso Mantovano • T 0386 32511



Experiences

You can enjoy the following surprising experiences on Isola Boscone:

- 1 Discover the secrets of a riverside wood.
- 2 See an oxbow lake.
- 3 Breathe in the nature and fresh air of the Great Po river.

Information
Town of Carbonara di Po • T 0386 41549
www.isolaboscone.it

Isola Boscone Nature Reserve

"Daughter of the river, mother of the wood"

On the banks of the Po, behind the village of Carbonara, **Isola Boscone** contains the **second largest spontaneous woodland area in the Province of Mantua**, a particularly relevant element in a region such as Lombardy where just 3.5% of the plain area is wooded.

Founded in 1984, the nature reserve covers an area of 130 hectares, is part of the Natura 2000 European ecological network and is recognised as a **Wetland of International Importance**.

Alongside the forested areas, all the typical environments of the Po river can be found: **oxbow lakes and forming oxbow lakes**, fundamental for feeding many animal species; **sandy banks**, ideal nesting sites for bee-eaters and sand martins; the short-lived **sandy areas** which are home to important bird species such as the **little tern** and the **little ringed plover**. Other important birds on the island include the **black kite**, the **hobby**, the **osprey**, the **screech owl**, the **red and green woodpecker**, the **nycticorax**, the **egret**, the **tomtit** and the **blue tit**.

Joined to land for many years now, Isola Boscone is easily reached from the village of Carbonara di Po. A convenient turf track runs through it, leading visitors on an hour-long walk to discover the most suggestive corners of the nature reserve.

It is freely accessible on foot or by bike all year long, the water level of the river permitting.

Isola Boscone is connected to the other nature reserves in the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** by the **Parks Cycle Route**. It is also on the **Eurovelo EV8** cycle itinerary and the **Province of Mantua cycle route 2d**. The old Carbonara elementary school near the reserve has been turned into the **Eridano Tourist Centre**, which hosts a small guest quarters and a rest area for cyclists.

Managing institution: Town of Carbonara di Po
Established in: 1984
Area: 131 hectares
Protection status: Regional nature reserve, Site of Community Importance, Special Protection Area, Wetland of International Importance
Year of joining Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System: 2007

Paludi di Ostiglia Nature Reserve

"The life flowing among the bodies of water and the reeds"

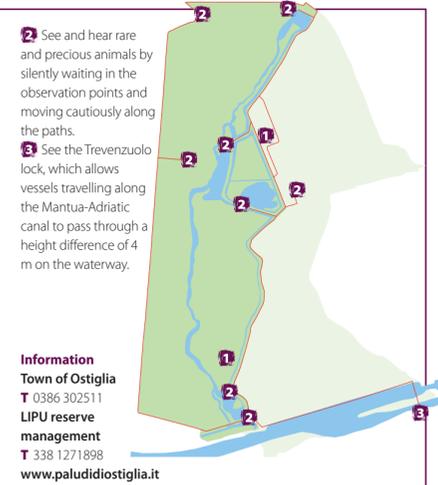
The **Paludi di Ostiglia Nature Reserve** represents a rare example of raised marshland, the last testimony to the huge **Veronese Valleys** marshland system. Drainage was begun on them in around 1850, but was not finished until the 1970s. The nature reserve, set up in 1984, extends over 120 hectares in the town of Ostiglia, on the border with the Veneto region. It hosts **175 species of birds**, as well as some particularly rare and prestigious habitats which have led to recognition on a European (the nature reserve is part of the Europe-wide ecological network, Natura 2000), and even worldwide level (the Paludi di Ostiglia are one of the 51 **Wetlands of international importance** in Italy). Among the most important species are the **Italian agile frog**, a red frog which lives only on the Po Plain, the **bittern** and the **red heron** (two rare reed thicket herons), as well as the **western marsh harrier**, the **viviparous lizard** and the **wetland tortoise**. There is a turf path inside the nature reserve which connects the visitors' centre to the observation huts. The reserve is open and freely accessible on foot or by bike all year round. The Paludi di Ostiglia are connected to the other areas of the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** by the **Parks Cycle Route**, and also lie along the **Via Claudia Augusta** – a cycle path which retraces the route of the Roman road which linked the Danube and Po rivers – and the **Province of Mantua cycle route 9**.

Managing institution: Town of Ostiglia
Established in: 1984
Area: 123 hectares
Protection status: Regional nature reserve, Site of Community Importance, Special Protection Area, Wetland of International Importance, LIPU (Italian League for Bird Protection) reserve
Year of joining Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System: 2007

Experiences

You can enjoy the following surprising experiences in the Paludi di Ostiglia:

- 1 Discover the world of the "valleys", an area which up until the last century occupied a huge area between Ostiglia and the Veneto region, but which drainage schemes made disappear. Explore unusual natural habitats rich in life, such as the reed thicket, the fen and the alder wood.



Information
Town of Ostiglia
T 0386 302511
LIPU reserve management
T 338 1271898
www.paludidiostiglia.it



Experiences

You can enjoy the following surprising experiences in the Gruccione Park:

- 1 Admire the Moglia drainage facilities.
- 2 Discover the relationship between a riverside community and its river by visiting the "Teleferica" Environmental Education Centre and the Sermidese Nautical Association.
- 3 Visit the Digagnola nature area.

Information
Sermide - Environmental Office • T 0386 967000
www.comune.sermide.mn.it

Golenale del Gruccione Park

"Where the waters of the Oltrepò, nature and humans meet"

Located near the town of Sermide, on the south-east edge of Lombardy, the park owes its name to a large colony of **gruccioni** (bee-eaters), birds with splendid plumage which have only started nesting along the Po in recent years.

The nature reserve extends over an area of 388 hectares, made up largely of flood plains and huge river islands (like the Schiavi and Bianchi islands). Inside it you will find a landscape typical of the middle course of the Po, made up of **inhabited areas along the main embankment**, river docks, agricultural areas on the **flood plains**, **poplar woods** and **wetland woods** which have spontaneously settled in abandoned quarries, **oxbow lakes** and huge **sandy areas**.

In one of these abandoned quarries you can find the **"Digagnola" nature area**, set up for nature watching and free to enter, with a circular pedestrian and cycle path about a kilometre long. Near the town of Sermide, right on the Po, is the **"Teleferica"** building, a unique example of industrial archaeology used as an environmental education centre for the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System**. Right next door to the "Teleferica" are the **tourist docks** and the Sermidese Nautical Association facilities.

Of notable importance, the hamlet of Moglia contains the **Mantua-Reggio Emilia and Revere Agro drainage system** (today joined under the Consorzio Terre dei Gonzaga in Destra Po organisation); built in the early 1900s, it sends much of the water of the Mantuan Oltrepò into the Great Po itself. From here, a 15 km circular dirt cycle path sets off, winding along the banks of the Upper Fossalta and Agro Mantua-Reggio Emilia outlet canal. Gruccione Park is connected to the other nature reserves in the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** by the **Parks Cycle Route**. It is also on the **Eurovelo EV8** cycle itinerary and the **Province of Mantua cycle route 2d**.

Managing institution: Town of Sermide
Established in: 2004
Area: 388 hectares
Protection status: Supra-municipal interest local Park
Year of joining Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System: 2007

Information

San Benedetto Po and the Mantuan Oltrepò Tourist Welcome Information (IAT)

Pzza Folengo, 22 - 46027 San Benedetto Po
T 0376 623036 F 0376 623021
iat@oltrepomantova.it

Download the **app** "The Mantuan Oltrepò Parks Cycle Route Network", with more than 380 things to do and see.

Download the whole network to **GPS** in GPX format or to **Google Maps** in KML format.

www.sipom.eu
info@sipom.eu

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EUROPARC FEDERATION
EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS
The Parks Cycle Route comes under the Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System tourist strategy, certified by EUROPARC Federation with the **European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas**.



CON I EUROPA PER CRESCERE INSIEME

Golene Foce Secchia Park

"Drainage systems, syphons, embankments and meanders: the river's strength and man's cleverness"

The **Golene Foce Secchia Park** encloses the final section of the Secchia river, from the border with Emilia until it meets the Po. Here, the Apennine tributary winds along between high embankments which delineate floodplains significantly smaller than those of the Great Po. With an area of around 1,200 hectares, the park includes territory from the municipalities of Quistello, Quingentole, San Benedetto Po and Moglia, and encloses agricultural systems and natural river environments, connected by a wide network of inter-farm roads which fan out from the main embankments. Even more so than for the agricultural and natural areas, the nature reserve is characterised by **territorial morphology dominated** by tight **meanders** of the river and major hydraulic systems, testimony of the thousand-year-long work by the people of the Mantuan Oltrepò to manage the waters.

In this regard, the **facilities of Mondine and San Siro**, as well as the **syphons** with which the Mantua-Reggio Emilia Agro canal passes under the Secchia, delivering water from the Sinistra Secchia to the Moglia di Sermide drainage plant, are of significant interest. The park is particularly well suited to cycling thanks to the circular panoramic path which runs along the top of the embankment, alongside significant historical, artistic and hydraulic sights (**Pollirone Abbey**, **Pieve matildica di San Fiorentino church** and **Gorni di Nuvolato Museum**, the **Bondanello drainage system**, the **San Prospero syphon**, etc.) and connects to the nature reserves of the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** via the **Parks Cycle Route**. The Secchia cycle ring is also part of the **Eurovelo EV7** route and the **province of Mantua cycle routes 3d and 3s**.

Managing institution: Agreement between the towns of Moglia, Quingentole, Quistello and San Benedetto Po and the Consorzi di Bonifica dell'Emilia Centrale and Terre dei Gonzaga in Destra Po organisations
Established in: 2005
Area: 1,177 hectares
Protection status: Supra-municipal interest local Park
Year of joining Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System: 2007



Experiences

You can enjoy the following surprising experiences in the Golene Foce Secchia Park:

- 1 Admire the imposing hydraulic works created during the great drainage of the early twentieth century.
- 2 Discover the tight meanders, the small flood plains, the little willow groves and imposing embankments of a river which is very different from the Po, but equally well loved and feared.
- 3 See the "bugno" del Conte.

Information
Town of Quistello
T 0376 627201/52
www.parcocosecchia.it

San Colombano Park

"The identities of peoples and places on the Po flood plains"

San Colombano Park extends over an area of 730 hectares in the municipality of Suzzara, on the flood plains overlooking the villages of Riva and Tabellano. The area hosts enormous areas of recently created **riparian woodland**, **poplar woods**, **plantations**, **spontaneous willow groves**, **sandy areas** and **wet areas** corresponding to the old clay pits and **"bugni"** (characteristic bodies of water originating when an embankment breaks during high water). During the landscape restoration performed by the Town of Suzzara beginning in 2000, over **250,000 plants** belonging to the main native species were planted: white and black poplar, white willow, field elm, bay oak, narrow-leaved ash, alder-buckthorn, snowball tree, dogwood, elder, cornel and so on. The fauna is composed of species typical to the flood plain environment and the woodland associated with it. The birdlife includes the **red and green woodpecker**, the **sparrowhawk**, the **hobby**, the **blue tit**, the **tomtit**, the **egret** and the **nycticorax**; the reptiles include the **grass snake** and the **coluber**; the amphibians the **green frog**, the **tree frog** and the **common and crested newt**. In 1702, the area was the scene of the **bloody battle of Luzzara** for the succession to the Spanish throne. Today, by the church in the ancient village of Riva dedicated to the Irish Saint Colombanus, you can find the **Memorial della Riconciliazione** (Reconciliation Memorial), a megalithic monument representing the tradition of stone circles in pre-Celtic Ireland. The park also contains an educational wood, a river dock, a large car park, a refreshment point, a public green space and a system of convenient cycling/walking paths which allow the most important naturalistic areas to be explored. It is freely accessible all year long, the water level of the river permitting.

San Colombano Park is connected to the other nature reserves in the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** by the **Parks Cycle Route**. It is also on the **Eurovelo EV8** cycle itinerary and the **Province of Mantua cycle route 2d**.

Managing institution: Town of Suzzara
Established in: 1997
Area: 733 hectares
Protection status: Supra-municipal interest local Park (within the larger "Viadana, Portiolo, San Benedetto Po, Ostiglia" Special Protection Area)
Year of joining Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System: 2007

San Lorenzo Park

"From clay pit to a place for the history and nature of the Po Plain"

Set up in 1990, the **San Lorenzo Park** is the **first experience in the province of a Supra-municipal interest local Park**, a type of nature reserve established "bottom-up" from the local population's desire to create "a place to show off the history and nature of the Po Plain". Entirely within the boundaries of the municipality of Pegognaga, the park is situated around three expanses of water which originated with the clay pits created beginning in the 1970s. The total area measures 54 hectares, 37 of which are assigned to a public park and 10 to a nature reserve (**raptor reserve**), while the remaining part contains a Roman archaeological area with the **Pieve matildica di San Lorenzo church at its centre**.

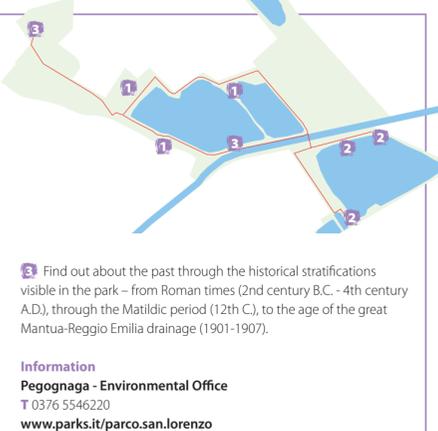
The restoration of the ecosystem with these newly formed lakes has attracted **180 species of birdlife**, including **great crested grebes**, numerous anatidae and, above all, **one of the most important heron colonies in the province of Mantua**. The park has a visitors' centre, observation huts, various types of paths, rest areas and parking. The urban park area is freely accessible year-round, on foot and by bike, while access to the raptor reserve is strictly regulated – if you wish to visit, please contact the managing institution. San Lorenzo Park is connected to the other nature reserves in the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** by the **Parks Cycle Route**.

Managing institution: Town of Pegognaga
Established in: 1990
Area: 54 hectares
Protection status: Supra-municipal interest local Park
Year of joining Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System: 2007

Experiences

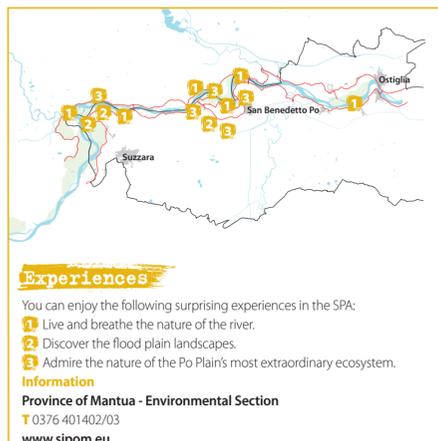
You can enjoy the following surprising experiences in the San Lorenzo Park:

- 1 Relax in a green and tranquil oasis which the local community created from ex-quarrying area.
- 2 See the incredible quantity of birds in the raptor reserve, one of the richest areas of birdlife in the whole Oltrepò.



3 Find out about the past through the historical stratifications visible in the park – from Roman times (2nd century B.C. - 4th century A.D.), through the Matildic period (12th C.), to the age of the great Mantua-Reggio Emilia drainage (1901-1907).

Information
Pegognaga - Environmental Office
T 0376 5546220
www.parks.it/parco.san.lorenzo



Experiences

You can enjoy the following surprising experiences in the SPA:

- 1 Live and breathe the nature of the river.
- 2 Discover the flood plain landscapes.
- 3 Admire the nature of the Po Plain's most extraordinary ecosystem.

Information
Province of Mantua - Environmental Section
T 0376 401402/03
www.sipom.eu

Special Protection Area of Viadana, Portiolo, San Benedetto Po, Ostiglia

"Main embankments, sandy areas, oxbow lakes, flood plains and woods: the tale of the Po river"

The **"Viadana, Portiolo, San Benedetto Po, Ostiglia" Special Protection Area** is divided into four large areas – of which only a portion falls within the Oltrepò – and belongs to the Natura 2000 European network. At over 7,000 hectares it is the largest nature reserve in the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** and contains all the natural (**flowing water**, **sandy areas**, **oxbow lakes**, **"bugni"**, **riparian woodland**) and man-made features (poplar woods, plantations, sand and clay pits, flood defences, river docks) typical of the lower course of the Po. The Po and its flood plains represent the **largest natural area** in the Mantua area and the **Po Plain in general**. The presence of the river has allowed large areas to escape the phenomena which, outside the embankments, have led to the destruction of natural formations in favour of agriculture and human settlement. The richness of wildlife in the Special Protection Area (SPA) is therefore not surprising, above all as regards birdlife (**over 200 species**), including the **black kite**, the **osprey**, the **harrier**, the **bee-eater**, the **little ringed plover**, the **common tern**, the **little tern**, the **woodcock** and the **golden oriole**. As far as the mammals go, besides the **hedgehog**, the **hare**, the **weasel** and the numerous species of small rodents, you can find **badgers** and **roe deer**; the amphibians include the **smooth and crested newt**, the **green frog**, the **tree frog** and the **common and European green toad**. Finally, the fish include the increasingly rare **sturgeon**, the **grey mullet**, the **eel**, the **twait shad**, the **carp** and the **wels catfish** (a species from the Danube which can exceed 2 metres in length and which is creating problems for the local ichthyofauna). The four sections of the SPA are connected together by the **Eurovelo EV8** paths and the **Province of Mantua cycle routes 2d and 2s**, and to the nature reserves of the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** by the **Parks Cycle Route**. The suggestive areas near the river are reached by a wide network of (mainly dirt) service roads, including sections of **towpath** once used to tow boats against the current. Access to motor vehicles is permitted only where indicated by specific signage.

Managing institution: Province of Mantua
Established in: 2005
Area: 7,055 hectares
Protection status: Special Protection Area of
Year of joining Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System: 2007