

“The great
Po river's nature,
its people and their works”

Welcome
to the
Mantuan
Oltrepò Parks
System



Mantuan Oltrepò
Parks System



THE WILDERNESS AREAS

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The Mantuan Oltrepò and the Parks System

The **Mantuan Oltrepò**, along with the Oltrepò Pavese, represents the only part of the Lombardy region to the south of the Great Po River. Contained between Emilia and Veneto, extending across about 700 km², along about 60 kilometres (from Suzzara to Felonica), the Mantuan Oltrepò embraces 23 towns, including 3 (Ostiglia, Serravalle and Sustinente) that are actually located to the north of the river.

Apart from its geographical position, the Mantuan Oltrepò represents a precise landscape and cultural context whose highlights can be traced back to the long-standing relationship between humans and the water (which can be seen from the powerful banks of the Po and the Secchia and the important monumental drainage systems), the figure of Matilde di Canossa - to whom the building of the abbeys and churches can be attributed which, still today, after nearly a millennium, punctuate the area - the agriculture, which has deeply shaped the landscape, and the marginality of the bordering lands, the crossroads of people and knowledge.

But the Mantuan Oltrepò also conserves amazing natural richness. It is marginal, residual nature that has miraculously survived the agricultural exploitation or has been lovingly reconstructed, whose value increases exponentially due to the presence of the Po, the most extraordinary ecosystem in the Po Plain. Hence, back in the 1980s the Regional Nature Reserves were set up, **the Paludi di Ostiglia, Isola Boscone and Isola Boschina**, and from the 1990s the local parks of **San Lorenzo, San Colombano, Golene Foce Secchia and Gruccione**, leading to the recognition on a European level in 2006 of the Mantuan section of the River Po, with the establishment of the Special Protection Area **“Viadana, Portiolo, San Benedetto Po, Ostiglia”**.

Over **9,000 hectares of protected territory**, enclosing a cross section of the most significant environments of the Oltrepò, such as sandy areas, oxbow lakes, expanses of water known as “bugni”, willow groves, lowland forests and marshes. An exceptional variety of habitats that host about **300 animal species**.

A constellation of wilderness areas which in 2007 joined forces to create the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** with the aim of combining the protection of the nature with local development through the **European Charter for Sustainable Tourism**: the reference tool for the tourism policy of the parks of the European Union.

Hence, there was a special focus on the cycle tracks with the creation of the **Parks Cycle Route**: a path of over 270 km that connects all the wilderness areas of the Parks System, perfectly integrated with the network of **cycle-touring routes in the Mantuan Oltrepò**. When, in 2008, the Parks System obtained the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, it was the fourth place in Italy, just behind important parks such as Adamello Brenta, the Sibillini Mountains and the Maritime Alps. This marked a very ambitious and inevitable challenge looking towards the future of the Mantuan Oltrepò with optimism.

Paludi di Ostiglia Nature Reserve

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

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

Information

Town of Ostiglia

T 0386 302511

LIPU Reserve Management • **T** 338 1271898

www.sipom.eu • www.paludidiostiglia.it

@ oasi.paludidiostiglia@lipu.it



— Cycling/walking paths

The **Paludi di Ostiglia Nature Reserve** represents a rare example of raised marshland, the last testimony to the **huge Veronese Valleys**, a vast marshland system - over 30,000 hectares - whose drainage began around 1850, but was not finished until the 1970s.

The wilderness area, 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 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). Due to its importance from a birdlife point of view, the Paludi di Ostiglia are part of the **Italian League for Bird Protection (LIPU)**. 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 convenient turf path inside the wilderness area which connects the visitors' centre to the observation points (a). The reserve is open and freely accessible on foot or by bike all year round.

It is to be noted that a LIPU operator is at visitors' disposal, as well as a very comprehensive environmental education program, which for over a decade has been involving the schools of the Mantuan Oltrepò in themes regarding nature and the sustainability of lifestyles.

The Paludi di Ostiglia are connected to the wilderness 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**.



Isola Boschina Nature Reserve

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

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

Information

ERSAF - Lombardy Region

T 0376 457321

WWF Basso Mantovano • **T** 0386 32511

www.sipom.eu

www.parks.it/riserva.isola.boschina/

www.forestedilombardia.it

@ carpaneta@ersaf.lombardia.it



— Cycling/walking paths



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. This is the **only island in the Po whose presence was already documented in the 17th century** and which was permanently inhabited until the second half of the 20th century. In fact there is an interesting **19th century group of buildings there (a)** composed of a villa, a farmhouse and a park.

The nature reserve was formed in the 1980s to protect the areas of **lowland forest (b)** present inside it which were threatened by the progressive expansion of poplar cultivation. Alongside the lowland forest there are now rows of **riparian willow groves, woods replanted from the 1990s onwards, an example poplar wood (c)** which gathers together the 20 most common clones used in poplar growing on the Po plain and large **sandy areas** which emerge when the river is low. There are also **two superb monumental trees**: the first, a *Populus deltoides* (**d1**), near the villa; the second, a white poplar (**d2**), overlooking a clearing in the eastern part of the island.

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**.

It is freely accessible on foot or by bike all year long, the water level of the river permitting. Inside the reserve there is a convenient self-guided tour, composed of information boards which accompany visitors in discovering the secrets of the island.

Isola Boschina is connected to the other wilderness areas 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**.



Isola Boscone Nature Reserve

"Daughter of the river, mother of the wood"

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

Information

Town of Carbonara di Po

T 0386 41549

www.sipom.eu • www.isolaboscone.it

✉ info@comune.carbonaradipo.mn.it



— Cycling/walking paths



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 one of the **51 Wetlands of International Importance** in Italy. The love of the residents of Carbonara for their wood can be seen from the work that has taken place over the last decade leading to the replacement of large portions of primigenial willow groves - which were heading towards dreadful ecological conditions - with bay oak, elm and poplar (a). Hence the typical vegetational succession of the forests of the lower course of the Po has been arranged which, due to the widespread anthropisation of the flood plain environments and the trivialisation of the surrounding countryside, has become increasingly rare, to the extent that the survival of much of the riparian woodland has been threatened. Alongside the forest environments, Isola Boscone hosts all the typical environments of the Great Po River: **oxbow lakes** and **forming oxbow lakes** (b); **sandy banks**, ideal nesting sites for bee-eaters and sand martins; the short-lived **sandy areas** (c), which are home to important bird species such as the **little tern** and the **little ringed plover**. Apart from the birds already mentioned, the **black kites**, the **hobby**, the **osprey**, the **red and green woodpecker** and various species of **heron** are worth noting. 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 a half hour walk to discover the most suggestive corners of the nature reserve (d). 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 wilderness areas 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.



San Colombano Park

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

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

Information

Suzzara Environmental Office

T 0376 513248

www.sipom.eu

www.parcosancolombano.it

@ ambiente@comune.suzzara.mn.it

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, **(a)**, **poplar wood, plantations, spontaneous willow groves, sandy areas, wet areas** corresponding to the old clay pits **(b)** and **"bugni"** (characteristic bodies of water originating when an embankment breaks during high water **(c)**).

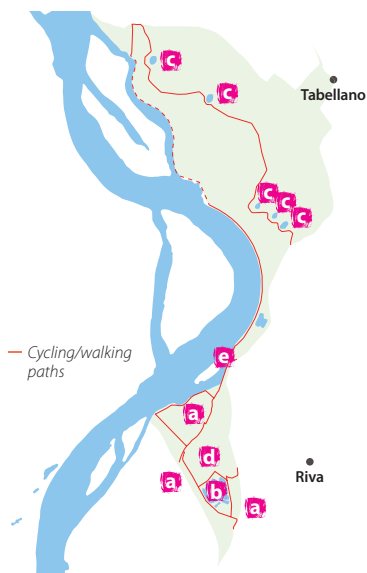
During the landscape restoration performed by the Town of Suzzara beginning in 2000, over **250,000 plants** belonging to the main native species were planted: white and black poplar, white willow, field elm, bay oak, narrow-leaved ash, alder-buckthorn, snowball tree, dogwood, elder, cornel and so on.

The fauna is composed of species typical to the flood plain environment and the woodland associated with it. The birds include the **red and green woodpecker**, the **sparrow hawk**, the **hobby**, the **egret** and the **nycticorax**; the reptiles include the **grass snakes** and the **coluber**; the amphibians include 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 Columbanus, you can find the **Memoriale della Riconciliazione** (Reconciliation Memorial, **(d)**), a megalithic monument representing the tradition of stone circles in pre-Celtic Ireland.

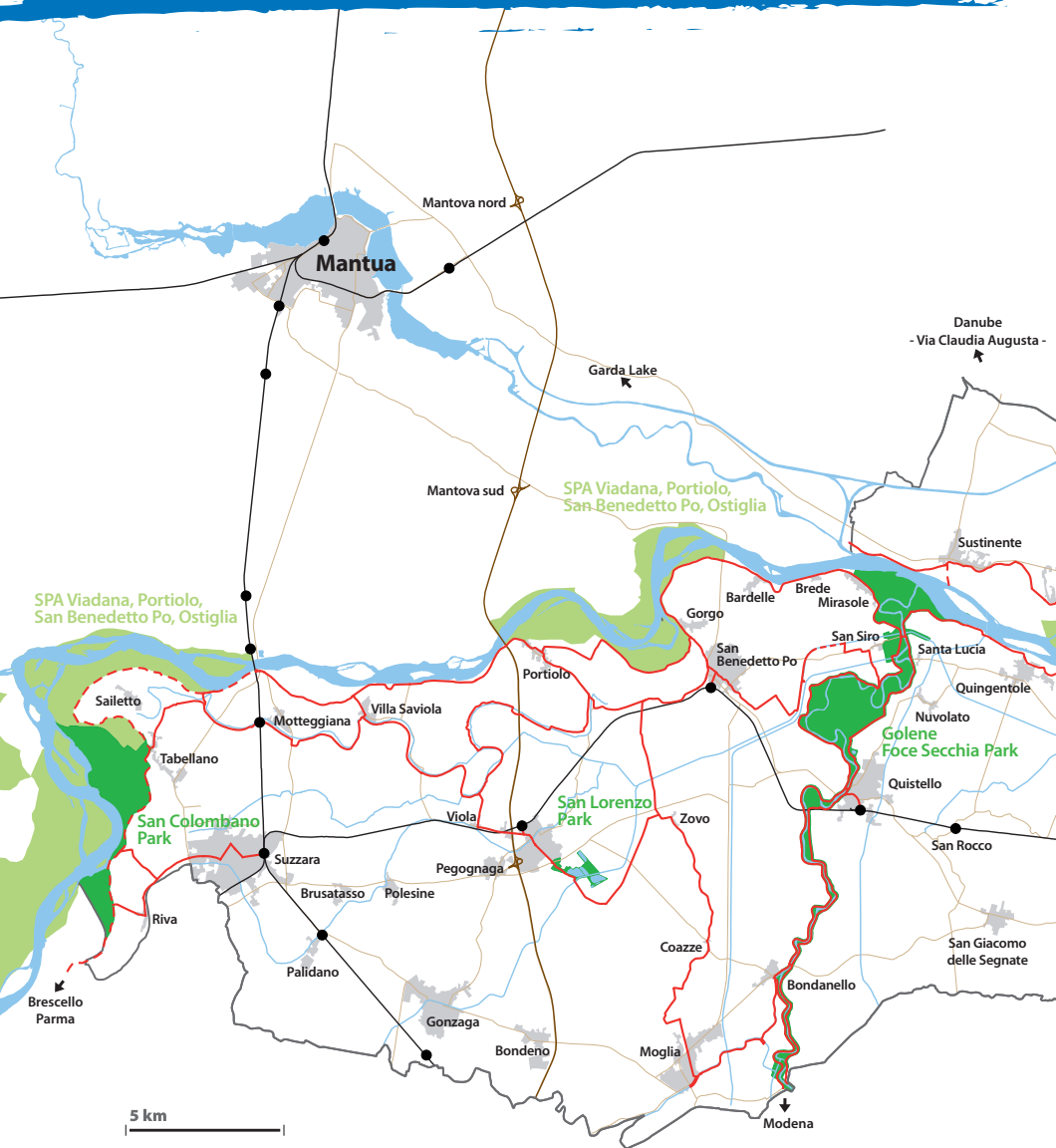
The park also contains an educational wood, a river dock, a large car park **(e)**, a refreshment point, a public green space and a system of convenient cycling/walking paths which allow the most important naturalistic areas to be explored. It is freely accessible all year long, the water level of the river permitting.

San Colombano Park is connected to the other wilderness areas 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 Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System



THE PROVINCE OF MANTUA

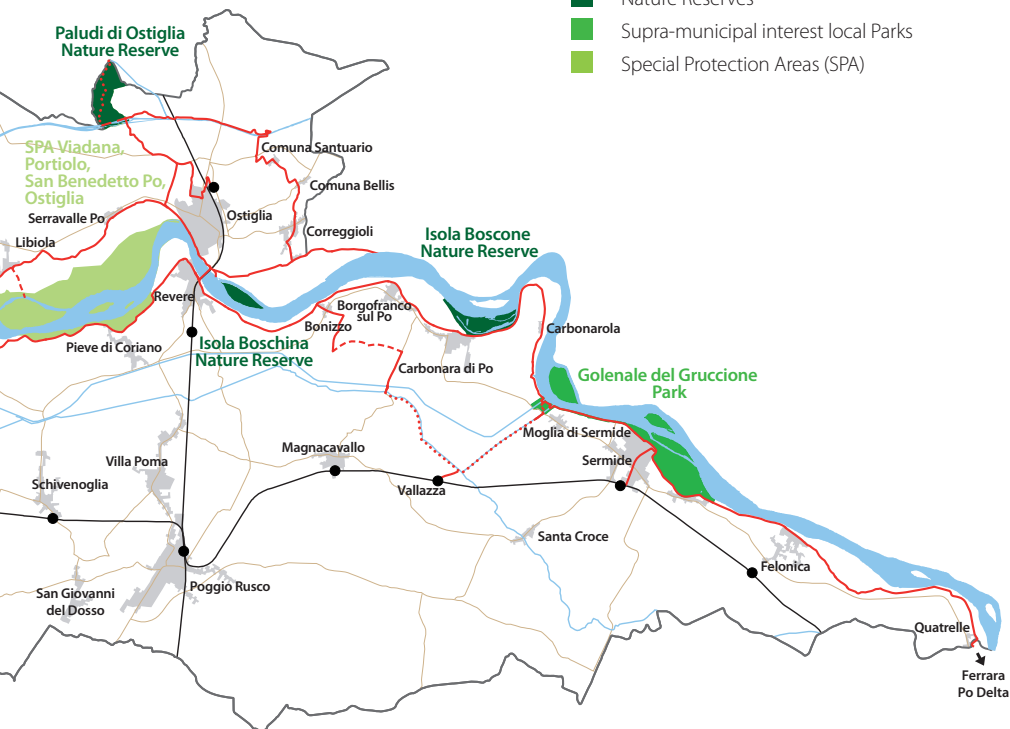


Parks Cycle Route Network

PATH TYPE

- Paved routes
- - - Gravel routes
- ... Dirt routes

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



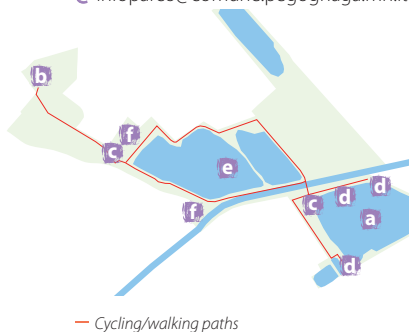
San Lorenzo Park

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

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

Information

Pegognaga Environmental Office
 T 0376 5546220
 www.sipom.eu
 e infoparco@comune.pegognaga.mn.it



Set up in 1990, the **San Lorenzo Park** represents the **first experience in the province of a Supra-municipal interest local Park**, a type of wilderness area 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 exploited until the 1970s. In the wilderness area, which measures 54 hectares, 37 hectares are assigned to a public park and 10 to a nature reserve (**raptor reserve (a)**), while the remaining part contains a Roman archaeological area with the **Pieve matildica di San Lorenzo church at its centre (b)**.

The suitable 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 visitors' centres (**c**), observation huts (**d**), discovery paths (botanical, birdlife, sensory), a bird ringing station for scientific purposes, sport fishing pits (**e**), rest areas and convenient car parks (**f**).

In partnership with local associations, the park offers a varied program of environmental education courses on subjects such as botany, ornithology, archaeology and sport fishing, as well as a workshop of audiovisual and literary documentation.

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, it is recommended to contact the managing institution.

San Lorenzo Park is located along the **Parks Cycle Route** that connects all the wilderness areas of the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System**.



Golene Foce Secchia Park

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

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

Information

Town of Quistello

T 0376 627201/52

www.sipom.eu

www.parcofoceseccchia.it

info@parcofoceseccchia.it



The **Golene Foce Secchia Park** (a Supra-municipal interest local 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 River.

Set up in 2005, the Park covers an area of around 1,200 hectares, including 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 wilderness area is characterised by **territorial geomorphology** 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 (a)** and **San Siro (b)**, as well as the **syphon (c)** with which the Mantua-Reggio Emilia Agro canal passes under the Secchia, delivering its own water into the Po at the Moglia di Sermide drainage plant, in the **Golenale del Gruccione Park**, are of notable interest.

The Park is particularly suitable for cycling for young people and others thanks to the 30 km circular panoramic path which runs along the top of the embankment, alongside significant historical, artistic and hydraulic sights (**Polirone Abbey**, **Pieve matildica di San Fiorentino church** and **Gorni Museum** of Nuvolato, **the Bondanello drainage system (d)**, **the San Prospero syphon**, etc.) and connects to the wilderness areas 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**.





Golenale del Gruccione Park

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

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

Sermide Environmental Office

T 0386 967000

www.sipom.eu

www.comune.sermide.mn.it

e ambiente@comune.sermide.mn.it



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 regularly along the Po in recent years.

The wilderness area, set up in 2004, 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 lower course of the Po, made up of **inhabited areas along the main embankment, agricultural areas on "closed 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 (a)**, 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 (b)**, 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 (c)** and the Sermidese Nautical Association facilities.

Of notable importance, the hamlet of Moglia contains the **Mantua-Reggio Emilia (d) and Revere Agro drainage system (e)** (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 River 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. The path is part of the **Parks Cycle Route** that connects all the wilderness areas of the Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System. The park is on the **Eurovelo EV8** cycle itinerary and the **Province of Mantua cycle route 2d**.



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"

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

Information

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

e natura@provincia.natura.it



— Cycling/walking paths



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 ecological network. At over **7,000 hectares** it is the largest wilderness area in the **Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System** and contains all the natural **(a)** (**flowing water, sandy areas, oxbow lakes, "bugni", riparian woodlands**) and man-made features (poplar woods, plantations, sand and clay pits, flood defences, river docks **(b)**, settlements, and civil and industrial infrastructure) typical of the lower course of the Po which, with its flood plains, represents the **largest natural area** in the Mantua area and the **Po Plain** in general. 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 and reptiles include the **smooth** and **crested newt**, the **green frog**, the **tree frog**, and the **common** and **European green toad**, as well as the **green lizard**, the **coluber** and the **grass snake**. 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 no shortage of problems for the local ichthyofauna). The areas near the river offer evocative views and can be reached, compatibly with the water levels at the time, through an extensive network of (mainly dirt) service roads. These also include some sections of **tow path (c)**: roads alongside the banks once used to tow boats and ferries against the current. Access to motor vehicles is permitted only where indicated by specific signage.

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 wilderness areas of the Mantuan Oltrepò Parks System by the **Parks Cycle Route**.







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**Mantuan Oltrepò
Parks System**



www.sipom.eu
info@sipom.eu



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