

ITALIAN WILDLIFE & PLANTS

Sometimes when traveling in Italy people get engrossed in the cities and the sites. They forget about the other Italy – its nature. Italy's wildlife and plants should not be missed.



Wildlife

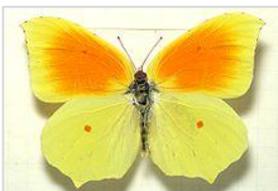
Thanks to the abundance and great variety of ecosystems, Italy is home to one third of Europe's animal species and half the world's plant species. The Italian peninsula is in fact home to 500 bird species, 100 species of land mammals and 6,711 plant species.

Italy boasts a high presence of animals and plants that are unique to a defined geographic location. This is due to various factors. Italy's varied geological structure, including the Alps and the Apennines, Central Italian woodlands, and Southern Italian Garigue and Maquis shrubland, contribute to high climate and habitat diversity. The Italian peninsula is in the center of the Mediterranean Sea, forming a corridor between central Europe and North Africa, and has 8,000 km of coastline. Italy also receives species from the Balkans, Eurasia, the Middle East.

Italy is an important route for trans-Saharan bird migrants because it is a natural bridge connecting continental Europe to Africa across the Mediterranean Sea. Migratory birds with a low wing loading such as storks depend on thermals and updrafts for soaring to cross the Mediterranean in spring. Large numbers leave Tunisia and enter Europe via the Straits of Messina to Calabria. Most of these birds breed in central and northern Europe. The birds return to Africa in autumn by the same route.



Italy is home to 37,303 species of insects. The richness of recorded species is the highest in Europe.



Plants

Some 8,195 species and subspecies have been identified to date, of which 1,708 are restricted to Italy. Italy ranks first in Europe in terms of number of native entities. In the Mediterranean basin, Italy is considered to be one of the most important areas of biodiversity, only Turkey has a higher number of species.



In Italy nothing is more popular perhaps than a wild mushroom. A mushroom is a fungus, and is usually placed in a Kingdom of its own apart from plants and animals. There are at least 1200 types of mushrooms in Italy. Mushrooms need specific conditions of temperature, humidity and forest habitat to bloom, and mushrooms grown in all seasons in Italy.

Picking wild mushrooms in Italy may be the most popular way to experience nature. It is so trendy that all of Italy has created laws and requires licenses to preserve mushrooms and their habit. There are even limits on how many kilos can be harvested at one visit. Some regions have outlawed foreigners from harvesting there.

In Italy even wild fruits, tubers, flowers, mosses and lichens are subject to harvesting limitations. There are nature reserves that have special protection for the orchids; Italy has 80 varieties of orchids. It seems a little Eden needs to be protected from mankind.

References

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