

## NATURE AND SPORT

by Gianluca Bambi



*Golf in Casentino is played all the year round*

The senses of smell, touch, sight, taste and hearing are continually stimulated by the landscapes that Casentino offers in every season. There are a multitude of opportunities

the heart-stopping thrill of hang-gliding or the *kayak*?

A Nature still intact and an ancient changing of the envi-

*Tuscan/Romagnola ridge from Mount Falco*



to spend a holiday completely surrounded by Nature. It is possible to explore the many country paths on foot, on horseback or by *mountain bike*. You can fish in the River Arno, in the various streams and artificial lakes in the area; bathe in limpid waters or in the modern swimming pools. How about a game of golf or tennis - or try

ronment to suit man's needs, have harmoniously integrated man to his surroundings. Nature has known how to hide herself, thus offering us, here, the possibility of seeing the first Natural Inte-



*The Elephant tree*

## THE NATURAL INTEGRAL NATURE RESERVE OF SASSO FRATINO

The luxuriant forest in this part of the Apennines, clinging to the steep, rugged central part of the rampart which gives life to two important branches of the River Bidente – rich in ditches and streams – is so much more similar today to the ‘*antica silva*’. A relentless morphology, peppered with rocks and the lack of access routes have made it difficult for man to penetrate this area. This has meant that the woods have remained almost totally in their ‘natural’ state. An exception to this is the richness of arboreal species of undergrowth which, in complete freedom appear, grow, adapt themselves to the area and, naturally, die and transform themselves. A spell-binding place and fundamental to understand and to study the ‘life’ of the woods which since 1959 we have wanted to safeguard, denying free access and any form of intervention through the Institution of the **First Natural Integral Nature Reserve in Italy** - since 1985 holder of the **European Diploma**.

**The Integral Reserves of Sasso Fratino and the Biogenetics Reserve** are run by the Territorial Office for Biodiversity (Pratovecchio).

Tel: 0575.583763

Fixed contact: U.T.B. Badia Prataglia

Tel: 0575.559155

Fixed contact: U.T.B. Camaldoli

Tel: 0575.55601

[www.parcforestecasentinesi.it](http://www.parcforestecasentinesi.it)



*The first Italian Integral Reserve*

The enormous morphological changeability and the presence of different forest forms produce an extraordinary and fascinating **variety of colours** as the seasons change, offering the tourist **exceptionally beautiful scenery**. An important biodiversity is to be seen in the **National Park** – a protected area which evidences the contrast of the rolling slopes on the Tuscan side to the rigorous Romagnolo mountainside. There are several places of natural, cultural and religious interest of world fame, e.g. **La Verna** and **Camaldoli**.

In these surroundings the wild animals find a perfect place to live and reproduce.

Among the mammals – the most important of which are the **hoofed animals** – deer, fallow deer, roe deer, wild boar and mouflon; followed by foxes, hares, hedgehogs, badgers, porcupines, beech martens, squirrels, dormice and pine martens, concluding with the **wolf** of

which only about 30/40 animals remain.

#### **NATIONAL PARK OF THE CASENTINO FORESTS MONTE FALTERONA AND CAMPIGNA**

The story of the Park began on 12<sup>th</sup> July, **1993**. It extends for about 36,000 hectares on the ridge between Tuscany and Emilia Romagna in the provinces of Forlì-Cesena, Arezzo and Firenze. The central part is formed by the Casentino Forests – about 10,600 hectares which include the historical **forests of Campigna, Badia Prataglia, La Lama** and **Camaldoli**. The legal office is at Pratovecchio 0575.50301 and the office of the Community of the Park is at Santa Sofia: 0543.971375.

[www.parcforestecasentines.it](http://www.parcforestecasentines.it)

#### **VISITORS' CENTRES AND INFORMATION POINTS IN THE PARK**

*Tuscan side, province of Arezzo*

• **Badia Prataglia** (Poppi)  
‘Man and the Forest’  
Via Nazionale 14a,  
Tel. and Fax: 0575.559477

• **Chiusi della Verna**  
‘Religion and Nature’  
Parco 1 Maggio,  
Tel. and Fax: 0575.532098

• **Serravalle** (Bibbiena)  
Via Coselschi

**Planetario** – Stia  
Via Montegrappa, 2  
Tel. 0575. 504596

• **Camaldoli**  
Information Point and Ornithological Museum  
Loc. Camaldoli  
Tel: 0575. 556130

• **Stia**  
Information Point  
Piazza Tanucci  
Tel: 0575.504106

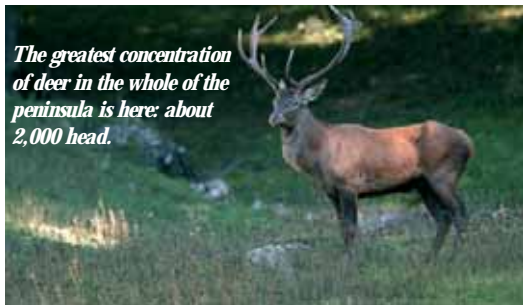


*The Golden Eagle is present in the Park*

## THE BELLOWING OF THE DEER

During the months of September and October there is a greater possibility of being able to see a deer as it is the **mating season** during which the male – which weighs about 250 kg. – gives out a mating call called '**bramito**' (= bell). Nocturnal excursions are organized in this period with 'approaches' during the day where, thanks to the experience of the guides, one can hear and get quite close to the deer intent on their ritual of love.

Information: [www.parcosforestecasentinesi.it](http://www.parcosforestecasentinesi.it)  
0575.50301  
[www.welcomeincasentino.it](http://www.welcomeincasentino.it) 328.4151735



*The greatest concentration of deer in the whole of the peninsula is here: about 2,000 head.*

100 species of nesting birds living in the Park and in Casentino, lovers of **bird-watching** have the opportunity of seeing uncommon species, e.g. black woodpeckers, the golden oriole and for the past 20 years white egrets and herons (*ardea cinerea*) along the local rivers.

Nature in Casentino is not only the Park. All the territory



*Chianina cattle grazing on the ridge*

Looking up at the sky it is possible to see **birds of prey** like falcons, sparrow hawks, buzzards, kestrels and goshawks. It is much more difficult to see the **Golden Eagle**, it being a rarity. As there are more than

offers various opportunities to the tourist to relax – from the splendid green of the majestic meadows of **Pratomagno** (altitude 1,592 metres) to the **Alp of Cateinaia**.

Neither are insects missing – among those present are beautiful butterflies and beetles like the rare **Rosalia Alpina** and more than 20 species between reptiles and amphibians. There are over **40 varieties of orchids** in the herbaceous sector.



*Orchis morio*

## THE MEADOWS OF PRATOMAGNO

**Itinerary:** Distance 4 kms.  
**Difference in level:** 200 metres  
**Time:** 2 hours..

A round trip which reaches the highest point in Casentino where the pastures of the ridge have left vast grasslands which have given **Mount Pratomagno** its name. It is still possible today to see herds of wild horses and cows and bullocks of the Chianina breed. **From Poppi** take the road in the direction of the small characteristic village of **Quota** for about 10 kilometres. The road climbs. Continue for the same number of kilometres until you arrive at the **Chalet, le Tre Fonti** (the last 4 kilometres on a rough track road). Leave your car here and walk beyond the fence in the square at the junction in front of the restaurant. The path leads to the summit of the ridge. From here you bear left and continue until you arrive at the **Cross of Pratomagno**, made in modulated iron. The landscape before your eyes offers a panorama which stretches from **High Valdarno** to – on a particularly limpid day – the **Tyrrhenian Sea**. With your back to the **Cross** you begin the descent, walking alongside a ditch. Following the white and red signs on the path you arrive at '**Fonte del Duca**'. On your left there is a picnic area with tables and barbecue. Continuing along the

track road, you arrive once again at the Chalet.



*The Cross of Pratomagno, about 20 metres high*

## THE ANCIENT PATHS OF THE CATENAIA ALP

**Itinerary:** Distance 16.5 kms.  
**Difference in level:** 600 metres.  
**Time:** 5.30 hours.

A demanding route which necessitates a whole day and which is famous for the history of the inhabitants of **Chitignano**, who trod these paths in order to smuggle **tobacco** (from Valtiberina) and **gunpowder**, the latter produced secretly in the woods. The group sets off



*A guided excursion*

from the starting point in front of the church which is just a little before the **Ecomuseum**. The trip continues through the 'Campo dell'Essere' until the red and white route sign Cai No. 26 is seen. At this stage you turn left until the route number changes to 28. This takes you to the ridge. At this point you turn left and eventually arrive (No. 50) at the **Eremo della Casella**, a place dear to **Saint Francis of Assisi**, where a shelter is always open. Continuing on the ridge, after 200 metres turn left following route Cai No. 30. At a crossroads you descend on the right until you see No. 29 and from there you arrive at the **Casina dell'Alpe**. Continuing on route 29, turn left again for number 25 and then for number 28 which brings you back to **Chitignano**.

In Casentino there are **CAI** routes, the **GEA** routes (Grande Escursione Appenninica) and Casentino Trekking. All these, at some stage, are within the boundaries of the Park, which cover an area of 650 kms. of well indicated paths, continually checked and maintained.





*Lierna, XIII century*

There are numerous thematic routes. Particular information on these can be purchased for whatever theme may be of special interest. In this sector there is the 'easy' level (3 kms.) with an explanatory information board at the beginning of the walk: **The route of the Water Mills** (La Via dei Mulini). The itinerary leaves from the medieval village of **Moggiona** (Poppi) and descends along the course of the stream Sova which brings the group to Lierna, a fortified village with church and castle. Along the route there is a **sulphurous spring** and the ruins of an XVIII century mill. On the small river Sova, below Lierna, it is possible to visit (having previously booked) the still functioning water mill.

In the two localities it is possible to get refreshments in the local food shops – the old fashioned kind where you can buy a

little of everything! There are also restaurants, pizza houses, bars and a bread shop where bread is made on the premises. The local tradition of working in wood has been maintained with the presence of qualified village craftsmen who make furniture, gifts and fancy goods.

In many well kept villages which have been restructured in local stone, it would seem that time has stood still. One can almost experience the rare emotion of living in the past: those sensations of pleasure and fear which are common to people who have lived in constant contact with the land and still recognize it as their means of survival.

### PLACES DEAR TO SAINT FRANCIS AND MICHELANGELO

**Itinerary:** Distance 6 kms.  
**Difference in level:** 330 metres  
**Time:** 2.30 hours

This excursion sets out to discover the monumental forests

peppered with limestone walls – an environment of particular naturalistic value – passing by places at one time favourite haunts of **St. Francis of Assisi** and **Michelangelo Buonarroti**. The group leaves from the ruins of the **Castle of Chiusi**. It is possible to arrive here by car, following the directions for the '**Roccia di Adamo**' which brings to mind a certain discovery about Michelangelo who knew this area very well, in particular the **residence of the Podestà**. At this stage the route follows the ancient path of **La Beccia** (indicated with white and red signs on the maps "**Nature Paths**".) Once having left the small town of Chiusi, on your left there is the **Park Visitors' Centre**. At this point we enter the forest to arrive later at the entrance door of the **Sanctuary** to see the places where **St. Francis** lived and received the **Holy Stigmata** in 1224. Leaving by the door near the larger church, turn left to climb **Mount Penna** (Cai No. 51).



*Main church at the Sanctuary of La Verna*

The tough climb through fir and beech woods will be well compensated by the magnificent panorama of the surrounding countryside far below. The route then descends to return to the Visitors' Centre at the Castle.

## THE MAJESTIC FIR WOODS OF CAMALDOLI

**Itinerary: Distance 7.5 kms.  
Difference in level: 400  
metres Time: 3 hours**

A route of remarkable historical and environmental importance which will bring you into contact with the most beautiful fir woods in Italy, cultivated for centuries by the monks. Leaving behind the **Monastery of Camaldoli**, after having visited the **Church**, part of the **guest lodgings**, the **antique Chemist** and the **Park Visitors' Centre** (including the **Orthological Museum**) the route climbs along the **ancient road** (path No. 68) and, crossing

the famous fir woods – **mainly white fir** – cared for by the monks, you arrive at the **Hermitage**. Here you can visit the **Church**, the **cell** which was 'home' to its founder **Saint Romualdo** and the Chapter Room. Leaving the Hermitage you turn left and after walking for about 1 km. on asphalt, you turn right and descend along path No. 70 which, still in the fir woods, brings you to a shelter (**Cotozzo**) and from there you continue going down on path No. 72 which brings you to the Monastery.

## ON YOUR BIKE IN CASENTINO

*For those who love cycle-*

### IT IS ADVISABLE

To contact: Park guides, those responsible for all types of excursions and equestrian outings who are professional escorts for group trips into the Park areas. Info 0575.50301



*On your mountain bike*

*tourism there are innumerable possibilities of excursions at various levels of difficulty.*

**Route No. 1**, for example (**Casentino on your bike**) passes where you can find natural springs of drinkable water in the north east part of Casentino (Stia).

*'Forests and Castles: Valley of the Oia and Porciano.*

(Distance 35 km. Difference in level: 800 metres Time: 4.10 hours)

You leave from the **Palagio Fiorentino** Stia and follow the 'provincial' road in the direction of the Calla Pass. After about 3.5 km. of asphalted road

We suggest to those passionately fond of trekking to obtain an Excursion Card which can be purchased at newsagents and at the Visitors' Centres of the Park, together with leaflets indicating Nature Paths for the less energetic.



*Cells of the monks at the Hermitage of Camaldoli*

### PEDALLING BUT IN NO HURRY...

Detailed information about routes can be found at the Visitors' Centres.

**On your bike in the Park**  
Euro 12.00: 20 trips with various levels of difficulty.

**Casentino on your bike**  
There are 15 itineraries (free), for mountain and city bikes, which contain useful information: maps, road books, differences in route levels and distances.

To hire a bike

Information from Visitors' Centres at **Badia Prataglia, Camaldoli and La Verna** or at the Furieri Bicycle Shop, Ponte a Poppi. Tel: 0575 529070

Sports Groups:

- Casentino mtb school 0575 560747
- G.S. Avis 338 1399710
- MTB Casentino 0575 539449

you turn left at the sign for *Boschetti*. From this point you take a track road, keeping to the left. Once having passed a barrier across the road, turn right (straight on after about 800 metres there is the **Casanova Shelter** [www.naturavacanze.it](http://www.naturavacanze.it)). After wading across the stream, turn left, climbing for the white-red route **No. 80** as far as the Fountain of **Calcedonia**. Take the first road on your left and climb until it ends then turn left again (turning right you arrive at

the Calla Pass 1,295 metres a.s.l.) and carry on following the signs for 'Strada forestale Oia' (forestry road Oia). Once you have passed the **Oia Shelter** carry on straight and, continuing past the **Bivacco il Lago** (The Lake Bivouac), you arrive at *Bocca Pecorina* and from here you take the white-red route **No. 92** which, descending, brings you directly to Stia passing by the **Castle of Porciano**.

### CASENTINO ON HORSEBACK

*Equitourism in Casentino offers the opportunity to discover hidden and mysterious places which evoke times past. Certainly a unique experience which the tourist, expert horseman or otherwise, can't afford to miss. It is*



*Talla. Pause during an equestrian outing*

*absolutely one of the most emotional ways of visiting Casentino and the National Park, trotting along one of the numerous natural tracks which for centuries have been trodden by man, often in the company of these wonderful animals.*

### Horse routes in Casentino

Those who are used to travelling on horseback for their holidays can take advantage of these organized trips. It is possible to go around the whole of Casentino by using the easy routes across the mountain ridges. Riders can sleep in reception hostels situated along the routes which, for the most part, **offer shelter for the horses too**. As well as this type of accommodation, there are also '**excursion shelters**' (complete with every comfort) with outbuildings where the animals can rest. We do suggest, however, that you always ask for information about the routes and the possibility of sleeping overnight at the **Guide Ambientali Equestri** (Environment Guides for Equestrians).  
**Information:**  
Gianluca 328.4151735  
Giovanna 328.3094444  
Serena 338.5960934  
[www.naturavacanze.it](http://www.naturavacanze.it).



## Equestrian Centre of Casentino

This centre is a reference point for experts and those less expert who wish to experience a journey on horseback. It is a Training School for both adults and children which also organizes riding excursions in the whole of Casentino. Qualified federal instructors will give you the chance to pass unforgettable moments in a fascinating natural environment.

Francesca: 393.4180963  
328.4151735

[www.centroippico-casentino.it](http://www.centroippico-casentino.it)

### LET'S CLIMB INTO A CARRIAGE!

Inside the Park it is also possible to climb into a carriage drawn by two splendid 'blond' horses, driven by Raoul. They will take you through the area of the beautiful secular forest of Camaldoli.

**Information:** Asqua  
335.8051553-348.6907793

## GOLF CLUB CASENTINO

9 holes, Par 36, 2800 metres  
CR 70,6 - SR 123  
Suitable for every level of play, it comprises a practice green with an instructor for lessons – even for beginners. From the terrace of the **Club House** Restaurant – a very old farm



*Green No. 8 showing Castle of Poppi*

estate building – you can look out over the whole Course and across the valley from an altitude of 500 metres.

Open all year. 0575.529810  
Poppi – Via Fronzola  
[www.golfclubcasentino.it](http://www.golfclubcasentino.it)

## TENNIS

*Numerous tennis courts – synthetic and clay – also covered courts.*

- **Badia Prataglia** 0575.559437
- **Bibbiena** 0575.536151
- **Capolona** 0575.489488
- Castel Focognano** 0575.591369
- **Castel San Niccolò**  
0575.570467
- **Chitignano** 0575.596204
- **Chiusi della Verna**  
0575.599629
- **Moggiona di Poppi**  
0575.556088
- **Montemignao** 0575.542013
- **Poppi** 0575.529007
- **Pratovecchio** 0575.583341

- **Soci** 0575 561536
- **Stia** 0575 583382
- **Subbiano**  
0575 420084
- **Talla** 0575 597527

## HANG GLIDING

Would you like to try the thrill of hang-gliding? If you would, telephone *Daniele* 0575 570410 and he will accompany you on a tandem flight over the mountains.

## ROLLING

Known as *rulletto* or *rulla*.

This game originated in Etruscan times and represents the history of this region. The 'roll' is a wooden disc (sometimes a form of seasoned cheese!) which is thrown, with the help of a ribbon or some string, along roads or tracks with a smooth surface. The winner is the player who, with the same number of throws, succeeds in making his disc cover a greater distance.

## BOWLS

A more developed version of an ancient game played in the rural farmyards ('aie'). It is played with **biased bowls** which have to be thrown for quite a distance with incredible precision. It arouses curiosity – also for the type of green on which it is played.

It is possible to play at:

- **Becarino di Poppi**
- **Sports Centre at Soci** (covered and heated area)
- **'Bocciofilo Club' A. Sassoli, Bibbiena** 0575.593391

## WHERE TO HAVE A DIP AND REFRESH YOURSELF

### Swimming Pools

- **River Piper** Loc. Ponte d'Arno, Castel San Niccolò 0575.550394
- **Camping La Pineta** Avena di Poppi 0575.529082
- **Public Swimming Pool** Bibbiena (open all year) 0575.593383
- **Molino delle Rocche** Talla 0575.597429
- **Public Swimming Pool** Subbiano (closed July and August) 0575.420459

### You can swim in the river...

- **Parco del Canto alla Rana**  
On the banks of the River Arno, only a few metres from the historical centre of Stia. There is a picnic area, a sports ground and shaded meadows.

**Information:** Stia council  
0575.504002 - 0575.581435

- **Ponte Rosso** By the small river Corsalone on the road that from Bibbiena - once you have crossed **Banzena** - takes you to La Verna. Before the bridge turn right on to a track road. This is sometimes covered in water as there was originally a waterfall from a dyke. For

those passionately interested, the trip down river is not to be missed.

### - *Pozzone della Steccaia*

Continuing on after the church of **Corsalone**, on the road for **Campi**, you will see numerous cars parked and don't hesitate! Stop! A waterfall - and the possibility to sunbathe on the white pebbles of the river.

### Thermal waters

#### - *Bagni di Cetica Spa*

Extremely cold water (fixed temperature 7° - 8° C) famous since the times of the Romans and today, as then, it is possible to have thermal treatment immersing oneself in the stone baths situated inside the ancient 'bathrooms' which remain today in their original structure, on the ground floor of the Albergo Ristorante San Romolo. Picnic area and entrance to the baths on payment.

Information: 0575.555325

#### - **Ferruginous water of Chitignano**

Exceptional curative properties which are very effective in

stimulating the digestive system, purifying the liver and kidneys; helping women's illnesses and for curing skin diseases. Situated in a picnic area with free access. The route is well indicated from the centre of Chitignano.

## FISHING

Streams like the Solano and the Scheggia west of Castel San Niccolò, the Staggia north of Stia, the Teggina at Ortignano Raggiolo and the Archiano north of Bibbiena and the River Arno are all famous for trout fishing. As a result of the natural difficulties in rivers, the fishermen have improved a particular technique known all over the world as 'Casentino style fishing'. We suggest you consult 'Trout Fishing in the rivers of Casentino' by Terenzio Biondi (Pesca alla Trota nei torrenti del Casentino)

Information: 0575.520511

It is possible to fish trout, chub, barbel, carp and eels in the River Arno provided you have a



*River Arno. Fly fishing*



*"Fario" trout*

Regional Permit and are fishing in the periods allowed. It is not permitted to fish fresh water crabs or shrimps as they are a protected species as indicators of the level of purity of the water.

#### Lake Fishing

- Tropicultura Puccini Stia  
Information: 0575.583639
- Sova, Poppi  
Information: 349.4219883
- Tripoli Bibbiena  
Information: 0575.595184
- Querceti, Subbiano  
Information: 0575.488991

#### KAYAK

If the water level permits along the River Arno near Subbiano and Capolona, it is possible to go down the river in a kayak accompanied by a qualified instructor.

Enrico: 335.6844664

#### BOWLING SQUASH

Castel San Niccolò Sports Club  
Loc. Ponte d'Arno  
0575.500942

#### THE MUSHROOMS ARE SPROUTING!

'Scappano i funghi!' This is the expression with which the Casentino people indicate that the Porcini mushrooms are beginning to show. We have mentioned it here because it is

a naturalistic activity but for the local inhabitants it is almost a national sport.

The quality of the highly valued Porcino is well known to be excellent. You can find different types of mushrooms depending on the time of the year and the altitude. It is necessary to have a Permit to collect them.

Information: National Park  
0575.50301  
Comunità Montana del Casentino  
0575.5071

#### PARCO ZOO Poppi

The First Zoo Park  
of European Fauna  
Info. 0575.504541/2



*Porcino mushroom*