

Sheet No. 3

From the Foce del Conca to Morciano di Romagna

Right bank of the Torrente Conca in the Protected Landscape

Cycling time: 2 hours outward; 1.30 hours return

Equipment: binoculars and telescope.

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First part: from the estuary to the golf course

The fluvial systems represent, in Rimini's region, the few territorial areas that still possess a certain degree of naturalness. In fact, in this part of Romagna, there are not many areas of a certain extent that present well-preserved natural environments that can host, in different times of the year, a rich wild fauna. Most of these areas are located in the high-hill area of the province, while others fall in the territorial areas of the water catchment areas of the main rivers. After the Marecchia, Torrente Conca is the most important watercourse of Rimini's area.

It originates from the eastern side of Mount Carpegna at 1,415 m above sea level and flows in the direction of the Adriatic Sea after about 44 km and after having collected the waters of a 164 km² wide area. The watercourse flows in a south-west north-east direction, between geological formations of marine origin and for more than half of its course it has an erosive character, affecting the rocky formations of the hilly and mountainous part up to the village of Taverna, in the middle valley.

Since 2009, the Conca is a protected area of the natural areas system of the Emilia-Romagna Region. The exact denomination is "Paesaggio Naturale e seminaturale protetto del Torrente Conca", so you will find it written on the illustrative panels along the way. It is a naturalistic and ecological corridor extended from the beach to the hills of the hinterland, connecting the area of the valley to the Onferno Nature Reserve.

The cycling route that we propose starts in the orographic right, near the outfall of the Conca in Cattolica, reachable from the beach, near the architectural complex "Le Navi".

Le Navi is a group of buildings, built near the beach, designed by the architect and engineer Clemente Busiri Vici, as a summer camp for the children of Italians abroad. The buildings evoke a naval fleet deployed around the flagship. Today the buildings are the location of an important aquarium.

From the sea rises a wide gravel path that runs along the right bank of the Conca. When you reach the fork after a few hundred meters, keep the right and, after passing the road underpass, the proper cycle path begins. By continuing, you will undergo the railway, the Via Emilia-Romagna and the Strada Statale n.16 Adriatica. The stretch of river that goes from the outfall to the railway line is ducted and bordered by dense marsh vegetation. In this area, near where the river enters the sea, waterfowl have become quite common and confident, therefore easily observable. It is easy to meet coots, moorhens and ducks of different species. There is also a small population of mallards who have tamed over time. They are very confident and they regularly frequent the area by flying from the outfall to the artificial reservoir that is more upstream.

The riverbed, upstream of the railway line, is poor in vegetation due to the numerous hydraulic control interventions. Immediately after the underpass of the Statale Adriatica, the cycle path moves away from the torrent and continues to the left going up the hill of Montalbano, a hamlet of San Giovanni in Marignano. Once you reach the top of the hill you can enjoy a remarkable panorama: the sea behind you towards the east and a circle of low hills to the west that delimit the basin of the Conca. The Montefeltro hills stand out in the background. The foreground is dominated by the presence of the large artificial basin (reservoir of the Conca) often full of water at the end of winter and in spring, containing the water supply of Cattolica and many inhabited areas of the coast.

By continuing, the path descends from the hill of Montalbano and approaches a thick riparian forest of white willows. You cross the viaduct of the A14 motorway leaving the dam front to the right and you reach the drinking water treatment plant managed by Hera, covering a short asphalt section. Keeping the right, you follow the track that runs along the bank of the reservoir. The perimeter is covered by a rich and thick vegetation that at some point opens itself and allows, by approaching the water, to have a wide and beautiful view of the free waters. A recent project to enhance the cycle path allowed the fixing of the layout of the track's bottom and the construction of lightweight structures such as perimeter piers to the lake and points of observation for birdlife, in order to increase the naturalistic enjoyment of the place. Therefore, on the right of the path, there is a jetty that allows the approach to the water and, by continuing upstream, before the golf course, a wooden structure from where you can observe, once left the bike, the rich avifauna that frequents the lake in all seasons.

The reservoir of the Conca, with its water surface of about 60 hectares, is a very attractive place for waterfowl that during the migratory movements follow the coastline. In spring and autumn the avifauna is very rich. You can see herons, ducks and waders of many species. In particular, in spring there are godwits, ruffs, common greenshanks and black-winged stilts. Herons are present in all seasons; you can see gray herons and little egrets but there are also night herons and the rare squacco herons.

During the autumn, the reservoir is always visited by the rare caspian tern, a giant sea swallow, as big as a royal seagull, unmistakable for the black vertex and the big pointed red beak.

The large quantity of individuals and species is, of course, determined by the abundant presence of fish fauna, the main food for many winged predators.

The path proceeds uphill, leaving the banks of the basin, entering the outfall of the river that flows to the right and, still along the right bank of the Conca, it rises on the floodplain and soon you are several meters above the level of flow of the river. From this elevated position you have a beautiful view of the Conca. The river flows very lower among the edges of dense broom bushes that with their intense yellow blooms create magnificent contrasts with the blue of the sky and the green of the riparian vegetation. Exactly at this point, at about 4,000 m from the outfall, in an elevated position, with the river flowing to the right and the green grassy turf of the golf course that stretches to the left, there is a splendid view on the horizon, on the heights of the Montefeltro. In this point, during the summer, it is almost impossible not to witness the aerial evolutions of bee-eaters, birds with a very colorful plumage, evidence of their tropical origin, which nest in a traditional colony settled in the steep walls of the river. The birds fly wings-spread in this area hunting for wasps, butterflies and dragonflies, emitting their characteristic call. They sometimes lie on higher branches of the trees and they often enter their nests, tunnels dug for more than 60 cm in the sandstone of the river walls, to feed the offspring.

Second part: from the golf course to Morciano di Romagna

From the hill of the bee-eaters, continue uphill with the golf turf on the side. We are about 6,000 m from the outfall. On the river you can see the first of 5 reinforced concrete bridges built to slow down the impetuous course of water. In correspondence to the barriers the water level rises and its course is slowed down. The marsh vegetation appears more luxuriant and hosts many species of birds typical of wetlands and reeds. Species from the elusive behavior easier to detect by the songs than by observation.

The fluvial stretch affected by the bridges ends at Pianventena of San Giovanni in Marignano, at the height of the Conca's crossing. This is the "ford" that connects the hamlet to Cella di Misano and San Clemente. After a few meters, turn right onto the long river path, leaving behind the remains of the former Asmara mill (a gravel processing site). In the green of a park, in addition to a pond, you can see the Balzi mill, one of the best preserved of the entire Valconca.

The area we are going through has interesting naturalistic aspects with small marsh areas, thickets, dry meadows and bushes that reach the riverbed. A mosaic of environments that hosts a good number of species including birds, amphibians and reptiles. On the path and in the driest parts, sometimes, you can observe the large and colorful green lizard, while in the ponds, in spring, you can listen and see the agile frog, the green toad and the tree frog.

By continuing, raised on the edge of the terracing of a few meters, compared to the altitude of the trail, you can see the remains of the millennial abbey of San Gregorio in Conca, founded in 1060. The monastery was of limited size, simple and rational, built according to functional criteria common to the Benedictine abbeys of the second half of the eleventh century.

After the monastery we are in sight of Morciano. The cycle path faces several times on the shore. Along the river bed the gray clays, called "genghe", emerge interlarded with clay soils with a layered appearance. These are sediments that date back to the upper Pliocene, about 2,000,000 years ago, originating in a marine environment with depths exceeding 100 m. The formation is rich in fossils of fish, cephalopods and plants similar to those found in the Marecchia riverbed.

We are almost at the end, about 10,000 m from the start. Just before the Ponte di Morciano, point of arrival of our route, a gate allows access to the public fluvial park of Morciano where it is possible to stop and find refreshment points and eventually continue towards the town. You can return by retracing the way forward or taking the path on the opposite bank.