

Sheet No. 4

Salina di Cervia:

Nature and Birdwatching in one of the most important wetlands in Europe for waterfowl's conservation

Route length: 37 Km; at 15 Km/h: 148 minutes + 2h for the proposed ornithological itinerary

Equipment: Mountain bike and binoculars.

Author: Lino Casini

First part:

Cervia's Salina (salt mine) is located in the south-eastern part of Romagna, west of the city of Cervia, 1,600 meters from the Adriatic Sea, and is the southernmost area of the "wetlands" system protected by the Parco del Delta del Po. Its geographic position, in the south-eastern part of the Po Valley, between the northern Apennines on the west and the Adriatic sea on the east, puts it on the migration line of the birds that follow the Adriatic route, therefore, the Salina is one of the most important areas of Italy and of the Mediterranean for waterfowl's nesting, staging and wintering.

The production of salt, an activity of great importance for the economy of this part of Romagna, began in Roman times and has continued to this day. The ecological and conservation importance of the area has instead been recognized in more recent years, following the growing knowledge on the biology of the species that populate it in different seasons. The ornithological studies, which began in the '70s and became methodical and regular afterwards, allowed us to know the enormous importance that this area represents for the conservation of wetlands' birdlife.

Salt production and conservation of habitats and birdlife are the objectives of today's management that works to reconcile production with the biological needs of populations (animals and plants) and habitats. The growing knowledge of the importance of the site has led to numerous foundational measures to guarantee preservation.

The area has been declared a Wetland of International Importance according to the Ramsar Convention since 1976, State Natural Reserve since 1979 and Rete Natura 2000 site since 2002.

The itinerary we propose starts from Rivabella. We go to the seafront and proceed north towards Ravenna. We cross the towns of Viserba, Viserbella and Torre Pedrera to reach, by staying as close as possible to the sea, Bellaria-Igea Marina. Once in Bellaria we have covered about 12 km. From Bellaria we can take a paved bike path that leads us to Cesenatico (about 26 km from the beginning of the path) passing through Gatteo a Mare. There are still about 9 km to reach Cervia and the Salina. From Cesenatico to Cervia we must stay as close as possible to the sea and never take the new State Road n.16 Adriatica, a very busy and congested road not suitable for the transit of bicycles. By staying instead to the east of the Adriatic road, we have several alternatives to reach Cervia, including the possibility of traveling along the old Adriatic road, today with very little traffic. In addition, a paved bike path connects Cesenatico to Cervia today.

Arrived in Pinarella, south of Cervia, by taking for example Viale Tritone, you go west, away from the sea, to get closer to the Salina. From Via del Tritone to Via Caduti della Libertà you arrive in Via Ficocle (the ancient name of Cervia). Going westwards we will arrive at the intersection with the SS 16 which, in this stretch, takes the name of Via Romea Sud.

We just have to cross the Romea, paying great attention to the intense traffic, and continue on Via Ficocle that runs along the southern perimeter of the Salina. At this point we will have on the left the Go-kart circuit (Happy Valley) bordered by a fence and on the right the large evaporating basins of the Salina, separated from the road by the surrounding canal. Via Ficocle is one of the best spots for watching, independently and at a respectful distance, the rich and specialized birdlife of this environment. On this road it is possible to plan different observation points. We are in the southern part of the Salina characterized by large basins with shallow water and a low level of salinity. In spring and summer, the banks that divide the pools are used by many species for the construction of the nests. It is therefore possible to observe black-winged stilts, pied avocets, common terns, little terns and seagulls of different species, hatching on nests or feeding their chicks.

In this area, thousands of ducks gather for the winter, from November to March. They are surface ducks like common shelducks, wigeons, gadwalls, teals, pintails, shovelers and mallards. In winter there are also little egrets, gray herons and great white egrets. The banks and the island called "Land of Roses" are frequented, up in mid-March, from large herds of wild geese.

The greater pink flamingos, since they began to frequent the wetlands of the Po Delta, twenty years ago, are a constant presence in the Salina. The southern basins are the most frequented. Here it is possible to observe hundreds of individuals who move in the water, intent on feeding themselves and, very often, numerous flocks that move in flight from one basin to another, offering the observer a magnificent show of flights, shapes and colors.

Approximately 1 Km from the Romea Sud, the Ficocle road detaches itself from the perimeter of the Salina and proceeds towards the farms at south-west. After about 800 m, take "Via dei Prati" on the right. Crossing a totally agricultural landscape, between fields of cereals and flowering crops of mustard and rape, after about 2.5 km you reach the provincial road n. 6 that connects Cervia to the inhabited area of Villa Inferno. The passage between the fields aims to reach the asphalted road that crosses the most interesting pools of the south-west area without having to use the busy road Romea Sud. Once reached the provincial road no. 6, proceed to the right (east) for 400 m and you will be again immersed in the Salina of Cervia. We have water on both sides and we can plan many observation points. In the first basin that we run into, on the right, the outcrops of land have always been used for the settlement of a multi-species colony of Laridae (terns and seagulls) and waders (pied avocet, black-winged stilt and redshank). It is one of the most numerous and easily observable colonies. Proceeding towards Cervia, a stop is recommended in the central point of the area, at the intersection of the road with the dividing walls of the basins. In spring, in March and April, this part of the Salina is frequented by ducks and waders of many species that from the African wintering areas, return for reproduction in northern Europe. With a little luck it is possible to observe dunlins, black-tailed godwits and other waders that in large flocks move in flight among the tanks, often flying over the lucky observers. In these basins you can also see the first flocks of ruffs and black-winged stilts, just arrived from Africa and that between one flight and the other show courtships and couplings, suggesting that the settlement for the nesting is imminent.

The provincial road no. 6, which we are following, enters, after a few hundred meters, in the Salara State Road which on the left leads to the village of Castiglione and on the right (Via Martiri Fantini), after about a couple of kilometers, leads in Cervia where our tour can end with a visit to the historical center.

Second part:

Alternative to the bike ride proposed in the first part, or complementary, if you want to dedicate the whole day to the Salina di Cervia, is the visit to the "Centro Visite Salina di Cervia" South Station of the Po Delta Park. Visitors center is located on the upstream side of the SS 16 Adriatica, in via Bova no. 161, on the edge of the Salina. The headquarters, inaugurated in 1998, was obtained from an old factory that housed the former municipal slaughterhouse. The Center is the starting point for excursions both inside and outside the perimeter of the salt complex on foot, by boat and by bike following the existing routes.

Walk in salina

This is a route starting at fixed times, during the opening period of the Visitor Center, or by booking for organized groups. The duration is about 1,30 hours. The participation fee includes: entrance to the Center, environmental guide and use of binoculars.

Bike in Salina

A cycling itinerary to discover the Salina. Route made on reservation for groups of 10 to 20 participants. Duration about 2.30 hours. The fee includes: entrance to the Visitor Center, bicycle, environmental guide, insurance and a small refreshment.

Navigable routes

From the Visitor Center there are three itineraries: naturalistic, historical and productive.

The naturalistic path takes place along the surrounding canal, going south for 1,400 m to the "Casello del Diavolo". The route follows over a long section of the surrounding canal and is carried out by electric boats. From the boats it is possible to climb on the embankment in correspondence with the birdlife's observation structures.

The historical route leads to the rediscovery of Ficocle and the lost city and follows, on an electric boat, the canal that connected Cervia to the sea.

The production path takes place (on electric boats) along the surrounding canal, in a northerly direction and leads to the small "Camillone" saltworks, the only example of a multi-collection artisan management, according to the original millennial collection system. Another interesting stage is the "salt basins" one, where you can see the final phase of salt formation carried out by using the modern method.

For information about Visitor center openings, itineraries and timetables:

Centro Visita Salina di Cervia

from Monday to Friday: 8:30 am - 1:00 pm and 2:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Saturdays, Sundays, holidays and days before: 10:00 am - 12 am 30 and 2.30 - 6.00 pm

0544-973040 / salinadicervia@atlantide.net