

**Sheet No. 1****Right bank of the Marecchia River**

From Rimini to Ponte Verucchio

**Time required for cycling:** 2-2.30 hours outward; 1.30 hours return

**Instrumentation:** binoculars and telescope

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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, first of all the Marecchia.

The Marecchia river has had a primary role in the genesis of the territory and of human settlements in the Rimini area and it certainly represents the most important geographical and physical element of the landscape.

The Marecchia River, Ariminus for the Latins, is a watercourse with a strong torrential character, and an important historical route between the Adriatic, the Padania and central Tyrrhenian Italy. The catchment area is in the middle of a climate transition territory and the plant and animal species that inhabit it belong to both the Continental area and the Mediterranean area; this causes the evident presence of a great biological richness.

Altogether the water catchment area of the Marecchia river has an extension of 416 sq km. From the beginning (Monte della Zucca, 1,263 m, near Pratieghi) to the sea, the course runs for 70 km in a south-west-northeast direction. The river's flow direction (and therefore the geographic position of the valley) is the same that migratory birds have been traveling through the northern hemisphere for thousands years. This is why Marecchia's valley is known as the traditional migration line of a very large number of bird species related to aquatic environments.

The cycling route that we propose starts from the Ponte di Tiberio and continuing for 20 km in the direction of the mountain, arrives at Ponte Verucchio, through the historical-naturalistic trail, for pedestrians and cycles only, located on the right bank of the Marecchia. This itinerary is very popular with walkers, hikers and cyclists. The route is interesting in all seasons but spring and early summer are the best times to enjoy the beauty of the river views, rich in water and lush vegetation and for the possibility of interesting encounters with the local fauna.

The cycle path starts in Rimini on the Circonvallazione Occidentale street. Going towards the sea, a few meters from the entrance of the bridge, on the left, you take a small road protected by a fence until you reach the Marecchia Park (Parco XXV Aprile). From here, in the mountain direction, cross the Park, populated by giant willows and poplars, witnesses of the passage of the river that flowed into the canal port and that only in recent years has been diverted to the north in Rivabella. Continuing in the direction of the mountain you arrive on the bank of the AUSA (1,400 m from the beginning of the track), a tributary of the Marecchia river. You follow a stretch of embankment and then, through a ramp to the right, you go down on the gravel (cemented) to go up immediately on the right bank of the Marecchia. The convenient

path in dirt floor takes us to the underpass of the State 16 that warns us that we are leaving the city. We are about 2,300 m from the track's onset.

Continue along the right bank of the river and after passing two junctions with the provincial road Marechiese (Sp No. 258) you arrive at the military area of Spadarolo, once used as a powder magazine. Continuing, we arrive at the underpass with the A14 motorway.

At this point the riverbed is particularly wide. The waters, after spring rains, tend to disperse among the gravels, forming secondary riverbeds that intertwine, as usually happens in the flat stretches of the streams. The banks of the river are bordered by abundant wooded vegetation with the presence of willows of different species and white poplars. Stopping for a moment and looking at the riverbed with binoculars, it is easy to meet some constant presences. Common seagulls and royal gulls are often laid in the dry parts of the riverbed and are often intent on plumage care. Little egrets and grey herons instead stand, still, in a few centimeters of water, waiting for prey. Small fishes approach the predators, unaware of the lightning whiplash that the long neck allows them and the unflappable grip of the long serrated beak that leaves no escape to the unwary.

Beyond the highway bridge, we are now about 6,000 m from the starting point, we cross the Rio Mavone, which enters the Marecchia, and we arrive at the noisy skeet shooting facility, with adjoining restaurant. In the last few years the most stringent legislation has prohibited the use of lead ammunition for this activity, due to poisoning for numerous species of wildlife, imposing the use of more expensive but more environmentally friendly ammunition with steel pellets. After the skeet shooting, we come across a model aircraft runway. An example of multiple use of the river bed, this time more sustainable.

Continuing the route, a short detour follows to avoid a collapsed stretch of runway. Now the track runs for a long stretch where the natural elements seem to regain the upper hand. The natural environments are formed by dense riparian groves with hygrophilous vegetation, bushes and dry meadows. We are about 9,000 m from the start of the runway. On our right we have the vast riverbed of the Marecchia and on the left there is the first of the former quarry lakes (Lago Incal System) which over time have been renaturalized and today host the most important and complex fauna of the whole lower course of the Marecchia (See sheet No. 2). Very important is the colony of cormorants and herons that for some years, in spring, settles in the wood of willows of the lake. Approaching the perimeter protection network or, even better, advancing within the fence crossing the special entrances, you can observe, with the help of binoculars, many species of birds, intent on building nests or more simply, grappling with lake fishes, their favorite prey. On the branches of the trees and on the banks of the lake it is possible to observe the gray heron, the little egret, the nocticora, the cormorant and the very rare pigmy cormorant, a species of conservation importance. In the mirror of the lake are instead frequent aquatic species that are immersed for fishing activities such as the great crested grebe, the little grebe, the coot and several species of diver ducks such as the pochard and the tufted duck or surface ducks like the garganeer, the teal, the gadwall and the mallard. A complete tour of the lake, stopping in the several observation spots built around the water, is really recommended and can give many satisfactions allowing a close and prolonged observation of species otherwise not easily observable (See sheet No. 2).

## **Second part: From Lago Incal System to Ponte Verucchio**

Continuing upstream we first meet the lake Azzurro, immediately after the detour that connects to the provincial road 258, deviation of the great solitary Pine, then, after the underpass of the Sp 49 (Traversa Marecchia, the road that connects San Martino dei Molini to Santarcangelo di Romagna), you reach the largest lake Santarini (11,500 m from the beginning of the track). The three lakes, formed by the mining activity of the gravels of the 60s and 80s of the last century, form a complex of wetlands of great attraction for the aquatic birdlife that in this stretch of river includes up to 174 species between nesting, migratory and wintering. While the first two lakes are almost totally dedicated to the biology and conservation of flora and fauna of river environments, the third largest lake is also used for sports and recreational activities such as fishing or rowing.

Following the trail again, between natural areas, small wetlands surrounded by marsh vegetation and crops, you reach the golf course, on the left of the path. This is another example of activity compatible with nature conservation needs. The green meadows, the tree-lined plots and the water collections are an environment much appreciated by different species of birdlife and also by many species of amphibians such as the green toad, the tree frog and the marsh turtle.

On the right of the track, about 15.300 m from the beginning of the path, there's a very interesting geomorphological element that accompanies the cyclist/hiker from this point to Ponte Verucchio. This is the so-called "Canyon of the Marecchia": a very deep notch in the Pliocene clays that the waters of the river produced as a result of the variations in the equilibrium profile of the watercourse. Today the river flows at the foot of steep clay walls that exceed 10 meters in height. To approach the Canyon, not always visible from the track, you need to go to the right, towards the river, in the short branches that go towards the edge of the cliff. A panoramic point can be reached by following the path on the right opposite the entrance to the Marecchia public park of Villa Verucchio (16,200 m from the start of the runway). The river embedding was included among the geomorphological assets of the Province of Rimini. The erosive process has produced the exposure of the rocky layers, with a sequence of visible layers for a length of over 2000 meters. The greenish levels composed of clay and of the remains of algae microorganisms proved to be a real mine of fossils, in particular fishes and cephalopods. The formation dates back to the lower and middle Pliocene and refers to a period with sub tropical climate. Fossil fish are composed of coastal marine species.

The Marecchia Park of Villa Verucchio is an excellent equipped stopping point where you can, among other things, supply water.

We are now close to arrival. We continue along the track between the canal on the right and the cultivated fields. Now we come to the hydraulic work of the hydroelectric plant that, using water derived from the river, produces electricity in the jump, inside the newly built artificial well. It is in this portion of the river that the bridle wanted by the Romagna Reclamation Consortium has caused over time the "Salto" of the Marecchia, the erosion downstream of the bridle has caused a difference in height of more than 10 meters forming an element of the landscape that did not exist before: the Marecchia waterfall, particularly impressive in moments of flood. We are about 20 km from the start and just before the span of the Ponte di Verucchio, a short climb leads to the Marecchiese road, where the route ends.

The return (false downhill) can take place on the same track or from the Marecchia left track, recently built.