

## **UPSIDE DOWN**

Heading down towards Spinazzola along the Murgian ravine we will get to the dismantled bauxite mines. There are a few dolines or sinkholes in the area. The most important is the one called "Cavone".

Not far from there between the towns of Spinazzola and Minervino there is the Acquatetta woodland that has got an area of 1083 hectares and constitutes the second largest wood in the Province of Bari.

The site has been improved through reforestation and tree plantation (mainly pine and cypress trees used to enrich the soil and the woodland). Some other indigenous oak trees such as the pubescent oak (Ital. roverella - Lat. *Quercus pubescens*) and the thorny oaks (Ital. quercia spinosa - Lat *Quercus coccifera*) can be seen growing here.

On the southern border of the artificial woodland on the Murgian piedmont there is a spontaneous wood also called Acquatetta, which is part of the National Park protected area. The thick vegetation in this strip of oakland is due to presence of water flows and stream on the surface and it is characterized by an indigenous bio-type that results from a cross between the pubescent oak (Ital. roverella - lat. *Quercus pubescens*) and the (Ital.) farnia oak trees.

The fauna in this section of the National Park is extremely interesting. In the oak trees lots of woodpeckers nests show how populated the oakland used to be. Other woodland birds to be watched are buzzards, horned owls, golden orioles and butcherbirds.

In the ravines or steppe there are also birds of prey or songbirds to watch: lannerets, horned owls, tawny pipits, calandra larks, sparrows, white wagtails, robins and ravens.

Other fauna examples are goatsuckers, newts, green toads, green frogs and fire-bellied frog from Apennines.

From there we will move on to Lambrenghi, where old farms and historic rustic buildings such as wells, pools, reservoirs are worth sightseeing. A stop over for lunch in an agritourist farmhouse is optional, but highly recommended. The tour ends in Minervino right on the southwest border of the National Park at the St. Michel's grotto church. The grotto is located in the old town of Minervino and it is also known as the "Apulian balcony". The main nave, where the altar is located, is a huge karst vault cave that develops into a deep ravine. Bypassing the altar through a corridor one is led into a series of smaller caves that lead onto the heart of the underground Murgia.

The grotto was surely a prehistoric site turned into a pre-Christian place of worship and eventually adapted to be used as a Christian church.

### **Overview**

Natural Environment: coppice woodland, pubescent oakland, scrubland, pastures, cropland, karst phenomena

Rural architecture: masserie, jazzì, dry stone walls and huts, potholes, reservoirs, pools.

Specialities/Delicacies: cardoncelli mushrooms, "lampascioni", escargots, vegetables soups, dried broad beans with wild chicory, bread of Minervino.

Starting point: Gravina in Puglia (recommended). Alternatively from any other towns.

Target: teenagers and adults;

Type of activity: guided tour - Difficulty: easy

Time: 8:30am; Length of the tours: all day/half day (on demand)

Transport: 15 passenger seats mini coach