

The Reserve of Torre Salsa

Franco Galia

WWF Representative, Agrigento

Since the 1970s the WWF has been in the foreground for the defence of the Nature Reserve of Torre Salsa. At the end of the 1980s it promoted a national campaign which culminated with the acquisition of 8.4 ha of land within the Reserve, parts of which were on the coast. In 1991 the area was inserted in the regional project of the government of Sicily. Then on 19th June 2000 a decree was signed along with the convention that entrusted the Reserve's management to the WWF of Italy.

The Nature Orientated Reserve of Torre Salsa lies between the town of Siciliana Marina and Eraclea Minoa in an uncontaminated territory where the cliffs of gypsum intervene with limestone marl which are covered, now and then, with layers of clay.

The landscape, covered with typical herbaceous and bushy vegetation, is sometimes inaccessible while other times it permits access to the beautiful seashore through narrow paths found between the rocks. Here the sea is crystal clear while its shallow waters are blooming with typical flora and rich fauna. The landscape is delineated by soft terraces formed from the vast depression of the Pantano and from the morphology of the cliffs.

The reserve, which is extended about 6 km, is characterized by high tracts of coastline from where are manifested blue clay, calcareous stratifications of gypsum, white limy marl eroded by the Aeolian wind, forming projecting cliffs, and loose sand found in the lower tracts that makes up the coastal dunes. The ancient watch-tower of Torre Salsa is situated in the very heart of the Reserve and dominates the top of a small promontory where the process of erosion is more intense, and from which gleams white calcareous marl. In the shallow sea, there are indented rocky slabs which create an immense number of paths where the tiny fish dart quickly between the seaweeds and where the slow crustaceans find shelter. The landscape, which characterizes the coast is rich of natural forms, and has majestic perspective and chromatic contrasts.

The flora which find shelter in the step rock formation close to the sea where can it can escape forest fires and can exploit the singular micro-climate is of particular interest. The cliffs where the falcons nest, represent the best integral ecosystem of the reserve and are protected by an uneven morphology and by the unstable nature of the terrain. The evergreen Mediterranean shrub presents a remarkable variety of floral species. Different endemic species have been discovered, along the gorge of Monte Cupolone, like the agrigentine lavatera, different varieties of wild orchids, the iris and several examples of the Phoenician juniper. Vultures like porcupines, buzzards, kestrels, find shelter along the rocky walls of the cliffs.