

Tuscany / Rocconi Nature Reserve

LANNER

It looks like a peregrine, but it is not. It's elusive like few others, rare and definitely one of most threatened raptors we have in Europe: it's the lanner falcon (*Falco biarmicus feldeggii*). Its main population is found in Italy, comprising about 140-172 pairs, the feldeggii is the lonely lanner of Western Palearctic. Known and described by emperor Federico II in his famous treatise "De arte venandi cum avibus", the lanner is now listed in the main international directives. There is also an Action Plan from BirdLife International for this bird. To recognize a lanner in the wild, and to distinguish it from more common peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, which is very similar in voice and size, is not easy. Among the characteristics visible in flight and from a distance, the most helpful distinction is the contrast between light flight-feathers and dark coverts of the underwing. The feathers of the nape are dark brown in female, brown in the male. The mustache is less pronounced than in the peregrine, compared with which the shape of the head has a much flatter top. This is a bird that remains throughout the year at the site where it breeds, on even modest cliffs of limestone, sandstone and tuff. They often hunt in pairs, plundering not only birds but also small sized mammals, catching them on the ground.

Where

The Italian region where lanners are more numerous is Sicily. In spite of environmental changes, poaching and - perhaps - competition with the peregrine (ornithologists are not agreed on this point), there are 80 - 100 nesting pairs on the island. Puglia and Basilicata host notable populations, while in central Italy there are a few localized pairs, Emilia Romagna being the northern limit. As in other regions (eg Lazio), Tuscany has

shown in recent years a further decrease of the species, in part for unknown reasons. Among the sites where the presence of lanner fortunately seems stable, thanks to careful surveillance and an unspoilt environment, was the regional reserve of Rocconi, managed by the WWF. But in 2011 late winter the male of local pair is suddenly disappeared, so the breeding saeson is blurred.



The reserve is located in southern Tuscany and covers about 371 hectares in the municipalities of Roccalbegna and Semproniano (province of Grosseto), along the river Albegna. Part of the protected area (130 ha) is owned by the WWF. Here landscapes are harsh and wild, and the Albegna river and its tributary Rigo have dug through spectacular limestone walls, interrupting a sequence of thick forests and pastures, hedgerows and patches of shrubs. A landscape of the past! Eight species of birds of prey nest here: in addition to the lanner we must add the peregrine and

kestrel, sparrowhawk, buzzard, honey buzzard, short-toed eagle and goshawk. In effect, Rocconi is a pearl of a park not only in Tuscany but in Italy as a whole.

The itinerary

To go from Rome to Rocconi takes three hours. Follow the Via Aurelia (and suddenly the fastest highway A12 to Civitavecchia) to Grosseto South, then exit the Aurelia by following the signs for Istia d'Ombrone and Scansano. At a fuel station, turn left where the signs to Roccalbegna begin and follow them up until you reach the town. Visits to the Rocconi reserve must be accompanied by a guide and take place on Sunday by appointment, starting at 9 (tel. 347 5823441-0564 989 098). Updated information on the lanner and other treasures of Rocconi biodiversity can be obtained from Riccardo Nardi, naturalist and creator of the reserve (tel.346 8576803, riccardonardi@gmail.com), who in addition to Italian also speaks English and German.

Internet

www.wwf.it/rocconi.nt