





The Natural Park of "Alta valle del torrente Carfalo" covers over 5 acres of an extremely wild area including the small towns of San Vivaldo, Sughera and Castelfalfi.

A forestal environment prevails: natural areas, a variety of vegetation species, and several animals can be easily found. The European Community and Tuscany consider it to be a very interesting territory since it is very difficult to find this variety of flora and fauna elsewhere in the world.

A forgotten forest of a similar beech and yew trees still exists here, in the deepest areas of the Valley, evidence of the prehistoric age when Tuscany and Europe were experiencing the ice era.

Many monumental yew trees can be found in this area and they have been here for centuries.

In the clear water of the creek and the fresh humus under the beech trees, you can suddenly catch a glimpse of the red Spectacled Salamander, a rare and endemic amphibian, which is typical of the Italian environment.

This region aims to conserve and enhance the beauties of nature organising educational activities and promoting more awareness towards an environmental tourism.

That is the reason why many paths in the park have been restored and marked with hiking and didactic signposts.

Well, enjoy your ride in "The Forest of Wonders"...



## THEMATIC PATHS

### The Beechwood's Didactic Path

This path was idealised by the students of Montaione's Secondary School: it covers a wild part of the beechwood, with yew trees and holly growing together and it reaches one of the purest spots of Carfalo's creek.

Signposts and noticeboards have been placed all around the park indicating the main naturalistic emergencies.



### The Bends' Path – Sparkling Water

This is a ring-shaped path, which reaches to the depths of the park, where Carfalo generates steep slopes with yellow sand and the creek becomes a tortuous and embanked labyrinth reaching a sparkling water spring.

### The Monumental Yew Tree's Path

It is a ring-shaped path going down to the abyss where the oldest tree of the valley has been dwelling for more than 500 years.

### The Pleasant Wood's Path

This is a slightly sloped path which is characterised by a lot of branches going from one part of the park to the other where there are no trees have been cut down (cutting down trees has become a more and more common habit during the last few years). Here you can enjoy a walk in a shady and tall forest.



## SPECTACLED SALAMANDER *Salamandrina perspicillata*

Unique endemic *genus* of the vertebrate fauna in Italy, the Spectacled Salamander has been recognized as a very important species by the Community. It lives only where nature is intact and streams are clean.

In our country it prefers the Tyrrhenian sea coast where the microclimate is fresh, there are mountains or high hills, shady forests and rich humus. As a matter of fact, you can see it under the beechwood, i.e. its natural habitat.

Its main feature is its fourfingered feet instead of the fivefingered ones, such as the Urodela amphibious'. It is 10 cm long, it has a dark



brown back and a garish ruby red coloured belly, characterised by black and white spots. It has a clearly visible sign on its Vshaped head, which is the reason why it is commonly called "spectacled".

During the year it lives, far from the creek, in the humus under the beechwood where you can catch it squirming and chasing small invertebrates. From the end of winter to the end of April the fecundated females come back to the water, laying pearly eggs which they admirably set out into crowns. They choose the creek where the stream runs slowly, looking for small rocks or wood pieces right for their purpose.



## BEECHWOOD *Fagus sylvatica*

The beechwood in the Carfalo's upper valley spreads from 300 m to 180 m above sea level along a low slope facing the north-east of the valley. This area probably has got the lowest altitude for beeches to grow. Here the microclimate is very similar to the one of the mountain area: here we have plenty of water and harsh temperatures due to its topographic exposure and its sloped position. The beechwood has survived as a relict ecosystem thanks to these special conditions since the ice age until 20.000 years ago to nowadays.

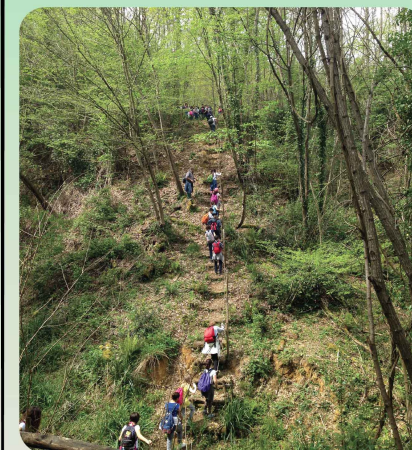
The beech, together with the durmast, the white hornbeam and the chestnut tree, constitutes this forest where you can occasionally run into very old specimens. Their trunks are more than 70 cm long in diameter.



## THE YEW TREE *Taxus baccata*

It represents one of the most important emergency of the valley: it is the evidence of an ancient vegetation growing under the beechwood together with the holly and the butcher's broom. Once there was an oceanic local climate here. Rainfall was heavy with a little temperature range.

These species, the yew trees and the butcher's broom in



particular, are very rare to grow in spontaneous conditions. This only happens in the deepest forgotten forests where the microclimate is suitable and wild, far from human intervention.

The Carfalo's upper valley keeps these features in the slope facing the north-east, where you can easily run into ancient yew tree specimen. In particular, we mention the oldest tree of the whole park: it is almost 80 cm long in diameter and about 500 years old.

However, the yew tree has also got a bad reputation: it is also called "death's tree" because of its high toxicity in every part of the plant, except for the sweet heady aril. This is the rounded part of its red berry. You can observe it in the female specimen during September and October in particular.

For any information: Tourist Office in Montaione:  
Ph. 0571/699255 - 0571/699205, turism@comune.montaione.fi.it  
17/19 Cresci st. - Montaione  
Ecoistituto delle Cerbaie  
Ph. 3403460859 - info@ecocerbaie.it

## Natural Habitat High Valley of Carfalo Torrent

Montaione - Florence

Guide to visit

