



Sophie and Manuel Baumgartner

Spoiler alert: Our mammal sightings list is far from impressive. But trip reports that aren't super impressive are important too, right? After all, you have to stay realistic.

We are writing this trip report anyway because we are still trying to go mammalwatching with two small children. And although we weren't really successful, we do have a few tips for travelling there with kids, which might be useful for someone or even several people. To make sure that everything is still quite enjoyable, we are now focusing less on the number of mammal species and more on observing mammal moments.

We travelled from Switzerland by train to Rome and then rented a car. Everything went smoothly, except that we had to prioritize very carefully when packing. It was clear that we had to find a way to take our scope with us, but we regretted not bringing our thermal camera.

We visited three different areas of the national park. First, we went to the well-known Opi/Pescasseroli area, then Villalago, and finally the area towards San Donato Val di Comino.



Opi / Pescasseroli: Since long hikes were out of the question for our 4-year-old and the refugio did not (yet) accept us with our baby, the obvious choice for evenings or early mornings was the well-known place at Gioia Vecchio. Our experience confirms what many recent reports have already described: There are apparently significantly fewer bear sightings in this area than before. We observed **Red Deer**, **Wild Boars** and **Red Fox** there, but spoke to people who had been there every day for over a week without seeing any bears.

We also went to another well-known place called 'Rifugio la Cicerana'. The hike there and back was easily manageable for our 4-year-old. We parked at 'Rifugio del Diavolo' and walked to the refuge in the afternoon. The refuge keeper told us about regular bear sightings and one the day before we were there. I think we had a good chance of seeing one, but we couldn't stay long enough in the evening because the little one had to walk back. We scanned from the refugio towards Campo Moricento. Night drives did not produce any new species except for the **European Hare**.

Villalago: Villalago became very well-known thanks to the bear 'Amarena', who regularly roamed through the village in the evenings, one year with four cubs. Unfortunately, the bear was ultimately killed. The large number of deer that roam peacefully in the village is quite unusual. Apparently, a pack of wolves regularly comes by hunting deer, and apparently, we would have a very good chance of observing a hunt in a week. We went to a great playground next to Caffè Babylon (41.934284, 13.845363) with a fantastic pizza to go and scanned

from there in the evenings. The chance of seeing a bear did not seem very high, but it was possible with a scope higher up in the mountains. We asked around about porcupines, apparently there are lots of them around the lakes. We went on night drives or night walks every evening but were unsuccessful. I imagine they are out later at night.

San Donato Val di Comino: Here again, it was also clear that bears and porcupines are regularly sighted here, but unfortunately we were unsuccessful in this regard as well. On the last evening, we got a very good tip and found an easily accessible place for us and the children that seemed very promising. We parked next to the road here: 41.741038, 13.814136 and walked towards a small valley (41.732598, 13.823981) which is apparently a passageway between many mountains. Apparently, the chances of seeing bears, wolves and even lynxes are relatively high there. We have received conflicting information about the lynx. Unfortunately, on the only evening we scanned there, there was a lot of fog, and the next day we went home again. On the way back to Rome, we saw a porcupine roadkill.

Overall, we had a wonderful time and are already looking forward to our next visit.

