

This is the report of a short trip in Italy mainly in Abruzzo National Park and a few days in the French Alps.

At the beginning of September I was tempted to return in Asturias (Spain) where it is easy to see bears. But the situation of the Covid in Spain + the forecast prevented me to return there. I had been twice in Asturias and many times in Spain. So I finally decided to go to Italy in the Abruzzo National Park. I spent 8 days there. This park is full of wildlife and the population respect even the carnivores as Wolf and Bear. Something which is very different in France.

On my way to and from Abruzzo I stopped each time for 2 nights near Orbetello, Alberese and Maremma Natural Park. These places were extremely crowded. There was traffic day and night and doing spotlighting was extremely difficult. Roe deer, Wild boar, European (or Corsican) hare and Red Fox were extremely common. I even saw a Wolf close to Alberese. A person working in Maremma Park told me there was 7 Wolves in the area. I also saw 2 Red Deers, 5 Fallow deers (3 males and a female with a young) and an European Badger. At la laguna de Orbetello reserve I saw 15 Bald Ibis (of which part of them migrate from Germany to Tuscany).

But Abruzzo Park was really worthwhile to visit. Every day I saw a lot of Red deers (males were roaring) and Wild boars. Roe deers were also present but in lower numbers. I had five sightings of Marsican Brown Bears (an immature and a big one)(one sighting was with my thermal camera) and once at dusk 4 Wolves. Wolves and Bears were all seen at the view point of Giaia Vecchio. By night I saw a Pine Marten near Biseigna, and close by on 3 days 9 Fat Dormice in beech trees. In alpine meadows I saw Savi's Pine Vole dens and glimpsed one at dusk and Mole's tumulus (these tumulus were quite small compared to those of European or Aquitanian moles). Apparently these moles are Blind moles. But seeing one is another matter.

As it was extremely dry many trails were still closed to protect the wildlife, mainly bears and Chamois. In fact for me the most important was to see a new subspecies of Chamois in fact of Isard, as now Chamois of the Cantabrian Mountains in Spain, of the Pyrénées in France and Spain and the Apennines in Italy are split as a different species from the true Chamois from the Alps to the Pontic Mountains in Turkey. As the Val di Rose famous for the Apennine Chamois was closed to independent walkers until the 20th of September I climbed the Monte Marsicano to see them and I saw more than forty. They were not shy and contrary to others Chamois have longer horns. I got information of this place thanks to 2 rangers. I have now seen the Cantabrian Chamois, Pyrenean Chamois, Apennine Chamois, Alpine Chamois, Carpathian Chamois, and Asia Minor Chamois. But the splits are increasing. It is fashionable! Even I think they are at the worst only 2 species (Chamois and Isard -the chamois of Cantabrian Mountains, the Pyrénées and the Apennines).

The most interesting bird I saw in the Abruzzo Park is the White-backed Woodpecker (ssp *lilfordi*).

As I had to cross the Alps to return at home, I stopped for 3 nights in the French Alps, stopping at 3 places that I visit nearly every year:

-col de l'Iseran and Pont St Charles to the border of Italy (Parc de la Vanoise): I saw first 51 Alpine ibex (females and young ones), then 25 males. By night I drove the col de l'Iseran where I have seen many times Mountain hare, but this time I didn't see any. On the Italian side 12 Alpines Chamois were laying on the snow. Alpine Marmots are extremely common and tame.

-La Grande Sassièrè reserve(Parc de la Vanoise): 35 alpine ibex (a group of females and young and a group of males : 6 large males were fighting early morning). There was also an Hermine exploring the area, often disappearing below rocks. But once it reappeared with a Snow vole, then disappearing below a rock. Two minutes later it reappeared without its prey and came on my backpack, then moved away. Marmots were plentiful as Alpine Chamois (161!!!)

-in the Chartreuse(Parc de la Chartreuse) I got 31 Alpine Chamois and 9 Mouflons (these Mouflons as all those introduced in Europe are now called Mediterranean Mouflons (as they are not genetically pure) to differentiate them from the Mouflons of Corsica and Sardina.

Dominique BRUGIERE