

## THE CASTELPORZIANO PRESIDENTIAL ESTATE

The Presidential Estate of Castelporziano is located at 25 Km from the centre of Rome, extends over a surface of 59 sq km (5,892 hectares) and includes several historic hunting grounds like *Trafusa*, *Trafusina*, *Riserve Nuove* and *Capocotta*.

By now it is almost embedded in the periphery of the city and extends to the Roman coastline, including approximately 3.1 Km of uncontaminated beaches.

Castelporziano partly borders with Via Cristoforo Colombo, a thoroughfare connecting the capital to Ostia, partly with the State Road "Pontina", which connects the town of Latina with Rome, and partly with the coast road running from Ostia to Anzio.

Castelporziano englobes most of the coastal ecosystems typical of the Mediterranean. Indeed, from the coast to the hinterland, it includes uncontaminated beaches, recent sand dunes with typical pioneer and colonizing species whose function is to consolidate the sands, old stabilized dunes with ample backdune wetlands, maquis shrubland and thickets featuring typical evergreen and aromatic species; it then covers holm-oak thickets, Stone Pine forests, a lowland mixed woodland of oaks (typical of coastal plains), cork oak forests, grazing land for livestock breeding and extensive cereal cultures.

Most of the Estate consists of lowland hygrophilous woodlands featuring evergreen and deciduous oak trees and more specifically hygrophilous species, especially near the wetlands.

These are the last forlorn and uncontaminated woodlands of the vast forests and woods that once, in ancient times, extended along the whole coast of Latium.

What makes Castelporziano unique is the combination of the oak woods typical of the Mediterranean climate and the oak woods characteristic of continental climates. Among the evergreen oak species, the most frequently found are holm oaks, cork oaks and *Quercus crenata*, a hybrid between Turkey oak and cork oak. Among the deciduous oaks, there are Turkey oaks, English oaks, Hungarian oaks, while the cooler wetlands are covered with poplars, narrow-leaved ash trees, maple trees, hornbeams and Oriental hornbeams typical of Mediterranean coastal ecosystems.

The brushwood is particularly rich in bushes typical of the Mediterranean maquis, mainly made up of evergreen and aromatic plants: strawberry trees, cistus, heather, juniper, mastic, myrtle, Phillyrea, laurel, *Rhamnus alaternus* and broom.

The lowland mixed woodlands, which have already been indicated among the most delicate ecosystems requiring protection, extend over an area of approximately 2,300 hectares. The Mediterranean maquis brushwood and thickets cover approximately 500 hectares, the holm oak thicket 261 hectares, especially in the backdunes, and the cork

oak grove 460 hectares. The thickets alternate with clearings and natural meadows, thus giving rise to a great variety of plant combinations.

Stone pine forests, planted in artificial reforestations with the aim of consolidating the sand dunes and protecting the backdunes from marine winds, extend over roughly 750 hectares. These forests yield pine nuts, have an environmental value in combination with holm oak thickets and the Mediterranean maquis, and are aesthetically monumental, especially those that are centuries-old. Stone pine trees, even if they are the fruit of reforestation, are a landmark in Italian landscapes. They were introduced by ancient Romans in order to reap pine nuts from the pine cones harvested in the wintertime.

Part of the monumental pine grove, considered to be an environmental landmark because of the trees' age and considerable dimensions, has been singled out for the "Silvo-Museo", a forest museum established to conserve and hand down the forest-growing and management traditions that have contributed to create an impressive perspective along the thick colonnade of tree-trunks.

In its less accessible recesses, the forest is rich with old monumental trees. A recent census singled out, on the basis of their size and elegance, 52 "Green Patriarchs" (monumental trees) belonging to 16 different species, and also listed the most beautiful tree-lined roads and the most majestic groups of plants.

From the biological and ecosystemic point of view, note should be taken of the so-called "pools", natural water tables bearing witness to the long-past existence of wetlands, flooded woodlands and marshes that once stretched southward until the Pontina Plain and northward until the Maremma region of Tuscany.

The great variety of vegetation is matched by a correspondingly large variety of wildlife species. Ungulates are numerous and live in the wild. In addition to wild boars and fallow deer, there are also roe deer and smaller groups of deer. Together with the ungulates, the forest is populated with other mammals: among the Mustelidae, there are pine martens, skunks, stone martens, badgers, foxes and hedgehogs while the rodents include porcupines, hares and wild rabbits. From a zoological point of view, note should be taken of the particular pureness of the Maremma breed of wild boars (*Sus scrofa majori*), the Italian sub-species of roe deer and the Mediterranean hare.

The Castelporziano forest offers an excellent refuge for several bird species, both migratory and non-migratory. The centuries-old oak forest offers adequate shelter for several species when their numbers peak. These include jay birds and, among nocturnal birds of prey, little owls, tawny owls and barn owls. The diurnal species include common buzzards and migratory birds, most of which come to spend the winter, like wood pigeons and woodcocks. Other migratory birds are attracted to the wetlands and include: Anatidae, waders and stilt-birds. In spring, the bird life is enriched with other species like

the golden oriole, turtle doves and black kites, which nest there and form a numerous colony, adding on to many insectivore species.

Castelporziano has been fitted with a bird-ringing station, as established in the international EURING project. Migratory birds are caught periodically in order to identify the species, record the pertinent data and ring them. There are also a large number of freshwater turtles, insects and reptiles, all of which are carefully surveyed.

In order to perform delicate wildlife handling operations, the Estate relies on the collaboration of ISPRA, Istituto Superiore per la Ricerca e la Protezione Ambientale (Superior Institute for Research and Environmental Protection).

Cattle breeding constitutes a relevant part of the typical Roman rural landscape. The Castelporziano Estate assures the pureness of breed of Maremman horses and cattle, which are practically on the verge of extinction, breeding the animals in the wild and managing them according to the centuries-old traditions of expert "butteri", the traditional Maremman cattle herders. The breeding selection is so efficient that the specimens bred at the Estate often win the first prize in major cattle shows.

The farming is traditionally intensive and the agricultural land is fully integrated into Rome's rural landscape.

At present, the 750 hectares of grazing and non-intensive cropland are planted with cereals and fodder, part of which is used to feed the livestock.

Over the years, protection measures aimed at safeguarding the naturalistic value of the only real green lung in a densely populated and developed area have been intensified, thus gradually enhancing its environmental relevance.

The Castelporziano Estate, which was first created as a hunting and agricultural preserve, gradually lost these specific destinations of use.

Hunting was prohibited there as early as 1977 and in 1985 the Estate annexed the area of Capocotta, another 1,000-hectare estate that was spared from the urban sprawl. In 1999 the Castelporziano Estate was recognized the status of Natural State Reserve and subjected to protection measures in line with those protecting natural areas. Consistently with the new destination of use, a Natural Museum was built with the aim of providing environmental education and training.

A Scientific and Technical Commission was established in order to maximize the protection of the delicate equilibrium of natural ecosystems. It counts on the membership of eminent academics and researchers whose task is to make suggestions and proposals aimed at guaranteeing the Estate's good and balanced management.

An environmental monitoring system was activated already in 1995. Thanks to the participation and commitment of numerous scientific agencies and institutes, the system makes it possible to continuously and carefully monitor all the environmental factors involved. The system records polluting agents, the organic make-up of the soil, the level of the groundwater aquifer, the properties and salinity of the groundwater, the state of conservation of forests by making sample inventories in permanent sampling plots, animal populations through censuses taken in springtime and autumn. The system is also equipped with weather stations that record air temperatures and rainfall in an effort to monitor climate change.

Castelporziano is known among scientists as a unique area of naturalistic value due to the high level of biodiversity, complex forest systems, a wealth of 1082 plant species and of a total of 2918 large animal and bird populations, in addition to the presence of natural pools of water and roughly 162 temporary and permanent wetland areas. This biological wealth has made it possible to include Castelporziano in the Natura 2000 network established by the relevant EU directive, classifying it as a SPA (Special Protection Area) and SCI (Site of Community Importance).

### **Castelporziano and the Laurentino**

The Castelporziano Estate also englobes a territory once known as Laurentino, stretching from Lavinio-Laureto, a town associated with the legendary landing of Aeneas in Latium, to the foothills of the Alban Hills (Colli Albani), the Tiber River delta plain and the coastline.

The region was settled by Man already in prehistoric times: starting from the Iron Age (9<sup>th</sup> Century Before Christ) it hosted settlements with dwellings which, over the Archaic period (800 BC - 500 BC), stabilized and gradually formed a town, most of which was perched on the hills so as to control the natural ways of communication, and put in place a flourishing society, for example in the town of Decima.

As Rome consolidated its power (400 BC - 300 BC), the whole Laurentino territory was covered with rustic-type buildings, villas and residences used in the organization of the area's agricultural activities while Rome's Laurentina and Ostiense historical roads were outlined in their definitive form.

Starting after the second Punic war and even more intensely during the period of the late Roman Republic (200 BC - 100 BC), sea-side settlements started developing along the old coastline, which was already popular because of the town of Ostia, Rome's port-town. The settlements comprised villas belonging to eminent figures of the Roman aristocracy built in close proximity to Rome.

During the Roman Empire, refined residential developments continued with the construction of numerous villas. Historical records list a villa owned by the Emperor's family and another one by the writer Pliny the Younger.

For the provision of essential services, the villas depended on a small village, Vicus Augustanus, which was created under Augustus and remained operative until late antiquity. The coastal developments were connected to Rome through an articulate roadway system comprising the Ostiense and Laurentina main roads and their branches and by the Via Severiana, an age-old footpath along the coast that, once it was connected to the road system, linked Ostia's port with the coast of Latium Vetus.

With the end of the Roman Empire, during the 5<sup>th</sup> Century AD, the territory passed under the control of the Catholic Church, and especially of the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. The first fortification was built on the present location of the castle during the 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD, when its ownership title was transferred to the monks of Rome's old basilica of San Saba until 1561. When the San Saba monastery was closed by order of Pope Pius IV, the Castelporziano estate was listed among the assets of the Ospedale di Santo Spirito.

In 1568, the estate was sold to the Florentine del Nero family, which maintained its ownership until 1823, when it was purchased by Duke Vincenzo Grazioli; in 1872 the Estate was purchased by Quintino Sella on behalf of the Italian State.

## **The Roman villas**

The ancient Roman villas built in the Laurentino area fall under a dual typology of extra-urban residences, generally subdividing them in rustic homes, in the sense that they were used for agricultural purposes, and stately homes, mainly used for the owners' entertainment and relax.

Remains of the first typology of homes can be found in the Malafede valley and on the adjacent hillsides. The stately homes were scattered throughout the coastal axis along Via Severiana and remains can still be seen along the coast, bearing witness to their monumentality and wealth of decorations, especially their mosaic flooring, the wall paintings and the marble panelling.

## **The Castle and the Village**

After the breakdown of the territorial organization following the fall of the Roman Empire and the turbulent historical developments in the post-Classical era and in the Early Middle Ages, the areas surrounding Rome mainly fell in the hands of the Church. The Laurentino area was managed by the Domus Cultra Laurentum, which was created by Pope

Zachary (741 – 752 AD) to organize the agricultural, social and religious activities of the Estate.

The original nucleus of the Castle was built following the changes in general political conditions that came about between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It consisted of a tower built on a structure from the Roman Age, around which a group of buildings was progressively built within a fortified enclosure which, during the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, would be recognised and named as “Castrum”. In 17<sup>th</sup> Century maps (the Alexandrine Cadastre of 1660), the Castle is often portrayed as a quadrangular fortification with towers at the corners, a double gate, crowing elements and battlements. The Castle was amply renovated by the Grazioli family (1823 – 1872) who almost doubled its original perimeter.

### **The historical and archaeological museum**

The historical and archaeological museum hosted in the Castle and hamlet displays a collection of over two-hundred objects from the archaeological digs carried out in the Castelporziano Estate from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The museum is articulated into several halls and displays a large number of objects in chronological order and divided according to the monument they belonged to.

The most historically and artistically relevant grave goods on display are from a tomb of the necropolis of Castel di Decima (700 BC) and a portion of a painted ceiling from the Roman period found in the area of the imperial villa that once stood in Tor Paterno.

### **How to visit the Castelporziano Estate**

The Castelporziano Estate can be visited from November 1<sup>st</sup> to June 15<sup>th</sup>, compatibly with the environmental restrictions of a natural reserve and with the institutional activities held there.

Cultural, educational and environmental tours are open to all schools and grades, associations, organizations and groups comprising a minimum of 30 and a maximum of 60 people.

Groups must have their own means of collective transport.

Admission is free of charge and groups are provided with a guide from the personnel of the Estate who will accompany them throughout their stay.

To reserve a guided tour, please send a request to: Presidenza della Repubblica – Tenuta di Castelporziano, Fax: +39 06–51098158, specifying a contact person to whom to send further information.

The Estate management shall not be held responsible for any damage to people or property during the tour or in consequence thereof.