

# USCIANA Trekking along the river

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The completion time of the itinerary refers to trekkers of medium ability and does not include long stops.

The itinerary is posted by vertical signs marked with the following logos: Consorzio di Bonifica del Padule di Fucecchio (Reclamation Consortium of the Fucecchio Marshes) and Comune di Fucecchio (Municipality of Fucecchio).

The suggested itinerary begins from Ponte di Cappiano, winds along the Usciana river - which flows through the Padule di Fucecchio (Fucecchio marshes) - up to the Padule basin.

Single legs of the itinerary can be covered, by starting from specific posted points of access.

The distance of the itinerary (in meters) refers to the leg immediately before and after the red dot, respectively.

The itinerary also signals hazardous points in connection with crossroads.

The itinerary by mountain bike is recommended solely for expert bikers because, for security and maintenance reasons, the bank of the river cannot be fenced. The itinerary develops almost completely along grassy trails, although an unpaved portion becomes muddy in case of rain.

Access to the itinerary is strictly forbidden to motorbikes and other motor vehicles.

Trekkers are kindly requested not to dispose of garbage in the area and to respect wild life.

The itinerary stands as a key connection between the trekking system in the Padule di Fucecchio and the Francigena Route when it crosses Ponte a Cappiano.

This map reports fauna and flora specimens that can be found along the trail but is nonetheless not exhaustive of the multitude of species that are present in this area.

## THE TRAIL

- 1** We suggest you leave from **Ponte a Cappiano (Cappiano Bridge)**, which is run through by the **Francigena Route**, and leave your car in Piazza Giani car park, on the left of **Canale dell'Usciana (Usciana Canal)**. Walk up along the left bank of Usciana, a tributary of the large basin of **Padule di Fucecchio (Fucecchio Marshes)**, and reach its source, where **canale del Capannone (Capannone Canal)** flows into **Canale del Terzo (Terzo Canal)**. The ground here is grassy; large cropped fields (partly flooded in winter) extend on your right, where large stretches of water mirror groups of migrating birds. On the left, there rise the high peaks of **Cerbaie**, and the gentle hills of **Pantano** and **Porto Burello**. (its name suggests the former existence of an old berth), with splendid and typically Tuscan farms.
- Beyond the half-flooded fields, the beautiful medieval town of **Fucecchio** stands on a hill in the distance. You can also just make out the hills of Montalbano, where there is **Vinci**, Leonardo's birthplace.
- After less than half an hour's walk, you will reach **Ponte di Burello**. Transmission towers can be seen in the distance on your right... what is surprising about them is that two storks have built their nest on top of one of them; born in captivity, the female stork remains on the tower throughout the year, whereas the male stork, born free, regularly migrates to Africa and comes back in springtime. If you wish to have a close look at the storks, go to **Via Querciola**: the tower is very close to the street where there is a descriptive signpost about the return of storks to Tuscany.
- Continuing your trekking itinerary, leave **Ponte di Burello**, crossing the homonymous street, and walk for another 1.5 km, thus reaching **Ponte**

- 5 Marabotti**. The view is stunning. On the north, between two poplar plantations, you can glimpse the Church of **Stabbia** rising on a hill. Between **Ponte Marabotti** and **Ponte di Cavallaia** (roughly 1 km away), the village of **Monsummano Alto** stands on a hill towards the north, against a breathtaking view; the village is clearly recognizable by the traces of its large quarry. Keep on walking along the bank, following the slight loops of the river; on the left, you'll see the hill of **Osanna**, and after a short while you'll reach **Canaletto del Vincio (Vincio small canal)**, just along the bank, with a small lock and adjacent spillway (still in use), which reminds us of the reclamation of the 1930s. We then suggest you walk down along the right bank, going down the short step-ladder, and then walk up along the bank for some metres, using the appropriate slide.
- Once you reach **Ponte di Cavallaia**, cross the homonymous street (leading to **Massarella** to the west and to **Stabbia** and **Cerreto Guidi** to the east) and walk for some 800 metres, thus reaching the point of confluence between the **Terzo** and **Capannone Canals**, thus giving origin to the tributary **Usciana**. The view towards the north-east stretches over the entire **Padule di Fucecchio**. The landscape has the typical features of wetlands with large poplar-woods, and an increasing number of water stretches joined by a wide canal network. Many fauna and flora species can be seen, including fish, birds, mammals and swamp vegetation. Our signposted trail ends here, though you may also decide to walk along the **Canale del Terzo** and penetrate **Padule di Fucecchio**, going straight across it by following its pathways (accessible in the dry season) and reaching other footpaths in Valdinievole.

## IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

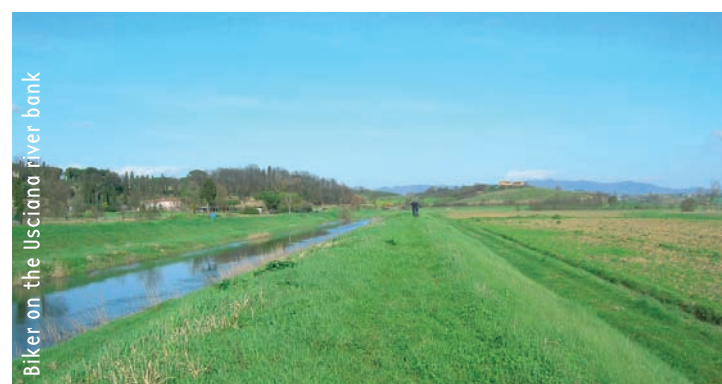
**Fucecchio** develops around Poggio Salamartano, the town religious center. From the top of the Poggio (*gentle hill*) your glance will go so far as to embrace the flatlands of Lower Valdarno and the hills of Cerbaie, up to Mont Serra and the Apuan Alps. The Church of Saint Salvatore and the Collegiata of Saint John the Baptist were built in this space in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but were then completely restored and widened between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In Piazza Vittorio Veneto, formerly known as Piazza Maggiore (*Main Square*), soars the Palazzo del Podestà (*Governor's Palace*), built at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and refurbished at a later epoch. Leaving the square, you will reach the Corsini Complex, which develops over a surface of nearly four hectares. Beginning in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, this complex of buildings was known as the Carolingian castle of Salamarana and, when the town acquired independence, it was turned into a rock whose tall towers have been recently restored. The palace was renovated over the course of time and its present aspect reflects the latest renovations carried out between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The main building, where the noble apartments were located, looks over an inner courtyard surrounded by other minor buildings. Today, the palace hosts the Municipal Library, the Historical Archives and the town hall offices in charge of childhood, adolescence and family issues. Worthwhile visiting is also the Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Vedute, built during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Sanctuary owes its name to the Image of the Holy Virgin which was brought here in 1730 from a village called "Le Vedute". Other places of interest are the Church and Monastery of the Holy Virgin, built at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century at the crossroad of important routes, and the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ferruza, a gracious oratory nearby a Fontana built in past times and known as the Fontana di Peruzza or Ferruza, built toward the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century right beyond the gate of Porta Nuova di Sant'Andrea. Elegant arcades welcome visitors to the oratory, and a characteristic staircase will lead you to the ancient lavatories.

**Medicean Bridge of Cappiano**  
Since the early Middle Ages the existence of a bridge nearby Cappiano has been reported, but it was only in 1550 that this bridge was turned into a monument thanks to Cosimo I de' Medici. In fact, the latter ordered that this bridge be widened and reinforced to as to fulfill several purposes: it was equipped with two towers so as to allow the passage of small boats; it was used to gauge the level of waters; special equipments were placed to exploit water motive power; it hosted the administration offices of a farm that was set up in the nearby area during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The bridge was severely damaged during the war and over a long time it was hidden by scaffoldings placed to secure its stability. After the completion of restoration works, the whole structure was turned into a hostel and it currently hosts cultural events.

**The Francigena Route**  
The origins and the first developments of the town of Fucecchio are tightly linked with the presence of this important road that allowed for connections through Tuscany in Medieval times: the Francigena Route, also known as Romea Route. Nearby Galleno, to the west of the road that



Cappiano Bridge



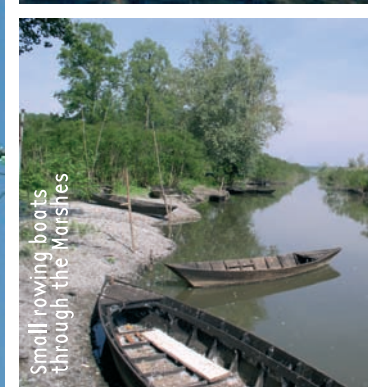
Biker on the Usciana river bank



Stork nest



Villa dell'Opera Pia

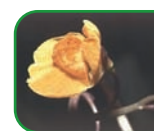


Small rowing boats through the marshes



Holy Virgin with child (Municipal Museum)

## FLORA Short survey of the most important species present on the trail area



**Bladderwort *Utricularia australis***  
Aquatic species, whose length can vary between 5-10 dm. Its branches are freely floating, the leaves have a lamina that is largely segmented. The floral stalk is provided with 3 to 7, and sometimes up to 12, yellow-crowned flowers. It can be found in still, slowly-flowing waters and in marshes.



**Yellow iris *Iris pseudacacous***  
The stem is erect, 40 to 100 cm high, the leaves are linear and elongated, sword-shaped, and show several narrow and parallel nervures; the leaves diverge from the stem on several different levels: the bottom leaves are as long as the stem itself. Petals are big and yellow, and mostly downward-oriented. There are three stamina, above which arise three yellow-colored, petal-like spikes. It grows in ditches, canals, marshes and swamps.



**Lymnathemus *Nymphoides peltata***  
Herbaceous, perennial aquatic species, whose size varies within the range of 5 to 15 dm. Its flexible stems arise from a root and, at the termination, are floating into water; the leaves are simple, the lamina more or less circular-shaped. The flowers are yellow, arising upon long petioles and terminating in small clusters of 2 to 5 flowers. It can be found in marshes and ditches, in case of reclamation areas.



**Yellow pondlily *Nymphoides peltata***  
Perennial aquatic species arising from a source, that can grow as far as 20 dm of length; its leaves have a lamina that is generally surfacing, and are oval-shaped and pointed, their edges slightly undulated. The flowers' diameter size is 4-5 cm, with 5 sepals and plenty of yellow petals. It grows in still or slowly-flowing waters, in marshes, or, in case of reclamation areas, in drainage ditches. Green rhizome roots of this species have been considered a powerful un-a-phrodisiac since antiquity.



**Sedge *Carex elata***  
Marshy bushlike plant; its root system can produce, in the course of the years, a cylindrical base support whose size can exceed 50 cm. Its leaves are linear, their length attaining a maximum of 10 dm, and the spikes are erect. It can be found in marshy flatlands, mainly in inland ones. The leaves, locally called "sedge", were used until a few decades ago for chair padding and wicker-covered bottles.

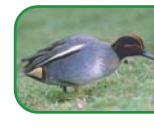
## FAUNA Short survey of the most important species present on the trail area



**White heron *Egretta alba***  
It has long legs and neck, an elongated bill, slender build and white plumage. It is easier to be watched in the fall season, and in the last few years its numbers have shown a remarkable increase. Reproduction happens in northern countries. Nests are built by bird colonies in trees or in reed meadows, laying eggs varying in number from 1 to 6. Adulthood is attained after 2 years, and a specimen can live as long as 22 years. It lives close to shallow freshwater areas.



**Great blue heron *Ardea cinerea***  
It differs from the other heron species for its large size (as big as 90-98 cm of length). Its plumage is ashgray colored, its legs are brownish, and reddish in spring. It is a powerful flyer, with slowmoving and deep wing-flapping. Wing extension, in adult males, can get as wide as 2 meters. It lives near ponds, rice fields, marshes, canals, rivers, lakes and sea coasts. Nests are built in colonies, and a favorite site is to be found in trees at least 25 meters high.



**Teal *Anas crecca***  
It is the smallest-sized European shallowwater duck species: the female is palebrown colored, with a variety of speckled and darkstriped plumage. It shows, at the tail, a white edge totally lacking in similar species. The young bird and the adult plumage male are hardly distinguishable from the adult female. It is a gregarious species, very noisy, and lives near marshes and water courses where vegetation is abundant. It is an excellent diver and a very good swimmer. It lays 7-9 eggs, that are hatched after 23 days. The young ones can fly after 3 weeks.



**Eel *Anguilla anguilla***  
Its body is cylindrical, with plentiful scales and mucous glands. The female, called goby, can attain a maximum length of 150 cm and 4.5 kg of weight. It is light-phobic, mainly active during the night. It is a voracious meat-eater; it likes sinking into muddy bottoms, and lives in sea waters and freshwaters up to 200 km inland. When sexual adulthood is attained, it goes back to sea, where it reproduces and dies, the young ones migrating countercurrent and upriver.



**Carp *Cyprinus carpio***  
Its body is oval-shaped, greenish brown colored on top and yellowish colored in the ventral area. It has a protracile mouth, provided with four barbs, and big regular-shaped scales. It is easy to be found in coast waters rich in vegetation and muddy bottoms. It is ambivalent, living both in fresh and saltwater environments. The female produces up to 2 million eggs, 1mm in size, laying them onto aquatic plants. The larvae remain inactive on the bottom, until the cytoplasmic membrane is reabsorbed, approximately 5-10 days after the eggs are hatched. A 3/4 years old specimen can attain 20/40 cm length (300-1000 gr.), and an adult can rarely get as old as 40 years and as long as 100 cm (25-30kg).



**Mullet *Leuciscus cephalus***  
It has a spinulish-shaped body, grayish back, silver-colored sides, and slightly reddish fins. The species is widely spread in almost all European rivers and lakes, particularly in Western Europe. In mountain waters it travels upriver up to 1000 meters height. It is a great predator: it eats voraciously small fish, shell fish, frogs and fish eggs. The meat, being full of bones, is not considered very valuable. Its average size is approximately 30 cm, but it can attain 80 cm. In fishponds it is often used as food for pikes and trout.



**Stork *Ciconia ciconia***  
It is characterized by white plumage, except for its black tail and wing ends, a red bill and yellow legs. Wing extension is almost 2.60 meters. Stork is a powerful flyer and can reach a speed of 100 km/h. Nests are built nearby rivers, lakes, and even in inhabited settlements (e.g. its typical nests on rooftops). It migrates to Africa during winter. Storks are monogamous and live in couples lifelong. They can live as long as 80-82 years. In average, they reproduce every four years; the female lays three eggs at a time that are hatched after 35 days both by male and female specimens. The young ones can fly after 45 days. They abandon the nest at three years of age and attain adulthood at nine years. At its partner's death, stork utters moans with its bill that resemble a human cry.



**Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***  
The moorhen is a heavy bird with almost brown/black plumage, a white tail band and whitestriped sides, a yellow-tipped red bill and greenishgray legs. Its toes are very long, to allow easy walking through marshy reeds. The little chicks are sootyblack colored, with a bright red bill. The species can be found in freshwater environments. The female lays 5-10 eggs.



**Little egret *Egretta garzetta***  
It is a slender-looking heron with starkly white plumage, a thin black bill and yellow feet. Nests are built in colonies, in trees or bushes, laying 4-5 eggs. The egret takes care of its young ones for 30/40 days, before they are able to fly. The species population in Italy is plentiful, and also wintering in Tuscany is an increasing occurrence.



**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***  
It is the best-known kind of wild duck. The male has a darkgreen head, a reddish hazel-colored breast, a thin white collar and a pale yellow bill, whilst the female has rather unobtrusive colored plumage. This species can live in a large variety of environments: ditches, ponds, water meadows, rivers and lakes. Nests are singly built, in the reeds or under coast bushes. Eggs are laid in number of ten, and hatched after 4 weeks. The second day after their birth, the young ones are able to come out of the nest and start swimming immediately.



**Pike *Esox lucius***  
Its body is elongated, greenishyellow in color, with darker marble shades that give it a definite mimetic quality; the snout is long and flat, with a large mouth and protruding jaw. The backbone fin is set in a backward position. The species is widely spread in slowflowing flatland rivers, and reclamation canals. It lays eggs varying in number from 10,000 to over 100,000, that are hatched in approximately one week. The larvae remain adherent to the vegetation until the cytoplasmic membrane is reabsorbed, occurring after 10 days.



**Garganey *Anas querquedula***  
Small-sized shallow water duck. The male is easily recognizable by its showy pale eyebrow, sharply contrasting with the brownish color of the head, and by the dikedged grayblue shade of the upper feathers. It is a gregarious species, living close to marshes and vegetation-rich water meadows. They are quick, light and irregularly timed flyers. The female lays 8-9 eggs and broods over them for 21-23 days. The young ones are able to fly when just 35-40 days old.



**Black crowned night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax***  
Heavy heron, with a solid short neck and yellowish short legs. Nests are built in colonies, in thick bushes, laying 3-4 eggs. The species takes care of its young for approximately 45 days, before they are able to fly. The bird is active by twilight, when it goes searching for food. The population in Italy is plentiful, and particularly present during migration periods (April/May and September/October).



**Coypu *Myocastor coypus***  
It is a hefty rodent species, with a big head and a short muzzle. It has short five-toed paws, with an inner membrane that makes the animal an excellent swimmer. The fur is very soft, and chestnutbrown colored. It lives and couples by lake or river coast, producing 4-6 rapidly developing little ones. The species has recently made its appearance in Italian humid lands, running away from breeding farms and successfully filling environmental recesses vacated by other animals, or never populated before.



**Tench *Tinca tinca***  
It has a solid and lengthy build, darkish green on top and yellowish in the ventral area, and a large mouth provided with two barbs. The eyes are small, and the body is covered by plenty of mucus, and very tiny scales. It is easy to be found in slowflowing and still flatland waters, in hill and mountain lakes. The female produces approximately 300,000 eggs (around 0.5 kg weight), rather small in size, laying them on aquatic plants. The larvae remain adherent to the vegetation until the cytoplasmic membrane is reabsorbed, occurring after 10 days.

presently links Rome to Lucca, traces of the ancient roadbed are still visible along the basin of the former Bientina marshes to the Fucecchio marshes: these hills are better preserved further to a deviation of the road occurred in recent times.

**Padule di Fucecchio (Fucecchio Marshes)**  
The Padule di Fucecchio stretches over 1,800 hectares of land between the Provinces of Pistoia and Florence and represents the largest marshy area in Italy and one of the most important wetlands in Tuscany. The Padule Natural Reserve is equipped with facilities that allow for excursions, including two fauna observatories; visitors can either have free access to a full range of trails or avail themselves of specialized staff for tours around restricted areas. Guided tours are organized by the Research, Documentation and Promotion Center of the Padule di Fucecchio, a no-profit association that promotes the preservation and enhancement of both the Padule and Silvola Lake areas, as well as other areas in northern Tuscany.

**The Cerbaie**  
Almost two thirds of municipal land are mantled with gentle hills that stretch along the basin of the former Bientina marshes to the Fucecchio marshes: these hills are better known as the "Cerbaie". This whole area represents an extremely important environmental resource, as it is largely covered with luxuriant vegetation. Woods mainly consist of cluster pines and, to a minor extent, of oak trees. The more humid areas are characterized by a particular microclimate that favors the presence of flora specimens that do no longer exist elsewhere. Fauna includes typical Tuscan wood species: here you will easily meet badgers, porcupines, squirrels and many birds such as magpies, woodpeckers and jacksnaws.



# USCIANA Trekking along the river



## Info points:

- Services to citizens Fucecchio Town Hall**  
Piazza Amendola 17 - Fucecchio  
Ph. 0571 26811 • fax 0571 268246  
www.comune.fucecchio.fi.it  
urp@comune.fucecchio.fi.it
- Municipal Library**  
Piazza V. Veneto 26/a - Fucecchio  
Ph. 0571 20349  
biblioteca@comune.fucecchio.fi.it
- Local Tourist Office - Fucecchio**  
Corso Matteotti 61/c - Fucecchio  
Ph. 0571 242717  
info@prolocofucecchio.it
- Research, Documentation and Promotion Center of the Padule di Fucecchio**  
Via Castelmartini 1  
Castelmartini - Larciano  
Ph. 0573 84540  
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- Tourist Office - Vinci**  
Via della Torre 11 - Vinci  
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Usciana Canal

Point of confluence between Capannone Canal and Terzo Canal



