

Sardinia & Corsica

Mediterranean Islands

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 & 2 Giara de Gesturi

As we touch down at Cagliari's international airport we'll likely see our first wildlife before disembarking - Greater Flamingoes feeding in the brackish lagoons alongside the airport! It is just a forty minute drive up to our agriturismo near the village of Turri and so we'll be settled into our rooms and still have time for a stroll before dinner. *Anemone hortensis*, Rosy Garlic and the lovely *Lathyrus clymenum* may be our first flowers in the olive groves and terraces across the road, and we'll soon find our first orchids. The large *Ophrys lutea* is the commoner of the 'yellow bee' types on this island and it grows near the hotel along with *Ophrys incubacea* and some fantastic Pink Butterfly Orchids.

The next morning we'll make the short trip to the 'lost world' of the Giara di Gesturi. The landscape is as unexpected as it is strangely beautiful. Outcrops of pinky-black basalt emerge from marshy meadows and vast dwarf Cork Oak woodlands on plateaux that are two thousand feet above sea level. Prehistoric 'nuraghi' indicate man's long association with the region and these structures, rather pyramid-like in appearance, give the Giara an added air of otherworldliness. We'll soon find early-flowering orchids such as *Orchis lactea*, *Romuleas* and in places *Ranunculus ophioglossifolius*. There are many pools and these are the favoured habitat of Tyrrhenean Tree Frogs and Tyrrhenean Painted Frogs. The endemic *Pancratium Illyricum* will hopefully be in flower nearby.

Days 3 & 6 Sinis

Two thousand hectares of dunes and lagoons is often, rather inaccurately, referred to as Sardinia's 'desert'. There is indeed plenty of sand - and we'll see such plants as *Aristolochia navicularis*, *Silene colorata* and *corsica*, *Matthiola Matthiola tricuspidata*, *Thymelaea tartonraira*, *Brassica tournefortii*, *Linaria sardoa* and **rare** *Helianthemum caput-felis*. Black-winged Stilts and Avocets are amongst a host of waders and on the nearby coast we'll encounter the rare Audouin's Gull. In the salt marshes a highlight will undoubtedly be the strange *Cynomorum coccineum*, parasitic on various chenopods. The dunes have a very good maritime flora with two species of *Dorycnium*, *Astragalus boeticus* and the lovely Barbary Nut joining the more usual medicks, stocks and champions. Under nearby pines we'll find the little green *Gennaria diphylla* and many very fine orchids. The very beautiful *Orchis longicornu* is a frequent sight and we'll see *Neotinea maculata*. Bee Orchids are very varied, and as well as the commoner species we'll encounter *Ophrys subfusca* and *Ophrys morisii*.

Day 4

Cala Mosca & the Molentargius Marshes

Cagliari itself has some wonderful wildlife sites practically within the city limits. The little headland of Cala Mosca has a rich flora along its pleasant trails. Shrubby *Globularia* drapes over banks where pink Weasel's-snout and orange-yellow *Fumana thymifolia* offer their blooms for inspection. Lovely little *Campanula erinus* is common and we'll find pretty *Convolvulus sicula* and *Succowia balearica*. Small groups of Corsican Finches, now generally split from Citril Finch, frequent this area. Butterflies will already be on the wing and amongst the Clouded Yellows and Cleopatras we'll pick out the occasional Corsican Dappled White. Stretching east from the headland are the Molentargius Marshes, one of Europe's top birding sites with nearly two hundred species recorded. Plentiful waders, gulls, terns and egrets will do a grand job if they can drag our attention away from the huge numbers of Greater Flamingoes. The locals call them the 'Esercito Inglese', the English Army, a reference to their ordered pink ranks!

Day 5

Domusnovas and the Sa Duchessa Valley

The hills and the valleys of the Fluminese provide excellent plant-hunting possibilities. A fine mixture of habitats have plenty of the typical flowers of the area such as Kidney Vetch and Friar's Cowl, Cretan Hounds-tongue and Honeywort, Star Clover and *Allium triquetrum*, *Saxifraga corsica*, *Cyclamen repandum* and *Genista corsica* and the lovely deep red Asparagus Pea. Southern Festoons are a colourful sight and Sardinian Warblers scold red-eyed from spiny Calicotome. Fabulous furry Mirror Orchids are commonplace and there are Man Orchids, *Orchis provincialis* and *Serapias lingua* to keep photographers occupied. This is a remarkable area for bee orchids. As well as widespread Sawfly Orchid there's *Ophrys eleonora* with glowing lips of blue and purple, endemic *Ophrys chestermannii* with large velvety flowers, and the gorgeous grey, purple and pink oval-lipped *Ophrys morisii*.

Towards the coast lies a pinewood where the impressive flowers of the tongue orchids *Serapias cordigera* will impress. Violet Limodores will be about to flower and in the driest spots blooms the unusual bulb *Simethis mattiazii*. The bizarre latticed Stinkhorn emerges through pine needles

Day 7

Laconi & Ortuabis

As the land rises towards the impressive Monti del Gennargentu the scenery becomes ever more impressive. Partially wooded slopes are decorated with yellow *Anemone palmata* and the pretty little stars of *Romulea requienii*. Spring will barely have arrived yet already a bee orchid is blooming up here, the recently described *Ophrys ortuabis*, a species named after this very locality, as well as *Ophrys lepida*. Below are terraces with Giant Orchids, *Morisia monanthos*, *Ornithogalum corsicum* and *Gagea granatellii*. Everywhere we'll encounter the lovely pastel shades of Milky Orchids and unobtrusive little Bumblebee *Ophrys*. We'll visit the magnificently

situated little-visited Nuraghi Adoni. Partially restored it provides a remarkable insight into the little-known stone-age culture that created it. *Ophrys eleonorae* and Giant Orchids are frequent but it is the endemic Peony *Paeonia morisii* that offers a particularly breath-taking display.

Day 8

To Corsica

This morning we'll head northwards stopping at a beautiful coastal spot overlooking the Maddalena archipelago for lunch and thence to the north-east of the island and the ferry terminal at Santa Teresa. As we leave the harbour we'll see *Pancratium illyricum* blooming on the coastal rocks. Though the crossing takes only fifty minutes we'll be busy as the strait that separates these two lovely islands are often full of both Cory's and Yelkouan Shearwaters. There is a superb view of Bonifacio on the approach to Corsica. From the terminal in Corsica it's a short journey to our hotel.

Day 9

To Corsica and Ajaccio

After a night at the U Libecciu we'll drive along the wild southern coast before turning north, a variety of impressive landscapes accompanying us. We'll spend much of the day in the environs of the fascinating prehistoric site at Filitosa, deep in the Corsican countryside. Here is the largest statue-menhir on the island, amid several groups of megaliths. It is also an interesting site botanically with masses of Illyrian Sea Daffodils a highlight. Among many other plants are White Ball Mustard, *Moenchia erecta*, and lots of fine *Arisarum vulgare*. The plant highlight for me was the endemic *Cymbalaria aequitriloba*, first found by us here two years ago. The ancient rocks are decorated with Jersey Fern, *Asplenium viride*, *Asplenium onopteris*, and *Asplenium trichomanes*, as well as endemic *Cymbalaria aequitriloba*. Red Kites soar overhead and Sardinian Warblers frequent the scrub. In the afternoon we'll reach bustling Ajaccio and drive through the busy town centre to get to our coastal hotel a little to the west of town.

Day 10

Pointe de la Parata and the West Coast

Square stone Genoese towers top the many promontories that jut out from the rather complicated geomorphology of the West Coast of Corsica. One such promontory ends in the Pointe de la Pineta, just 12km west of Ajaccio. Here *Narcissus tazetta* decorates rocky crevices almost to the high tide line whilst above brick pink porphyry cliffs sweep down to the sea draped with delicate blue-flowered *Convolvulus sicula*. The Pointe points to the Iles Sanguinaires, a line of four islands that form an idyllic scene stretching out into the Golfe d' Ajaccio. Audouin's Gulls fly overhead and we'll see Hoopoes and Crested Larks at the back of beaches where dunes have Dense-flowered Orchid, the stock *Matthiola tricuspidata* and lovely *Silene sericea*. On nearby rocks is the endemic *Limonium articulatum*. *Cytinus ruber* parasitizes *Cistus monspelliensis* (and other nice flora

here includes Small-flowered Catchfly, Weasel's-snout, Fringed Rue, *Stachys glutinosa*, *Euphorbia pithyusa*, pretty *Vicia benghalensis* and *Succowia balearica* with its distinctive hedgehog-like fruits. Green Underside Blue, Clouded Yellow and the endemic Corsican Dappled White will already be on the wing and we'll also see the locally common Tyrrhenian Wall Lizard and hopefully the Moorish Gecko.

We'll see many orchids on this tour and we'll start here with a fine meadow full of *Orchis morio*, *Orchis papilionacea* and two Tongue Orchids, *Serapias lingua* and *Serapias neglecta*. We'll find the tiny light blue stars of *Sedum coeruleum* above fleshy green leaves tinged red. Another tiny, unusual and beautiful plant is *Linaria flava sardoa*, a small yellow flax endemic to Corsica and Sardinia, and we'll also see *Linaria pelisseriana*, an unusual red form of *Fumaria capreolata*, and *Jasione echinata*, a Sheep's-bit only very recently added to the flora of Corsica.

In the afternoon we'll head uphill through the lovely now leafless beech woods with *Cyclamen repandum* becoming common as we go. Roadsides are covered in mats of rosy *Saponaria ocymoides*, blue *Anemone apennina* and magenta *Gladiolus segetum*, as we head into the mountains northeast of Ajaccio. It is just an hour's drive from Ajaccio to Corte and the Restonica Gorge, but we are sure to stop many times! *Orchis papilionacea* is frequent as well as *Orchis lactea*, whilst the drifts of *Asphodelus cerasiferus* are something to behold. We'll spend two of the next three days exploring the magnificent gorges that descend from the flanks of Monte Cinto, an impressive peak, and Corsica's highest mountain.

Days 11 & 13

Restonica Gorge and the Col de Verghio

Fabulous mounds of *Saxifraga cervicornis* adorn shaded rocks close to our hotel in the Gorges du Restonica. Tumbling down through the scenic gorge is a lovely river whose waters are one minute cascading white through giant boulders, the next lucid pools of pale turquoise, the pebbly riverbed giving hints of jade, pink and fawn; a most beautiful sight. With the river on one side of the track and carmine and white colour forms of *Cyclamen repandum* on the other, our cameras will be busy! Bulbous *Brimeura fastigata* flowers in the valley with *Allium triquetrum* and on rocks we may find *Erica terminalis* with the odd flower. *Helleborus argutifolius* has pellucid lime-green petals that seem to shine amongst the dark green rather spikey-looking foliage. Found only in Corsica and Sardinia this hellebore however occurs at all levels on the island. The cries of Yellow-billed Chough echo across the gorge walls and we'll likely see Black Redstart and Crag Martins. Giant Orchid, Lady Orchid and Man Orchid bloom on the shales at Favalello and with luck we can see the Pygmy Lizard, *Algyroides fitzingeri* here. Woodlarks sing about us as we look at some fine rockplants such as *Teesdalia coronopifolia* and the endemics *Coincya monensis recurvata* and *Barbarea rupicola*.

A little to the north we'll find lovely *Saxifraga corsica* hanging from the sheer cliffs of the Scala di Santa Regina. Above the gorge Nightingales sing in the gardens of the little village. This is Calacuccia, set by a beautiful deep-blue man-made lake in a shallow valley below the pinnacles of the northern slopes of Monte Cinto. We'll

see the endemic Corsican Swallowtail here. Small blue *Lupinus angustifolius* and the pink-flushed cream flowers of *Stachys corsica* decorate the neglected stoney terraces around the village with cerise *Orchis papilionacea*. *Pancratium illyricum*, unlike its more widespread beach-flowering cousin, can be found growing far up into the mountains, its heads of striking white flowers an impressive sight. We'll keep a watchful eye out for Lammergeier and Golden Eagle in the skies above.

Amongst dwarf junipers by the roadside on the Col di Verghio we'll find the little green-centred yellow stars of *Gagea fragifera* - there are no less than six species of *Gageas* blooming in these hills during the time of our tour. The lovely lilac *Crocus corsicus*, the outside of the flowers flushed satiny-yellow and etched with deep purple lines, forms drifts on the slopes close to the road and hidden amongst clumps of *Berberis* and *Daphne* we'll find perfect little *Viola biflora*. Descending we'll pass through an area of pines where we'll stop to look for the endemic Corsican Nuthatch, the only species of nuthatch on the island. Down the valleys are gorgeous forests of beech and freshly-leaved chestnuts in which we'll find Firecrests, Serins and more Citril Finches. Stately spikes of *Orchis provincialis* will just be coming into bloom with the local form of *Orchis mascula (olbiensis)*, and abundant blue anemones mix with some beautiful forms of *Corydalis pumila*. Among fresh green birch woods we'll look for intense purple *Romulea requienii*. Descending further into gorges we'll see *Armeria leucocephala* and Burnt Candytuft, a species found for the first time in Corsica by our groups here.

Day 12

The East Coast etc: Aleria, Inzecca Gorge & Col de Sorba.

Today we'll do a circuit down to the east coast near Aleria and back into the mountains via the beautiful Inzecca Gorge, enjoying a great range of habitat and flora during the day. We'll start with some fine old cork oaks under which Sword-leaved Helleborine and the Tyrrhenian endemic *Ptilostemon casabonae* flower. We'll see the attractive legume *Anthyllis hermanniae* in fine flower and down on the coast, with a marvellous photogenic background of snow-capped mountain peaks we'll see Marsh Harriers and enjoy coastal flora such as various orchids, *Lathyrus angulatus*, *Biserrula pelecinus*, Sea Holly, Sea Medick and the unusual *Erodium lebelii ssp.marcuccii*. *Cytinus hypocistus* is plentiful on the Cistuses here and will be in full flower. After lunch we'll head inland where serpentine outcrops have the endemics *Biscutella rotgesii* and *Senecio serpenticola*. We'll see *Dianthus sylvestris godronianus* and *Petrorhagia saxifraga gasparinii* and *Pancratium illyricum* is impressive here. Returning over the spectacular Col di Sorba we'll have another look for the Corsican Nuthatch.

Days 14 & 15

Bonifacio & the Southern limestone

Heading south we'll drop down to the coast, on the way encountering a dense maquis of *Cytisus triflorus* where *Cytinus hypocistus*'s yellow flowers glow from red bracts amongst *Cistus salvifolius* and *Cistus albidus*. The regional endemic Marmora's Warbler is frequent in this habitat alongside more widespread species

such as Stonechat and Sardinian Warbler. Cirl Bunting and Blue Rock Thrushes are also frequent. *Cyclamen repandum* is a frequent sight in shaded locations; it is a very widespread plant on Corsica. Pretty *Erodium corsicum* cascades over rocks close to the sea where we'll also find colourful displays of *Matthiola tricuspidata* and *Anchusa crispa*.

Limestone areas near Bonifacio host endemic *Morisia monanthos* and orchids. There's bee orchids such as *Ophrys corsica*, *Ophrys marmorata* and *Ophrys panormitana praecox*. There's also the gorgeous *Ophrys morisii* and *Ophrys incubacea* amongst plenty of lovely *Bellardia trixago*. The site is rich in rather special plants such as *Simethis mattiazzii* (Kerry Lily), *Ranunculus ophioglossifolius* (Adder's Tongue Spearwort), *Baldellia ranunculoides* (Lesser Water-plantain), *Isoetes histrix* (Mediterranean Quillwort), *Ranunculus revelieri* (endemic to Corsica and Sardinia) and *Erica scoparia*.

Unlike much of the Mediterranean a good percentage of Corsica's shorelines are relatively unspoilt. Impressive hummocks of *Astragalus massiliensis* (Marseille Milkvetch) and *Juniperus phoenicea* (Phoenician Juniper) the fascinating limestone habitats just along the coast east from Bonifacio. *Allium roseum* (Rosy Garlic) of the endemic *insulare* subspecies is common here and is joined by more endemics such as *Limonium obtusifolium* and beautiful *Erodium corsicum*. Also flowering here is *Morisia monanthos*, the pink-flowered *rubriflora* subspecies of Kidney Vetch, and blooming rock crevices both *Narcissus tazetta* and *Romulea requienii*.

The lagoon there attracts various waterbirds and both Small Red-eyed Damselfly and the Island Bluetail are found around its shoreline. Scarlet Darters are also common and we can see Emperor Dragonflies and Keeled Skimmers too. The rare Tyrrhenian Tree Frog is found in such spots along with the unusual Kerry Lily and several broomrapes, including beautiful richly-coloured *Orobanche sanguinea*, (Bloody Broomrape) which parasitises *Lotus cytisoides*. Blooming in the old town of Bonifaccio is the impressive *Ornithogalum arabicum*. There is a richness of quantity and colour to the displays of *Serapias* hardly matched elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Large-flowered *Serapias cordigera* is joined by *Serapias parviflora* and huge numbers of *Serapias lingua*. A perhaps surprising habitat to find a 'citril finch' in but the Corsican Finch is quite catholic in its choice of habitat and can be found at all altitudes!

Day 16

Departure

We'll have plenty of time for a little more local exploration as our return flight departs from the airport just outside Bonifacio.

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