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FAUNA IN SICILY



Walking along woods on the Etna Volcano, the Peloritani, the Madonie and the Nebrodi Mountains, you can taste the nature's smell and enjoy the mountain's silence, but it is getting harder and harder to meet some pretty specimen of the animal world. Hunting, logging, use of pesticide, aggressive tourism are key factors which caused the rarefaction of fauna.

The opening of parks, reserves and other protected natural areas in Sicily, represents a significant turnaround and seeing the Golden Eagle to Etna, Nebrodi and Madonie again is a great hopeful sign. Among the animal species you can meet in Sicily, the most important or common species are:

AMPHIBIANS



Amphibians live close to aquatic environments. The most common species is the **Pool green frog**. Typically aquatic, they populate ponds and streams.

Common Toads belong to terricolous species. They mainly have nocturnal activities and predate small vertebrates such as lizards, rodents and insectivores

REPTILES



Lizards are the most common reptiles. They live on drystone walls and rocks



Green Lizards belong to the Lacertidi family. Their color is bright green and they are very fast in movements. They are like lizards, but they have a larger body than them. They do not climb easily and prefer to be camouflaged among the grass

Ocellatedskinks, gongilos, are small reptiles, half snake and half lizard. Their legs, can reach up to 30 cm in length. They have a small head, a cylindrical body and very small legs that allow them to move by winding.



In Sicily they are better known as "tiraciatu" because in the past, people believed they were attracted by the infants' breath and for this reason mothers feared they might get close children's cradles. They are not dangerous for men. They belong to a shy diurnal species, which gets scared and runs away



Among snakes we can see the , Green Whip Snakes and the European ratsnakes, the Aesculapion snakes, the grass snakes and the common vipers, that are the only poisonous snakes. Anyway vipers rarely attack and prey small mammals (especially rodents), lizards and birds.

BIRDS

There are many winged animals and many of them are protected. Where you see diurnal raptors there are large uncontaminated spaces.

Sparrowhawks are rare small raptors linked to the woods. They are agile and fast animals and they mainly hunt small birds.



Buzzards are big birds that live in mountain areas. They nidify In undisturbed woods They hunt small mammals and rabbits, but they eat also terrestrial birds, reptiles and insects.



Kestrel does not build nests but uses natural cavities and abandoned nests of other birds



Peregrine Falcons are strong flyers that nidify on rocky walls or trees, in abandoned nests. They hunt birds of medium size



After many years, Golden Eagles returned to make their nest on Etna, on the Nebrodi and on the Madonie. They eat mammals, birds and reptilians.

MAMMALS

There are many types of mammals that you can see in green areas and even in urban areas: hedgehogs, bats, rabbits, hares, dormouses, oaks, black rats, house mice, wild mice and porcupines.

You can find Foxes in urban centres and in the most frequented tourist structures, or Weasels, all around cultivated areas. Wild cats are difficult to observe because of their reserved characters and their nocturnal habits.

Cirneco of the Etna is one of the oldest dog breeds in the world. They are typical animals on Etna volcano. They are men and hunters' friends. Cirnecos arrived in Sicily in the 4th BC from Africa and are one of the oldest known representatives in Greyhound . Studies on Mediterranean races show they origins derive from ancient hunting dogs. They were bred during the Pharaonic age in the Nile valley and they were taken to Sicily by the Phoenicians. Recent researches show Cirnecos belong to a native breed in Sicily and exactly in the Etnean region, In fact coins and engravings show that Cirnecos had been here for many centuries before Christ.



They are primitive type dogs. They have elegant and slender shapes. They are medium-sized, muscular and strong. They have straight and wide ears, slender posture, long and agile legs.

Cirnecos are very good at finding hares and rabbits, and at hunting pheasants, partridges, woodcocks, quails.



Hedgehog

Hedgehogs' body is entirely covered in short and thick thorns, except for a narrow strip on the neck. The thorns are as a weapon for them. When hedgehogs are threatened, they close on themselves and form a ball of thorns that is hard to predate.

They are very common in Sicily, even if they are not easy to meet.

They live in wooded areas especially in cool and sheltered areas such as hedges and bushes.

They eat insects, molluscs and other invertebrates, but also small birds, amphibians, reptiles and small mammals.



Bats are the only flying mammals. They fly only at dusk and at night when eat insects. They emit ultrasounds from their mouth or nose. During the day they take refuge in caves or in natural cavities or buildings where they are hung upside down



Italian hares live in open areas in central-southern Italy and in Sicily. They eat buds, roots, tubers, barks, fruits, etc. They are very fast and smart. If you find a hare, before getting out from its den, it shoots, jumps, turns around. In this way it masks its own smell and mislead possible predators.



Foxes live in woods, among bushes. They are omnivorous and they predate rodents, rabbits, birds, insects and other invertebrates. They are animals with a prevailing nocturnal activity and take refuge in deep dens. You can see them in various areas of Sicily



Deers are native animals to southern eastern Europe. They were extinct in the 19th century in Sicily. In the '80s they were reintroduced by the State Forestry Company. In the Madonie park they are not more than 300 units



Boars are progenitors of pigs. Their legs are longer than pigs' legs, they have long muzzle and they are leaner than pigs

Porcupines



Porcupines' body is covered by hard hair. They live in dry, rocky places. They eat fruits, roots and bulbs and take refuge in dens dug or in caves.