

UNGULATES IN THE PROVINCE OF MANTUA

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The province of Mantua is located in the south-eastern part of the Lombardy region. Its wedge-like shape stretches between the neighbouring regions: Veneto region to the North and Emilia-Romagna region to the South. The country is mostly flat, except for some moraine hills in the northern part of the territory. It is characterised by intensive agriculture and urban development, as well as high levels of environment fragmentation and occupation. Some important rivers cross this land: the Po River along with its tributaries, Oglia, Chiese, Mincio and Secchia Rivers.

Since 2000 it has been held a data collection and georeferencing activity, concerning some species of ungulates: mostly roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*, Linnaeus, 1758) and recently wild boar (*Sus scrofa*, Linnaeus, 1758) and red deer (*Cervus elaphus*, Linnaeus, 1758). In the past some fallow deers (*Dama dama*, Linnaeus, 1758) sightings were recorded, but it surely concerned some escaped exemplars, as they concerned ungulate farming areas and no further sightings followed.

The data mainly comes from direct observations from line transects spotted by highly qualified and trustworthy experts and from *ad hoc* surveys (spotlight night count, camera-trapping as well as indirect census method) and from the analysis of bibliography and local press.

The latest historical ungulate sightings in the plain around Mantua seem to date back to the end of the 15th century. In written texts dating back to 1825 and 1870 no reference to their presence was found. The first recent roe deer sighting in the province of Mantua can be found in 2004. From 2004 to 2008 no further sightings followed but they have significantly increased since 2011. More than sixty deer sightings were reported all over the province until January 2016. At the beginning they concerned solitary exemplars, young or adult males, as in 2010 the number of animals that live in groups led by adult females has increased. The first recorded accident dates back to the 2008 and took place near the Oglia River, on the borders with the province of Cremona. Then other accidents have followed: since 2009 five car accidents and one train accident have been recorded. It is also documented that there are several stable reproductive groups distributed throughout the province, specifically in wooded and semi-natural areas (even if included in highly urbanized contexts) and along river courses. As stated in the data, currently the local distribution is highly influenced by the sightings distribution; anyway there is clearly a strong link with the first-level elements of the Lombardy Regional Environment Network (R.E.R.) and consequently with the protected areas system and the main waterways in province of Mantua.

Concerning the wild boars, all the sightings were reported in 2015 and they mainly involve five areas: the first one is the central-west part of the province, on the borders with the province of Cremona, the second one concerns the southern part of the province, on the borders with the province of Reggio Emilia, the third one is the northern part of the province, on the borders with the province of Brescia and the province of Verona (where some striated animals have been recorded). Furthermore, close to the Mincio River, in the southern part of Mantua an exemplar crossed the road and various sightings have been recorded while, in October 2015 a car accident took place in a small village close to the Mincio River in the northern part of the city of Mantua. This information confirms the phase of colonization currently taking place in the province of Mantua.

In October 2014 two male red deers were photographed in Casatico, near the Parco Regionale Oglia Sud, in the central-west part of the province. It was not possible to verify if they were escaped exemplars, as no further sightings of this species followed.

The emerging picture shows how even a highly anthropomorphic and fragmented territory, as the province of Mantua is, can support reproductive group of ungulates. However, this leads the territorially competent authorities and all the involved persons to take charge of the implications.

Therefore it is extremely important to undertake a systematic and structured monitoring activity, aimed to the development of suitable guidelines and more appropriate management actions in such a complex territory, as the province of Mantua is. These activities should focus on safeguarding and taking into account all the interests of the categories involved in the ungulates presence in the province of Mantua.