



Visit to Elba – Friday 28 March to Saturday 5 April 2025 – with one night in Pisa and seven in Porto Azzuro

Elba is about 28 km long and 19 km across at its widest point, with a curious shape that resembles that of a fish. It is the largest of the islands forming the Tuscan archipelago and its highest point is Monte Capanne (1019 metres). Since 1996, half of it has been deemed to be in the Tuscan Archipelago National Park.

Our tour will focus on the diversity of the native vegetation landscape and on the early-flowering flora, which we will explore in relatively short walks and some longer hikes. To enjoy it, members should be comfortable to walk four or five kilometres a day (sometimes on rough and steep) trails, and to have good walking shoes with anti-slip sole, a comfortable backpack and a waterproof outdoor jacket. Trainers are not adequate footwear. Other members are welcome if they are prepared to find alternative things to do on their own and to cater for themselves when they opt out of a walk or walks.

The wild flora of Elba Island is very rich – around 1,100 species were recorded in the latest checklist of the island – and the natural vegetation and landscape are varied because the island lies as a natural bridge between mainland Tuscany and Corsica, thus hosting both West Mediterranean and Apennine (East-Mediterranean) species. Moreover, the island has a complex geology, that includes patches of both granite and limestone, leading to the occurrence of both acidophilous and basiphilous plant communities.

The island is also famous for its wealth of different minerals and its ancient mines – with iron ore extraction dating back to the Etruscan period (7th century BC). Vegetation types we will walk across include: holm-oak coppicewoods (in April often with nice *Cyclamen repandum* flowering); acidophilous garrigues, dominated by many *Cistus* species (probably not yet in flower in early April) and by *Lavandula stoechas*; limestone garrigues, dominated by *Rosmarinus officinalis* and *Erica multiflora*, often rich in early-flowering orchids; thorny-cushion vegetation, dominated by the Italian endemic *Genista desoleana*; Chestnut woods, rich in early-flowering geophytes; macchia of the warm and exposed coastal cliffs, with *Anthyllis barba-jovis*, *Lavatera arborea*, etc.; tall-grass vegetation dominated by *Ampelodesmos mauritanicus*; annual grasslands of the abandoned terraced vineyards, that can host a high number of orchids and other early-flowering herbs.

We will be based in a simple small hotel in Porto Azzurro (a nice old fishing town on the east coast of the island) and each day a 20-seat minibus will take us to the start of the walks. Lunches will be either in simple cafés or bars at the end of the morning walk, or picnics during the walk in case of longer hikes. Dinners will be in restaurants a short walk from the hotel.

The possible walks will include, depending on the weather and group mood:

- From Marciana to Poggio: 5 km, 200m height gain (N-facing slopes of Mt Capanne, with chestnut woods and creeks)
- From Viticcio to Biodola: 4 km, 50 m height gain (lovely walk along coastal cliffs and small coves, with sea-sprayed macchia)
- Capo d'Enfola: 3 km, 100 m height gain (scenic promontory with *Cistus* and *Lavandula* shrubland)
- From Pomonte to Colle della Grottaccia and Vallebuia: 9 km, 600 m height gain (wonderful and very scenic hike in a south-facing valley reminiscent of the landscapes of Corsica)
- Cavo and Monte Lentisco: 4 km, 150 m height gain (lovely fishing town and nice views)
- From Marina di Campo to Mt Poro and back to Marina di Campo: 6 km, 200 m height gain (holm-oak woods, rosemary garrigue, south-facing cliffs)

We will also enjoy a free half-day to explore Porto Azzurro on your own or just relax.

Other possible activities/visits:

- take the chair-lift to the top of Mt Capanne from Marciana;
- easy walk to Madonna di Monserrato above Porto Azzurro;
- very easy walk from Porto Azzurro to Barbarossa beach;
- visit the old town in Portoferraio;
- visit the two villas (one in Portoferraio, one in the countryside) used by Napoleone Bonaparte during his Elba exile in 1814;
- visit the Roman villa near Portoferraio or the environmental-art garden by Italo Bolano;
- visit the areas of the old iron mines on the south-west promontories;
- explore a couple of sandy beaches reachable with a very short walk (e.g. Fetovaia or Lacona).

Plants of interest because they are endemic or because they should be particularly showy at the time of our visit. More detailed botanical information and species lists will be sent later on to the interested members:

Allium subhirsutum

Allium triquetrum

Anemone apennina

Anthyllis barba-jovis

Asphodelus microcarpus

Calicotome villosa

Crocus biflorus

Crocus ilvensis (= *C. etruscus*)

Cyclamen repandum

Cytinus hypocistis

Erysimum cheiri

Euphorbia dendroides

Euphorbia spinosa

Genista desoleana

Hyoseris radiata

Lavandula stoechas

Leopoldia comosa (= *Muscari comosum*)

Linaria capraria

Mattiola incana

Narcissus tazetta

Orchis morio

Ophrys bombyliflora

Ophrys crabronifera

Ophrys lutea subsp. *corsica*

Ophrys fusca

Ophrys sphegodes subsp. *classica*

Pancratium illyricum

Serapias vomeracea

Tulipa pumila

Viola alba subsp. *dehnhardtii*

Viola corsica subsp. *ilvensis*