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UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE
DOLOMITES

South Tyrol Nature Parks

Fanes-Sennes-Prags/ Fanes-Senes-Braies Nature Park

In the animal kingdom

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NATURA 2000

Nature Park Fanes-Sennes-Prags/Fanes-Senes-Braies

Cover image
Heiligkreuzkofel/Sasso di Santa Croce
Photo: Alfred Erardi

In the animal kingdom

Immense rock walls rise above dense forests, enclosing the karstic highlands of Fanes and Sennes/Senes.

Wide alpine meadows and colorful pastures filled with flower species stretch beautifully across the Armentara and Plätzwiese/ Prato Piazza, creating various habitats that are home to a variety of wildlife.

Geology and Hydrologic Balance

Like an arena, the highlands of Fanes, Sennes/Senes and Fosses are surrounded by a ring of steep mountains. The rocks here are about 190 to 225 million years old. They are intermingled with Main Dolomite, which is also the rock that constitutes the mountain borders of the Rautal/Val di Rudo valley, the lower part of the Kreuzkofel/Sasso della Croce Group in the west, and the Conturines in the southern part of the park. After this come the Rhaetian Dachstein limestone and the gray (Jura) limestone, which are decisive features of the landscape: the bright, markedly striated limestones of these two formations form the peaks of the Hohe Gaisl/Croda Rossa, the Seekofel/Croda del Beco, the Kreuzkofel/Sasso della Croce Group, La Varela and Col Bechëi.

During the tectonic deformations that occurred during the Alpine orogeny event, the limestone formations were erratically distorted and folded in some instances, and molded into forms like the steps of an amphitheater in others. In places of steeper parallel slope stratification, such as that found at the Zehnere/ Sasso delle Dieci, Neuner/Sasso delle Nove, La Stiga and Seekofel/ Croda del Beco, whole sections of rock have sheared off, creating massive, house-sized groups of boulders at the feet of the mountain slopes.

At Limosee/Lago di Limo and on the southern slopes of the Paromspitze/Cima Parom-Sas dai Bec (Großfanes/Gran Fanes) mountain ridge one finds reddish ammonite limestone embedded with fossils of spiral ammonites (a cephalopod that became extinct about 145 to 180 million years ago). Extremely folded gray and reddish lime marl are cut from the path below the Faneshütte/Rifugio Fanes alpine hut. This lime marl sunk into the older gray limestone due to tectonic activity.

The most recent marine deposits in the Dolomites are found at the Col Bechei (2,794 meters) above the Limosee/Lago di Limo lake. During the Tertiary period around 230 million years, when the Alpine folding process was in full swing, one final foray into this area by the sea left behind breccia (sedimentary rock formed of coarse, square-shaped rock debris, incorporated in a fine-grained groundmass), conglomerate (sedimentary rock, at least 50 percent of which consists of rounded gravel and debris), sandstone and limestone containing balanids (ostracods), remains of red algae, bryozoa, and foraminifer.

More than any other area of the Dolomites Fanes, Senes and Fosses are characterized by karst. Carbonic acid dissolved in water has weakened and dissolved mainly the Dachstein and gray limestone, but also the Main Dolomite. This chemical erosion led to hollows such as the Conturines being formed. In the Nature Park it is possible to observe almost all typical karstic elements: crevices, channels, shafts, and dolines in which lakes periodically form, and funnel-shaped sinkholes into which streams disappear under the ground. These resurface further down in the valley as powerful karstic streams pouring out of impermeable strata forms.

Habitats, animals and plants

The Fanes-Sennes-Prags/Fanes-Senes-Braies Nature Park is home to many different habitats: mixed coniferous forests, dwarf shrub heaths, mountain pines, talus slopes, rough cirques, steep cliffs, rocky highlands, bogs, streams and lakes, as well as traditionally cultivated Alpine pastures. The diversity of habitats present corresponds to an equally diverse presence of flora and fauna.

Forests

About a quarter of the Nature Park is covered with forests. The largest portion of this is spruce forest, which makes up about twelve percent of the whole. The pine forest accounts for around six percent, and the larch-pine forest for about seven percent of the total surface covering.

Spruce forests are mainly found around the Puster Valley, in Prags/Braies, and in the area around Armentara. The use of traditional forestry methods and the adaptability of this species have promoted their proliferation. Spruce forests thrive upon acidic silicate and limestone soils. A distinction is usually made between the montane and subalpine spruce forests. The montane spruce forests thrive on fresh slopes at altitudes between 1,200 and 1,400 meters; the trees are broad-domed and seldom have branches down to the ground. The undergrowth in these forests is extremely sparse. The subalpine spruce forests that grow further up have trees with pointed tops and branches that reach down to the ground. The spruce forests are usually quite shady and their undergrowth is composed of acidic soil-loving species such as blueberry, cranberry, sorrel and goldenrod. The branches and trunks of the spruce trees are often overgrown with lichens. Contrary to common belief, these parasites are not harmful to the forest, but are rather symbiotic organisms of algae and mushroom. The lichens are extremely sensitive to air pollution and therefore make reliable indicators of the air quality.

In the undergrowth of the nearby clearings are pyramid-shaped ant hills (sometimes up to one-meter-high) constructed by red ants. These ants have a highly developed social structure and fulfill an important role in the forest ecosystem: they control the populations of other insects and are an important food source for many animal species. The treetops are often filled with chirping groups of coal-, crested- and Alpine marsh tits and Eurasian treecreepers, searching for seeds and insects as they fly from tree to tree. Squirrels can also frequently be seen in the trees, searching for the spruce seeds upon which they feed.

In the nearby tranquil forests of the Natural Park live two rare species of grouse, the wood grouse and the hazel grouse. Grouse are a bird family characteristic to the vast coniferous forests of the northern hemisphere; their species settled in the Alps during the ice ages. The wood grouse needs mature, sparse forests with thick undergrowth for food and cover, whereas the hazel grouse, while also preferring dense ground vegetation, tends to stick to younger and bushier forested areas.

Scots pines typically grow in areas of shallow soil, littered with ground debris such as in the Rautal/Val di Rudo and Höhlenstein/ Val di Landro valleys. This clear forest type is characterized by rich herbaceous-shrubby undergrowth that comprises heather, bilberry, juniper, common Amelanchier, and fragrant flowers such as the striated daphne and plants such as the dark columbine and the rare lady's slipper. The older Scots pine forests, especially those with a certain amount of dead wood make ideal habitats for the black woodpecker, the largest European woodpecker species. This bird is completely black with the exception of a bright-red forehead and an ivory beak. It feeds on insects and larvae, using its powerful beak to extract then from the wood. The woodpecker carves out its nests with a particular oval-shaped opening and these play an important role for the forest ecosystem once they are abandoned by the black woodpecker. They become homes for other species, such as the boreal owl, a species that breeds almost exclusively in abandoned woodpecker holes. These nests also become homes to many insect species such as wild bees, or even mammals like the pine marten.

As one goes higher up, the spruce and Scots pine forests mostly give way to larch- Swiss pine forests. These often constitute the upper limits of the forest and extend (in the area of Großfanes/Gran Fanes, Kleinfanes/Pices Fanes, and Plätzwiese/Prato Piazza, for example) up to a height of 2,000–2,200 meters, where they slowly merge into the krummholz landscape. The Swiss pine spread throughout the Alps from its original Siberian habitat during the ice ages. As a species it is well-suited to survival in cold regions and can bear up under temperatures as low as –30 °C.

Among the various shrubbery that thrives in these forest formations, one can find the rusty-leaved alpenrose and the hairy alpenrose and cranberries. These are interspersed by spruce, green alder and rowan trees. The herbaceous layer contains mountain germander, clematis and the bearded bellflower. Some of the animals that make their home here are the nutcracker (a small, dark brown corvid bird, with white spots that feeds mainly on pine seeds and contributes significantly to the spread of this tree species. Many of the pine nuts that it gathers and buries for winter stores are never found again, and thus are able to germinate in spring.

The timberline

The areas of the forest that lie between 2,000 and 2,200 meters above sea level that have not been cleared by man, take the form of either a dwarf shrub heath or a krummholz belt. Above this area, the land gradually gives way to alpine grassland communities. The krummholz belt is home to plants such as the alpenrose, blueberry, cranberry, common Amelanchier and the mountain pine. In the more humid and acidic soils, we can find green alder, alternating with small isolated larch or Swiss pines. This area is home to various characteristic species, such as the black grouse. Black grouse are black and white, with red wattles and a distinctive, lyre-shaped tail. Another species found in the krummholz belt is the alpine hare, whose gray-brown summer coloration, and pure white winter fur and paws specially adapted to the snow, make it perfectly suited to living in this Alpine environment. Its long, greatly expandable paws are covered with stiff hair that allow it to move especially well through the snow.

In the extensive Swiss pine forests it is possible to observe redpolls and crossbills flying from bush to bush in search of seeds. Despite the harsh climatic conditions, the krummholz belt is also home to several species of amphibians and reptiles. Among the species found here are the grass frog, the Alpine newt, the Alpine salamander and the European viper, although their frequency here is much less than at lower altitudes. The European viper is the most common snake species found in the Nature Park. It is characterized by its gray or brownish-red color and the dark zigzag band on its back, though it may also be completely black.

Although it is a poisonous snake it is not very dangerous for a healthy adult, but in the event of snake bite it is necessary to seek medical care.

Alpine meadows and rocky regions

The Alpine meadows which lie above the krummholz belt and extend over the limestone plateau of the Park are interspersed with scree and rocky ridges. This extensive calcareous grassland, which appears not unlike a lunar landscape, is not only scenically impressive, but also hosts a variety of animal and plant life. Special representative of this habitat are edelweiss, various types of gentians, nigritella, Alpine rockrose, helianthemums and various species of saxifraga. A typical animal species found in the high plains around Fanes, Senes/Sennes and Plätzwiese/Prato Piazza is the strongly represented Alpine marmot. It lives in family groups and digs deep burrows into which it can retreat in case of danger. The burrows are also used for winter hibernation, which last from the end of September to May.

Rocky areas of scree and rock debris cover large areas of the Nature Park. In the extreme conditions of this habitat with its nutrient poor soils, lack of water, intense sunlight, wind exposure and high temperature fluctuations, only the most highly adapted organisms can survive. Thus on the scree we can find the round-leaved pennycress, whose deep and branched root apparatus allows it to colonize even the most unstable rubble piles. Then there is the bright yellow Rhaetian Alps poppy, the Alpine toad-flax, the dwarf alpine rose, the Dolomite cinquefoil. Tufts of devil's claw grow on the rock debris. One of the most representative animal species of the rock and scree areas is the wallcreeper, easily recognizable by its long curved beak, butterfly-like flight and habit of hunting for insects by climbing over the cliffs. Its black, white and red colored wings make it strongly resemble a broad-tailed hummingbird. Similarly connected to this habitat is the chamois. Apart from the mating season at the beginning of winter, the male goats live alone. The herds, which can be seen on the cirques in the summer, are only made up of females and kids.

The Human Factor

Although the Fanes-Sennes-Prags/Fanes-Senes-Braies Nature Park is full of naturally beautiful and unique landscapes, the presence of man can be seen and felt in many places. Centuries of cattle grazing has continued to expand the pastures and hay meadows at the expense of the mountain forest. When these lands are managed properly – as fortunately they are almost everywhere in the Nature Park – and not intensively farmed, they are landscapes of great value and significant biodiversity. The old, traditional wooden "barns" make the landscape often even more beautiful. One of the most beautiful hay meadows in the Nature Park is situated 1,700—2,000 meters above sea level. Known as the Armentara, it is located at the foot of the Kreuzkofel/Sasso della Croce Group in the Gadertal/Val Badia valley, which is characterized by a considerable wealth and variety of flora.

Equally impressive are the pastures of the limestone plateau, which for centuries were traditionally used as summer pastures for the cattle. Around Fanes, Senes/Sennes, Fodara Vedla and Fojedöra there are still small meadow villages with houses made of limestone and wood. In some places the old dwellings of the shepherds are still standing. Although these settlements have partially lost their original function, there is still a special charm and magic about them. It was in fact probably here on the long summer nights in front of a fire that the ancient Ladin legends arose that were passed on from generation to generation, telling of old empires that fell long before and recounting the history and culture that left their imprint on these valleys.

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Fig. 1
An endemite of the Dolomites: Moretti's bellflower
Photo: Maurizio Bedin

Fig. 2
Pragser Wildsee/Lago di Braies – one of the most beautiful mountain lakes in South Tyrol. It is dominated by the Seekofel (2,810 meters).
Photo: Nature Park Archives Office

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Fig. 3
The squirrel is found throughout the forests of the Park. Though it spends almost the entire winter hibernating, it may sometimes be spotted searching in the snow for its hidden caches of food.
Photo: Maurizio Bedin

Fig. 4
The lady's slipper is the most common and visible of the native orchids. It is only found in forests with calcareous soils.
Photo: Renato Sascor

Fig. 5
In contrast to the Senes/ Senne plateau, that of Fanes has more surface water. The photo shows the Rü de Fanes in Groß-Fanes/Gran Fanes.
Photo: Nature Park Archives Office

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Fig. 6
The golden eagle has a large presence in the Park and is at the top of the food chain. In the summer this bird of prey mainly feeds on marmots, while in winter it tends primarily to eat dead hooved animals, and occasionally fruit.
Photo: Maurizio Bedin/ Walter Nicolussi

Fig. 7
The Parliament of the marmots on the small Fanes plateau shows the uniqueness of this landscape, and the geological and morphological wealth that characterize the entire Park area.
Photo: Nature Park Archives Office

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DOLOMITI
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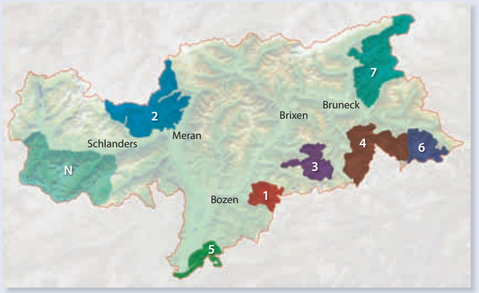
UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE

Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage Site

In summer 2009, due to their scenic beauty and their geomorphological and geological significance, the Dolomites were added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This carefully chosen list of sites includes the most outstanding and unique natural or cultural assets, whose protection is particularly important for the international community. The Dolomites and with them also the **Fanes-Sennes-Prags/ Fanes-Senes-Braies Nature Park** have thus been awarded the greatest recognition a natural asset may receive. Such recognition, however, also confers certain duties and responsibilities relating to the conservation and sustainable development of this extraordinary mountain region.

Fanes-Sennes-Prags/Fanes-Senes-Braies Nature Park (4)

Area: 25,453 hectares, established in 1980



1 Schlern-Rosengarten/Sciliar-Catinaccio Nature Park
2 Texelgruppe/Gruppo di Tessa Nature Park
3 Puez-Geisler/Puez-Odle Nature Park
4 Fanes-Sennes-Prags/Fanes-Senes-Braies Nature Park
5 Trudner Horn/Monte Corno Nature Park
6 Drei Zinnen/Tre Cime Nature Park
7 Rieserferner-Ahrn/Vedrette di Ries-Aurina Nature Park
N Stilfser Joch/Stelvio National Park

South Tyrol Nature Parks

Nature parks are of particular importance for the preservation of nature and landscapes, education and research, and providing an opportunity to experience nature. The concept is based on a few clear principles:

1. South Tyrol Nature Parks protect and preserve the diversity of the mountains with their habitats, plants and animals.
2. Information, environmental education and a special nature experience offer visitors a new understanding of nature and promote good governance.
3. The Nature Parks comprise mountains, pastures and forests; permanent settlements are not part of the area.
4. Forest and alpine farming and transhumance are maintained using sustainable methods.
5. No construction is permitted (except for the forest and alpine farming and transhumance). No overhead lines, mines, gravel mines or use of water for hydroelectric or industrial purposes is allowed.

A Brief Overview of the Nature Park

Exceedingly high, nearly impassable rock walls tower above dense forests in the Fanes-Sennes-Prags/Fanes-Senes-Braies Nature Park, enclosed by the Abteital/Val Badia valley in the west, the Pragser Tal/Val di Braies valley in the north, the Höhlensteintal/Valle di Landro to the east and the Travenanzestal/Val Travenanzes valley in the south. Behind these mountain ranges extends a very special landscape: the pastures of Fanes, Senes/Sennes, Fosses and Plätzwiese/Prato Piazza. It is no wonder that the local Ladin legends recount tales of long-ago fallen empires and fossilised paradises. The protected area is accessed by the two branches of the Pragsertal/Valle di Braies valley, St Kassian/San Cassiano in Abtei/Badia or the Rautal/Val di Rudo valley behind St. Vigil in Enneberg/San Vigilio in Marebbe. Visitors enter into the world of the "Pale Mountains", as the Dolomites are also called, full of barren karstic plateaus, glimmering mountain lakes beneath pale towering peaks, wide scree slopes and the colorful flowers of Alpine meadows. In the southwest area of the Park, at the foot of the Kreuzkofel/Sasso della Croce Group, La Varela, Conturines and Lagazuoi are the villages of the Abtei/Badia valley: Pedratsches/Pedraces, St. Leonhard/San Leonardo, Stern/La Villa and Sankt Kassian/San Cassiano. A lift runs from St. Leonhard/San Leonardo over the mountain meadows and forests almost to the foot of the Heiligkreuzkofel/Sasso della Croce. Beneath an imposing wall sits the Sanctuary of the Holy Cross – a symbol of man's impotence against the forces and dangers of nature. The Prager Wildsee/Lago di Braies, set in a rock basin, is the most impressive lake in all the Dolomites. Just like the Toblacher See/Lago di Dobbiaco lake, it was dammed in by massive landslides. From the Brückele/Ponticello parking area in Altpragsertal/Valle di Braies Vecchia valley a road branches (with bus service in the summer) off to Plätzwiese/Prato Piazza, the flowering paradise located at the feet of the Hohen Gaisl/Croda Rossa and the Dürrensteins/Dolomia del Picco di Vallandro.

Nature Park communities

Toblach/Dobbiaco: 3,319 inhabitants, Area 12.633 hectares, of which 2,816 hectares are part of the Nature Park
Tourist office: Ph. +39 0474 972132, www.toblach.info

Prags/Braies: 669 inhabitants, Area 8,926 hectares, of which 6,916 hectares are part of the Nature Park
Tourist office: Ph. +39 0474 748660, www.pragsertal.info

Olang/Valdaora: 3,114 inhabitants, Area 4,895 hectares, of which 1,593 hectares are part of the Nature Park
Tourist office: Ph. +39 0474 496277, www.olang.info

Abtei/Badia: 3,388 inhabitants, Area 8,294 hectares, of which 1,924 hectares are part of the Nature Park
Tourist office: Ph. +39 0474 847037, www.altabadia.org

Enneberg/Marebbe: 2,945 inhabitants, Area 16,134 hectares, of which 10.861 hectares are part of the Nature Park
Tourist office: Ph. +39 0474 501037, www.sanvigilio.com

Wengen/La Valle: 1,300 inhabitants, Area 3,903 hectares, of which 1,343 hectares are part of the Nature Park
Tourist office: Ph. +39 0471 843072, www.dolomitisuperski.com

Nature Park Archives Office

Nature Park Archives Office

Fanes-Sennes-Prags/Fanes-Senes-Braies Visitor's Center in St. Vigil in Enneberg/San Vigilio in Marebbe

Open: from early May to the end of October and the end of December until the end of March, Tuesday to Saturday 9:30 am – 12:30 pm and 2:30 pm – 6:00 pm; in July and August also open on Sundays. Admission free!
Ph. +39 0474 506120
info.fsp@provinz.bz.it
www.provinz.bz.it/naturparke

Key

- Nature park boundary
- Access road
- Waters
- Parking lot
- Closed road
- Alpine hut
- Tavern/Rest station
- Visitor's center
- 12 Marked hiking trail
- Difficult path
- Secured via ferrata
- lift
- Pass/gap
- Provincial border

Alpine emergency signals

- Within 1 minute emit 6 audio/visual signals (at 10 second intervals)
- Pause for 1 minute
- Repeat the signal (until a response is received)
- Response: 3 signals within 1 minute

Emergency number for mountain accidents

Provincial emergency call center 118

Park regulations

- No motor vehicles, use public transport to access the Park.
- Stay on the trails.
- Avoid making noise.
- Do not throw anything away, do not take anything (mushrooms, plants, minerals).
- Tents? Camping? No. Please have consideration for the facilities of the Park.
- Fire hazard! No campfires, no grills. Cigarettes?
- Take your time, and enjoy the experience.