

Pisa's Dromedaries

The handsome Tenuta di San Rossore, located near Pisa, approximately three kilometres from the city centre, is a natural park well worth a visit. The more than 4,800 hectares covered by the park are characterised by a great wealth of animal and plant species.

Not everyone knows that in the park there are also three dromedaries, two females and a male. They were donated to the park in 2014 by the *Agesci Scout Group*. Before arriving in Pisa, the three animals were already accustomed to a non-African climate. In fact, one of the females comes from the *Parco Faunistico Le Cornelle*, in the Bergamo province; the other two from the *Parco Faunistico Leopark* of Gualdo Cattaneo, in the Perugia province.

The tradition of having dromedaries in San Rossore has a long history. The first specimens were introduced in 1622 by the Grand Duke Ferdinand II de' Medici, who had received them as a gift from Africa. In reality, they weren't a novelty for Tuscany, as it seems that these exotic animals had existed here since the Middle Ages. Although they were perhaps introduced mainly as a curiosity, Grand Duke Francis III decided to take the matter seriously and attempted breeding them. The animals found a favorable climate and fitted perfectly with the local ecosystem. It was therefore a great success.

Other Italian sovereigns, envious of the Grand Duke's success, tried breeding the animals but failed. The dromedary could not be acclimatized to any other part of Tuscany except for San Rossore. Over the course of time, the total number fluctuated because of cold winter weather and diseases, but in 1789 there were a total of 196 animals. They gradually started to be seen as another Italian livestock species, but during the Second World



Dromedaries cleaning the beach

War their number was reduced to fewer than seventy. They had been slowly diminishing in number because of sales, lack of donations, diseases, reduced grazing areas and modern breeding methods that required the disposal of weak animals, and they totally disappeared when they were slaughtered for meat.

Today, there are plans for helping them breed. Their presence is important because they contribute to the restoration of the sand dunes ecosystem along the coast, as these animals help clean the beach without damaging the dunes. The three dromedaries roam freely in the park, and the *Centro Visite San Rossore* organises guided tours to spot them.

The park entrance is free and the park is open to the general public at weekends and festivities, while during the week it is open for pre-booked organized tours.

– by Chiara Calabrese

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*To reach the Tenuta di San Rossore, take the n. 6 bus from Pisa (Viale Gramsci-Barbaricina), get off at Viale delle Cascine and walk the 3km to the entrance.
Or, you can rent a bike in Pisa.*

Postcard from Pisa (about 1920)

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