

Some reasons to reconsider dunes an important habitat to protect

7/27/2019

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Just a couple of weeks ago I was told by my friends 'let's go an attend an evening event at the beach all about the local dunes - there is also a moonlight walk planned'. Okay, who wouldn't fall for that? Let's forget an evening of Netflix and chill **and out we embark on an exploration about the local dunes...**

The event was organised by a friend who happens to work on a big European project, called [Life Redune](#), part of the 'life' programme, that aims to 'restore and maintain the ecological integrity of a set of dunes listed under the *annex I of the european habitats directive*'. Now, I would like to mention that like maybe some of you, I also did not know that much about dunes before this event. Yes I could guess that they were important for the ecosystem, and I know that some were protected, as they can host of some rare vegetation (and in turn some peculiar insects), but I didn't know just how diverse they could be!

Well, first of all dunes are situated at the border between the sea and the land, thus are what we consider transition habitats. These are diverse habitats per se, as some species need to be more adapted to live closer to sea conditions while other closer to the land, creating a special mix and having species in the middle which are special to the ecosystem as they adapt to the mid-level conditions.

Turns out, however, that they are not all the same. Dunes can be quite different depending on where you are. Since we were in the Venice area, we had a lesson about the dunes local to us. The dunes in the Veneto area are fairly particular, and if I have understood correctly, this has something to do with the special position so close to the mountains (and yet at the sea), and that seeds from mountain plants travel down the many rivers and bring down some plants that establish on the back of the dunes system. On top of that, the dunes here are hosts to some endemic species , some of which pretty rare, like *Stipa veneta* (just a few thousands individuals left...).

Unfortunately, like many other special places, dunes have also experienced extensive damage. Interestingly, I learnt that most of the dunes were lost during the Second World War , as lookouts were needed (so they were flattened) and after that, there was no time to think about rebuilding them

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so what can you do:

1. **Don't pick dune vegetation.** Even if they are pretty flowers or nice smelling herbs. Leave them be
2. **Don't walk on them** , unless there are specified paths
3. **Insist that your local councils maintains them and protect them** (boardwalks can be useful addition!)
4. **Spread the word and get informed** on any project that you can get involved in

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