

The Eastern Carnic Alps - Flora and Fauna

by Dr. Hermann Verderber

The Carnic Alps are not only at the crossroads of three cultures - Slavic, Romanic and Germanic, but they also represent a link between the influences from the east, south and north in terms of flora and fauna. Migratory birds use the cuts in the mountains for their migrations, just as people have done for a long time. The same applies to the plants, which naturally require more time for this.

If we look at the flora of the Carnic Alps, we find unique treasures here, e.g., the famous *Wulfenia carinthiaca*, which is found worldwide only at Nassfeld and crosses the national border here. According to its name, the Carniolan lily (*Lilium carniolicum*) comes from the Slavic region and feels particularly at home on the southern slopes of the Carnic Alps. Manna ash, laburnum and hop-hornbeam are trees that bring the Mediterranean influence to the Gailtal Valley. It is very interesting that through the gorges and ravines of the Gailtal Valley, mountain plants such as alpine rose, auricula, etc. have partly penetrated down into the valley. This can be observed very well in the Garnitzen Gorge and the Mauthen Gorge. However, the vegetation in the Schütt at the foot of the Dobratsch is also very much influenced by the Mediterranean. This results in highly complex habitats and unique biotopes with many botanical rarities. On the other hand, the edelweiss, which has migrated from the east, has also become a characteristic plant of the Carnia. In the area around the Plöcken Pass, the magnificent white paradise lilies are a wonderful greeting from the south and the alpine sea holly (*Eryngium alpinum*) delights with its steel-blue petals.

The term "fauna" covers animal life from insects to large predators, including fish and the world of birds. In recent years, bears and wolves have increasingly been seen in the Carnic Alps, with bears probably having migrated mainly from Slovenia, where there is still a large population. Wild boars also roam the forests from time to time. The high-alpine regions are mainly populated by chamois, while deer and roe deer prefer the valley and mountain slopes. Ibex are not found in our region. Griffon vultures from Friuli frequently drift over our mountains, as do golden eagles. Rock ptarmigan, black grouse and Western capercaillie are endangered representatives of their species.

Due to climate change, higher regions such as the Gailtal Valley are also becoming interesting for thermophilic species, such as the death's head hawk moth or the privet hawk moth. One of the most beautiful butterflies, the Apollo, flutters through its territory on south-facing rock formations. The wasp spider also travels on its threads from the south into the Gailtal Valley and hunts there - for dragonflies, for example.

During bird migration in spring and autumn, Lake Pressegger See is an important resting place for waterfowl that spend the winter on the Adriatic Sea and travel north in spring. An interesting phenomenon is the migration of honey buzzards across the Val Canale to the Dobratsch, with several thousand individuals within a few weeks. Thus, our area offers the possibility for wonderful and special nature observations from pass to pass in all seasons.