A culinary voyage

Bassa Reggiana

The land’s products

Cucina

Here you'll discover a familiar cuisine, with its time-honored traditions and homely flavors.

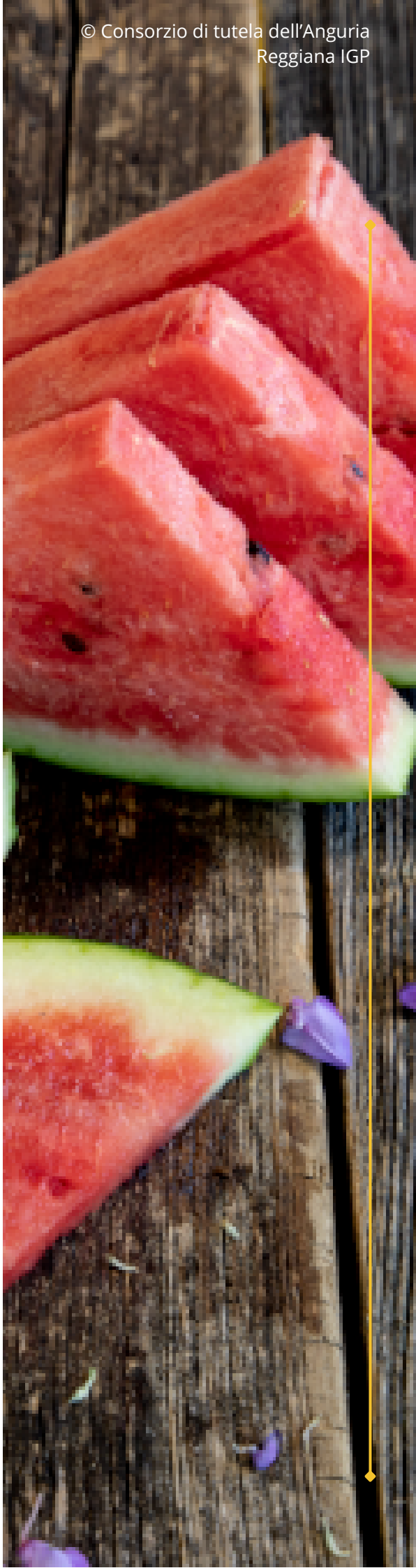
Let's begin with the land's products - the precious raw materials of classic recipes and centerpiece of local festivals.

Anguria Reggiana Igp

LThe **Anguria Reggiana IGP** is one of the sweetest watermelon varieties - a sugary fruit known for its refreshing and beneficial properties, thanks to which it earned the **IGP mark** (*Indicazione Geografica Protetta – Protected Geographical Indication*). No other watermelon varieties in Italy or in Europe have been bestowed with it!
Rich in antioxidants and a significant source of vitamin C, it helps strengthen the immune system. These health benefits, combined with its origin in compact yet cool and well-drained soils, make this watermelon a true summer icon in the Bassa Reggiana region.

Its production is based on three main seed types: the *Ashai Mijako*, with a roundish shape; the *Crimson*, which is oval; and the *Sentinel*, characterized by an elongated form.

Together, they give rise to a fruit that, in Renaissance times, was considered a delicacy reserved for the nobility. Today, this heritage is celebrated in the annual festival **Miss Anguria** (lit. *Miss Watermelon*) in Novellara.



Antichi Meloni Reggiani

The cultivation of the **Antichi Meloni Reggiani** (*Ancient Melons of Reggio*) is typical of the valleys of Novellara, Santa Vittoria, and Guastalla, where several historic varieties are still grown:

> **Melone Ramparino**: with pale flesh and intense, slightly spicy flavour, this melon owes its name to its ability to climb over stakes, nets and other supports while it grows (*rampare* > *to climb*; "*ramparino*" > *the one who climbs*). Known since the 17th century, it was once common in the lands near the River Po. Cultivation, however, soon declined due to its fragility and limited sweetness.

> **Melone Rospo** (*Toad Melon*): resembling a pumpkin in shape and warty to the touch (hence nicknamed "*toad*"), it is flavorful with a slightly spicy taste.

> **Melone Banana of Santa Vittoria**: named for its delicate banana-like aroma, this winter melon has white flesh and extremely thin rind.

> **Melone Banana of Lentigione**: smooth and roundish, with tender, sweet flesh and a strong fragrance. Its origins remain mysterious, and it was traditionally cultivated only in the Sorbolo and Brescello areas.

Zucca

The **zucca** (*pumpkin*) is one of the most characteristic vegetables of the Bassa Reggiana, especially since it lies at the heart of many traditional recipes of the area, some of which date back to the Renassaince.

These includes various *risotti* (rice-based dishes) and above all the classic *tortelli di zucca*, a delicacy that brightens kitchens and tables throughout the Po Valley. Pumpkins from this territory encompass a wide range of varieties, the most beloved being the **zucca violina**, with its elongated shape, and the traditional **zucca Reggiana e Mantovana**, usually nicknamed "***cappello di prete***" (*priest's hat*) for its distinctive rounded form.

So dear is this vegetable to the local culinary traditions that, each year, in Reggiolo, the **Fiera della Zucca** (Eng. *Pumpkin Fair*) is held, celebrating it with tastings and seasonal specialities.

Cipolla Borettana

The **cipolla** (*onion*) is a bulb whose origins can be traced back to the ancient civilizations of Turkey, Egypt, Iran, and India, where it was already a staple food for peasants and servants as early as 4000 B.C. Thanks to its versatility, it quickly spread across the world, evolving into a vast range of shapes and varieties. In the Po Valley, the **cipolla borettese** (*onion of Boretto*) emerged and, from the 15th century onwards, became a staple on the tables of local families.

This particular variety is renowned not only for its distinctive flavor, but also for its remarkable **beneficial properties**: it combines detoxifying qualities with a richness in mineral salts (including calcium and phosphorus), Vitamin C, and the ability to help regulate blood glucose levels.

Enjoyed both as a side dish and as a snack, the *cipolla borettese* is today officially recognised by the Province of Reggio Emilia among the 42 species of local **biodiversity** to be safeguarded and preserved.

Prugna Zucchella

The **prugna zucchella** (*zucchella plum*) is a small, succulent fruit whose very name reflects its most distinctive trait: it comes from the local dialect word *suchéla*, meaning "*juicy*".

With humble origins, it was introduced to the fields of Brescello in the early 17th century by Slavic laborers brought in under Maria Luigia of Austria, whose duchy at the time extended as far as Guastalla.

Since then, the fertile and mineral-rich soils of the Po Valley have given this plum its characteristic sweetness.

Today, the *prugna zucchella* is cultivated mainly in Lentigione, which is why it is also affectionately known as the ***prugna di Lentigione***.
To promote and celebrate this unique fruit, the Associazione per la Valorizzazione della Prugna Zucchella (*Association for the Promotion of the Zucchella Plum*) was established.

Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale D.O.P.

The **Aceto Balsamico** (*Balsamic Vinegar*) is one of the true gastronomic treasures of the Bassa Reggiana. Its roots lie in a centuries-old tradition: as early as 1046, it was praised in the poem "*Vita Mathildis*" by the monk Abbot Donizione.

According to its production regulations, only local grapes may be used to prepare the must, which, after fermentation, undergoes a long and patient aging process in barrels made of different types of woods. This passage of time and variety of woods create the remarkable range of aromas that make the *Aceto Balsamico* unique.
Only after **at least twelve years** of careful work, is the vinegar ready for collection and bottling.

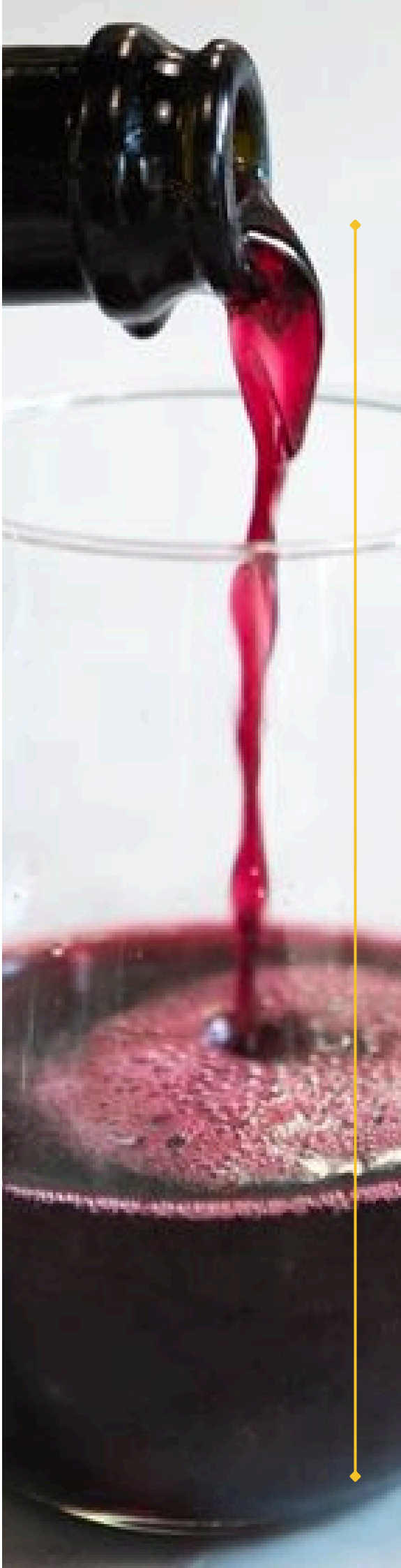
In the Bassa Reggiana, visitors can discover this tradition first-hand at the **Acetaia Comunale of Novellara**, as well as in several private acetaie, where this precious vinegar is carefully preserved and where the art of making it is passed down from generation to generation.

Vini locali

The **Fogarina** is a black grape variety that gives its name to the wine produced with it. Once widely cultivated across the province of Reggio Emilia - where it accounted for up to 80% of the total wine production in the municipalities of Boretto, Brescello and Gualtieri - *Fogarina* is today recognized as a **DOC** wine (*Denominazione di Origine Controllata, Denomination of Controlled Origin*) a guarantee of its authenticity and place of production. Its distinctive traits are its lively acidity, deep purplish-red colour, fruity aroma and late harvest.

Lambrusco Reggiano, recognized as a **DOC** wine since 1996, is a sparkling wine whose colour ranges from ruby red to rosé. It is typically enjoyed young, lively, and slightly sweet.

Much appreciated as aperitifs, they both pair beautifully with traditional specialities of local street food, such as *gnocco fritto* and *erbazzone*.



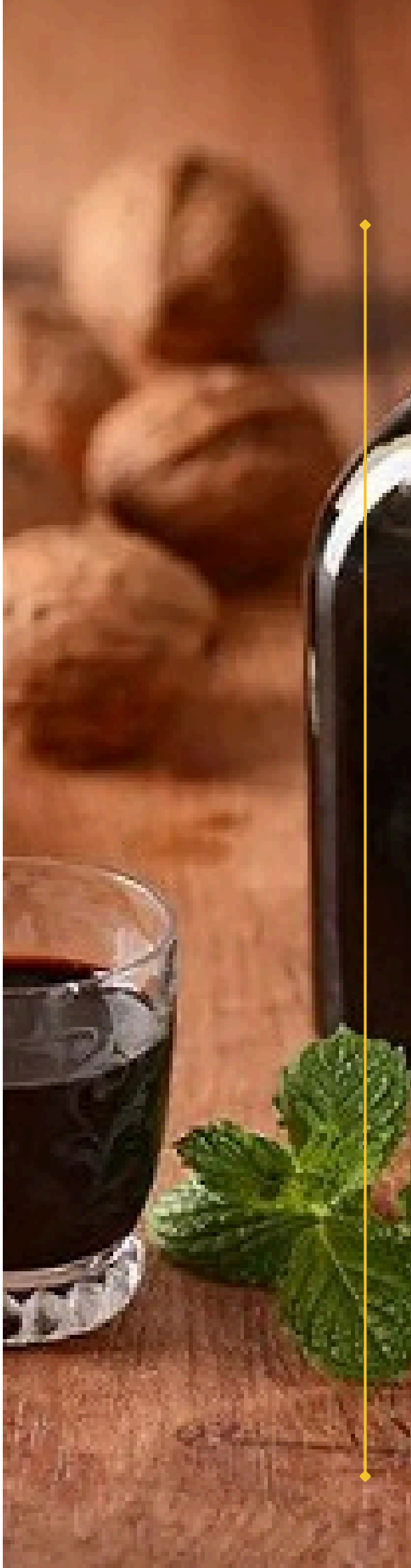
Nocino

The **Nocino** is a dark, dense liqueur traditionally served as a digestif.

It is obtained from walnut husks, the pulpy and aromatic outer shells that enclose the fruit and its wooden case. The walnuts used for production come from old hillside trees and must be harvested at just the right stage: not too immature -otherwise the *Nocino* turns greenish- nor too ripe, which would result in a sour, woody liqueur.

Its origins are somewhat mysterious: the Romans attributed it to the *Picti*, a Gallic people. Probably introduced from France, it soon became surrounded by an aura of esotericism, as walnuts were often associated with spells and witchcraft.

Traditionally, the walnuts were gathered on the night of **San Giovanni** (St. John's Day), picked with bare hands on account of the belief that iron tools would compromise their medicinal virtues. After harvesting, they were left to macerate.



Parmigiano Reggiano

Parmigiano Reggiano is a hard cheese - firm in texture due to its low moisture content and long aging period - whose origins trace back to the Benedictine and Cisterian monastic communities of the 12th century.

It was in the castles and abbeys of that time that the first diaries devoted to its production were established.

Traditionally, *Parmigiano Reggiano* was made using the milk of **Red Cows**, a breed introduced to Italy during the barbarian migrations. Today, **Friesian cows** are also among the most commonly used breeds for its production.

This cheese is a **DOP** product (a PDO product, *Protected Designation of Origin*, a European certification that safeguards typical high-quality products by linking them to their area of origin and protecting them from counterfeiting). Only cheeses produced according to strict regulations are entitled to bear the name "*Parmigiano-Reggiano*" and display the identifying marks engraved on the rind of each wheel.

Miele

Honey has always been part of rural culture, though it was later appreciated for more refined uses, especially as a pairing with fine foods. In Italian cuisine, some of the most beloved combinations are *Parmigiano Reggiano* with the amber-colored *honey of Erba Medica* (*alfalfa*) and fresh *ricotta* with the delicate sweetness of *Acacia honey*.

Local tradition particularly values the golden, aromatic **miele di Tiglio** (*honey of linden*), sometimes added to the filling of *tortelli di zucca*; and the dark, slightly bitter **miele di Castagno** (honey of chestnut), most often paired with *gorgonzola*.

The latter, celebrated for its soothing and nourishing properties, is also widely used in cosmetics, such as face and hair masks.

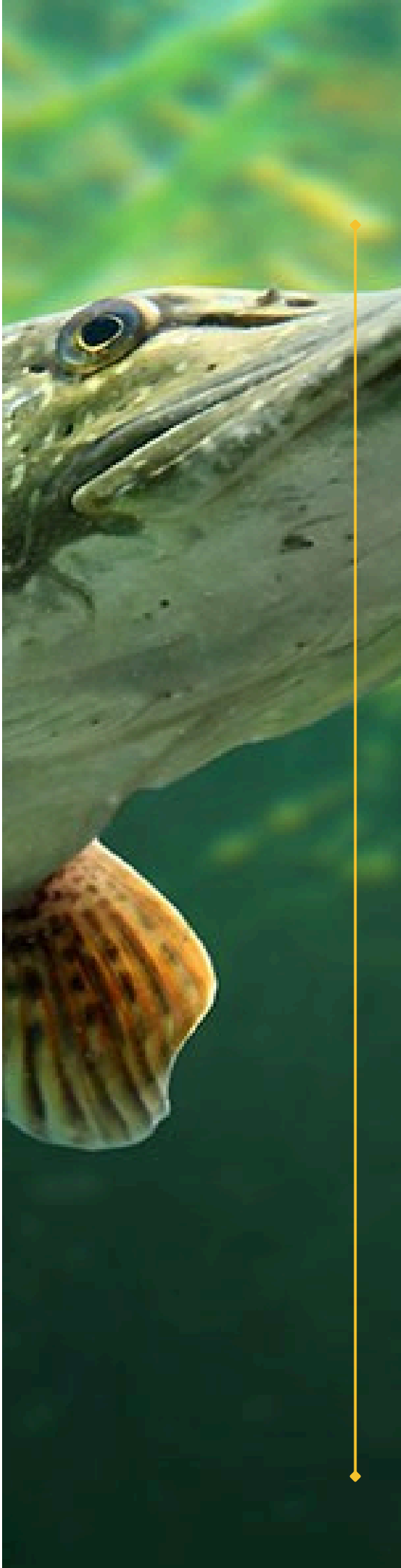
Luccio

The **Luccio** (*pike*) is a freshwater fish with a very distinctive appearance: it has sharp, powerful teeth and a long mouth shaped like a duck's beak.

These features make it a key predator in maintaining the balance in its habitat, as it helps prevent the overpopulation of particularly prolific species.

This fish, which can sometimes weigh up to 30kg (almost 70 pounds), is an important inhabitant of the **River Po** and has left its mark on local culture as well: the name of **Luzzara**, originally *Luciara*, actually derives from this creature.

It also plays a notable role in culinary tradition. After being slowly boiled for many hours, it is typically served with a sauce of capers, vinegar, oil and peppers, often accompanied by slices of toasted *polenta*.

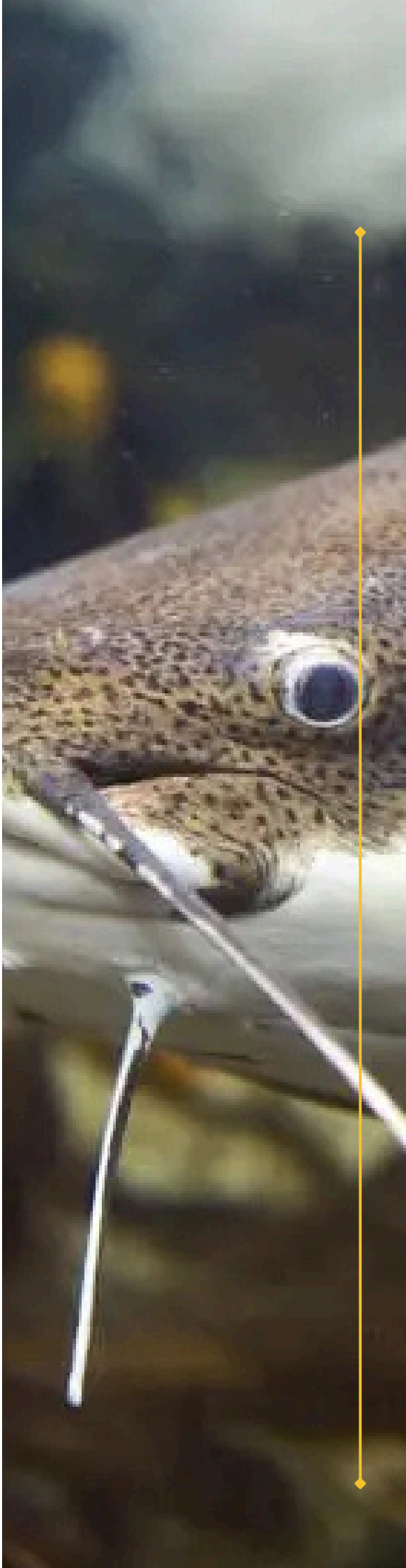


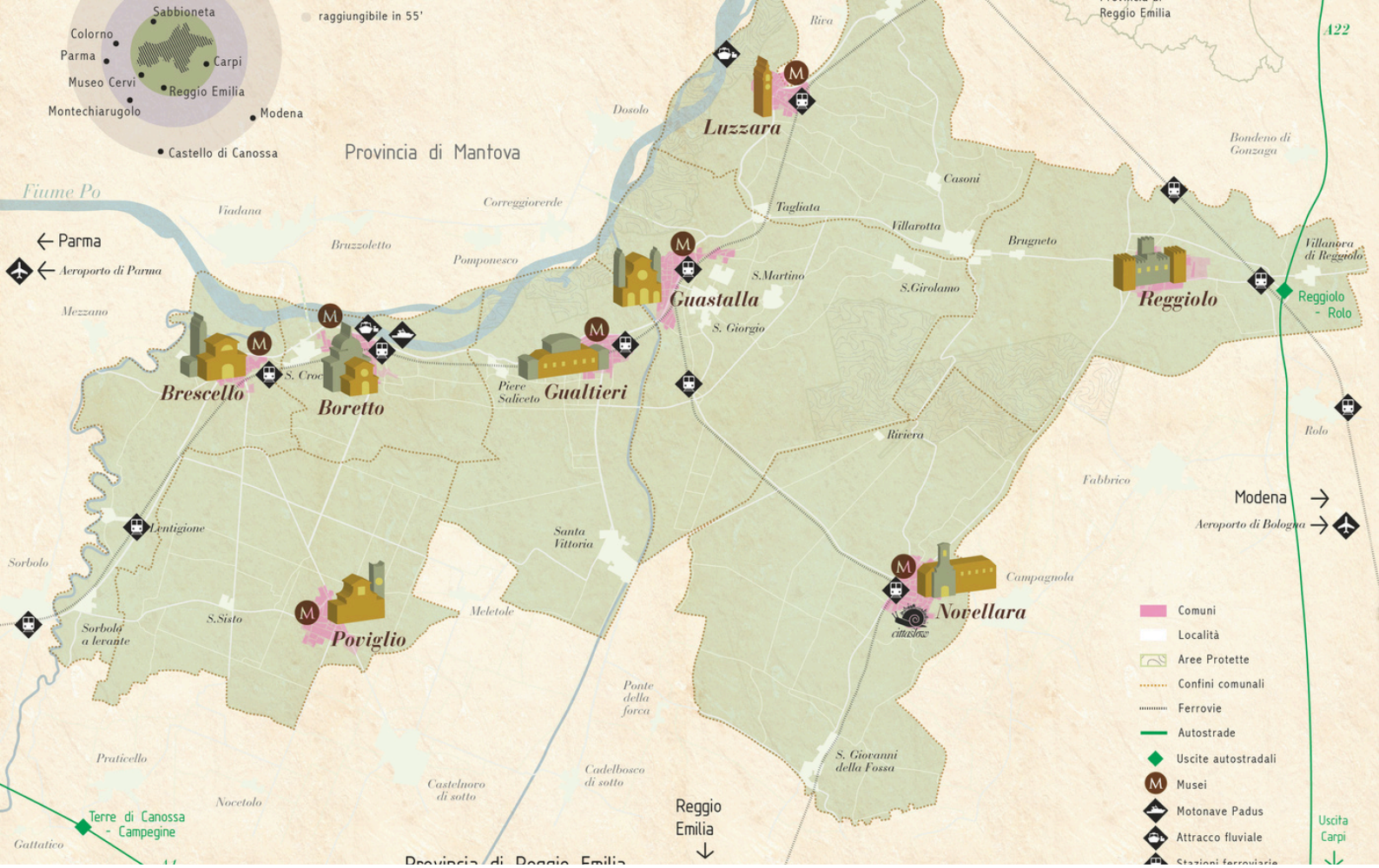
Pesce Gatto

IThe **Pesce Gatto** (*catfish*) is a fish of remarkable adaptability and endurance. It can survive even in brackish, oxygen-poor waters and withstand temporary droughts, though it prefers stagnant or shallow, slow-flowing environments. It is commonly found in the lower stretch of the River Po and in drainage canals.

Thanks to both its hardiness and the flavor of its flesh, it is also raised in ponds through extensive fish farming. An allochthonous species, it was introduced from North America in the 20th century and has since spread throughout the entire Po basin.

Beyond its culinary value, the *pesce gatto* also plays an important role in safeguarding the **river ecosystem**, as it feeds on invasive and harmful species.





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Terre di Po e dei Gonzaga

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Partnership and contribution

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