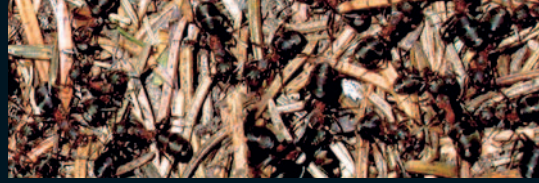




Conifers play a dominant role in the mountain forest landscape - the Alps in particular. The larches and pines which have grown in these areas for centuries are familiar components and often essential in daily life.



The low vegetation which develops at the foot of these trees is considerably influenced by the acid soil and often covered by large carpets of moss, but it also hosts many precious grasses which are relicts of the Ice Ages.



Life inside conifer woodlands is less easy than their evergreen foliage might indicate (only larch loses its leaves every year). This is because cones and pollen offer little in the way of food, and the timber is protected by resin.



But these protective devices do not hinder the development of interesting specialised fauna, and large nests of red ants are characteristic and widespread.



For centuries, the mountain forests have been exploited and manipulated by man, so that their original aspect has been greatly changed and, with it, their evolution. Today, a definite cultural (rather than economic) commitment is necessary, in order to conserve, improve and enhance this natural patrimony, which deserves to be better known.

