

A large, ancient cork oak tree with thick, textured bark stands prominently on the left side of the frame. The background is a dense forest of similar trees, with sunlight filtering through the leaves, creating dappled shadows on the ground. In the lower right foreground, a black cow is grazing on the grass. The overall scene is a peaceful, natural landscape.

SIERRA DE
ANDÚJAR

A TRIP THOUGH THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN



The Sierra de Andújar is home to the largest expanse and best conserved Mediterranean vegetation within the Sierra Morena. It is located in the northwest corner of the province of Jaén. The area became a protected area when it was declared a Nature Reserve in 1989, and occupies an area of 74,774 hectares. The zone represents one of the last refuges for species such as the wolf, the Iberian lynx, the imperial eagle and the cinereous vulture, all of which are under serious threat of extinction. It is dominated by low slopes that are covered with ilexes, scrubland and meadows, with rugged terrain to the north and narrow ravines marking the pass of rivers and streams with lushly vegetated banks. The Nature Reserve includes the Lugar Nuevo and Selladores Game Preserves, two of the most famous Hunting Grounds in the South of Europe. Since 2003, the region has been recognised as a Special Protection Area for Birds. In addition to its natural features, the Sierra de Andújar is known for the fact that it contains the Sanctuary of the Virgen de la Cabeza, which is visited each year by thousands of pilgrims.



HISTORY

The Sierra de Andújar has been inhabited since the prehistoric era. Its gentle slopes, rich mineral deposits and the fertility of its meadows, irrigated by the Guadalquivir, drew many peoples, cultures and civilisations to this location.

Milestones and eras

As a result of the gentle slopes of the Sierra de Andújar and its proximity to the fertile land surrounding the Guadalquivir, the area has been populated since time immemorial. Hundreds of human settlements, some dating back to the Palaeolithic, have left their mark in the form of paintings on the

walls of caves and hollows. These peoples were aware of the extent of the area's mineral riches. Deposits of bronze, iron and silver were used to manufacture the funerary effects and attire of the Iberian aristocracy, and allowed Roman colonisers to establish a flourishing trade in the area. Mining in the area declined significantly under Muslim rule, which, nevertheless, inaugurated a new era of development in the



region that lasted up until 1225 when the area was conquered by Fernando III. Shortly after this event, in the heat of the sierra, one of the oldest and most venerated Christian churches was erected: The Sanctuary of the Virgen de la Cabeza. The Castilian nobility built mansions and stately homes in Andújar and Baños de Encina from the 16th century onwards and enriched the region by financing the construction of churches

and convents. In Marmolejo various inns were set up to provide accommodation for illustrious visitors who came to bathe in the locality's famous medicinal spa. At the beginning of the 19th century, in Villanueva de la Reina, General Castaños amassed an army that would provide the Napoleonic troops with their first taste of defeat in Bailén. On the 22nd of July 1808, in Casa de Postas, the French troops signed their surrender.



Granite core

The Sierra de Andújar covers an area of 74,774 hectares that form a part of the Sierra Morena mountain range, which stretches across the north of Andalusia, from one side to the other. The rolling hills of the Sierra possess the dark colours of the sandstone and slate of which they are composed. The quartzite masses, the oldest material in the massif, form the tallest and most abrupt peaks to the north of the nature reserve, where the peak of Burcio del Pino is the highest, at a height of 1290 metres. By contrast, the southern area of the reserve is dominated by granite that forms a part of the Los Pedroches batholith, representing the lowest point within the range which drops to 400 metres in the River Jándula Valley. Several streams carve their way through the smooth orographical features of the region before merging with the Guadalquivir, giving rise to deep ravines and steep valley walls that are noteworthy for their exceptional beauty. Along with the River Yeguas, River Sardinilla and the River Cabrera, the River Jándula is the most important river in the reserve. Its waters, subject to severe seasonal changes, are gathered in the Jándula and Encinarejo reservoirs. These calm artificial lakes provide a perfect opportunity for sailing and fishing. Moreover, the Encinarejo reservoir also boasts a recreational area.

GEOLOGY

The slate and granite blocks that are characteristic of the Sierra Morena dominate the landscape of the Sierra de Andújar Nature Reserve. The area is filled with gently sloping hills and mounds with a few heights and a large number of rivers that form narrow ravines.

An aerial photograph of a forest landscape. A river flows through the center, surrounded by dense green trees. The surrounding area is a mix of green and brownish-yellow trees, suggesting a transition between different forest types. The word 'FLORA' is written in large, white, serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

FLORA

The ilex is the most common tree in the Sierra de Andújar, and appears in single-species clusters or next to gall oaks and cork oaks, growing over dense Mediterranean scrubland. At higher levels we find clusters of sessile oaks.

The Mediterranean Forest

The ilexes cover a considerable portion of the surface area of the Sierra de Andújar Nature Reserve. In some places they grow singly on wide sunny grasslands, meadowland that provides grazing for fighting bulls. In the areas with most shade, the ilexes are interspersed with clumps of gall oaks and cork oaks and dense scrubland made up of heather, strawberry tree, cistus and terebrinth. The most important vegetation in the reserve is concentrated in the northern area, where we find clusters of sessile oaks on the highest peaks of the Sierra Quintana.

Endangered species

The majority of the large and medium-sized mammals that inhabit the Iberian Peninsula are found in the Sierra de Andújar. As a result of its special characteristics, the Nature Reserve has become one of the last refuges for extraordinary mammals such as the wolf and the Iberian lynx, which are both in danger of extinction. The imperial eagle, the cinereous vulture and the black stork are other highly endangered species that inhabit this protected area. These Mediterranean mountains are also home to species of otter, wild cat and mongoose, in addition to small populations of roe deer and Spanish Ibex. However, the most common mammals are the deer and wild boar, which can frequently be found close to the roads and fences of the reserve. Along with the fallow deer and mouflons, they make up the game that is the object of a considerable hunting activity. These tranquil ranges provide a home to several species of birds.



FAUNA

The Sierra de Andújar is home to 49 species of mammals, 178 species of birds, 21 species of reptiles, 14 species of amphibians and 10 species of continental fish. The tranquil forests provide shelter to a multitude of animal species, some of which are in serious danger of extinction.





There is a rich and varied population of birds of prey, with emblematic species such as the golden eagle, the eagle owl and the short-toed eagle. The community of amphibians and reptiles, the so-called herpetofauna, is also noteworthy in view of its diversity. Due to their uniqueness or rarity, attention should be drawn to the Iberian newt, the Iberian midwife toad and Schreiber's green lizard. The bogardilla, a fish that lives in the rivers and reservoirs of the reserve, is an endangered species that arouses considerable interest as it exists exclusively in the province of Jaén, in the waters of the River Jándula, the River Rumber, the River Robledo and the Guadalquivir, in an area of less than 100 km².



The most endangered feline

The total number of specimens of Iberian lynx is estimated at two hundred. A large portion of this number live in the Mediterranean mountain range of the Sierra de Andújar Nature Reserve. In the past, this exceptional feline, endemic to Spain and Portugal, was found throughout the entire Peninsula, but the populations were dramatically reduced over time. Nowadays, the Iberian lynx – *lynx pardinus* – is considered to be a species in “critical danger of extinction”. The quiet scrublands and ilex woods of the Sierra de Andújar have become one of the last refuges of this extraordinary animal species, which is difficult to observe in the wild. The Iberian lynx has the appearance of a large domestic cat with spots on its fur, a short tail and sharply pointed ears that end in the characteristic tuft of brush-like hair. It inhabits the quietest areas of the park, and at dawn, having hunted silently during the night, it can usually be found resting on the sun-warmed granite stones. Its diet mainly consists of rabbits. To a large extent, its future depends on the health of the rabbit populations. The conservation of its natural habitat and peace and quiet to reproduce and rear its young are other urgent requirements of the Iberian lynx. There are signs within the reserve advising of the presence of the lynx and requesting visitors to refrain from making noise in the area and to drive with care to avoid running over any of the animals.



THE IBERIAN LYNX

In the silent and solitary Mediterranean mountains of the Sierra de Andújar Nature Reserve some of the last remaining specimens of lynx find refuge. This extraordinary species of animal, which is unique, is considered to be in danger of extinction.

HUNTING AS A TOURIST ACTIVITY

The Sierra de Andújar Nature Reserve provides an ideal setting for big game hunting, the main type of hunting practiced in Spain. In this area of the Sierra Morena, the best hunters have learned their trade, following age-old traditions.



The Fountainhead of Big Game Hunting

The Sierra de Andújar Nature Reserve contains numerous country estates dedicated to the sport of hunting, an activity that has a great deal of prestige and a long tradition in this area of the Sierra Morena. The magnificent Lugar Nuevo and Contadero-Selladores private game preserves are frequently visited by hunters from all over the world, as has been the case for time immemorial. King Alfonso XI himself, in his Libro de la Montería [Book on Big Game Hunting], makes reference to the woods and abundance of deer and wild boar that existed in the Sierras de Andújar. Big game hunting, one of the most magnificent and exclusive types of hunting, originated in these lands in approximately the 12th century, when the feudal lords began

to control the number of wild animals on their lands on an annual basis. Deer and wild boar hunts involve around forty hunters armed with shotguns and a pack of around four hundred dogs. After the drawing of lots to decide positions, each hunter fires on the animals, which are driven along by the noise of the barking. Deer, fallow deer, wild boar and occasionally the mouflon, are the object of this type of hunting. Animal species such as the rabbit, the hare or

the partridge are the focus of other varieties of small game hunting, which gain a great deal of popular support. For generations, hunting has been the main economic resource of the Sierra de Andújar. The permanent security and care of the game preserves has enabled the vital preservation of the habitat of many endangered species that have found their final refuge in the reserve.



A wide-angle, high-angle photograph capturing a massive crowd of pilgrims gathered for a religious procession. The crowd, composed of people of various ages and ethnicities, fills the foreground and middle ground, extending towards a stone archway in the background. In the center-right of the crowd, a highly ornate, multi-tiered float carries the image of the Virgen de la Cabeza. The float is decorated with numerous flowers and garlands. The background features a large, multi-story building with a prominent tower and a cross on its roof, situated on a hillside under a clear sky. The overall atmosphere is one of a significant public event.

LA VIRGEN DE LA CABEZA

On the last Sunday of April, thousands of pilgrims travel in procession to the Sanctuary of the Virgen de la Cabeza. The long-standing and widespread devotion inspired by the image of La Morenita has been recorded by celebrated figures such as Lope de Vega and Miguel de Cervantes.



The oldest romería [religious procession]

The Sanctuary of the Virgen de la Cabeza, built on the rocky summit of the Cerro del Cabezo [Cabezo Hill], dominates the vast mountain range of Andújar. The first granite stones were laid at the end of the 13th century, on the same spot where, according to tradition, the Virgin appeared before a shepherd from Colomera (Granada) amidst lights and the ringing of bells. Since then, the Sanctuary, which was granted the epithet of Royal by Alfonso XIII, has been constantly extended and reformed in order to accommodate the ever increasing veneration towards the Virgen de la Cabeza, both within and beyond Andalusia. This famous procession, which has been described by Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca in their literary work, currently involves the participation of more than eighty religious

brotherhoods and around half a million pilgrims. The most important point of the fiesta takes place on the last Sunday of April when the image is carried in procession around the area surrounding the Sanctuary. Hundreds of the faithful vie to carry the image on their shoulders, whilst cheering and applauding and throwing articles of clothing and objects to be blessed. The Virgen de la Cabeza is known amongst her followers as La Morenita [the little dark one], as a result of the dark colouring and reduced dimensions of the image. A replacement statue was sculpted by José Navas Parejo after the disappearance of the old Gothic statue in the grievous events that occurred during the Spanish Civil War. The intense history of the Sanctuary and the Virgen is displayed in the Marian Museum in the form of valuable documents, objects and works of art.

GASTRONOMY



Mountain aromas

From the outset, the gastronomy of the Sierra de Andújar has been linked to the harvesting, hunting and farming activities that take place in these mountains. The asparagus and mushrooms that grow on stony ground and shaded areas are used to prepare exquisite “revoltillos” [scrambled egg dishes]. The aromatic plants that grow in the area have been used as a traditional condiment in a wide variety of recipes, particularly in marinades for game. From October onwards the specimens of deer, fallow deer and wild boar obtained in the hunt become the protagonists of various casseroles and high quality tinned food that use virgin olive oil, one of the healthiest and most appreciated ingredients in Jaén’s cuisine, as a base. “Conejo al hinojo” [fennel rabbit], a typical dish in Andújar, or hare in bordonera sauce in

Baños de la Encina, are some of the dishes elaborated with specimens of small game, which also include the noteworthy pickled dishes employing partridges, thrushes and quails. The extensive olive woods on the meadowland and the fertile lands in the Guadalquivir valley provide popular dishes such as dressed olives and the pajarillos de huerta [fried pepper dish], which are typical in Marmolejo, along with a large variety of vegetables. These fruit and vegetable products form the basis of salads, gazpacho, ajoblanco [cold garlic soup] or salmorejo [a thick gazpacho], which are served as starters to stews such as ropa vieja [stewed meat in tomato sauce] or potaje de Cuaresma [Lent Stew], which are typical in Villanueva de la Reina. In terms of desserts, pestiños [honey-coated pastry], gachas [hasty pudding] and fried roscos [a type of doughnut] are the most common home-made sweets in the region.

