



Parc national
des Cévennes

The National Park

(Cévennes Biosphere Reserve)



Réserve de
BIOSPHERE



CEVENNES



What is a National Park?

A National Park is a territory which, due to its biological diversity, scenic beauty, cultural interest, and historically preserved character, warrants a form of protection and management that guarantees the survival of its exceptional heritage.

It is managed by a public body overseen by the Ministry of Ecology.

Under a law passed on 14 April 2006, the Park consists of a regulated central zone and an outer membership zone. Along with other local participants, it will draw up a legal foundation for itself: the Charter. This Charter will express the ecological and cultural solidarity between the central zone and surrounding areas.

The central zone is the jewel of the Park, an exceptional territory that must be preserved for future generations. Here, specific regulations apply (the environmental code), enabling the Park to supervise human activities, limit damage to the environment, and preserve the outstanding quality of sites as well as the National Park's character. For this zone, the Charter will set out its objectives for protecting the natural, cultural and scenic heritage.

The membership zone will be delimited on the basis of the Charter, which will be proposed to the districts that are located around the central zone. The Charter will detail the direction for member districts to take as regards heritage protection, economic enhancement, and sustainable development. Once the drafting process of the Charter has been completed, the districts which have decided to become members will form the definitive borders of the National Park (here, in 2013).

The Charter is currently being drafted at the Cévennes National Park. ●

The Cévennes National Park

Some history...

The idea of protecting the landscapes of the Causses (limestone plateaux) and the Cévennes emerged at the end of the 19th century. The famous cave explorer Edouard-Alfred Martel and the Club Cévenol were the first to use the terms “national park”, in 1913.

In 1956, following a proposal by well-known local figures and the sub-prefect of Florac, Lozère county council suggested to the French central government that a “cultural national park” be created. In the context of a rural exodus that was threatening the area’s very identity, there was an urgent need to revalue an environment and landscape profoundly shaped by humankind, particularly through livestock grazing and forest management.

A parent act on National Parks was passed in 1960, and the Cévennes National Park saw the light of day in 1970.

...and some geography

The Park’s central zone lies on both sides of the Atlantic-Mediterranean watershed and consists of five geographical entities.

- In the West, the Causse Méjean, a limestone plateau belonging to the Great Causses, which has an Atlantic climate (average height 1,000 m; sheep farming),
- In the East, the siliceous Cévennes, with a climate that, as the altitude decreases, is increasingly Mediterranean:
- Mont Lozère, a granite massif (highest point of the Park: 1,699 m; cattle farming and transhumance of sheep [migration to summer pastures]),
- Mont Bougès, a granite-and-schist massif, with a wooded north slope (highest point 1,421 m; sheep and cattle farming, forestry),
- the Gardons river valleys cut into the schist, southern in climate, with the rivers Hérault, Gardons, Cèze and Luech (sweet-chestnut groves, sheep and goat farming, bee-keeping),
- Mont Aigoual (1,565 m) and Mont Lingas, schist and granite, heavily wooded (forestry, transhumance of sheep and cattle).

Actions taken to protect the Park territory

- contract-based solutions with farmers: Mazenot Contracts, Patrimoine Contracts, territorialised agro-environmental measures (MAET);
- reintroducing animals; managing and conserving fauna and flora species and their habitats;
- concerted management of hunting, which is mainly reserved for local hunters;
- restoring the architectural heritage: providing technical support in architectural matters, encouraging the use of local materials, developing hamlets, creating rural gîtes;
- exploration of natural and cultural heritage;
- environmental education;
- developing high-quality responsible tourism within the principles set down by the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism;
- international cooperation, particularly through twinning with the Saguenay National Park (Québec) and the Montseny National Park and Biosphere Reserve (Spain);
- -a forestry policy of biological diversification, in partnership with the Office national des Forêts (the body that manages state forests) and private forest-owners;
- monitoring natural and cultural heritage and all activities that manage or use the territory;
- partnerships with local authorities and other bodies involved in long-term protection, management and development of the natural and cultural heritage.

The Cévennes Biosphere Reserve

The Cévennes National Park is the only mid-altitude National Park on the French mainland whose central zone is inhabited year-round. The geography and history of this complex territory give it a very strong identity.

In 1985, the Park was admitted to the world network of Biosphere Reserves (under UNESCO's "Man and the Biosphere" (MAB) programme) because of its work in associating protection and development in an area where a particular equilibrium between man and nature has been fashioned over centuries. This distinction makes it a benchmark territory for research and monitoring for the international community. ●

The regulations

In the central zone, building works and certain practices and activities are regulated or subject to authorisation from the Park's director (professional or commercial sound or image recording, public demonstrations, over-flights at heights of under 1,000 m for non-motorised aircraft, etc.). Agriculture, grazing and forestry are still practised. Hunting helps to control the numbers of wild animals.

In the membership zone, national regulations on traffic, planning and advertising will be established that are coherent with the Park Charter.



- **Keep dogs on a lead.**
Otherwise they disturb wildlife and livestock.
 - **No picking, gathering or removing.**
Animals, plants, minerals and fossils belong in the landscape.
 - **Take your litter home**
...to keep the environment clean.
 - **No fire**
except where required for pastureland or forestry management... to prevent wildfires and soil degradation.
 - **No noise or disorder**
...for everyone's peace of mind.
 - **No camping, no RVs, no caravans**
... to preserve the beauty of sites and avoid polluting.
 - **No off-roading by bike, motorbike or car.**
No wheeled access is allowed except on authorised roads and tracks.
Over-flights at heights of less than 1,000 m are subject to authorisation from the Park's director (non-motorised aircraft).
 - **Respect fences and crops, and close gates**
...to ensure the safety of flocks and farmers' peace of mind.
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Flora and natural habitats

From the Arctic Circle to the tropics

The huge variety of flora in the Park (2,300 species have been inventoried since 1820) is encouraged by its climactic diversity (oceanic, continental and Mediterranean); the chemical composition of its soils (granitic, chalky or schistose); and by the altitude range of the protected zone (from 378 to 1,699 m).

The range of vegetation is enormous. The subalpine short-grass prairies of Mont Lozère are home to some species more typically found at the polar circle (Mud Sedge) or in the mountains (Spring Pasque Flower). In the hot rocky shelters of the Mediterranean valleys plants grow that are found in dry subtropical climates (Black Maidenhair Fern). The flora associated with the Holm Oak (hot and dry climate) offers a striking contrast to the natural mixed beech-fir forests of the high northern slopes (cold and damp climate).

Of the 430 species of French flora that are protected nationally, 40 have been recorded in the Park (Spring Pheasant's Eye, Gagea, rockroses, orchids). The public body which manages the Park looks after the conservation of almost 300 rare or endangered plants, of which 48 species are "endemic", meaning they have a reduced range, which includes the Cévennes.

The subalpine level (1,500 – 1,700 m), mainly found on Mont Lozère, is particularly interesting, with subalpine short-grass prairies of nard grass, hair-grass and fescue.

It is home to peat bogs with sphagnum mosses, bog-bean, marsh marigold, cottongrass, cranberry and the famous carnivorous plant sundew (drosera).

A wooded Park

The Cévennes National Park is the only wooded large National Park in mainland France. Over 1,500 sq km of forest (half deciduous, half coniferous) cover its central and membership zones. Two-thirds of the trees are species native to the region and one-third are introduced resinous species.

Forest covers 68% of the central zone (61,916 ha) in three distinct levels: Holm Oak (below 500 m), deciduous oaks and Sweet Chestnut (500 to 900 m), and Beech (900 to 1,500 m). The large state-owned forest of the Aigoual is in part the work of late-19th century foresters.

The Sweet-Chestnut groves of the Cévennes (40,000 ha, over 120 varieties), cultivated for over a millennium and still maintained in part today, are a typical landscape.

Preserving old forests in a natural state is a major challenge for the public body that runs the National Park. To this end, with the Office national des Forêts it has created joined-up corridors of forests left to age, where there is no felling (to date, over six forests with over 900 ha and 350 stands of 3 ha on average). ●

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Pictures:

- 8. *Drosera*
(J.-P. Malafosse)
- 9. *Cephalanthera rubra*
(Y. Maccagno)
- 10. *Lilium martagon*
(Y. Maccagno)
- 11. *Pulsatilla vulgaris*
(Y. Maccagno)
- 12. *Linaria supina*
(Y. Maccagno)

Cover:

- 1. Corniche des Cévennes
(G. Grégoire)
- 2. Mas Camargues, mont Lozère
(G. Grégoire)
- 3. Griffon Vulture
(J.-P. Malafosse)
- 4. Transhumance of sheep
(M. Menut)
- 5. Chestnuts
(G. Grégoire)
- 6. Forest
(M. Menut)
- 7. Goats on terraces
(M. Sabatier)

Fauna

A spectacular “biological recovery”

2,410 species have been inventoried, including 45% of French vertebrate species.

Until the 19th century, high population density led to a decline in the larger wild animal species (ungulates, birds of prey, carnivores). At the same time, because intensive agriculture and chemical treatments were kept away from the Park’s territory, it was a natural refuge for small wildlife. The subsequent diminution of cultivated areas and the spread of heaths and forests once again created environments favourable to megafauna.

The Cévennes are one of the European regions whose biodiversity has increased most over the past thirty or so years. This increase is partly due to several re-introductions carried out in the National Park: Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, beaver, stag, Roe Deer, Western Capercaillie. It is also the result of biotope protection, which has allowed some species of great heritage interest to resettle their habitats naturally: Golden Eagle, European Otter, Black Woodpecker, Tengmalm’s Owl, Egyptian Vulture, etc.

The Park’s exceptional variety in biotopes (forest environment, heaths, prairies and short-grass prairies, dry and humid environments, etc.) has encouraged the presence of a diverse fauna, ranging from the discreet but fabulous world of insects to the more spectacular one of vertebrates. Birds of prey

and bats are particularly well-represented.

The increase in cervid populations (the most handsome stags in France are found in the Cévennes) and the damage caused to some farms by wild boar make it necessary to control the populations of larger animals through hunting.

Among the 2,410 species inventoried to date in the Park, there are 89 species of mammals (two-thirds of French species), 208 of birds (of which 135 breed here), 17 of reptiles, 18 of amphibians, 24 of fish, 1,824 of insects (including 846 Coleoptera), 53 of arachnids, 12 of Crustaceans/shellfish, 106 of gastropods/snails, 26 of nematodes/roundworms and threadworms, etc.

For more details, you can consult the detailed inventory of Park fauna (correct as of end 2009), the fauna catalogue and the Park’s online atlas at www.cevennes.atlas.parcsnationaux.org/ ●

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13. Griffon Vultures

(J.-P. Malafosse)

14. European Otter

(J.-P. Malafosse)

15. Roe Deer

(A. Roobrouck)

16. Tengmalm's Owl

(J.-F. Noblet)

17. Beaver

(O. Vinet)

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Humankind: culture and landscape

A local architecture

In the central zone, the public body managing the National Park preserves a rich and diverse vernacular architecture, whose very specific styles depend on the bedrock (granite, limestone, schist or contact zones). Many hamlets have also kept their small heritage constructions: bread ovens, mills, crosses, *ferradous* (ox-shoeing stocks), drinking troughs, old farms, *clochers de tourmente* (small bell towers once used during mountain blizzards to indicate the way to safety), and traditional water-management systems.

Traditional agricultural activities

Cattle farming (of the Aubrac breed) on Mont Lozère, sheep farming on the causses or cans (small causses), and goat farming in the Mediterranean valleys produce high-quality local meat and cheese. Around a dozen large sheep flocks still practise transhumance each year.

Historical high places

The National Park contains many prehistoric sites from the Chalcolithic (about 2500 to 1800 B.C.). Tumuli and dolmens are found especially on the causses. On Mont Lozère, the concentration of menhirs at Les Bondons (the second-largest in France after Carnac in Brittany) is situated in a particularly stirring landscape.

The important third-century Roman mausoleum in Lanuéjols (Lozère) is well-preserved and listed as a Historical Monument.

At L'Hôpital on Mont Lozère, some traces can still be seen of a commandery of the Knights Hospitaller. The Abbey du Bonheur (12th and 13th centuries) on Mont Aigoual and the 16th-century Château de Roquedols near Meyrueis are much appreciated romantic sites for walks.

Many sites (Le Pont-de-Montvert, Le Plan de Fontmort, La Can de l'Hospitalet, Bougès, the "royal" roads including the Corniche des Cévennes) are still memorials of the Camisard revolt. The French Resistance (Aigoual maquis) also left many memories in the Cévennes, land of refuge...

The territory of the National Park – historically a borderland and a zone of confrontation, transit and trade – enjoys a unique position south of the Massif Central that partly explains the abundance of its heritage and the undoubted attraction that it has. The Cévennes, while essentially rural, nonetheless have a significant and relatively dense religious and defensive architectural heritage.

Over 150 sites and monuments are listed or classified (3,000 heritage elements have been inventoried). Archaeology in general and prehistory in particular (on the limestone plateaux more than anywhere else) have left many traces of the earliest human settlements, a presence which has been continuous up to the present. ●

Some statistics

Date created:	2 September 1970
UNESCO Biosphere Reserve since:	1985
Central zone:	93,500 ha
Membership zone (maximum extent):	278,500 ha
Number of districts:	152 (of which 55 are partly in the central zone)
Central zone:	Lozère (82%), Gard (18%)
Membership zone (maximum extent):	Lozère (49%), Gard (42%), Ardèche (9%)
Number of visitors:	over 2 million per year
Accommodation:	100 stopover gîtes, 700 rural gîtes
Lowest/highest point:	110 m (Les Vans), 1,699 m (summit of Finiels, Mont Lozère)
Signposted trails:	3,600 km (of which 400 km are riding paths, 200 km mountain bike trails, 100 km cross-country skiing tracks)
Meadows, heaths, pastures:	29,248 ha in the central zone
Forest:	58,047 ha in the central zone
Flora and mushrooms:	11,000 species, of which 2,300 are flowering plants and 48 endemic species
Fauna:	2,410 species

Discovering the National Park

The Eco-Museums (networks of sites)

They enable you to discover the natural and cultural heritage of each massif, by suggesting a coherent set of visitor sites and discovery trails.

The Mont Lozère Eco-Museum hosts a permanent exhibition at Le-Pont-de-Montvert that retraces the natural and human history of the mountain. This is a good introduction to discovering the Eco-Museum's other sites (typical hamlets, historical monuments, trails).

The Cévenne Eco-Museum, located in the schist valleys, groups together a set of museums and visitor sites that promote a better understanding of Cévenol civilisation. The mission of the Causse and Gorges Eco-Museum is to explain the exchanges

between gorges and plateau. It goes beyond the famous sites (Aven Armand, Tarn Gorges, the felsenmeer or block field at Nîmes-le-Vieux) by letting you encounter the people who have shaped this land.

Hiking

The National Park is crossed by several linear GR ® long-distance hiking trails (nos. 4, 6, 7, Stevenson Path, etc.) and local circular hikes (Aigoual, Cévenol valleys, Causse Méjean and Mont Lozère). There are nearly 300 PR (short hiking/walking) paths, signposted by local authorities in partnership with the Park. 28 discovery trails, and horse-riding, cross-country skiing and mountain bike tracks complete the picture. ●