MAD RURAL

Protected areas of the Madrid Region



Financiado por la Unión Europea NextGenerationEU

GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA MINISTERIO DE INDUSTRIA Y TURISMO

Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia

Comunidad de Madrid

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PROTECTED AREAS OF THE MADRID REGION

The protected areas of the Madrid Region paint a picture of stunning landscapes, where nature is preserved as a living memory of the region and as a promise for the future. Amidst mountain peaks, forests, riverbanks, wetlands and gypsum cliffs, these enclaves harbour extraordinary biodiversity and offer a diverse and nuanced picture of the region, far broader than that of its urban surroundings. These are places where the passage of time is perceived differently: in the silence of the beech forests, in the flight of birds of prey over the valleys, in the stillness of the water, or in the geological imprints that shape each landscape.

Beyond their ecological value, these areas form part of a cultural and landscape heritage deeply linked to rural life. Here, the conservation of the natural environment coexists with traditions, crafts, historic paths and ways of life that have adapted to the environment without losing their identity. Visiting these places is not just about immersing oneself in scenes of great beauty, but also about understanding the relationship that local communities have woven over the centuries with their landscape, their resources and their way of understanding the territory.

Exploring these areas invites you to enjoy a serene, mindful and enriching experience, in which nature, culture and sustainability go hand in hand. Each site offers a different way to discover the Madrid Region: from leisurely contemplation to wildlife watching, hiking or landscape interpretation. This selection invites you to explore some of its most precious corners to rediscover a region where the protection of natural heritage not only preserves highly unique ecosystems, but also opens the door to respectful, locally rooted and meaningful tourism.



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SIERRA OESTE DE MADRID

Nature - Riverine areas - Mediterranean woodland

Sierra Oeste combines pine forests, holm oak woodlands and large bodies of water in a landscape that forms a transition between the plateau and the foothills of the Central Mountain Range. Here, the Mediterranean influence intertwines with the proximity of the mountains, giving rise to varied ecosystems and a distinctive landscape character.

SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION: THE ALBERCHE AND COFIO RIVER BASINS

This protected area encompasses riverbanks, holm oak woodlands, pine forests and steep cliffs, providing refuge for iconic species such as the Iberian imperial eagle, the black stork and the eagle owl. The rivers Alberche and Cofio have carved out a landscape of steep-sided valleys and wooded slopes that retains a remarkable degree of naturalness.



SAN JUAN RESERVOIR

The San Juan Reservoir is one of the best-known recreational spots in the Madrid Region and, at the same time, an area closely linked to a setting of high environmental value. Its waters, surrounded by pine forests and Mediterranean woodland, offer a bright, open landscape where leisure activities coexist with the proximity of protected habitats.

Trails through Pine Forests

The traditional paths around the Alberche allow visitors to explore ancient landscapes that once marked the border between Castile and the Tagus Valley



SIERRA DE GUADARRAMA

National Park – Hiking – Viewpoints

Sierra de Guadarrama is one of the great natural treasures of the Madrid Region. Its stunning landscapes combine high mountain peaks, glacial lakes, vast pine forests, lush oak groves and unique granite formations, making this area an ideal destination for enjoying nature at any time of year. Throughout its valleys and mountains, visitors discover a setting where natural heritage, tradition and mountain culture come together to offer unique experiences just a few kilometres from the capital. Among its protected areas, the Sierra de Guadarrama National Park and the Cuenca Alta del Manzanares Regional Park stand out, preserving some of the most valuable and representative ecosystems of central Spain.

At the heart of this exceptional area lies the Sierra de Guadarrama National Park, one of Spain's most iconic natural sites. Among its most striking features is Peñalara, which, at 2,428 metres, is the highest peak in the Madrid Region. Its spectacular glacial landscapes, featuring lakes, cirques and high-mountain wetlands, form one of the most recognisable images of the mountain range. Alongside it lie other landscapes of extraordinary beauty, such as La Pedriza, part of the Cuenca Alta del Manzanares, as well as Siete Picos, La Maliciosa and Cabezas de Hierro, which are popular destinations for walkers, mountaineers and nature photographers.

The natural richness of Sierra de Guadarrama is reflected in the extraordinary variety of ecosystems it harbours. Its extensive forests of Scots pine or Valsaín pine, the scrublands of mountain broom and creeping juniper, together with the high-altitude grasslands and the vegetation typical of the mountain peaks, form landscapes of great ecological value and beauty. This diversity of habitats provides a refuge for a remarkable community of wildlife, including such iconic species as the mountain goat, roe deer, wild boar and fox, as well as large birds of prey such as the imperial eagle and the black vulture.

Among its most distinctive inhabitants are also protected species such as the Iberian desman and the Isabelina butterfly, considered one of the symbols of the mountain range's biodiversity. Each season transforms this landscape and offers new ways to discover one of the most fascinating natural environments in the Madrid Region.

To help visitors learn about and enjoy this natural heritage, the park boasts a comprehensive network of facilities, notably the Valle de La Fuenfría and La Pedriza visitor centres, as well as the Canto Cochino information point, which provide guidance, practical information and insights into the area's natural and cultural heritage.





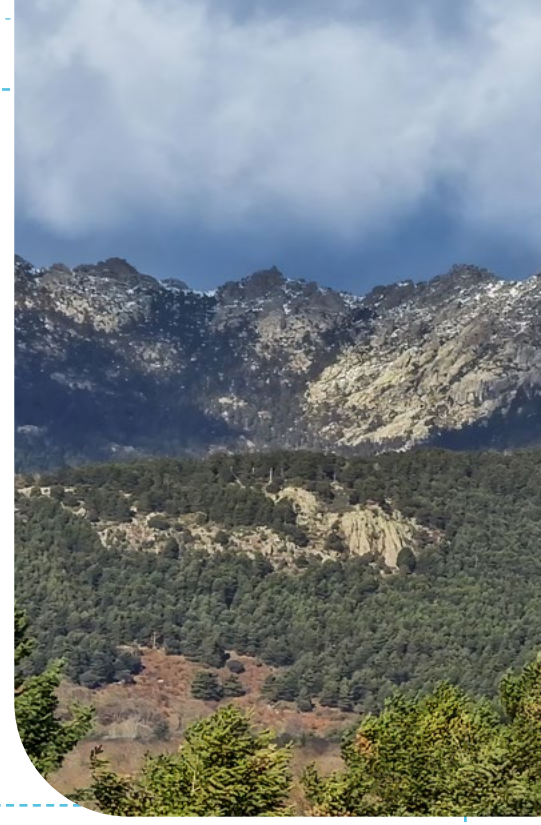
SIERRA DE GUADARRAMA NATIONAL PARK

Sierra de Guadarrama National Park offers a unique landscape where majestic peaks, glacial cirques, vast pine forests and spectacular granite formations come together.

Its trails lead visitors into an environment of outstanding beauty and ecological richness. Among its most notable routes is Cuerda Larga, a mountain traverse linking some of the park's most iconic peaks, including La Bola del Mundo and Cabezas de Hierro. Also well worth visiting are the mountain passes of Navacerrada, La Morcuera and La Fuenfría, as well as the Sierra de los Porrones, the spectacular La Pedriza and Siete Picos.

Whether for hiking, enjoying nature or taking in some of the most beautiful landscapes on the Iberian Peninsula, the Sierra de Guadarrama is an ideal destination for mountain lovers and outdoor enthusiasts.

Nature, adventure and unforgettable panoramic views await in the heart of the Sierra de Guadarrama.



MANZANARES UPPER BASIN REGIONAL PARK

The Manzanares Upper Basin Regional Park is one of the Madrid Region's great natural treasures, an immense green corridor linking the city with Sierra de Guadarrama.

From the granite formations and pine forests of La Pedriza to the holm oak woodlands, ash groves and wetlands of Hoyo de Manzanares, the park encompasses an extraordinary diversity of landscapes, flora and fauna. This is a place to lose yourself among mountains, dehesas, mountain trails and secluded corners where nature and the human imprint have coexisted in harmony for centuries.

A journey into the most authentic side of Madrid's mountain landscape, just a few kilometres from the capital.



Sierra de Guadarrama combines spectacular mountain scenery with an extensive network of visitor centres that help visitors interpret and enjoy the National Park. These include the Valle de La Fuenfría Visitor Centre, the La Pedriza Visitor Centre and the Cantocochino Information Point, which is also linked to the Climbing Museum. These facilities provide guidance, practical information and interpretive content on the area's natural and cultural heritage. The park also regulates access to certain areas in order to protect the most environmentally sensitive sites and manage visitor numbers.





PROTECTED RESERVOIRS:

The network of protected reservoirs is an essential part of the landscape of Sierra de Madrid. Among the most notable are the Pedrezuela, Navacerrada, Santillana and La Jarosa reservoirs, surrounded by pine forests, mountains and granite profiles that reinforce the area's scenic character. Of all of them, Santillana has become one of the most recognisable images of the region. Located between Manzanares El Real and Soto del Real, it combines the broad expanse of its waters with the unmistakable silhouette of the old neo-Gothic dam tower.

PROTECTED WETLANDS:

Alongside the large reservoirs, the region also preserves small wetlands of great scenic and environmental value, spread across different parts of the Sierra. The quarry pools and seasonal wetlands of Alpedrete, the Los Camorchos ponds in Hoyo de Manzanares, the Lagunilla del Lomo and the Ventisquero de la Condesa in Manzanares El Real, and the Laguna del Gato in Moralzarzal form a network of spaces.



LAS VEGAS & ALCARRIA MADRILEÑA

Nature – Birdlife – River landscape

This area is home to some of the region's most unique and least well-known landscapes. Here, fertile floodplains, gypsum-rich cliffs, lakes and wetlands alternate, creating a landscape of striking contrasts that is particularly valuable for birdwatching and for understanding the relationship between water, agriculture and biodiversity.





SOUTH-EAST REGIONAL PARK

The South-East Regional Park protects the lower reaches of the Jarama and Manzanares rivers, alongside gypsum cliffs, lagoons and wetlands that serve as a refuge for numerous bird species. It is a key habitat for the white stork, the black-crowned night heron, the marsh harrier and the lesser kestrel. The interaction between water, gypsum and vegetation gives rise to highly distinctive landscapes.

Added to this natural mosaic are the gypsum cliffs and escarpments shaped by erosion, which are of great geological and landscape value; their vertical walls also provide a refuge for rock-dwelling birds such as the eagle owl and the peregrine falcon. Their presence reinforces the contrast between the river floodplains, the bodies of water and the gypsum-rich landforms that define the identity of this protected area.

In Soto Gutiérrez, within the fertile floodplain of the lower Jarama, this landscape reaches one of its most remarkable expressions: the Ciempozuelos circular route covers 16.2 km in an area renowned for its birdlife, where some 220 species of birds have been recorded, and several points along the route serve as excellent wildlife observation points. The recent restoration of the Soto-Gutiérrez lagoon further enhances the ecological value of this mosaic of wetlands, reedbeds and cliffs, where species such as the black-winged stilt, the marsh harrier and the marsh sandpiper are once again being spotted.

THE TAJO AND TAJUÑA FLOODPLANS

The Tajo and Tajuña floodplains form a traditional agricultural landscape where biodiversity, historic crops and ecological corridors coexist. The presence of water has fostered the development of market gardens, groves and meadows, illustrating the continuity between human activity, soil fertility and land conservation.



LAGUNAS DE SAN JUAN



Protected wetland – Birdlife – Agricultural landscape

The San Juan Lagoon and its surroundings form one of the most valuable wetlands in south-eastern Madrid. Protected as a Wildlife Refuge within the municipality of Chinchón, it is a perfect haven for waterbirds and migratory birds.

Amidst the reed beds and pools of water, it is possible to spot species such as the mallard, the common coot and the marsh harrier. Its traditional agricultural setting forms a mosaic in which biodiversity, agricultural practices and the landscape are closely intertwined.



The route from Ciempozuelos to Soto Gutiérrez runs through one of the most valuable natural areas in the south of the Madrid Region. This circular route crosses the fertile floodplain of the lower Jarama, passing through crops, riverside woodland and seasonal lagoons, in a setting of great scenic and environmental richness. Soto Gutiérrez is particularly notable for its ornithological importance, as more than 200 species of birds have been recorded in the area, making it one of the best places in the region for birdwatching.

SIERRA NORTE DE MADRID

ACCESSIBLE ROUTES AND LOCAL HERITAGE

Nature – Scenic – Wildlife watching



Sierra Norte boasts some of the most diverse and best-preserved landscapes in the Madrid Region. This region features a succession of high peaks, glacial valleys, traditional pasturelands, hi-gh-mountain forests, wetlands and large historic reservoirs linked to the capital's water supply. The result is a serene and ever-changing landscape, where nature and rural culture have coexisted for centuries. The official website highlights key protected areas such as Sierra de Guadarrama National Park and its surrounding area, the Sierra del Rincón Biosphere Reserve, and the Natura 2000 sites linked to the Jarama and Lozoya river basins.

In Sierra Norte, the Peñalara-Los Cotos area, which forms part of the Sierra de Guadarrama National Park, is particularly noteworthy. The Peñalara massif, at an altitude of 2,428 metres, is its highest peak and one of the major symbols of the mountain landscape. The Peñalara Visitor Centre and the Valle de El Paular Visitor Centre are also situated in this area. Given the environmental fragility of this area, the park also imposes a maximum daily quota for visitors and vehicles in the Los Cotos car park, in order to prevent over-crowding and promote its conservation.

Among its most iconic sites is the Montejo Beech Forest, part of the network of European beech forests recognised by UNESCO as a World Herita-ge Site, alongside extensive oak woodlands, Scots pine forests and mountain pastures that form a mosaic of great ecological richness. Sierra Norte is also an outstanding area for wildlife watching, home to species such as the black vulture, the gri-ffon vulture, the Iberian imperial eagle, the golden eagle and the peregrine falcon, which find refuge here in a landscape that changes dramatically throughout the year.







THE 5 RESERVOIRS

Cultural landscape – Nature – Heritage

The reservoirs form one of the great cultural landscapes of the Madrid Region. Five major reservoirs are found in this area, historically linked to the region's water supply and now also valued as places of interest for rural tourism and birdwatching. Set among pine forests, dehesas and mountain slopes, their expanses of water enhance ecological diversity and open up some of the broadest and most tranquil landscapes in the Lozoya Valley.

Since the 19th century, infrastructure such as El Villar, Puentes Viejas, El Atazar and Riosequillo has formed part of a hydraulic system essential to supplying the capital with water, while also helping to shape a landscape in which engineering, water and the natural environment maintain a distinctive balance.



SIERRA DEL RINCÓN BIOSPHERE RESERVE

Recognised by UNESCO, the Sierra del Rincón Biosphere Reserve protects one of the most valuable mountain landscapes in the Madrid region, where the conservation of ecosystems and traditional land uses have maintained an exemplary balance. Its forests, mountain peaks and mountain villages retain a close relationship with their surroundings, making this area one of the finest examples in Madrid of the coexistence of biodiversity, cultural landscape and sustainable development.

Microexperience

Explore the trails of the Hayedo de Montejo in autumn: the colour contrast between the beech forest, oak groves and the mountains makes this corner of Sierra Norte one of the most unique scenes in the Madrid Region.





SIERRA DE GUADARRAMA NATIONAL PARK

In the heart of the Sierra Norte lie some of the most spectacular landscapes in the Madrid Region. The Peñalara massif, standing at 2,428 metres, dominates a landscape of glacial lakes, centuries-old pine forests and sweeping views of the mountains. Routes set off from villages such as Rascafría and Lozoya, allowing visitors to discover some of the most iconic spots in the Sierra de Guadarrama National Park.



NATURA 2000 NETWORK

The valleys of the Lozoya and Jarama rivers form part of the Natura 2000 network, one of Europe's largest conservation networks. These protected areas feature a succession of riverside woodlands, pastures, holm oak forests and reservoirs such as El Atazar, which provide a refuge for numerous species of birds and wildlife. A privileged area for enjoying nature and taking in the landscape.

BIOSPHERE RESERVE OF THE UPPER BASINS OF THE MANZANARES, LOZOYA AND GUADARRAMA RIVERS

The Sierra Norte is home to some of the most iconic landscapes of this UNESCO-recognised Biosphere Reserve. Highlights include the Peñalara massif (2,428 m), with its glacial lakes, and the peaks stretching from the Puerto de la Morcuera to Puerto de Navafría and Reajo Alto (2,100 m). These high-mountain areas provide a refuge for iconic species such as the Iberian imperial eagle, the black vulture and the peregrine falcon, making them a prime destination for nature lovers and wildlife watchers.



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