

NATURE PROTECTION IN THE CATALAN AREA



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THE PROTECTION OF NATURAL AREAS IN THE PAÏSOS CATALANS IS INSPIRED IN THE PRINCIPLES OF THE WORLD STRATEGY FOR NATURE CONSERVANCY. THE EFFECTIVE POWERS IN EACH COMMUNITY, THOUGH, SHOW CERTAIN DIFFERENCES.

MARTÍ BOADA LECTURER. DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY,
AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA

This year is the seventy-fifth anniversary of the death of Rafael Puig i Valls, a forestry expert from Tarragona and the first person in Spain to propose the creation of a protected natural area. It was 1902 and his plan was for the creation of the national park of the mountain of Montserrat. Puig i Valls, who was obviously a long

way ahead of his time, began to take an interest in this topic following a journey to the United States in 1882. Even at that early date, the particular historical context of Catalonia favoured the protection of natural areas as a result of the interest in the countryside and in rambling which was one aspect of the *Renaixença*. Excursionism as a social phenomenon was

over the years to play an important part in the defence, care and protection of the Catalan countryside. It was complemented after the seventies by environmentalist movements, especially following what we might call its historical turning-point, the Campaign for the Safeguard of the Natural Heritage by the *Congrés de Cultura Catalana*. From this



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campaign there emerged a document which was to be decisive in the environmental future of Catalan natural systems, the *Llibre Blanc de la Gestió de la Natura als Països Catalans*.

After the advent of democracy in Spain and the birth of the decentralized state, the protection of natural areas came under the law of Conservation of Natural Areas and Wild Flora and Fauna, inspired in the World Strategy for Nature Conservancy.

In some autonomous communities, however, the effective authority in matters of conservation and management of natural parks often goes back to a date before this law.

In Catalonia, the legislative framework covering the protection of natural areas is the Law of Natural Areas of 1985. Added to in 1992 with the Plan for Areas of Natural Interest (PEIN), it provides for the protection of 146 sites—22% of the territory subjected to special protection—, amongst which there is one national park and seven natural parks.

The national park of Aigüestortes-Sant Maurici, set up in 1955, has a surface

area of 10,230 hectares with some fifty glacial lakes. The landscape is high Pyreneean mountain.

The seven natural parks are:

Sant Llorenç del Munt-l'Obac, a natural park since 1972. It has a surface area of 9,638 hectares and is a conglomerate massif with cave-dwelling animal species, rock plants and endemic species.

The Montseny, a natural park since 1978. It is listed as a biosphere reserve. It has a surface area of 30,120.2 hectares, within which are represented the three great biogeographical regions of Europe: Mediterranean, Central-European and Boreal-Alpine. There are also various endemic species to be found there.

The volcanic region of la Garrotxa, declared a natural park in 1982. It has a surface area of 11,908 hectares and is the best example there is of Iberian volcanism and a bridge between the Mediterranean and Central-European landscapes.

The pre-Pyreneean limestone massif of Cadí-Moixeró, declared a natural park in 1983. It has a surface area of 41,342 hectares. It stands out for its rock faces and

the predominance of subalpine landscapes. The Ebre Delta, a natural park since 1983. It has a surface area of 7,736 hectares and forms the most famous wetlands in the Catalan area and one of the most important aquatic habitats in the Western Mediterranean.

The Aiguamolls de l'Empordà, made a natural park in 1983. It has a surface area of 4,866 hectares consisting of coastal marshland with dunes, marshes and fresh- and salt-water ponds.

The Montserrat massif, declared a natural park in 1987. Montserrat is a massif of limestone conglomerates of a very unusual nature and for the Catalans it is a symbol of their landscape and culture surrounding a Benedictine monastery.

In the Balearic Isles, the protection of natural areas has developed basically with the Balearic parliament's law of 1984. Known as the Law of Natural Areas of Special Interest, it protects 86 natural areas with a total surface area of 187,397 hectares, including one national park and two natural parks.

The Cabrera archipelago, a national park since 1991, has a surface area of 9,715



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hectares. It is made up of six islands with abundant sea-cliffs which provide a refuge for endangered birds. It contains interesting Mediterranean scrub which abounds with endemic species.

S'Albufera in Mallorca was made a natural park in 1988. It is the most important wetland area in the Balearics and its 1,708 hectares of sand dunes and marshes are the home of several endemic species. Mondragó, which has a surface area of 785 hectares, was declared a national park in 1992. It is a series of gulleys and coves abounding in Balearic pine and unusual forms of unirrigated crop growing. There are also abundant endemic species.

There are 83 natural areas of special interest, of which the main ones, in order of age, are: Es Trenc i Salobrar de Campos, Mallorca (1984); Ses Salines in Eivissa and Formentera (1985); Sa Punta d'Amer, Mallorca (1985); S'Albufera des Grau, Menorca (1986); Son Xoriguer-Cala Galdana, Menorca (1988); Barranc d'Algendar, Menorca (1988); Sa Canova d'Artà, Mallorca (1988).

In the País Valencià, the Generalitat Valenciana set up the Environmental Agency in 1989. This body concentrates authority in matters of protected areas, five of which are classified as natural parks and five as natural sites. All together they cover a surface area of 39,580 hectares.

L'Albufera, a semi-salt lake 6 kilometres in diameter, has been a natural park since 1986. Surrounded by marshes and paddy-fields, the site is of great interest for its bird-life. It has a total surface area of 21,000 hectares.

The Penyal d'Ifac, a natural park since 1987, is a limestone massif jutting out to sea in the form of a peninsula. Its 35 hectares contain a very special coastal rock vegetation and fauna.

Montgó was declared a natural park in 1987. It is an elongated limestone headland jutting out into the sea with cliffs more than 100 metres high. Its 2,200 hectares are the home of predominantly Mediterranean plant communities and associated fauna, with species linked to the coastal marine

habitat and some endemic species. El Carrascar de la Font Roja, a natural park since 1988, is a small archipelago made up of four groups of islets of volcanic origin. Its 2,500 hectares contain an unusual fauna with some endemic species. The sea bottom, with red coral, is of great ecological value.

The five Valencian natural sites are El Fondo, in Elx; Les Llacunes, in La Mata and Torrevella; El Prat de Cabanes-Torreblanca; the salt beds of Santa Pola and the Desert of Les Palmes.

Catalonia North includes none of the 25 French regional parks, but there are eight areas which because of their biogenetic interest are included in the list of Natural Areas of Ecological, Floral and Faunal Interest (ZNIEFF).

In Andorra, despite the enormous ecological interest of its countryside, there is not a single protected area in the form of a natural park or a similar figure. Let us hope that the determination of the Andorran government to join the European concert will lead inexorably to the application of effective measures. ■