

INFORMATION

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www.ledepartement66.fr/dossier/la-reserve-marine-de-cerbere-banyuls/
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www.ledepartement66.fr/dossier/le-site-classe-de-lanse-de-paulilles/

The French department of Pyrénées-Orientales may have a restricted surface area but it boasts a wide variety of natural habitats across the whole area, with no less than 11 natural reserves and around thirty protected natural sites, representing a total surface area of 45,000 hectares, or 11% of the department.

The nature reserves and protected natural sites (classified and labelled) are areas that are subject to regulations to ensure the protection of the natural environment there, due to the remarkable nature of the natural species or habitats, that absolutely must be safeguarded.

On the rocky coast

Cerbère-Banyuls Natural Marine Reserve (650 ha): This exclusively marine reserve runs along the rocky coast, was created in 1974 and is managed by the Conseil Départemental. It is home to red coral, posidonia meadows, molluscs, shellfish, all sorts of fish, some of which are very rare (grouper, forkbeard, zebra sea bream, eagle ray, etc.) From the sheltered bay of Peyrefite beach, there is an **underwater trail** that allows visitors to discover the sheer beauty of the underwater world, with a mask, snorkel and flippers. The underwater trail can be accessed from the 1st July to 31st August from 12pm to 6pm and it is completely free-of-charge.

Paulilles, a classified site (32 ha): This former **Nobel dynamite factory** in Port-Vendres was completely redeveloped as part of the 'Avenir d'une mémoire' (giving remembrance a future) project, to restore the place to its former glory and to conserve its natural features while respecting its industrial history. It was acquired by the Conservatoire du Littoral (French Coastal Protection) in 1998 and the Conseil Départemental took over the management. There is a permanent and temporary exhibition at the Maison du Directeur devoted to the bygone days of the factory and the surrounding natural heritage. At the Atelier des Barques Catalanes, it is possible to admire the significant restoration work on marine heritage. There are various events and guided tours organised all year long.

Albères Massif Natural Site (7,000 ha): Next to the Albères de Catalogne Natural Park, the peak of the Albères Massif, **Néulos**, stands at 1,256 m, before plunging into the sea, creating the jagged coastline. The beech woods, the oak forests and the maquis make up this area, which has been recognised Europe wide by its inclusion in the Natura 2000 network. Testifying to the great ecological wealth of this massif: The **Massane** with its endemic species. There are countless trails to explore the landscapes and many natural habitats in this iconic forest.

Le Racou Sites (30 ha): The Conservatoire du Littoral (French Coastal Protection) acquired this area, including the Portails **coves**, Ensourd mill and Valmarie woods, which are all part of the Argelès-sur-Mer territory. Le Racou is a place with significant ecological value, thanks to two protected species: the shaggy sparrow-wort shrub and the Jersey thrift, as well as several natural habitats which are of community interest. The landscapes here are remarkable and diversified, with views of the cliffs along the coastline and the undergrowth. Significant restoration work was done in all these natural areas to ensure they are protected and secured, even with an increasing number of visitors. There is a footpath that leads down to Le Racou beach and a coastal path that allows visitors to explore the wealth of the Vermeille coast.

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INFORMATION

Mas Larrieu Natural Reserve
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Etang de Canet-Saint-Nazaire
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Along the sandy coast

Mas Larrieu Natural Reserve (145 ha): The natural reserve is one of the last remaining wild sites along the coastline. It is an area between land and sea, between freshwater and seawater. There are five natural habitats here: the dune ridge, the wetlands, wooded areas on the banks of the river, natural meadows and cultivated land. These intertwining habitats mean that rare and endemic plant species can develop here, as well as specific animal species. Unfortunately, the dune ridge is being progressively eroded due to storms, and summer crowds. The town council of Argelès-sur-Mer is responsible for the management of this fragile and threatened environment, and they have introduced two trails for visitors to observe the plant life and countless birds.

Etang de Canet Protected Natural Site (1,000 ha): This lake was acquired by the Conservatoire du Littoral (French Coastal Protection) in 1978, and it is home to more than 200 species of migratory and sedentary birds. It also boasts an exceptional mosaic of habitats and particularly impressive plant life. The fishing village and cabin are popular with visitors, as well as the sightseeing trail and bird observatories along the shores of the lake.

Les Dosses (130 ha): This wetland on the shores of Sales Leucate lake is a refuge for biodiversity and a mosaic of natural habitats that are home to a wide variety of plant and animal species. To protect and enhance this area, the local Conseil Général has set up visitor's trail with interactive signs to learn about the lake, its history, the landscapes and the species here that need to be protected.

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In the surrounding area of Canigou

The [Canigó Grand Site](#) (8,000 ha): The peaks of the massif stretch across Canigou and Haut-Vallespir forests and there is so much to explore here, either on a leisurely stroll or a sporty hike, thanks to the countless trails. Most of these trails can be used from June to October, except in the case of early or late snowfall in some areas. There are mountain refuges with a guardian, [Chalet des Cortalets](#) (2,150 m), [Refuge de Mariailles](#) (1,718m), [Refuge de Sant Guillem](#) and the Refuge de las Conques, as well as the Refuge de [Batère](#) and the Refuge de [Ras de la Carança](#) (with a guardian in the summer) which are all the perfect departure points for walking up to the [Pic du Canigou](#) (2,784 m). There are shelters along the trails (without a guardian), as well as some architectural curiosities known as 'orris' (former sheep farmer shelters made from dry stone). The Canigou Massif is a sensitive and protected natural area. Motorised vehicles can access the area but are subject to very strict regulations. The area is home to remarkable biodiversity, for the animal species (Pyrenean chamois, capercaillie, ptarmigan, Pyrenean desman) as well as the plant species (5 priority habitats and countless habitats which are of community interest).

In Cerdagne and Capcir

[Eyne Valley National Natural Reserve](#) (1,177 ha): The reserve was created in 1993, at the heart of the Pyrénées-Orientales, on Cerdan plateau. Eyne Valley has been a favourite place for botanists for a long time, thanks to the sheer diversity of the plant life and the many endemic species found here. 500 plants, including rare and protected species, 30 species of bumblebee, 60 species of butterfly... Added to the great variety of landscapes is an impressive range of historic ruins.

[Les Bouillouses lakes, a classified site](#) (1,800 ha): This classified natural site at an altitude of 2,107 m, at the heart of the Carlit Massif, includes several lakes. There are so many walks to do here, and walkers will discover an area that is extraordinary for hiking, from the visitor's trail along the water's edge to the climb up to the peak of Le Carlit. There are varied itineraries, with something suitable for everyone looking to discover preserved wildlife. In the summer, access to the site is regulated and there is a shuttle service and a cable car.

[Camporells Lakes, a classified site](#): At the heart of a protected massif, this natural site is an exceptional place with mountain lakes, wooded slopes and the impressive Péric peaks, together forming a truly spectacular landscape. The area is easy to access and is a popular place with walkers and fishermen thanks to the remarkable wildlife. It is also a place for pastoralism and forestry activities. If you choose to stay at the Camporells mountain refuge with a guardian, you can explore the wide-open spaces of the Capcir either in a day or over several days.

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INFORMATION

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Sources and bibliography

L'Encyclopédie du Pays Catalan, published by Privat,

Les plus beaux Sites Naturels du Languedoc-Roussillon et de

l'Aveyron, les Carnets Midi Libre

Découverte;

Petit Futé Nature Languedoc-

Roussillon

Websites

www.tourisme-pyreneesorientales.com/en

www.catalanes.espaces-naturels.fr/

In Haut Vallespir

Prats-de-Mollo La Preste Natural Reserve (2,185 ha): The Prats-de-Mollo Reserve was created in 1986 and is the most southern reserve in France. This is an area with high rainfall and so there are habitats that are characteristic of both Alpine and subalpine zones. Mammals such as the Pyrenean chamois, wild cat and the stoat live alongside amphibians, reptiles and countless birds including the bearded vulture, the rarest species of vulture. The reserve is particularly special thanks to extremely rare species such as the Spanish moon moth and the western capercaillie. The Chalet de Las Conques (a stopover gite at an altitude of 1,640 m) is an excellent place to start if you want to explore the Reserve and venture along the footpath through the forest with your guide booklet.

Puig de l'Estelle Forest (214 ha): This forest is set between limestone and granite and is mainly made up of chestnut trees, young oak trees and laricio pine trees. The Mas de la Bouadelle is a welcoming stopover gite with a guardian for hikers and visitors. There are hiking and horse riding itineraries (Tour of Vallespir and the tour of Canigou) available along the trails that wind around the Puig de l'Estelle forest, for some unforgettable panoramic views of the Pyrenees.

In Haut-Conflent

The **Py** and **Mantet** National Natural Reserves (6,930 ha): The 2 reserves were created in 1984 and can be found on the north-west side of the Canigou, and in **Alemanya** valley. The agropastoral activity from the past centuries has left its mark here (farming terraces, sheep farmer shelters, etc.). There are several waymarked trails through the wooded areas, so visitors can explore the area, especially the visitor's trail that leads to the Nyer Reserve. These extremely diverse habitats are home to varied animal and plant life, and the most extraordinary species here is the Pyrenean desman.

Nyer Regional Natural Reserve (2,265 ha): In the lower Mantet valley and on the east side of **Carança** valley, the northern entrance to the reserve is characterised by spectacular narrow gorges. Nyer Reserve was created in 1998 upon the initiative of the Conseil Départemental, who owns and manages the site. It is a place with an important role to play in terms of protection, conservation and management of the natural environment, thanks to the scientific work done here, as well as various initiatives to inform, increase awareness and educate people about the environment. At the visitor's centre, the **Maison de la Réserve**, there is an exhibition devoted to bats, bearing the French **Tourisme & Handicap** label.

Jujols National Natural Reserve (472 ha): The reserve was created in 1986 and the peak stands at an altitude of 2,172 metres. The limestone cliffs on the south side of Madres-Coronat act as a significant source of heat, therefore creating favourable conditions for Mediterranean plant species that are not usually found at this altitude (holm oak, thyme, lavender, etc.) The remarkable and diverse animal species here can be seen along the 'Manout' trail. An audio guide is available from the visitor's centre so you can venture along the footpath and listen to Catalan storytellers at the same time.

Nohèdes National Natural Reserve (2,137 ha): This reserve was created in 1986 in the Madres-Coronat massif. It is characterised by the sheer diversity of habitats, climatic influences (both Mediterranean and Atlantic) and geology (limestone, shale, granite). This explains the wealth of endemic plant species. There are some one-of-a-kind plants found here, such as the Alyssum of the Pyrenees. The footpaths are dotted with lakes, providing walkers with contrasting scenery along this balcony trail through the Canigou.

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