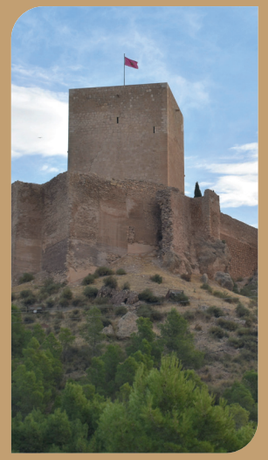
CULTURE AND TRADITION

Sierra de la Torrecilla receives its name from a medieval watchtower, built by the Muslims in the 12th century in order to control the passage through Valle del Guadalentín corridor, as it is an important natural communication route with Andalusia.

Several archaeological remains located nearby demonstrate human presence in this area. Some examples are **Los Cipreses** Argaric site and **Quintilla Roman village** -located to the north of Cejo de los Enamorados-, as well as **Lorca city** itself, declared a historic-artistic site.

In Parrilla County, we find **El Pradico Hermitage,** a popular architecture eighteenth-century building, where one of the most typical rural pilgrimages of Lorca is celebrated.

The western sector of this natural space is dotted with traditional farmhouses,



Lorca Castle

associated with extensive dry land farms, where almond, olive and cereal crops predominate.

Several cattle trails cross Sierra de la Torrecilla such as **Colada del Cerro del Puerto,** at the eastern end of the SAC.



La Torrecilla watchtower

RED NATURA 2000 RECOMMENDATIONS

The most recommendable way to visit this natural area is to go on **excursions on foot or by bicycle,** using the existing tracks and equipment.

The outdoor car park of Fortaleza del Sol (Lorca Castle) is an ideal place to start the tour in the north-eastern limit of this area, through the sign posted route of **Cejo de los Enamorados.** From the **fountain and viewpoint of Los Pilones,** you can walk comfortably following the **GR-253 Camino de la Cruz del Alto Guadalentín path,** which leads to the Cejo viewpoint.

Spring is the ideal season to get to know this natural space due to scrub flowering and the arrival of some migratory birds.

During your visit:

- Always walk along authorized pathways; do not take shortcuts to avoid unnecessary trampling of plants and erosion.
- Your noise level should not disturb other visitors or wildlife.
- Respect surrounding flora and fauna; collection is not allowed.
- This is the habitat of spur-thighed tortoise; you cannot take or release any specimen.
- Remember that fire is prohibited.
- Take responsibility for the waste you generate, take it home or use the containers. Butts and food are also garbage.
- Pets must be leashed and their droppings must be picked up.
- In summer, avoid midday hours, protect yourself from the sun and carry water in your backpack.
- In case of emergency or if you find an injured or dead animal, call 112.

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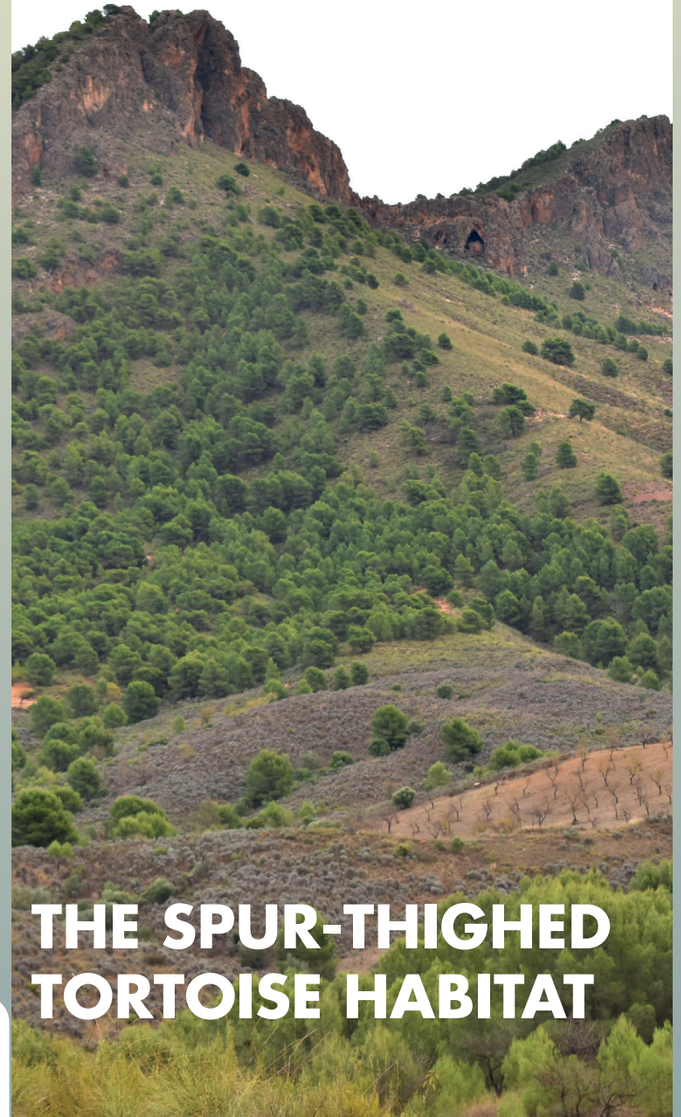
SAC Sierra de la Torrecilla



THE SPUR-THIGHED TORTOISE HABITAT

INTRODUCTION

Sierra de la Torrecilla Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is located in the southwest of the Region of Murcia, in the municipality of Lorca, and has an area of 3,557 hectares.

This protected space combines **semi-arid environments of Mediterranean mountains with ravines and riverbanks.** Regarding vegetation, we can mainly see scrub, besides **holm oaks** *(Quercus rotundifolia)* in the southernmost spots of the Region and small relict groves of **gall oak** *(Quercus faginea)* in Hortillo ravine.

This natural environment has very good conditions for the conservation of threatened fauna. In fact, this area is home to one of the most important population centers of **spur-thighed tortoise** *(Testudo graeca)* in the southeast of the peninsula. We can stand out the presence of **rock-dwelling birds of prey** such as the **Eurasian eagle-owl** *(Bubo bubo)*. This is the reason why almost the entire surface is included in the **Special Protection Area called Sierra del Gigante-Pericay, Lomas del Buitre-Río Luchena y Sierra de la Torrecilla.**



Typical ravine environment

In addition to its diverse geological and landscape values, this territory has **historical and cultural elements** of great interest, due to its strategic location in the natural corridor of Valle del Guadalentín and Lorca city.



Aqueduct with Cejo de los Enamorados (Lovers Cliff) in the background

LANDSCAPE

This natural space covers a part of **Sierra de la Torrecilla** to the west, formed by a set of undulating, medium-altitude hills, whose peak is **Alto de La Jarosa** (929 m). Scrubs, pine forests, holm oaks and almond groves make up a landscape mosaic, crisscrossed with several ravines.

Sierra de la Peña Rubia is located to the east, with a marked contrast between sunny side, with low scrub, and shady side, where we can find thickest repopulated pine forests. Rocky and cliff areas stand out in this landscape, such as the calcarenite wall of **Cejo de los Enamorados** (Lovers Cliff) and **Alto de la Peña Rubia** (927 m).

On the southern slope, the impervious nature of the land increases erosion, giving rise to an intricate network of ravines. Among the most important watercourses that discharge their waters into Guadalentín River are **Navazo and La Torrecilla ravines,** to the south, and **Las Canteras, Diecisiete Arcos and Cambrón ravines,** to the north.

The metamorphic nature of the land gives the landscape grey and red tones, easily visible in agricultural areas. Dry crops, mainly almond and olive trees, dot foothills and the central part.



Sierra de la Peña Rubia



Crops, scrub and ravine in Sierra de la Torrecilla



Map tiles by Stamen Design, under CC BY 3.0. Data by OpenStreetMap, under ODbL.

FAUNA

This natural space has excellent conditions as a habitat for the **spur-thighed tortoise** *(Testudo graeca)*, a threatened species. The main population centre of this reptile is located to the north of Valle del Guadalentín.



Spur-thighed tortoise *(Testudo graeca)*

Among birds of prey, we can stand out the species that use the rocky cliffs to breed, such as the **Eurasian eagle-owl** *(Bubo bubo)*, **golden eagle** *(Aquila chrysaetos)* and **peregrine falcon** *(Falco peregrinus)*. The **Eurasians parrowhawk** *(Accipiter nisus)* prefers nesting in pine forests, and the **little owl** *(Athene noctua)* prefers agricultural areas, especially old olive groves. We can stand out the **red-billedchough** *(Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax)* in **Peña Rubia,** which was declared a Protected Wildlife Area as it is home to a colony of this corvid.

Small forest birds are abundant in pine forests, such as the **great tit** *(Parus major)* and **coal tit** *(Periparus ater)*. In undergrowth, various species of warblers find shelter, including the **Dartford warbler** *(Sylvia undata)* and **Sardinian warbler** *(S. melanocephala)*, while in ravines we can find birds of more open environments, such as the **woodlark** *(Lullulaarborea)*, **black wheatear** *(Oenanthe leucura)* or **bee-eater** *(Merops apiaster)*.



Badger *(Meles meles)*

Among mammals, we can find the **Iberian hare** *(Lepus granatensis)* in open areas of low scrub, and small mammals such as the **garden dormouse** *(Eliomys quercinus)* and **shrew** *(Crocidura russula)* in pine forests. The most common carnivores are the **badger** *(Meles meles)* and **fox** *(Vulpes vulpes)*. We can also stand out the five species of **bats** due to their degree of threat.

The ravines and small water points are essential to guarantee the conservation of amphibian populations, such as the **parsley frog** *(Pelodytes punctatus)* and **natterjack toad** *(Epidalea calamita)*.



Eurasian sparrowhawk *(Accipiter nisus)*

FLORA

Sierra de la Torrecilla vegetation is made up of typical Mediterranean scrub that stands out in spring for the striking yellow flowering of ***albaida*** (Anthyllis cytisoides), which is the predominant species in the area. We can also find **black wormwood** (Artemisia barrelieri), different types of **thyme** (Thymus spp), **lavender** (Lavandula dentata), ***turmera*** (Helianthemum almeriense) and **esparto grass** (Stipa tenacissima).



Albaida *(Anthyllis cytisoides)*

Among small plants, we can find **Lorca's houseleek** *(Limonium album)*, which lives only in Tercia and Torrecilla mountains, and grows on marly or siliceous soils with little vegetation. We can stand out species exclusive to North Africa and the south of Spain, such as the herbaceous *Astragalus longidentatus* and some rare **vetches** such as *Vicea luteas ubsp. vestita* and *Vicia hirsuta,* as well as ***fumaria*** *(Platycapnos tenuiloba)*.



Gall oak *(Quercus faginea)*



Kermes oak *(Quercus coccifera)*

We can also highlight **holm oaks** *(Quercus rotundifolia)* and the small groves of **gall oak** *(Quercus faginea)* in the valleys, whereas in the ravines, there is **oleander** *(Nerium oleander)* and **tamarisk** *(Tamarix sp)*. Some of these ravines, like Cocón ravine, have majestic specimens of **black poplar** *(Populus nigra)* and **elm** *(Ulmus minor)*. The headwaters of Dieciete Arcos ravine has dense groves of **white poplar** *(Populus alba)*. The floristic importance of these environments is reflected in **"Rambla del Hortillo" Place of Botanical Interest.**

In Sierra de Peña Rubia and Cejo de los Enamorados, the most characteristic shrubs are **kermes oak** *(Quercus coccifera)*, **black hawthorn** *(Rhamnus lycioides)* and **juniper** *(Juniperus oxycedrus)*, together with **rosemary** *(Rosmarinus officinalis)* and **grey-leavedcistus** *(Cistus albidus)*, forming the undergrowth of **Aleppo pine** *(Pinus halepensis)* forests, mostly repopulated.