CULTURE AND TRADITION

The oldest known remains in Sierra de la Tercia date back to 2216 BC, such as the grave goods from a Chalcolithic burial found in **Cueva Sagrada,** on display at the Archaeological Museum of Lorca. To the east and bordering the SAC, in the municipality of Totana, we can highlight **Cerro de La Bastida site,** declared ***Bien de Interés Cultural*** (Cultural Interest Asset).



La Bastida archaeological site

This human settlement was inhabited between 1675 and 100 BC, in the so-called Bronze Age. It is the first Argaric culture enclave discovered and, currently, one of the most important in Europe.

The northern slope plains were a natural passage for communication between the fortresses of Lorca and Aledoin ancient times. Due to this movement of people and cattle, there are several traditional paths and cattle trails, such as **Vereda de la Rambla de Lébor.** We can also find vestiges of associated constructions such as **Chichar Tower,** from the Islamic period, and several **farmhouses** such as Chichar, El Pozuelo and Los Allozos, the latter being abandoned.



Traditional dovecote in Chichar area

RED NATURA 2000 RECOMMENDATIONS

We can access Sierra de la Tercia through roads that give access to two recreational areas: **Virgen de la Salud,** in the southern area, where the hermitage is located, and **La Tercia** in the west end. The best way to get to know the natural and landscape values of this natural space is by walking along paths where access is allowed, always with good planning and avoiding the hottest periods. For visitors who ride a bike, it is advisable to always use the network of forest tracks and know beforehand the route characteristics and difficulty.

To the north of the SAC, close to Nonihay district, we find **Estrecho de la Agualeja.** This **Geological Interest Place** is a very beautiful narrow gorge that Lébor ravine has excavated for millions of years on calcarenites. There is a recreational area and a conditioned path to access this spot.



La Tercia recreational area

The heritage elements that can be visited in the surroundings of this natural space are also interesting, such as **Cerro de La Bastida** site or **Aledo historic site,** declared *Bien de Interés Cultural* (Cultural Interest Asset).

During your visit:

- Always walk along authorized pathways; do not take shortcuts to avoid unnecessary trampling of plants and erosion.
- Leave your vehicle in the authorized car parks.
- Your noise level should not disturb other visitors or wildlife.
- Respect surrounding flora and fauna; collection is not allowed.
- Remember that fire is prohibited.
- Leave your rubbish in the bins or take it back with you.
- Pets must be leashedin this natural space.
- 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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Red Natura 2000
NATURA 2000
SAC Sierra de la Torrecilla

NATURAL CROSSROADS BETWEEN VALLE DEL GUADALENTÍN AND TIERRAS ALTAS

INTRODUCTION

Sierra de la Tercia Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is located in the southwest part of the Region of Murcia, has an area of 5,038 hectares, and is distributed among the municipalities of **Aledo, Lorca and Totana.**



Cliffs on the southern slope

This area is made up of a small mountainous massif with gentle relief and a maximum altitude of 964 meters at **Pico de Manilla.** This land has great environmental value, because of the habitat richness and interesting species due to its conservation.

Among its most representative environments are the **Aleppo pine** *(Pinus halepensis)* forests, the **cliffs** and the **saline soils.**

We stand out its floristic singularity, represented by two plants exclusive to the area: ***zamarrilla de la Tercia*** *(Teucrium terciae)* and **Lorca's houseleek** *(Limonium album).* These plants have led to the designation of two **Places of Botanical Interest:** "Roquedos y matorrales de la Tercia" and "Tomillares de siempreviva de Lorca", respectively.

This SAC is also very important because it is home to populations of endangered fauna, including the **spur-thighed tortoise** *(Testudo graeca)* and **Bonelli's eagle** *(Aquila fasciata),* a species classified as "endangered" in the Region of Murcia.

The environment of Sierra de la Tercia, also known as Sierra de Chíchar, has an interesting historical heritage, due to its strategic location between Sierra Espuña, Valle del Guadalentín and surrounding towns.



HOG

Wide plains separate La Tercia from Sierra Espuña

LANDSCAPE

Sierra de la Tercia is a medium-height mountain, whose peak is **Pico de Manilla** (964 m), with two very well differentiated slopes.

The **south slope** is more abrupt and is characterized by the cliffs in its line of summits. Its hillsidesare populated by **esparto grass** *(Stipa tenacissima)* and **scattered pine** *(Pinus halepensis)* forest. Besides, there arestriking deep ravines produced by erosion in the steepest areas.

The **shady side** has a gentler orography and is covered by a **thick Aleppo pine forest.** This slope is crisscrossed by several **ravines,** such as those called **Chorrillo, Cañada del Cabezo** and **Periago.** The latter is a tributary of Lébor ravine that borders this natural area to the east. In the foothills, marls and gypsum appear, hosting a more open and steppe-like vegetation.

At a geological level, the types of rocks existing in this area determine the landscape appearance. On the north face and the summits, limestone rocks stand out, as well as **marl, sandstone and gypsum.**

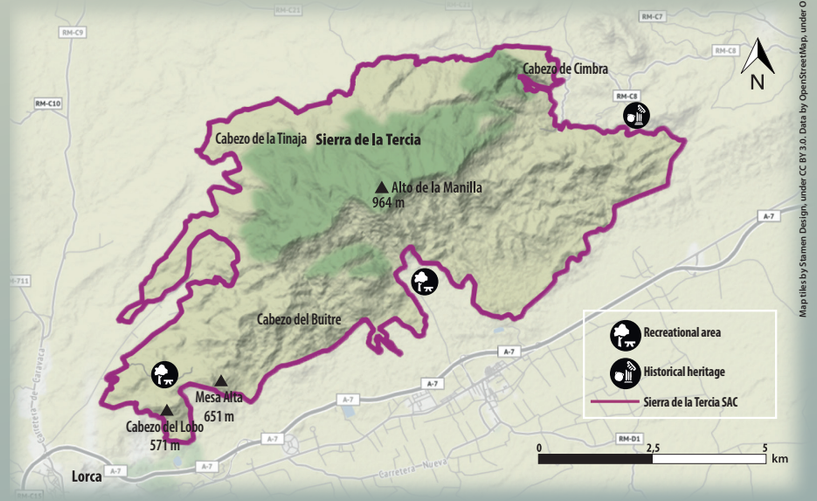
In central and western areas of southern slope, we can highlight the contrast of colours caused by the different types of rock, with a predominance of **schists and phyllites** that provide a wide range of colours: grey, bluish-green and reddish. From **Cerro del Arcón** and **Manilla Sur,** above 900 meters of altitude, we can clearly see this contrast of colours and the vegetation thickness.



Rocks and low scrub landscape typical of sunny side



Shady side landscape



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FAUNA

Among the **birds of prey** that find an ideal environment for nesting in rocky cliffs, we can stand out the **Bonelli's eagle** *(Aquila fasciata)*, **golden eagle** *(Aquila chrysaetos)*, **peregrine falcon** *(Falco peregrinus)* and **Eurasian eagle-owl** *(Bubo bubo)* together with corvids such as the **red-billed chough** *(Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax)*.



Spur-thighed tortoise *(Testudo graeca)*

Small birds such as **coal tit** *(Parus ater)* and **long-tailed tit** *(Aegithalos caudatus)* are abundant in forest areas, as well as other typical birds of pine forests such as the **wood pigeon** *(Columba palumbus)* and **jay** *(Garrulus glandarius)*.

Among the bushes, **warblers** are common, such as the **Dartford warbler** *(Sylvia undata)* or **Sardinian warbler** *(Sylvia melanocephala)*. In open and sunny areas, we find the **black wheatear** *(Oeanthe leucura)*, while in ravines we can stand out the **Thekla's lark** *(Galerida theklae)*, **woodlark** *(Lullula arborea)* and **Iberian grey shrike** *(Lanius meridionalis)*.

Regarding mammals, **rabbits** *(Oryctolagus cuniculus)* are abundant, which are the main source of food for birds of prey and carnivores such as the **fox** *(Vulpes vulpes)*, **genet** *(Genetta genetta)* and **badger** *(Meles meles)*, all of them being nocturnal.



Genet *(Genetta genetta)*

Among reptiles, the **spur-thighed tortoise** *(Testudo graeca)* stands out, as well as **Iberian pond turtle** *(Mauremys leprosa)* that inhabits Lébor ravine. Other species that prefer sunny areas are **Sierra Nevada lizard** *(Timon nevadensis)*, **spiny-footed lizard** *(Acanthodactylus erythurus)* and **ladder snake** *(Rhinechis scalaris)*. The most widespread group of amphibians is the **natterjack toad** *(Epidalea calamita)*, which takes advantage of the few water points available in the area to reproduce.



Bonelli's eagle *(Aquila fasciata)*

FLORA

Sierra de la Tercia has important formations of **pine** *(Pinus halepensis)* forest and **Mediterranean false brome** *(Brachypodium retusum)* grasslands that, in the high areas, are combined with specimens of **holm oaks** *(Quercus rotundifolia)*.

Shrubs are represented by species such as **kermes oak** *(Quercus coccifera)*, **juniper** *(Juniperus oxycedrus)*, **mastic** (Pistacia lentiscus) and **African sandalwood** *(Osyris lanceolata)*. In open land facing south, **esparto grass** *(Stipa tenacissima)* and different types of **thyme** *(Thymus spp.)* are more abundant.



Lorca's houseleek *(Limonium album)*

In rocky environments, we can highlight some unique flora species, such as ***zamarrilla de la Tercia*** *(Teucrium terciae)*, which has the most important populations in this area. We can also find **arnica** *(Hypericum ericoides)*, **rock tea** *(Chiliadenus glutinosus)* and other endangered plants such as **orejilla de roca** *(Lafuentea rotundifolia)*.

Floristic communities are very valuable, as they adapt to living



Zamarilla de la Tercia *(Teucrium terciae)*

in saline soils where **Lorca's houseleek** *(Limonium album)* grows, whose distribution is limited to Sierra de la Tercia and Torrecilla. We can also find other relevant species such as ***zamarrilla de yesos*** *(Teucrium balthazaris)*, ***espuelilla de yesos*** *(Chaenorrhinum rupestre)*, ***brochera pegajosa*** *(Santolina viscosa)* and ***quebrantapiedras*** *(Herniaria fruticosa)* in spots such as **Cabezo Atrajillado** and **Cabezo de la Tinaja.**

Salix pedicellata (a species of willow) and **evergreen honeysuckle** *(Lonicera implexa)* grow on some shady ravines. **Oleander** (*Nerium oleander)* populates mainly the sunny riverbeds while **jujube** *(Ziziphus lotus)*, a species from North African and southern of the Iberian Peninsula, appears sporadically in spots like **El Saltador** and **Casa del Zapatero.**



Jujube *(Ziziphus lotus)*