HISTORY

Over time, this area has preserved much of its rural character, reflected in its hamlets, landscape and cultural traditions.

Human presence in the Barrancos de Gebas dates back to prehistoric times. Notable archaeological sites include Fuente del Murtal (Alhama de Murcia) and El Castellar (Librilla). These settlements were occupied between the 8th and 4th centuries BC, and their location enabled them to control the natural route from the Guadalentín Valley to Sierra Espuña through the Algeciras rambla (ephemeral watercourse).

Associated with traditional practices, the collection and use of esparto grass as a valuable material is notable.

Among the gullies and ravines, cultivated lands can be seen, mainly dryland farming, where almond orchards predominate. Remains of ancient irrigation structures, such as channels and ponds—some of Arab origin—are also visible.

In the past, livestock farming was an important part of local life.

Gebas, a small village within the municipality of Alhama de Murcia, gives its name to this Protected Landscape. It consists of small groups of rural houses near springs. In the past, it had up to 300 inhabitants, but rural depopulation has reduced the number to around twenty.

In mid-August, the village comes alive again during its patron saint festivities.

Small village of Gebas (Alhama de Murcia)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Discover the Protected Landscape from its viewpoints, appreciating the changing colours throughout the day and across the different seasons.

Walking along the trails, you can admire its steep gullies and ravines, and the turquoise-blue reservoir, which contrasts with the colour of the marls.

Among the attractions of this natural area are its unique geomorphological formations, flora and fauna that survive in extreme conditions, the Algeciras Reservoir and the nearby village of Gebas.

During your visit:

- Leave your vehicle in the designated parking areas.
- Always walk along authorised paths; creating shortcuts harms the flora and fauna and damages the soil.
- Keep pets on a lead and remember to pick up after them.
- Respect the surrounding flora and fauna.
- Preserve geological, archaeological and historical heritage without altering or removing it.
- In case of emergency, call 112.
- Do not disturb other visitors or wildlife with noise.
- Take responsibility for the waste you produce. Cigarette butts and food scraps are also litter.
- Avoid walking in this landscape on very hot, sunny, windy or rainy days, as well as when it has recently rained.
- Stay protected from the sun and carry plenty of water in your rucksack.
- Do not feed wildlife, for your safety and the welfare of the animals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
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CALIDAD TURÍSTICA

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Protected Landscape
Barrancos de Gebas

EUROPARC
Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

A rich and arid landscape in constant change

INTRODUCTION

Barrancos de Gebas Protected Landscape is located in the heart of the Region of Murcia, within the municipalities of Alhama de Murcia and Librilla, on the eastern slope of Sierra Espuña.

Covering 1,875 hectares, it is surrounded by Sierra Espuña, Sierra de la Muela, Sierra del Cura and the Fuente Librilla plain.

The Protected Landscape is notable for its high geological and geomorphological value, representing one of the finest examples of badlands in the Region of Murcia.

This importance led to its designation as a Geological Site of Interest (GSI).

Equally remarkable is the variety of environments that support flora and fauna adapted to harsh arid and saline conditions. These unique features create habitats of outstanding ecological value.

The Sierra Espuña Natural Resources Management Plan, approved in 1995, included the protection of the Barrancos de Gebas as a Protected Landscape.

Algeciras Reservoir

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Barrancos de Gebas lie at elevations between 185 and 450 metres. They have a warm climate with scarce and irregular rainfall, and their rocky substrate—composed of clays, salts and gypsum—breaks down easily. They are crossed by two major ramblas—the Rambla de Librilla and the Rambla de Algeciras—ephemeral watercourses that flow only after heavy rainfall.

From seabed to the present landscape

Around 10 million years ago, it lay beneath the sea, where sediments carried by watercourses flowing from emergent areas such as Sierra Espuña were deposited on the seabed. Approximately 6 million years ago, the sea level dropped and the area was exposed, marking the beginning of the erosion of these soft, poorly consolidated materials.

Various tectonic readjustments and a climate characterised by more intense and irregular rainfall—which further intensifies erosion—have helped shape this remarkable landscape.

Gullies, rills, gypsum strata, fairy chimneys and piping structures are some of the spectacular geomorphological formations that erosion has sculpted here.

Fairy chimney

It is a living, ever-changing landscape. Its shifting light and shadow, combined with the variety of colours and textures, leaves every visitor captivated.

Gypsum strata

Badlands landscape

FAUNA

Rich and varied wildlife in a harsh environment
The fauna is adapted to the extreme conditions of this unique semi-desert environment.

In the early hours of the morning, it is common to hear the calls of the western jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*) or to spot the crested lark (*Galerida cristata*), while birds of prey such as the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and the common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) soar overhead in search of prey.

In the height of the day, reptiles such as the Algerian psammodromus (*Psammodromus algirus*), the Montpellier snake (*Malpolon monspessulanum*) and the Sierra Nevada lizard (*Timon nevadensis*) bask in the sun to regulate their body temperature. In spring and summer, the European bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) adds colour to the landscape as it feeds on honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) and other insects.

Crested lark
(Galerida cristata)

At dusk, birds such as the little owl (*Athene noctua*), the Eurasian stone-curlew (*Burhinus oedicnemus*) and the imposing Eurasian eagle-owl (*Bubo bubo*) appear, alongside nocturnal mammals including the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), the European hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*), the wood mouse (*Apodemus sylvaticus*)

European bee-eater
(Merops apiaster)

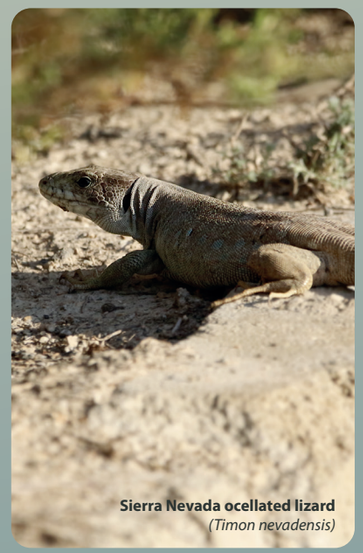
and the European badger (*Meles meles*). The Iberian spiny toad (*Bufo spinosus*) can also be observed in the more humid areas of this rugged terrain.

A great wealth of invertebrates
Butterflies, beetles, spiders and other insects inhabit this arid yet vibrant landscape.

The reservoir, home to waterbirds
The reservoir is home to both resident and wintering species. Among the most notable are the mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), the grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*), the great crested grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) and the great cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*).

Iberian spiny toad
(Bufo spinosus)

Giant fennel
(Ferula communis)



Sierra Nevada ocellated lizard
(Timon nevadensis)

FLORA

Plants that withstand extreme conditions
The vegetation of the Barrancos de Gebas is adapted to the harsh conditions of this environment: high temperatures, water scarcity and saline and gypsum-rich soils.

Plant life on gypsum and saline soils
The gypsum steppes stand out, a plant community particularly adapted to these soils. Here grow three toothed restharrow (*Ononis tridentata*), rupturewort (*Herniaria fruticosa*) and scaly rockrose *(Helianthemum squamatum)*.

We can also find species associated with marl and saline soils, such as Mediterranean saltbush (*Atriplex halimus*), which expels excess salt through its leaves, and albardine (*Lygeum spartum*). Plants typical of damp ravines are also found, such as oleander (*Nerium oleander*) and tamarisk (*Tamarix* sp.), which provide shelter for small birds, as well as roundhead bulrush (*Scirpoides holoschoenus*) and common reed (*Phragmites australis*).

Scents and colours along the way
As we walk, we are accompanied by the scent of the thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*) and *Artemisia barrelieri*, a type of wormwood. A particularly characteristic plant is the giant fennel (*Ferula communis*), which adds colour in late spring when it blooms.

Three toothed restharrow
(Ononis tridentata)

Survival strategies
Sometimes we may discover plants that store water in their tissues, such as pale stonecrop (*Petrosedum sediforme*), or plants that lack chlorophyll and depend on other plants to survive as parasites, such as yellow broomrape (*Cistanche phelypaea*) and common dodder (*Cuscuta epithymum*).

Plants of traditional use
Esparto grass (*Macrochloa tenacissima*), caper bush (*Capparis spinosa*) and *Caroxylon genistoides*, a shrubby saltwort, grow here and have been used for centuries.

Caper bush
(Capparis spinosa)