

Key features of the Capçaleres del Ter i del Freser Natural Park

Puig de la Clapa, 1.654 m

Puig de les Basses de Fabert, 1.637 m Puig Pedrissa, 1.641 m

Puig de les Forques, 1.619 m Puig de Montesquiu, 1.579 m Montfalgars, 1.610 m

Roca del Gall, 1.413 m

Comanegra, 1.557 m



Basses de Puig Sec



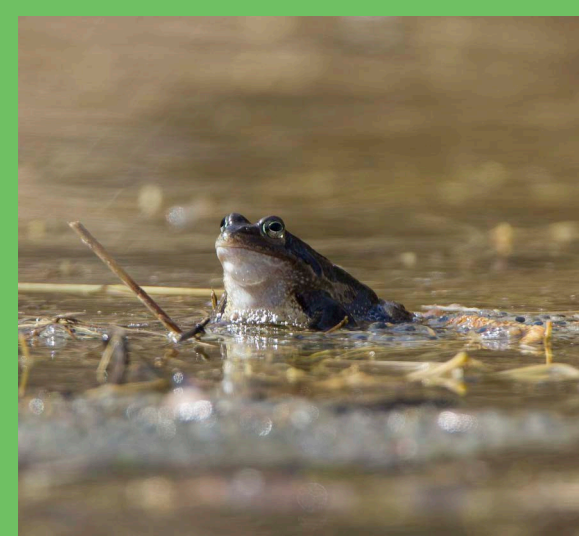
On the ridge top above Fabert lie a series of pools, used by grazing cattle, that play a key role in the local ecosystem and its biodiversity.

These temporary ponds are where the cattle and wild animals that frequent the area come to drink, shelter and breed; this is the case of the Common Frogs (*Rana temporaria*) and the dragonflies that require small wetlands in which to lay their eggs and for their larvae to develop.

Other animals come to these pools to drink, including numerous birds, some of which are passing through on migration.

An interesting inhabitant of these pools is the fairy shrimp *Chirocephalus diaphanus*, which is a little over 1 cm in length and has a transparent body. They appear seasonally, often in large numbers, in shallow waters and have short life-cycles that last just long enough for them to mate and lay their eggs. If the pond dries up, these eggs lay dormant in the mud and will only hatch when the pond floods again.

These ephemeral pools turn into mud baths as the water evaporates. They are easily recognizable by the numerous clumps of sedges, above all of *Carex cespitosa*, a species that in the Iberian Peninsula is only found in the eastern part of the Natural Park and the county of Bortziri in Navarre.



Common frog (*Rana temporaria*)
Photograph: Mario Cobler

Grazing pastures

The landscape that surrounds you is not natural and is, rather, the product of centuries of human intervention. The pastures below 2,000 m that abound in the Natural Park were carved out by our distant ancestors from the oakwoods that clothed the lower slopes and from the mountain pines that thrived at somewhat higher altitudes. For over 6,000 years herders have been burning and cutting back the forests to allow the grasslands their herds graze to flourish.

The montane pastures at altitudes of 1,200–1,800 m were once used around St Michael's Day (29 September) as temporary grazing for the herds heading down from their summer pastures to their winter quarters in the lowlands or along the coast.

Today, with the demise of the vast flocks of sheep that once grazed these mountains, these pastures are gradually being lost and swallowed up by tracts of unproductive thicket and scrub.



Migration

Every spring and autumn millions of birds migrate between Europe and Africa, thereby swapping their breeding areas for wintering quarters (and vice versa). In spring, birds move south-north and then complete their return journeys in autumn.

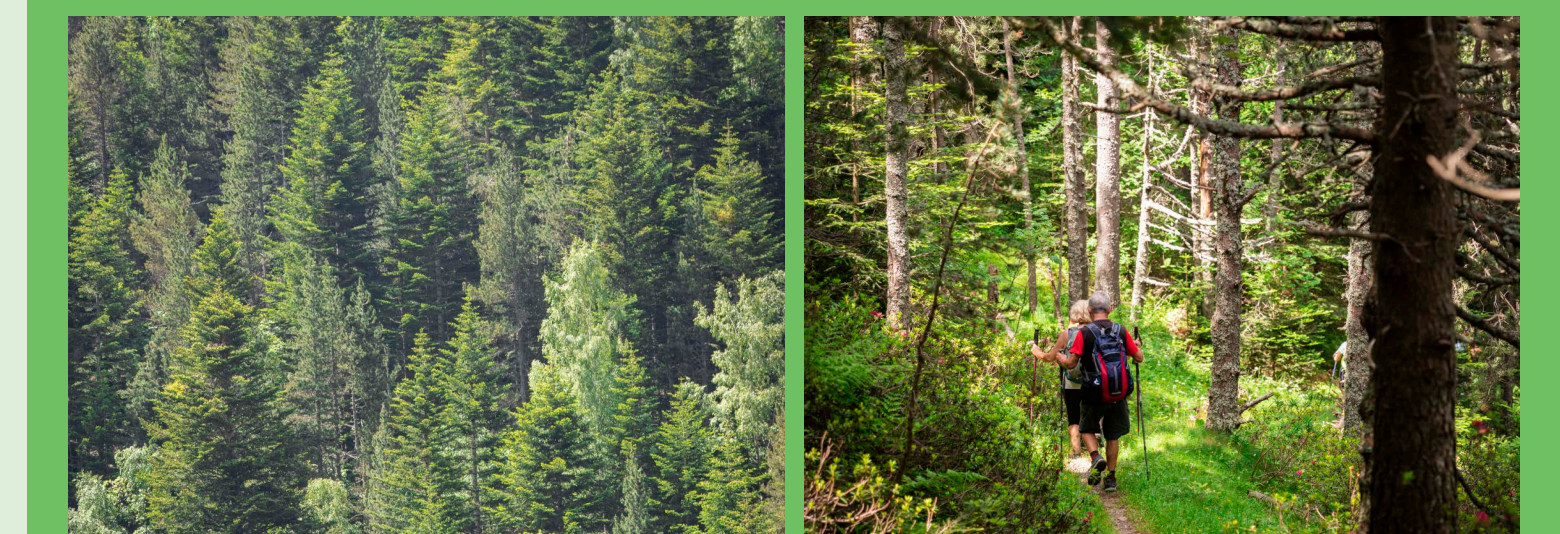
Birds choose the most energy-saving strategies and so when they have to cross mountain chains like the Pyrenees they opt for direct routes between peaks; for this reason, Coll d'Ares is an excellent place for observing migratory birds.

Some of the easiest species to spot on migration are raptors such as Short-toed Eagle, Honey Buzzard and Black Kite.



Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)
Photograph: Thomas Kraft (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:ThKraft)

The Scots pine



The Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) is known as the 'red' pine in Catalan due to the colour of its bark, which is orange towards its crown but redder towards its base.

This conifer grows rapidly, up to 6 m in 10 years if environmental conditions (rain and temperature) are favourable and the soil moist, deep and fertile. Scots pines can reach 40 m in height and are resistant to both drought and cold. They are thus the most commonly used species for forestry plantations in both the pre-Pyrenees and Pyrenees.

Scots pines flower in May-June and their cones, which may stay on the tree for 1-2 years, mature in the autumn but are not fertile until trees are over 40 years old.