

La Serra de Montsant Natural Park



Parc Natural
**de la Serra
de Montsant**



Generalitat de Catalunya
Government of Catalonia
**Department of the Environment
and Housing**



La Serra de Montsant

Natural Park

The Montsant mountain range is one of the most unusual areas in Catalonia. Its distinctive relief, severe mountains, important biodiversity and the fact that the area remains almost entirely in its natural state make for a unique and very valuable landscape, with a large number of interesting species, and the area is now one of the principal reserves of flora and fauna in the Mediterranean coastal mountains. This exceptional value was recognised by the Parliament of Catalonia on 30th April 2002, when it approved the designation of the area as a Natural Park "with the objective of protecting its geological, biological, landscape and cultural value, respecting the sustainable development of its use."

This territorial approach has led to the structuring and rationalising of the relationships between human activities and the ecosystem, preserving the natural and cultural heritage of the mountain range, encouraging society to value it to the full, and favouring economic development that will guarantee the quality of life of those who live in the municipalities in the area.

The territory of the Natural Park is predominantly rocky, and stretches as far as the western sector of the Catalan Prelitoral mountain range, in the region of El Priorat. The protected area covers 9,242 hectares, with a maximum altitude of 1,163 metres at Roca Corbatera. It is included in the municipal areas dependent on La Morera de Montsant, Ulldemolins, Margalef, Cabacés, Cornudella de Montsant, La Vilella Alta, La Vilella Baixa, La Bisbal de Falset and La Figuera.

The Physical Environment: Relief and Climate

The unusual aspect of the mountain range is the unique nature of the relief, which rises up as a block running from east-northeast to west-southwest, in the western sector of the Catalan Prelitoral mountain range. The unusual shape of the landscape is due to the different erosion of the wind and water on the calcareous materials and other, softer stones that are layered among them, along with the phenomenon of karstification. The surrounding peaks stand out with their gullies and prominent cliffs. The calcareous nature of the massif is evident in the more characteristic elements of the relief, such as the crannies in the rocks, chasms, crags and caves.

On the south side, the most noticeable features are the imposing rocky faces of Cingle Major (Large Cliff), formed by the collection of Oligocene limestone from 38 to 24.6 million years ago. Above this, the mountain continues its gentle climb up to the Serra Major. This crest has a wavy appearance as a result of the combination of its rounded, winding contours and troughs. Three peaks of moderate height can be distinguished: La Cogulla, of 1,063 m; Piló dels Senyalets, of 1,109 m; and Roca Corbatera, of 1,163 metres, the latter being the highest point of the Park.

To the north, the undulating landscape is transformed into a vision of sharp gullies, such as the ones at Els Pèlacs, which pour their waters into the extremely well conserved Montsant River.

Beyond the majestic Fraguerau gorge, on the western side, the speed of the waters is brought to a stop by the Margalef reservoir, and the Serra Major breaks up into a fan of minor ridges, falling away gently towards the river's westernmost meander.

To the extreme east, the mountain makes a complete turn towards the northwest and the Serra de Solans ridge, with a maximum altitude at the peak of El Peret of 1,106m. This branch of the ridge falls sharply away, into Los Ventadors, towards the river.

The Park is situated in the north east of the Iberian Peninsula, and, seen on a large scale, it falls into the strip of warm, temperate climates that circles the entire Northern Hemisphere. On a smaller scale it should be noted that the Mediterranean climate fully affects it. This is characterised by a dry, subtropical summer and a mild winter, with periodic cold snaps.

The significant altitude difference between the base and the peaks of the range, the varying orientation of the slopes and the complicated relief mean that climatic factors encourage the existence of greatly varied microclimates.

1 Cover: Serra de Montsant
Photo: Richard Martin

2 Opposite page: Grape vines at the foot of the Montsant mountain range
Photo: Biel Roig

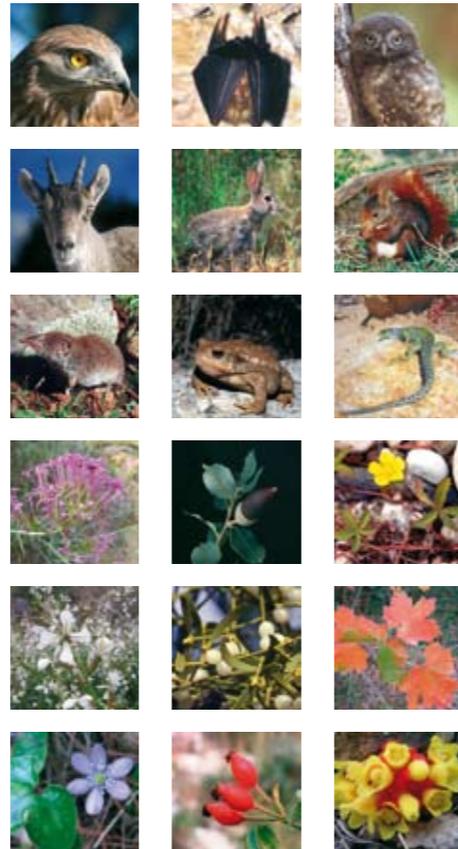


The highest temperatures are recorded on the western side of the massif between the months of June and August, and can reach 40°C. The minimum temperatures in winter are very low, especially in those valleys affected by thermal inversion, and can be between -10°C and -15°C. These valleys are often frozen from early autumn right through to mid-Spring. The average annual temperature is around 15°C. Precipitation is irregular, with maximum precipitation recorded in the spring and autumn, and minimum levels in summer and winter. Average annual rainfall varies between 450 and 600 l/m². Snowfall is frequent, as are low cloud formations, creating fog banks which, on occasion, last for quite some time.

Fauna

La Serra de Montsant Natural Park contains what is without doubt one of the richest animal populations in Catalonia. Its variety of environments leads to a wide diversity of extremely interesting species not only for their abundance but also due to their nature as endemic species or animals that are very rare among Catalan fauna. Among the mammals, it is worth highlighting the presence of the greater horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*), the wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) and some isolated examples of the Spanish ibex (*Capra pyrenaica ssp. hispanica*). Other characteristic mammals are the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), the common genet (*Genetta genetta*), the beech marten (*Martes*

foina), the Eurasian badger (*Meles meles*), the polecat (*Mustela putorius*) and the Etruscan pygmy shrew (*Suncus etruscus*). The Montsant mountain range is a nesting and resting place for a number of species of birds of prey of great interest, such as the Bonelli's eagle (*Hieraetus fasciatus*), the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), the kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), the Eurasian eagle owl (*Bubo bubo*), the Northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) and the long-eared owl (*Asio otus*). Among the other birds, it is worth mentioning the blue rock thrush (*Monticola solitarius*), the rock thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*), the wallcreeper (*Trichodroma muraria*), the crested tit (*Parus cristatus*), the great spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*), the dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*) and the kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*). The reptile family is represented by the Iberian wall lizard (*Podarcis hispanica*), the Lataste's viper (*Vipera latasti*), the ladder snake (*Elaphe scalaris*), the viperine snake (*Natrix maura*), the horseshoe whip snake (*Coluber hippocrepis*) and the Montpellier snake (*Malpolon monspessulanus*). Of the invertebrates, beetles such as the Capricorn beetle (*Cerambyx cerdo ssp. mirbecky*), the rhinoceros beetle (*Oryctes nasicornis ssp. grypus*), and the stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*) are the largest and most often seen. In addition to this, the good quality of the waters of the Montsant river and its subsidiary streams has resulted in a wide variety of fish, in particular species such as barbels (*Barbus graellsii*, *B. haasi*), French nase (*Chondrostoma miegii*) and



trout (*Salmo trutta*). In the more hidden spots the white-clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*), which is growing ever rarer, can still be found. Among the amphibians, the salamander (*Salamandra salamandra*) and the natterjack toad (*Bufo calamita*) are noteworthy.

Vegetation

The plant life of Montsant is predominantly Mediterranean, with a certain degree of sub-Mediterranean and Eurosiberian influence. The vegetation is divided between the areas where the deciduous oak and viburnum and the evergreen oak dominate (most of the space) and the dry oak forests of Portuguese oak which can be found in the more humid valley floors and on the higher levels of the mountain range. Woods of Portuguese oak are not common on Montsant, and those that do grow form small groves within the pine woods, making them mixed woods. In addition to the Portuguese oak (*Quercus faginea*) and the downy oak (*Q. pubescens* and *Q. x cerrioides*), there are Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra ssp. salzmannii*). In these woods there are other deciduous trees such as the Danish maple (*Acer opalus ssp. granatense*), the Montpellier maple (*Acer monspessulanum*), and the hazel (*Corylus avellana*) which sprinkle the forest on the shady slopes and gullies, and which are especially visible in autumn, when the leaves take on different shades of yellow and red.

In addition to this, we will also find woods of Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*) in the lower parts, growing above the undergrowth of rosemary and winter heather or Scots pine and Austrian pine on higher ground. The humid valley floors and riverbanks are able to sustain some non-Mediterranean plant species such as fragments of downy oak groves, yew groves and incipient riparian forests. Poplar groves are the most common riparian woods and cover those areas where flooding is unlikely. They are made up of white poplar (*Populus alba*), Lombardy poplar (*Populus nigra*) and narrowleaf ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*). Willow woods are riparian woods covering those areas that flood frequently. The willows (*Salix alba*, *S. atrocinerea*, *S. elaeagnos*, *S. purpurea*, *S. fragilis*) grow over the undergrowth of low shrubs and herbs, such as brambles, hops (*Humulus lupulus*) and apple mint (*Mentha suaveolens*). Reed beds are formed by species that flourish in flooded, shallow rivers, such as the common reed (*Phragmites australis*), the narrowleaf cattail (*Typha angustifolia*) and the bulrush (*Scirpus maritimus*). In the more sheltered areas of Montsant, frequently found plants are box (*Buxus sempervirens*), Phoenician juniper (*Juniperus phoenicea*), prickly juniper (*Juniperus oxycedrus*) and bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi var. crassifolius*). The large area covered by rocky ground makes the Park unique, rich in the elements common to this type of environment, such as the communities of rock willow. The cliff and rock faces are home to a whole range of plant species that cling directly to the rock, making the most of what little soil

accumulates in the cracks and holes in calcareous rock, such as the globe flower (*Globularia repens*), the potentilla (*Potentilla caulescens*) and the rock tea (*Jasonia saxatilis*). In addition, the foot of the mountain, especially where the oak woods dominate, shows the influence of continental species, such as the barberry (*Berberidatum aragonense*).

- 1 Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)
Photo: Pep Gener
- 2 Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)
Photo: Pep Gener
- 3 Barn owl (*Tyto alba*)
Photo: Pep Gener
- 4 Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*)
Photo: Ricard del Rio
- 5 Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)
Photo: Pep Gener
- 6 Strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*)
Photo: Roger Pascual
- 7 Pyrenean fritillary (*Fritillaria pyrenaica*)
Photo: Roger Pascual
- 8 Wild senna (*Globularia alypum*)
Photo: Roger Pascual



A Little History

The first indications of settlement here date from the mid and upper Palaeolithic period, indications taking the form of flint tools found at various sites such as the El Filador and El Boix caves, the El Coll archaeological sites and, the oldest of all, the Planots sites (90,000 to 35,000 BC). The oldest figurative wall etchings in Catalonia were discovered in the La Taverna cave, dating from the upper Palaeolithic period, showing the figure of a red deer. Remains from the Neolithic age have also been found, in sites such as the Cave of Santa Lucia, the Sant Bartolomeu shelters or the cavern of L'Heura. Evidence of burial caves and inhabited caves from the bronze and iron ages can still be seen, as can stone huts. The funerary urns kept at Obagues d'Ulldemolins and La cista del Tancat, burial chambers with traces of fire rituals found at Escaladei, and the village of Coll de la Coma, near La Morera de Montsant, are all from this period. No traces have been found here of the Iberian and Roman civilisations, although legend has it that the village of La Figuera (The Fig Tree) owes its name to an enormous fig tree which the Romans used as shelter from the rain for their flocks. The first historical records date from the when the area was under Arab control, from the 8th century to the middle of the 12th century, when Siurana fell in 1153. During this time, there are records of the presence of hermits in the Montsant, which the Arab population knew as «blessed mountain». The conquered territory passed into the hands of the Lord of Siurana, Albert de Castellvell, who would later,

with the consent of the King Alphonse I, concede powers over the population to other Lords, such as Ramon de Vallbona, Fra Guerau Miquel and Arnau de Salfores. The majority of the villages as they are today, along with the foundation of the Carthusian monastery of Escaladei and the Monastery of Bonrepòs, date from the 12th or 13th centuries. Over the centuries, the population has increased and decreased, as in the rest of the Principality, for various reasons, such as the arrival of waves of migrants from the other side of the Pyrenees, smallpox epidemics, famine, war etc. From the end of the 17th century to the last quarter of the 19th century, the area boomed with the expansion of wine production. There is evidence all around of the agricultural and stockbreeding use of the land which come right into the present: banks, walled shelters and huts and wells built from stone. The main crops on the mountain were grapes, olives, cereals and nuts. From the end of the 19th century, with the crisis in agriculture caused by the phylloxera parasite that led to the abandonment of crops and farms, and throughout the 20th century, the villages of Montsant have experienced a constant decline in population, with people migrating to more industrialised areas. After the Civil War came a period of intense exploitation of the forest resources – wood and carbon – but in the last third of the century, the traditional economic activities of the area such as agriculture and stockbreeding all but disappeared, limited to the lower parts of the mountain range. With the growth of hiking, the mountain became a sport and leisure area from the beginning of the 20th century. Today, the total inhabitants of the municipalities that

benefit from the Park is scarcely 2,850 [2007], a long way from the highest recorded population of 11,062, according to the census of 1887. Of these people, very few live within the protected area of the Park. The active population works principally in agriculture (22%), commerce and services (46,6%), industry (17,6%), and construction (13,8%). The declining population seems to have stabilised, and a slight revival can be seen thanks to the high opinion of the wines of the Qualified Designation of Origin Priorat and the Designation of Origin Montsant and oil from the Designation of Origin Siurana along with the new economic activities linked to leisure activities.

The Villages

Vines, olive groves, soft fruits, escarpments, villages with mills, peaceful and welcoming in atmosphere, narrow, cobbled streets, and churches and bell towers rising up from the human landscape rich in traditions and customs, make the Priorat region, and more specifically the villages that constitute the La Serra de Montsant Natural Park, an extremely attractive place.

La Morera de Montsant - Escaladei

A small, welcoming village situated at the foot of Montsant, with a wide variety of different ways to ascend to the Serra Major: El Caixer, L'Enderrocada, L'Escletxa, Salfores, El Camí de Montsant (also known as La Grallera), L'Espinós, L'Agnet, Els Barrots, Carrasclet and Carabassal, which offer the visitor a wonderful view of the

landscape of the Priorat area. It is well worth taking a walk around the streets of this old village, which is of Arab origin, to see the different walls made from stone. It is also worth highlighting the Romanesque façade of the church, the Mas de Sant Blai (old monastery of Bonrepòs), the chapel of La Mare de Déu de Montsant and the Carthusian monastery of Escaladei, one of the most significant national monuments of Catalonia and the first Carthusian community of the Iberian Peninsula, founded in 1194. The inhabited centre that can be seen today of the Escaladei Monastery, built around the former residence of the monastic Procurator, dates from the middle of the 19th century.

Cabacés

Located to the west of the Priorat region, this village has water running in its streets, fountains and chapels. Over the Montsant river there is a stone bridge with an impressive central arch and two side arches, a piece of mediaeval construction appropriate to this important route and which tradition attributes to the Romans. Within the village is the Chapel of Sant Joan, the Miquel Montagut Museum and, within Montsant, the chapels of Sant Roc and La Foia.

Ulldemolins

The municipality of Ulldemolins occupies the northernmost sector of the region, on the skirts of Montsant, known as the Vall del Silenci (The Valley of Silence). Within this municipality there are a number of chapels of architectural, historical and legendary interest. The oldest of these is the chapel of Sant Bartomeu, dating back to the 12th century and situated in the Fraguerau gorge,

a place of great and unique beauty where the Montsant river can be crossed. The chapel of Sant Antoni de Pàdua and the chapel of Santa Magdalena are also worthy of mention. The same municipality houses the parish church of Sant Jaume and at the edge of the village lies the Shrine of Loreto, a building of Neoclassical appearance.

Cornudella de Montsant - Albarca

The town of Cornudella de Montsant is situated high in the Siurana river valley, between the Montsant massif to the west and the Prades mountains, to the east, joined by the Albarca Pass, from where many trips leave. The chapel of Sant Joan del Codolar, on the southern face of the Montsant ridge at the head of the Sant Joan gully, is well worth a visit. From there, various routes lead up Montsant such as, for example, the Els tres Esqleaons path and the El Montsant path.

La Vilella Alta

A small town on the summit of an outcrop offering the visitor panoramic views of the lower Montsant and the paths of La Vilella, and La Guineu, among others, by which to climb it. The parish church of Santa Lúcia, dating from the second half of the 18th century, stands out for its Neoclassical style with a strong Baroque influence.

La Vilella Baixa

A captivating village in the Montsant river valley. This is a village of great architectural and picturesque value, with a strong Mediaeval flavour. The steep, narrow streets and the unique buildings emphasise this. The building of most note is the parish church

of Sant Joan Baptista, in a Baroque-influenced Neoclassical style. There are a number of different paths from here that wind their way towards La Figuera. Also of interest are the trails of Els Bous and the Coll Empeprat, which climb into the Montsant mountain range.

1 La Vilella Alta

Photo: Richard Martin

2 La Figuera

Photo: Anton Briansó

3 La Vilella Baixa

Photo: Anton Briansó

4 La Morera del Montsant

Photo: Anton Briansó

5 Escaladei

Photo: Biel Roig

6 Albarca

Photo: Anton Briansó

7 Ulldemolins

Photo: Anton Briansó

8 Cornudella del Montsant

Photo: Richard Martin

9 Margalef de Montsant

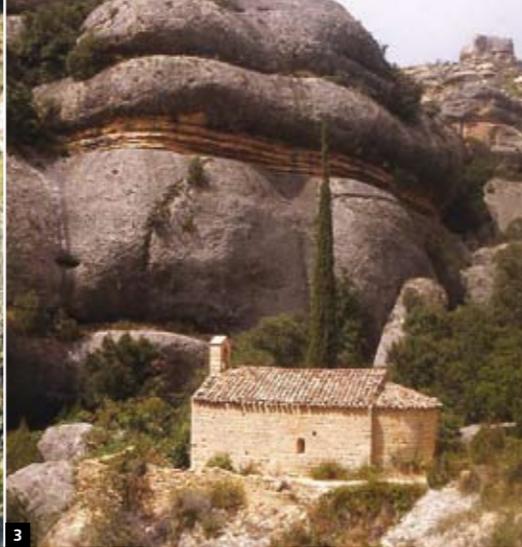
Photo: Anton Briansó

10 La Bisbal de Falset

Photo: Anton Briansó

11 Cabacés

Photo: Richard Martin



1 2

3

4 5

La Bisbal de Falset

The village of La Bisbal de Falset, mainly agricultural in landscape, seems to cling onto the mountain among rock shelters and outcrops. It is in the Montsant river valley, which separates the last Western gullies from the Llena mountain range. A number of houses are of interest here, mainly from the 19th century, and the parish church of La Nativitat de la Mare de Déu, from the end of the 18th century, in the Neoclassical style with some Baroque elements, is also worth a visit. Near the village is a cave dedicated to Santa Llúcia, which was used as a military hospital in 1938.

Margalef de Montsant

A charming village situated in the extreme northwest of the Priorat region. One of its main features is the church of Sant Miquel, clinging to the rock, with a neoclassical appearance from the 18th century. The municipality is on a bend in the Montsant river, which crosses the northeast and northwest of the territory, forming a narrow, sheer gorge between the southern face of the La Llena ridge and the northern face of the Montsant massif, to the Serra Major chain. The gullies of Sant Salvador, La Coma Negra, La Coma Closa and La Taverna slope up from the left bank of the river, rising up to an area of abundant springs, shelters, caves and chasms, such as the five chasms of L'Auferí and the La Taverna cave, which are important for the richness and abundance of Palaeolithic remains found there. The most representative of these is the engraving of a red deer in the La Taverna cave. Also of note is the chapel of Sant Salvador de Margalef, built in the 16th century.

La Figuera

A high village on the right of the Montsant river, in the mountainous area that separates the river basin of the Montsant river from those of the Siurana and Ebro rivers, with the cliffs of El Tossal de Guixar, to the extreme east, and the culminating point of El Tossal de Sant Pau, to the north. The village of La Figuera is in an elevated location, with good visibility, from where seven provinces can be seen (Tarragona, Lleida, Barcelona, Osca, Saragossa, Teruel and Castelló), and which offers a panoramic view of the Montsant mountain range. The parish church of Sant Martí is worth highlighting, with its Baroque elements from the 18th century, as is the chapel of Sant Pau.

Rules and Recommendations

- Respect private property. Remember that the mountains and woods have their owners, but we are all responsible for the conservation and improvement of this part of our heritage.
- Respect all the elements of architectural heritage. Remember that our society has to protect this culture for future generations.
- La Serra de Montsant Natural Park is an ideal place for hiking and for getting to know our natural and cultural heritage. Please follow the tracks and paths.
- Remember that the activities which can be carried out in the Natural Park are regulated. Flying, rock climbing, group activities etc. are governed by specific regulations.
- Remember that lighting fires is strictly prohibited. Carelessness can destroy something that nature has taken centuries to create.

- Don't let anyone know where you've been! Don't litter the mountain with your rubbish.
- Wild camping is prohibited.
- Motor vehicles are only permitted on the forest tracks open for public use.
- Follow the signs.
- If you are looking for mushrooms, do not harm the woodland.
- Admire the plants respectfully; it is our duty and responsibility to look after them.
- If you find an animal, do not disturb it or catch it. Just enjoy watching it.
- The instructions of park rangers, accredited park employees and the owners and residents of the Park must be heeded at all times.
- Visit the information centres before entering the Park. In them you can find out how to enjoy the Park without damaging it.

1 Carthusian monastery at Escaladei

Photo: Richard Martin

2 Bridge of Cavaloca

Photo: Salvador Palomar

3 Chapel of Sant Bartomeu

Photo: Salvador Palomar

4 Grazing on Montsant

Photo: Salvador Palomar

5 Crops on La Serra de Montsant

Photo: Richard Martin

6 Montsant River (back cover)

Photo: Richard Martin

Information centres and places of interest

Office and information centre of La Serra de Montsant Natural Park

C/ Major, 4 baixos. 43361 La Morera de Montsant
 Telephone: (00 34) 977 827 310
 Fax: 977 82 71 05
 E-mail: pnmontsant.dmah@gencat.cat
 http://www.parcscatalunya.cat

Cornudella de Montsant Information Point

C/ Comte de Rius, s/n. 43360 Cornudella de Montsant
 Telephone: (00 34) 977 821 000

Ulldemolins Information Point

Plaça de l'Església, s/n
 43363 Ulldemolins
 Telephone: 977 56 18 66

Falset Tourist Office

C/ St. Marcel, 2. 43730 Falset
 Telephone: (00 34) 977 831 023

Cartoixa d'Scala Dei

Camí de la Cartoixa, s/n
 43379 Escaladei - La Morera de Montsant
 Telephone: 977 82 70 06
 E-mail: escaladei.cultura@gencat.cat

Shelters

Albarca. Refugi Montsant

Telephone: 660 66 07 21

Margalef. Can Severet

Telephone: 977 81 90 08

Cabacés. Cal Ferrer

Telephone: 977 83 91 84 - 696 85 43 90

Cornudella. Climbing World

Telephone: 977 82 13 13

Ulldemolins. Ermita de Sant Antoni

Telephone: 636 62 81 52

Collaborating Bodies

PEDRENCA, NATURA I CULTURA

C/ de la Font, 2. 43361 La Morera de Montsant
 Telephone: (00 34) 690 251 295
 E-mail: pedrenca@pedrenca.com
 http://www.pedrenca.com
 They offer: Guided trips, nature talks, educational itineraries, nature workshops and environmental education programmes for teaching centres.

CATSUD

Pl. Vila, 16. 43736 El Masroig
 Telephone: (00 34) 636 16 24 26
 E-mail: info@catsud.com
 http://www.catsud.com
 They offer: Guided trips, hiking, educational trails and rural tourism.

EXCURSIONS.CAT

Telephone: 626 82 23 85
 E-mail: info@excursions.cat
 www.excursions.cat
 We offer guided hikes in Catalan, Spanish, English and German.

Area (Department of the Environment and Housing Planning Service.
 Last updated: 2008)
 9.242 ha

Municipalities

La Bisbal de Falset
 Cabacés
 Cornudella de Montsant
 La Figuera
 Margalef de Montsant
 La Morera de Montsant
 Ulldemolins
 La Vilella Alta
 La Vilella Baixa

Regions

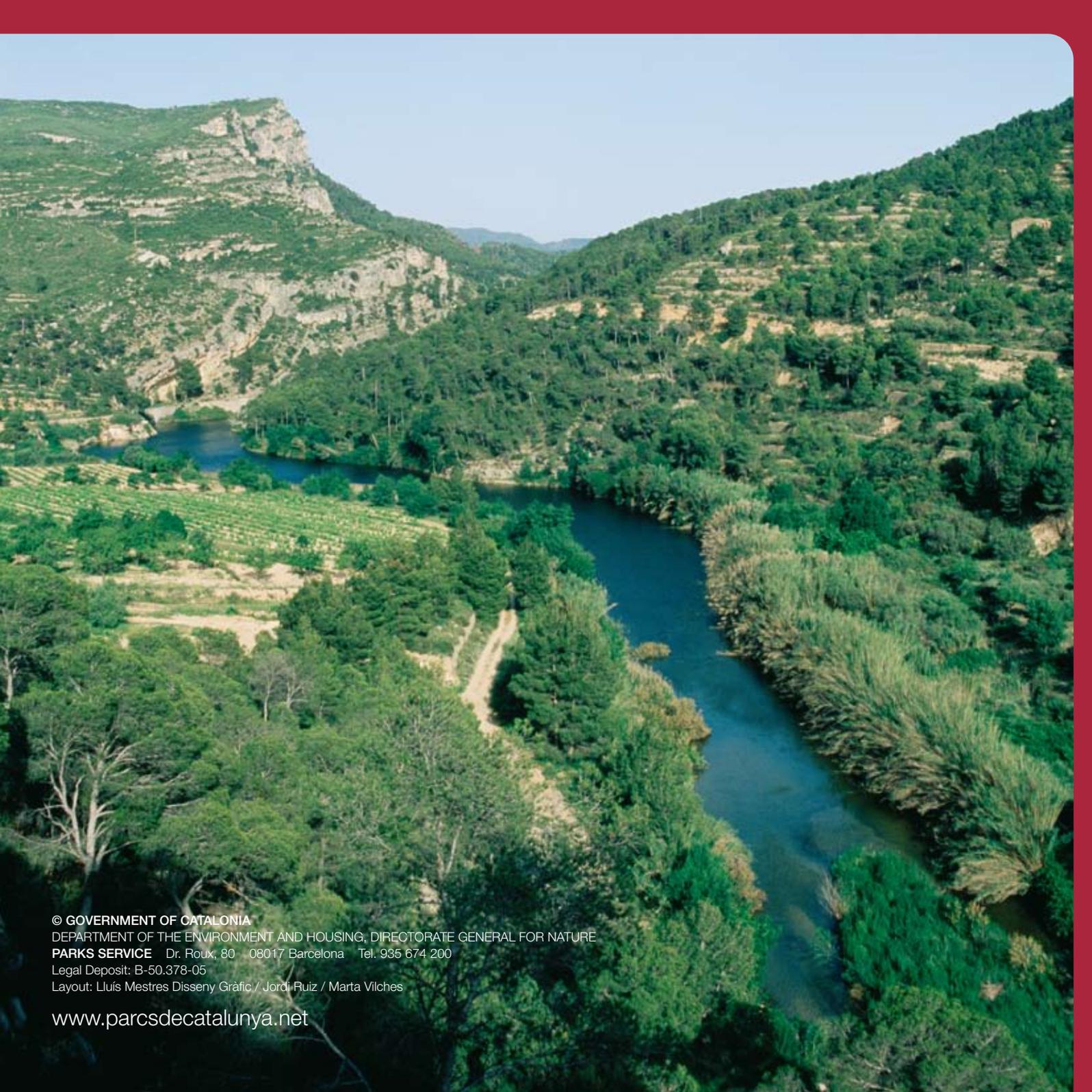
El Priorat

Date of creation

Decree 131/2002, of 30th April, declaring La Serra de Montsant a Natural Park

International Protection

Natura 2000. Mediterranean Region



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