

Cabo Gata-Nijar

Legal status	Natural Park and Marine Reserve
Foundation year	1987 and 1995
Foundation text	Decreet n° 31/1987 and Order 3 July 1995
Management body	Protected Areas and Environmental Services, Environment Council of the Assembly of Andalucia
Superficy	38000ha
Management category (IUCN, 1994)	V



Territory

The Cabo de Gata – Nijar is located in the southeastern limit of the province of Almeria. It covers a territory of 38,000 ha and one nautical mile (12,000 ha.) starting from the coastline (about 45 km long).



Cabo de Gata – Nijar has been a SPAMI since 2001 thanks to the presence of endemic habitats and species, both on land and in the sea.

Physical features

Cabo de Gata – Nijar is a natural space with structural and biological complexity, since it extends from the ocean floor to coastal mountains of a volcanic origin, passing through wetlands and coastal areas. The particular geological formation enabled to formation of one of the most unique Volcanic Complexes in Europe. Domes, volcanic taps (extracted slowly like a mantle), chimneys, furnaces and pyroclastic rocks (produced by brusque explosions that threw material that was later deposited in beds or layers due to the effect of gravity) are the most characteristic mechanisms of the formation of this rock complex.

The relief of the space is hilly in its interior and very abrupt on the coast, essentially with many cliffs.

Specificities and Importance

The zone is one of the most peculiar floral units in the entire Peninsula. The scarce annual rainfall explains the abundance of ephemeral annual plants. Among the underbrush there appear some very singular elements in the European context and 8 different endemic elements.

The great diversity of terrestrial fauna is presented in direct relation with the great quantity of environments in this space, with the most notable being the presence of the *Testudo graeca* and impressive bird communities associated with the steppe formations.

The principal marine species correspond to phanerogams of a great ecological interest such as *Posidonia oceanica* or *Cymodocea nodosa*, as well as the communities of brown and red algae with *Cystoseira* spp., *Lythophyllum incrustans*, *Janica rubens*, *Corallina granifera*, *Mesophyllum lichenoides*, *Spongites notarisii*, as the most representative species or indicators of quality.

The most marine notable are the communities on the soft, rocky sea floor in their distinct levels or bands (*Astroides calycularis*, *Pinna nobilis*, *Scyllarides latus* or *Epinephelus marginatus*), though there also exist species that are live in the sea such as sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*) and the marine mammals.

Among the sea floor communities there are some important species in danger of extinction or that have reduced the area such as some emblematic fishes and crustaceans.

Threats and pressures

The main exploitation of natural resources is the commercial fishing industry with 280 small scale boats, and of these 80 are of a traditional style. In the past the mining activity has been important here, but currently there is only one exploitation of clay.



Management

The regulation approved under the Natural Resources Organisation Plan and the Governing Plan for use and Management is permitting managing of the natural resources and a regulation of the activities of the Natural Park.

The zoning prospect for the Natural Park takes into account various zones: 4 grade zones on the land and 2 grade zones at the sea: integral reserve and a marine reserve where some activities are permitted and others prohibited.

The existing personnel (8 permanent members) in the central offices are working to realise the objectives of protection and conservation of the resources. The number of guards is the minimum necessary to comply with the objectives. The main financing for the Natural Park comes from the Regional Environmental Ministry, the Autonomous Andalusian Government and for the Marine Reserve, from the Ministry of the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs.

A guard system of the Natural Park and the Marine reserve maintains the land and the sea portion of the area under surveillance.



The Environmental Ministry of the Regional Andalusian Government is carrying out individual programmes in relation with education and awareness of the value of nature, scientific collaboration for the study of sensible zones and protected species, and organizes one-day and multi-day courses for the training of environmental monitors.