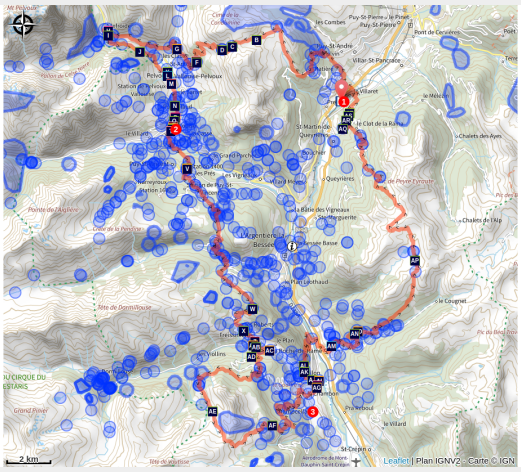
The Pays des Écrins Super Noir (trail no. 15)

Parc national des Ecrins

Le super noir du Pays des Écrins (Thibaut Blais)



A complete circuit of the mountain trail area, the best possible way to soak up the atmosphere of the Pays des Écrins!

Breathtaking panoramas, paths hugging iconic peaks, high lakes, alpine meadows, larch forests… Cover more than 100 kilometres through the Pays de Écrins to discover the diversity of this region in terms of landscapes and flora and fauna

Useful information

Practice : Trail

Duration : 3 days

Length : 111.2 km

Trek ascent : 6912 m

Difficulty : Hard

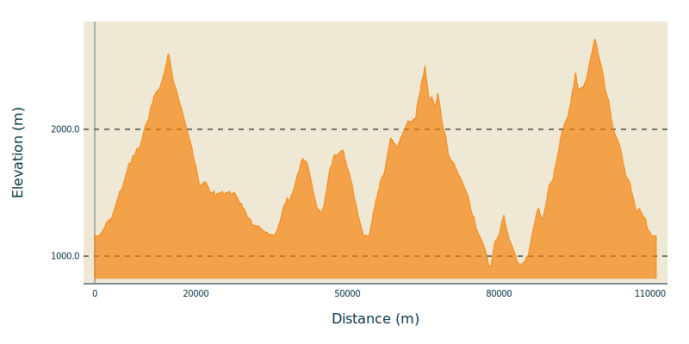
Type : Multi-day trekking

Themes : Archaeologie, Fauna, Flora, History and architecture

Trek

Departure : L’Iscle de Prelles campsite, Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières
Arrival : L’Iscle de Prelles campsite, Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières
Markings : Trail
Cities : 1. Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières
2. Puy-Saint-André
3. Vallouise-Pelvoux
4. Puy-Saint-Vincent
5. Les Vigneaux
6. L'Argentière-la-Bessée
7. Freissinières
8. Champcella
9. La Roche-de-Rame

Altimetric profile



Min elevation 922 m Max elevation 2710 m

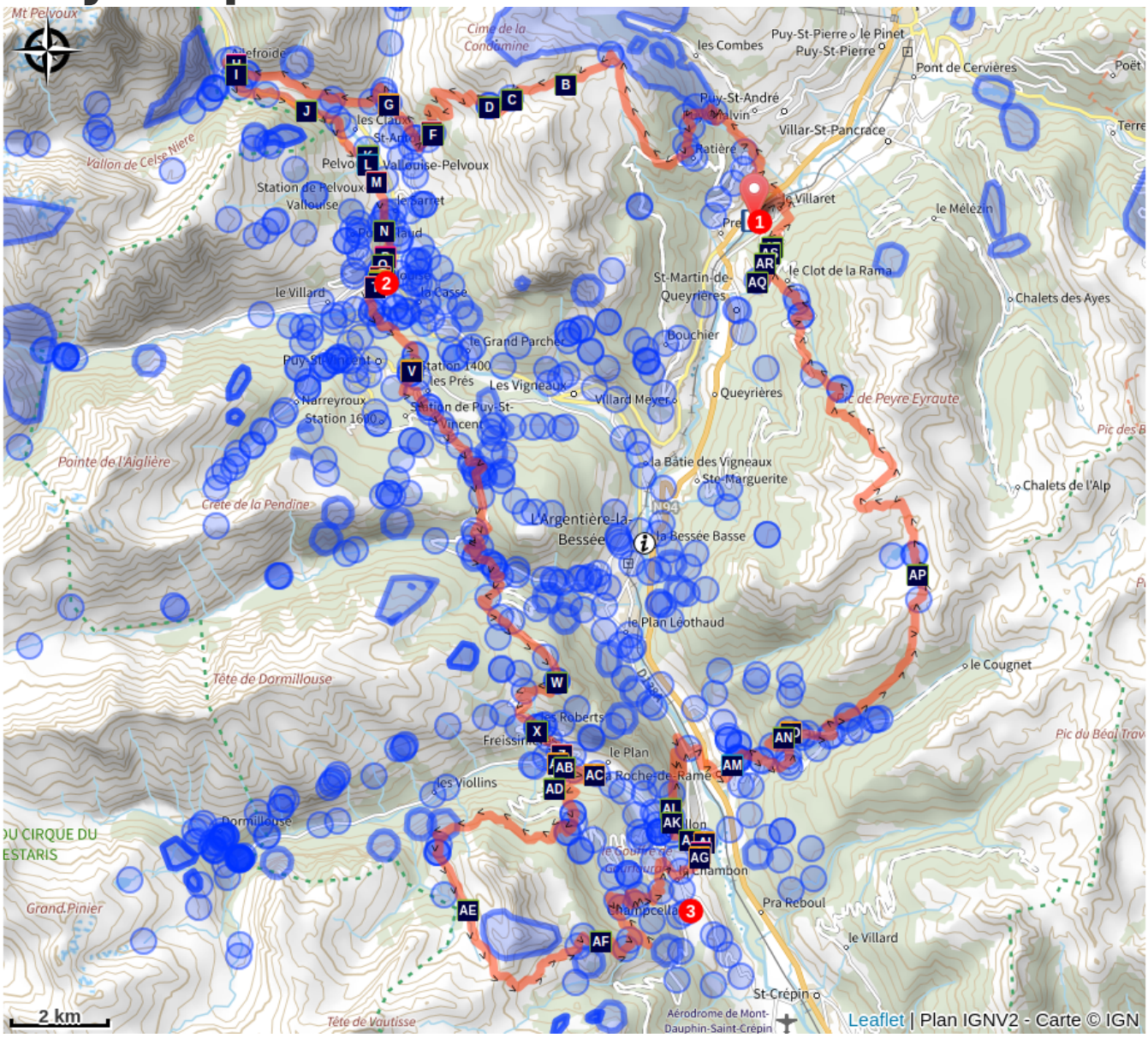
This trail route takes you on a complete circuit of the Pays des Écrins, through the many valleys that make up this region!

1. The first stage crosses the Durance valley before rising uphill towards Montbrison and passing over into the Vallouise valley. The route continues via the Col de Vallouise and on to Ailefroide, offering an unrivalled view of Mont Pelvoux. As you pass through Ailefroide, take the opportunity to admire this ancient hamlet with its alpine pastures, which has lost none of its charm and is surrounded by high granite walls. This stage culminates with a stretch along the Gyr until you come to Vallouise.
2. The next stage runs from Vallouise to Puy Saint-Vincent. After passing through the larch trees at the Col de la Pousterle, you cross another two wild valleys, the valleys of Le Fournel and Freissinières. After running beneath the cliffs of the Tête de Gaulent, the route continues on to Champcella, a pretty crossroads between the valleys of Freissinières and La Durance.
3. After passing through La Chapelle de Rame and La Roche-de-Rame, this last stage closes the loop in beautiful fashion with an ascent up to Lac de l'Ascension. You then have to reach Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières to complete this circuit of more than 100 km.

Stages :

1. From Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières to Vallouise (stage on the Super Noir - trail no. 15)
34.4 km / 1739 m D+ / 7 h
2. From Vallouise to Champcella (stage on the Super Noir - trail no. 15)
42.3 km / 2761 m D+ / 8 h 30
3. From Champcella to Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières (stage on the Super Noir - trail no. 15)
35.1 km / 2422 m D+ / 7 h 30

On your path...



- The field maple (AA)
- The woolly berardia (AC)
- The Cabane de Chouvet (AE)
- Les Choulières (AG)
- The golden eagle (AI)
- The grey alder (AK)
- The ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise (AM)
- Saint-Étienne de Vallouise Church (AO)
- The narrow-leaved lavender (AQ)
- The lesser horseshoe bat (AS)
- The clouded Apollo (AU)
- The four-spotted chaser (AW)
- The marmot (AB)
- The common rock thrush (AD)
- The Briançon plum tree (AF)
- Ailefroide (AH)
- The willow tit (AJ)
- The Gyr (AL)
- Forest of pine and oak (AN)
- The Montbrison massif (AP)
- The church in Vallouise (AR)
- Vallouise (AT)
- The Sentier du Facteur - the postman's path (AV)
- The common redstart (AX)

Félix Neff (AY)

Freissinières (BA)
The Freissinières valley (BC)
The spotted nutcracker (BE)

The Sentier du Gouffre - the ravine path (BG)
The lost village (BI)

The Aristolochia pistolochia (BK)
Bouchouse mountain stream (BM)
The Bois du Truc (BO)
The large marsh grasshopper (BQ)
The larch (BS)

The church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine (AZ)
The common barberry (BB)
Cool forest (BD)
Eagles, vultures and bearded vulture (BF)
The high Durance valley (BH)

Juniperus thurifera or Spanish juniper (BJ)
The savin juniper (BL)
The bearberry (BN)
Cotton grass (BP)
The bullfinch (BR)
The alpine anemone (BT)

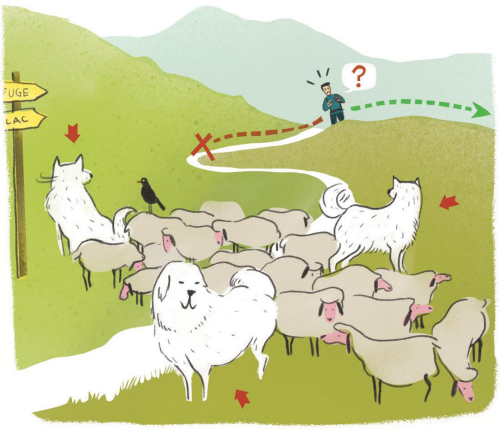
All useful information

Herd protection dogs

In mountain pastures, protection dogs are there to protect the herds from predators (wolves, etc.).

When I hike I adapt my behavior by going around the herd and pausing for the dog to identify me.

Find out more about the actions to adopt with the article "Protection dogs: a context and actions to adopt".
Tell us about your meeting by answering this survey.



Advices

This route can be undertaken in several Stages, in the form of a rambling circuit.

The GPS track starts in Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières but the trail can be started at any welcome centre (“Base d’Accueil”) within the Pays des Écrins.

The N94 is a dangerous and busy road, take care when crossing it.

Before setting off, it is very important to check the opening periods for this route on the website: https://stationdetrail.com/fr/stations/le-pays-des-ecrins/parcours

Share your photographs on social networks with #stationdetrailecrins

Check weather conditions before setting off

Rescue services contact details: Secours Montagne (Mountain Rescue): +33 (0)4 92 22 22 22 or 112

Show consideration for the work of farmers, livestock keepers and owners

Close all gates behind you

Take your litter home

Do not take shortcuts across pastureland

The trail routes are also suitable for walking

How to come ?

Transports

Public transport >> www.pacamobilite.fr

Consider car-sharing >> www.blablacar.fr

For more information, ask at the Tourist Information Office nearest to the trail starting point.

Access

10 km from L'Argentière-La Bessée, take the N94.

Advised parking

L’Iscle de Prelles campsite car park, Saint-Martin-de-Queyrières

Environmental sensitive areas

Along your trek, you will go through sensitive areas related to the presence of a specific species or environment. In these areas, an appropriate behaviour allows to contribute to their preservation. For detailed information, specific forms are accessible for each area.

Black grouse - winter

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, Decembre

Black grouse - winter

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, Decembre

Contact: Parc national des Ecrins - 0492402010

Alpine ibex

Sensitivity period: June, July, August, September

Contact: Parc National des Écrins
Julien Charron
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

Zone de présence du Bouquetin des Alpes

En période de mise bas et d’élevage des jeunes (juin à septembre) les bouquetins peuvent être très sensible au dérangement notamment en cas de survol à basse altitude. Dans leur fuite les risques d’accidents sont multipliés. Merci de rester à bonne distance et d’éviter le survol de la zone à moins de 300m sol soit moins de 3170m d’altitude.

Attention en zone cœur du Parc National des Écrins une réglementation spécifique aux sports de nature s’applique : https://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/thematique/sports-de-nature

Golden eagle

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August

Contact: Parc National des Écrins
Julien Charron
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

Nidification de l'Aigle royal

Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec l'Aigle royal en période de nidification sont principalement le vol libre et les pratiques verticales ou en falaise, comme l'escalade ou l'alpinisme. Merci d'éviter cette zone !

Attention en zone cœur du Parc National des Écrins une réglementation spécifique aux sports de nature s’applique : https://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/thematique/sports-de-nature

RNR Partias

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, Decembre

Contact:

LPO PACA antenne de Briançon
0492219417
hautes-alpes@lpo.fr

The Partias Regional Nature Reserve is managed by the LPO PACA and the commune of Puy Saint André. This is a protected and regulated area: dog leash, forbidden harvest, stay on marked trails, climbing prohibited except Meurseult pilami track, etc.

Golden eagle

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August

Contact: Parc National des Écrins
Julien Charron
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

Nidification de l'Aigle royal

Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec l'Aigle royal en période de nidification sont principalement le vol libre et les pratiques verticales ou en falaise, comme l'escalade ou l'alpinisme. Merci d'éviter cette zone et de privilégier un survol de la zone à une distance de survol de 300m sol soit à une altitude minimale de 2380m.

Attention en zone cœur du Parc National des Écrins une réglementation spécifique aux sports de nature s'applique : https://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/thematique/sports-de-nature

Black grouse - winter

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, Decembre

Contact: LPO Paca antenne des Hautes-Alpes
0492219417
hautes-alpes@lpo.fr
http://paca.lpo.fr/partias

Deux secteurs de zone d'hivernage du Tétras lyre sont identifiés sur leur partie amont par des cordes et fanions dans le secteur du Jeu de Paume / sous la Croix d'Aquila. La montée se fait par le col de la Trancoulette, puis en contournant le rocher jaune, et la descente ces zones sont évitées en rejoignant les couloirs. Zones mises en place en 2013 par la LPO, gestionnaire de la Réserve Naturelle Régionale Partias, en concertation avec les skieurs locaux + CAF de Briançon, Compagnie des guides Oisan-Ecrins, etc.

Golden eagle

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August

Contact: Parc National des Écrins
Julien Charron
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

Nidification de l'Aigle royal

Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec l'Aigle royal en période de nidification sont principalement le vol libre et les pratiques verticales ou en falaise, comme l'escalade ou l'alpinisme. Merci d'éviter cette zone et de privilégier un survol de la zone à une distance de survol de 300m sol soit à une altitude minimale de 2300m.

Golden eagle

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August

Contact: Parc National des Écrins
Julien Charron
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

Nidification de l'Aigle royal

Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec l'Aigle royal en période de nidification sont principalement le vol libre et les pratiques verticales ou en falaise, comme l'escalade ou l'alpinisme. Merci d'éviter cette zone et de privilégier un survol de la zone à une distance de survol de 300m sol soit à une altitude minimale de 2400m.

Golden eagle

Sensitivity period: January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August

Contact: Parc National des Écrins
Julien Charron
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

Nidification de l'Aigle royal
Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec l'Aigle royal en période de nidification sont principalement le vol libre et les pratiques verticales ou en falaise, comme l'escalade ou l'alpinisme. Merci d'éviter cette zone et de privilégier un survol de la zone à une distance de survol de 300m sol soit à une altitude minimale de 2580m.

Peregrine falcon

Sensitivity period: February, March, April, May, June

Contact: Parc National des Écrins
Julien Charron
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

Nidification du Faucon pèlerin.

Les pratiques qui peuvent avoir une interaction avec le Faucon pèlerin en période de nidification sont principalement le vol libre et les pratiques verticales ou en falaise, comme l'escalade ou l'alpinisme. Merci d'éviter cette zone !

En cas de survol merci de rester au-dessus de 2140m d’altitude à une distance de 300m sol.

Au site dit de Grand Bois, le couple de faucons a retrouvé son aire de prédilection dans le secteur "flamme de pierre" ; à éviter donc.

http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/actualite/amis-grimpeurs-attention-aux-pelerins-voies?fbclid=IwAR2Z8hX_38vpdW3mS499aRnY08jarhfm-5-eNV8K29k3WB3q3Ik2US_Alec

Peregrine falcon

Sensitivity period: February, March, April, May, June

Contact: Parc National des Écrins
Julien Charron
julien.charron@ecrins-parcnational.fr

Un site de nidification est actuellement utilisés par un couple de faucons pélerins dans une falaise équipée pour l'escalade, un secteur est à éviter jusqu'au 15 juin :

Au site dit du Ponteil, le niche dans la partie haute de la falaise, au-dessus de la vire, entre les voies "le grand dièdre" et "rôle en dalles".
Pour préserver leur tranquillité, il est donc préférable d'éviter la partie supérieure de ces voies.
La partie inférieure, jusqu'à la vire, ainsi que les autres voies de la falaise peuvent être grimpées en étant discret. Pour la descente, afin de limiter la fréquentation dans ce secteur à gauche de la falaise, il est proposé de prendre les rappels du "nid d'aigle", de "la fuite enchantée" ou bien le câble à droite de la falaise.

http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/actualite/amis-grimpeurs-attention-aux-pelerins-voies?fbclid=IwAR2Z8hX_38vpdW3mS499aRnY08jarhfm-5-eNV8K29k3WB3q3Ik2US_Alec

Merci d'éviter cette zone !

En cas de survol merci de rester au-dessus de 2010m d’altitude à une distance de 300m sol.

Information desks

Vallouise Park house

vallouise@ecrins-parcnational.fr
Tel : 04 92 23 58 08
http://www.ecrins-parcnational.fr/

Bureau d'Information Touristique de L'Argentière-La Bessée

23 Avenue de la République, 05120 L'Argentière-La Bessée

contact@paysdesecrins.com
Tel : +33(0)4 92 23 03 11
https://www.paysdesecrins.com/

Source

Pays des Ecrins

https://www.paysdesecrins.com

On your path...

The field maple (AA)

This is the smallest member of the family of forest maples, growing to a height of 8 to 15 metres. It can live for up to 150 years. Its leaves have five round lobes; they are winged with wings sticking out in opposite directions. It is not fussy as to the dampness of the soil and it can withstand cold temperatures and drought. It is also an excellent bee forage plant, which can be enhanced by the proximity of a hive.

Attribution : Nicollet Bernard - Parc national des Écrins

The marmot (AB)

In the alpine pastures, the iconic marmot utters a loud high-pitched whistle to warn its neighbours of approaching danger: the golden eagle is on the prowl! This medium-sized rodent prefers to live in the high-mountain grasslands in family groups. Their favourite pastimes are gnawing, digging, taking a siesta in the sunshine and performing somersaults. In the winter, the marmot takes refuge in its burrow where it hibernates. It is only seen between the months of April and October. It marks the boundary of its territory by rubbing its cheeks on the rocks or leaving droppings.

Attribution : Thibault Blais Photographie

The woolly berardia (AC)

The woolly berardia is a plant that grows approximately 10 centimetres tall and has a short, almost non-existent stem. This perennial member of the Asteracea family grows in limestone and schist screes. It has veined oval, woolly leaves which are covered in soft hairs. Its 4 to 7 cm compact head with pale yellow flowers stands up from its centre.

Attribution : Cédric Dentan - Parc national des Écrins

The common rock thrush (AD)

In May, a melodious song rings out from the cliff top. It’s the song of the common rock thrush, appropriately named and a wonderful bird. Although the female is rather dull (an advantage when egg-sitting) the male sports an orange underside and a blue-grey head. A trans-Saharan migratory bird, every year it returns to the mountains of Southern Europe where it frequents the rocky, sunlit slopes. It is not very common and is in decline, so spotting it is even more special!

Attribution : Pascal Saulay - Parc national des Écrins

The Cabane de Chouvet (AE)

Discover one of the most famous forest cabins in the Vallouise valley, the Cabane de Chouvet. Surrounded by larches, Scots pines and black pines, this unmanned cabin stands at an altitude of 1,860 metres. On this slope, the mountain land has been under restoration since 1914 to prevent erosion and to combat deforestation.

Attribution : Marie-Geneviève Nicolas - Parc national des Écrins

The Briançon plum tree (AF)

Not far from the Cabane de Chouvet, some small trees grow which are covered in white flowers in the springtime. This is the Briançon plum tree. Later in the year, it will produce golden plums with a tart flavour, carried on a very short stalk. A species endemic to the southwestern Alps, it has been prized by man because the kernel inside its stone produced a very fine oil, called huile de marmotte (marmot oil).

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

Les Choulières (AG)

The French children's song Savez-vous planter les choux? (Do you know how to plant cabbage?) is very appropriate here! In any event, the name Choulières is believed to be a reference to a place planted with cabbages and, by extension, a place where vegetables are grown. The phasing out of crop cultivation in the mountains has altered the landscape: the hay meadows and fields are now used as grazing meadows for increasingly large flocks of sheep.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

Ailefroide (AH)

Formerly an alpine pasture hamlet, Ailefroide lies at the foot of Mont Pelvoux, surrounded by larch woods and granite cliffs. It is the last hamlet in the valley, at the confluence of the valleys of Saint-Pierre and Celse Nière. The name Ailefroide is thought to originate from the term Alpe froide or “cold Alp”, a reference to the lack of sun here in the winter. It is the starting point of numerous trails and is a paradise for climbers. Ailefroide is a legendary destination for mountaineers: a stele commemorates the conquest of Mont Pelvoux in 1828.

Attribution : Jan Novak Photography

The golden eagle (AI)

A pair of eagles lives in the Ailefroide valley. Every pair has a very large hunting territory, which means there can be no more than one pair in a small valley of this size. This pair has built several eyries in the cliff walls around Ailefroide: just one is occupied every year, after a few refurbishments. The eyries are located at the lower altitudes of the hunting territory, so that the eagles can easily bring heavy prey back to the eaglet.

Attribution : Pascal Saulay - Parc national des Écrins

The willow tit (AJ)

A soft call, a series of short repetitive notes, is heard in the forest. It's the call of the willow tit, also known as the alpine tit. As for its plumage, it has a greyish brown back, beige underparts, a white head with a black cap and a little black bib, It lives in mountain forests. It is the double of the marsh tit, which tends to live below 1,400 metres.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The grey alder (AK)

In the valleys of the Alps and the Jura, the grey alder often grows in place of the black alder, present in many parts of France. Like its cousin, it grows on riversides and plays an important role in stabilising the banks. If it is cut down, its wood is bright orange in colour. But why cut it down?

Attribution : Nicollet Bernard - Parc national des Ecrins

The Gyr (AL)

Humans are decidedly bizarre animals: they build, knock down and start again. To protect the new infrastructures of Pelvoux, the Gyr was dammed. But, not able to flow as it did before, it deepened its bed, thus placing the foundations in danger of damage. And so works were carried out to widen its bed, allowing it to flow more naturally. This is also more favourable for biodiversity, as well as protecting the developed urban areas.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise (AM)

The route first leads through the small ski resort of Pelvoux-Vallouise, built in 1982. Very family-focused, in winter it's the ideal place for young children to learn to ski, with small lifts lower down, while their big brothers and sisters can ski higher up.

Attribution : Pelvoux Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

Forest of pine and oak (AN)

The path now alternates between cleared areas and forested areas. This forest contains Scots pine (recognisable by its orangey coloured trunk, especially at the top), downy oak (its young branches and leaf undersides covered with a fine down), and larch. The Scots pine and downy oak are very drought-tolerant (it is very limey soil here) and can also withstand low temperatures, and they are typical of the montane zone in this part of the Alps.

Attribution : Parc national des Écrins

Saint-Étienne de Vallouise Church (AO)

Listed and protected as an historic monument since 22 October 1913, the church dedicated to Saint Stephen is one of the most beautiful religious edifices in Hautes-Alpes. It is typical of the Romanesque churches in the Briançon region built in the second half of the 15th century, although its exact construction date is still uncertain.

Attribution : Thierry Maillet - PNE

The Montbrison massif (AP)

The path offers a beautiful overall view of the limestone massif of Montbrison, overlooking the hamlets of Pelvoux with the peaks of the Cime de la Condamine, the Tête des Lauzières, the Pic de Montbrison and the Tête d'Amont.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The narrow-leaved lavender (AQ)

The path crosses some limestone screes. It is a dry environment. The narrow-leaved lavender grows in sunny areas, a reminder that the Pays de Écrins is in the Southern Alps after all! Not to be confused with the lavandin, this plant naturally grows on rocky slopes in the mountains of the Midi.

Attribution : Jean-Pierre Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The church in Vallouise (AR)

The church of Saint-Étienne dates from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Inside is an altarpiece and a tabernacle in gilded wood dating from the eighteenth century, together with come mural paintings. Not far from the church stands the late sixteenth-century Chapel of the Penitents with a nineteenth-century painted facade.

Attribution : Thibaut Blais

The lesser horseshoe bat (AS)

In summer, bats take up residence in the church roof. The species living here is the lesser horseshoe bat, which has been in serious decline over recent decades. Every year, the mothers return after hibernating in caves and each one gives birth to one bat pup. Bats are insectivore mammals threatened by the insecticides used on farmland and on wooden structures and the loss of their hunting habitats and roosts, among other things. They are all protected.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

Vallouise (AT)

Multi-storey houses - typical of the architecture in the valley in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries - stand on the old village street. The ground floor was reserved for animals, the first floor for habitation and the upper floors for grain storage. People moved from one floor to another by means of balconies interconnected by a staircase. Many of these balconies are arcaded with stone columns. This type of arcaded balcony is found throughout the valley.

Attribution : Pierre Nossereau

The clouded Apollo (AU)

This butterfly with hyaline (glass-like) translucent white wings, marked with two black spots, flutters around the clearing or the edges of the forest, where the host plants of its caterpillars grow: the corydalis. Although abundant locally, it is nevertheless a species in sharp decline and is protected.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The Sentier du Facteur - the postman's path (AV)

In former times, the postman would take this path every day: He would set out from Vallouise, deliver letters in Puy-Saint-Vincent and drop back down to Vallouise, stopping at the hamlets of Parcher on the way. In the winter, when the snow was too deep, the Traversouires (the inhabitants of Puy-Saint-Vincent) donned their snowshoes and wielded their shovels to clear the postman's path down to Vallouise.

Attribution : Christophe Albert - Parc national des Écrins

The four-spotted chaser (AW)

Dragonflies can be seen gliding around the lake One of them is relatively easy to identify: the four-spotted chaser. It is called this because there is a spot on each of its four wings. The female lays her eggs on floating vegetation and the larvae are aquatic. The dragonfly feeds primarily on mosquitoes and midges which it catches in mid-air. The male and female also mate while in flight... A real acrobat!

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The common redstart (AX)

The common redstart can be told apart from its cousin, the black redstart by its white eyebrow (hence its French name which is translated as "white-browed redstart") and its orange breast. At least for the male, since the female of both birds is duller and brownish, but the female common redstart also has an orangey tail. It returns from Africa in early April and searches the areas to find a hollow in a tree or in an old wall where it builds its nest.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

Félix Neff (AY)

Félix Neff was a Swiss Protestant pastor. He was responsible for the Protestant Revival in the Freissinières valley in the seventeenth century. He also set up the first education college for primary school teachers in France, in Dormillouse in 1826. He was also behind new irrigation and house-building techniques, developments which improved the everyday lives of the local people.

Attribution : Manuel Meester - Parc national des Écrins

The church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine (AZ)

The church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine was built in the seventeenth century. It is thought to be a former Protestant church which escaped destruction in 1684 when Louis XIV was leading an anti-Protestant drive. The Protestant church is then thought to have undergone works to convert it into a Catholic church.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Freissinières (BA)

The name Freissinières comes from the old word freissinière meaning "black ash". This municipality, which extends as far as the Col des Terres Blanches and the Col de Freissinières, both of which overlook the Champsaur valley, is made up of thirteen hamlets, although none of them are called Freissinières! Archaeological excavations carried out twenty years ago show that sites at high altitude (such as Faravel) were occupied on a seasonal basis from the retreat of the glaciers 12,000 years ago (Upper Palaeolithic period) and that this occupation continued after that.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The common barberry (BB)

The common barberry is a bush with long thorns arranged in threes, and with oval serrated leaves. In spring, it produces clusters of yellow flowers, which later develop into red, oval and elongated berries. These tart fruits are edible and can be made into jellies... if you have the patience to gather them! This shrub grows almost everywhere.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The Freissinières valley (BC)

The valley was created as the result of glacial overdeepening, that is to say, when the glacier came to a halt against the Pallon hard rock bar, it created a depression. When the glaciers retreated, a lake was left behind this rock bar and was gradually filled up by alluvial deposits. From a historical point of view, the Protestant pastor Félix Neff fundamentally altered life in the valley in 1826 by founding a training college for primary school teachers, developing irrigation processes and teaching new crop growing methods, among other things...

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

Cool forest (BD)

Here, the drought-sensitive fir has established itself among the larches. This forest harbours treasures such as the very rare ghost orchid and the shield-moss, a unique little moss - also rare - which grows on wood in an advanced state of decomposition and thus signals that the natural cycle of the forest is unimpaired.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The spotted nutcracker (BE)

A harsh call sounds from the forest. A jay perhaps? No, a nutcracker, its cousin. With dark, white-spotted plumage, this bird's strong beak can break open hazelnuts (although not walnuts as suggested by its name in French, cassenoix (walnut breaker)) and in particular it can dissect Swiss pine cones in order to reach the pine nuts inside. It inhabits high forests. It buries Swiss pine nuts in the ground to store up food for the winter. When winter comes, it will find the pine nuts again even under a thick layer of snow. Those it forgets will germinate.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

Eagles, vultures and bearded vulture (BF)

Numerous species of birds of prey glide around the Crête de Gaulent, scanning the alpine meadows. Might there be something edible down there? The pair of eagles living in this little valley might well choose a marmot. Present in the massif only in the summer and autumn, the griffon vultures keep an eye out for a dead sheep. As for the regal bearded vulture, even larger than the griffons, he picks up the leftovers as he can feed on bones.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The Sentier du Gouffre - the ravine path (BG)

The Sentier du Gouffre has sometimes been described as a Roman road, but we do not know the exact route the Roman road followed. One thing is certain, it used to be used by the villagers to reach their fields and vineyards, and for any other journeys they had to make.

Attribution : Thibault Blais Photographie

The high Durance valley (BH)

Protected from Atlantic influences by the Massif du Pelvoux, the high Durance valley has a very dry climate with wide seasonal temperature fluctuations. It has grasslands very similar to the steppes of Central Europe which are rare in France. It is part of the Natura 2000 “Steppique durancien et queyrassien” (Durance and Queras valley steppes) site.

Attribution : Office de tourisme Pays des Écrins

The lost village (BI)

In ancient times, the Durance valley was a key communication corridor. Rama was a kind of staging post on the Roman road. In the Middle Ages, Rama was a small town with a noble's château. But the village was devastated by the capriciousness of the Durance and the Biaysse rivers on numerous occasions and the inhabitants gradually deserted the site, moving to neighbouring villages. The attachment of the parish of Rame to that of La Roche in 1446 is indicative of this decline.

Attribution : Jean-Philippe Telmon - Parc national des Écrins

Juniperus thurifera or Spanish juniper (BJ)

This small tree is present in North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula and in a few departments in southern France, including the Hautes-Alpes. It is regarded as a relic from a warmer period far back in history. It has found a refuge in well exposed situations, on warm sunny slopes. Its needles are in the form of scales, lying against the branches. It is a monitored species.

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

The Aristolochia pistolochia (BK)

The hamlet of Pallon is in a sunny location. Around the village, a curious plant with long brown trumpet-like flowers grows on the edges of the stone piles in the fields and meadows: the aristolochia pistolochia or birthwort. Of Mediterranean affinity, this plant benefits from the hot dry climate here and is virtually at its northern boundary. It is the host plant of the caterpillars of a rare and protected butterfly: the Spanish festoon.

Attribution : Damien Combrisson - Parc national des Écrins

The savin juniper (BL)

A low spreading shrub, the savin juniper is very common in stony meadows and uncultivated land on warm slopes. Its dark, matte green leaves in the form of small scales, overlap along the branches. So it isn't spiky... but you still need to be cautious as it is very toxic. For seasoning dishes, better to gather the fruits of the common juniper!

Attribution : Bernard Nicollet - Parc national des Écrins

Bouchouse mountain stream (BM)

The Bouchouse mountain stream is fed by the Le Pansier and La Pisse mountain streams 1,900 metres above sea level. It crosses the municipality of La Roche-de-Rame, supplying it with water. This mountain stream then flows into the Durance below the municipality.

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

The bearberry (BN)

The bearberry is a small bush which grows no taller than 20 centimetres. Its small, glossy, evergreen leaves are reminiscent of those of the lingonberry (Vaccinium vitis idaea) but they are not as thick and, above all, its fruits are much less appetising, although they are edible. It will depend on your tastes!

Attribution : Nicollet Bernard - Parc national des Écrins

The Bois du Truc (BO)

The Bois du Truc overlooks the rock beds above the hamlet of Le Bathéou in the municipality of La Roche-de-Rame. In our region, a truc is a large buried rock, a rocky area or an abrupt buttress. So the Bois du Truc is the "wood of the large rock".

Attribution : Office de tourisme du Pays des Écrins

Cotton grass (BP)

On the water's edge, in the wet meadow, plants with a cottony head sway gently. This is cotton grass, a plant which has insignificant rudimentary flowers but it has fruits that have feathery tufts which aid their dispersal by the wind. The fruits are grouped in such a way that their tufts form a very appealing «pompom»! These plants are well adapted to the mountain climate.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The large marsh grasshopper (BQ)

In the wet areas beside the streams lives the large marsh grasshopper. Its French name, criquet engsanglanté, translates as the "bloodied grasshopper" because the female has purple-red marks which stand out against her general green colour. Her eggs are drought-sensitive so she only lays them in damp soil. When courting the female, the male does not chirp but makes clicking sounds, which he produces by stretching his hind leg in a sudden movement.

Attribution : Mireille Coulon - Parc national des Écrins

The bullfinch (BR)

Gentle and melancholic calls can be heard coming from trees in the forest. They are the calls of the bullfinch, a plump and timid little passerine. The male can be identified from his pinkish red underside, while the female's is beige. Both have a black cap. They often live in small groups, staying in contact with one another through their little calls. It is a year-round resident.

Attribution : Christophe Albert - Parc national des Écrins

The larch (BS)

Golden yellow needles in autumn, purple cones in the spring... The larch offers colour interest throughout the year, and rather suits its title "the tree of light". It drops its soft deciduous needles in autumn and winter. In spring, the slender branches of this conifer are dotted with female flowers, which will develop into cones, and male flowers. The larch thrives on the north-facing slopes and lights up the mountainsides.

Attribution : Robert Chevalier - Parc national des Écrins

The alpine anemone (BT)

The alpine anemone or the alpine pulsatilla blooms here in the spring. It is a plant with a downy covering of white hairs on the large drooping flowers which are dark purple, contrasting with the bright yellow of the numerous stamens, and with very indented leaves. In summer, its fruits with a long pappus, or tuft, form a feathery seed head atop the stem. Although it is frequently found in localised areas, it is nevertheless a rare species dependent on steppe meadows in the Durance valley.

Attribution : Thierry Maillet - Parc national des Écrins