

Campsite Reports

Eleanor Carlton

Camping el Cares, Santa Marina de Valdeon (Leon, Spain)

The first campsite that we stayed in was Camping el Cares, located high in the beautiful Picos de Europa mountain range, Santa Marina de Valdeon. We stayed here for 3 nights whilst the group conducted our bilberry survey and broom removal study. The campsite staff were approachable, helpful, and environmentally aware. One employee even helped me to return a baby bat to its roost, which had fallen on site.

The mountains surrounding the campsite are one of the few areas left in Europe that still practises traditional agricultural management, rather than the ecologically destructive practise of intensive farming (Bunce et al., 1998). The hay meadows in the Picos de Europa are defined as semi-natural, species-rich communities that are maintained by man. These traditional management methods have allowed a high level of species diversity to flourish. Surveys in the Valdeon valley have shown that the traditional agricultural management methods are the main reasons for the richness of biodiversity of these habitats (Garcia, 1992). If these traditional agricultural management practices are not continued, one of the most important resources of herb-rich and diverse meadows in Europe will be lost (Prince et al., 2012).

The diverse, species-rich meadows are essential for supporting a range of vertebrates and invertebrates. The fauna of the Picos de Europa includes the Wolf, Brown Bear, Chamois, Western Capercaillie, Golden Eagle, Alpine Newt, Atlantic Salmon and Bats (UNESCO, 2014). The vegetation includes meadows gorse and heath scrubland, pure or mixed forests of Beech, Oak and Birch, with gallery woodlands of Aspen, Ash, Willow and Alder. There are a staggering 1,600 species of phanerogamplants in the Biosphere reserve supporting the invertebrate population. Species richness has proven to be beneficial to the range and abundance of butterfly species in the local area (Gutierrez, 1997).



Photograph of an Early bumblebee, *Bombus pratorum*, taken by Eleanor Carlton on 15/07/2016 at the Camping el Cares site.



Photograph of Small white butterfly, *Pieris rapae*, atop a Red clover, *Trifolium pratense*, taken by Eleanor Carlton on 15/07/2016 at the Camping el Cares site.



Photograph of the Mountains surrounding the Camping el Cares site, where traditional hay farming occurs, taken by Eleanor Carlton on 15/07/2016.



Photograph of a Wasp beetle, *Clytus arietis*, visiting an Ox-eye daisy, *Leucanthemum vulgare*, taken by Eleanor Carlton on 15/07/2016



Photograph of a young bat found on the Camping el Cares site taken by Eleanor Carlton on 15/07/2016.

References

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