

Photo: Gràcia Salas

Route s'Hort d'en Metge



G CONSELLERIA
O MEDI AMBIENT,
I AGRICULTURA
B I PESCA
/

ENGLISH

s'Hort d'en Metge route

This route runs through the s'Hort d'en Metge, Can Biga and Can Parra public estates and through Mondragó Nature Reserve.

Its scenery ranges from the dunes of s'Amarador beach to farmland typical of Mallorca's inland areas, allowing you to discover the flora and fauna that lives there. You will also be able to see different examples of ethnological heritage, including noria-type water wheels (sínia), irrigation ponds (safareig) and peasant farmers' huts known as barraques), all testifying to how the islanders' ancestors once lived.

Difficulty: easy.

Total distance: 1.164 metres.

Time: 35 mins.

1. S'AMARADOR DUNES

*The starting point for the route is behind s'Amarador beach, on the side closest to the walkway along the shore leading to ses Fonts de n'Alis. Before you set off, have a look at the different plants that grow in the dunes. Among other species, you can find sand couch grass (*Elymus farctus*), a member of the grass family whose underground rhizomes help to anchor the dunes in place, sea holly (*Eryngium maritimum*) with its prickly leaves and metallic blue flowers, and sea daffodils (*Pancratium maritimum*), whose striking white flowers come out in summer. They are all plants that have adapted to survive on a very dry shifting substrates, lacking in nutrients. That is why these species need to have deep roots.*

To protect and help conserve this habitat, for some years the team in charge of the nature reserve has roped off this area, gradually leading to the recovery of the dunes and the different species found there.

Sea holly



Sea daffodils



2. SAKIA-TYPE WATER WHEEL



Irrigation pond and water wheel (Photo: Gràcia Salas)

*A little further on, you will come across **the first points of interest along the route, s'Hort d'en Metge irrigation pond (safareig) and water wheel (sínia)**, two items of ethnological heritage that were restored in 2014.*

A safareig or irrigation pond is an open tank built to store rainwater for crop irrigation purposes. It is generally rectangular-shaped and medium or large in size. Due to the low rainfall and lack of permanent watercourses, alternative water supplies were sought, leading to the construction of noria-type water wheels (sínia) based on a system of cogwheels, like a clock. They were used to draw water from the subsoil with the aid of a draft animal.

The construction of water-related architectural features of this kind is known to date back to Moslem times, although the origin of these ones is unknown. This particular spot has probably been used to get water supplies since far distant times, because bits of old pottery have occasionally been found scattered here and there, including fragments of amphorae, jugs, bowls and other kinds of recipients, some dating back to Punic and Roman times. This suggests that it was used as a water supply point and trading post in the past.



If you move briefly off the path, crowning the dry-stone wall to the left, you can see an old recently restored water supply duct. Because the water table was so high, irrigated crops could be grown here.

A few years ago, some fruit trees were planted to try and recapture the estate's former appearance when it was farmed. These include pomegranate, quince and plum trees.

*Back in the past, pools and irrigation ponds were used for livestock drinking and crop irrigation purposes. Today, these freshwater havens play a fundamental role in the survival of certain wild species and they are places with a very high biodiversity. Some examples of species that benefit from these habitats include aquatic invertebrates, carnivores like the common genet (*Genetta genetta*) and the European pine marten (*Martes martes*), and birds typically found on agricultural land, such as the Eurasian stone curlew (*Burhinus oedicephalus*), Thekla's lark (*Galerida theklae*) and the European nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*).*

3. THE BALEARIC GREEN TOAD

*Given how important these places are as breeding grounds and refuges for the Balearic green toad (*Bufo balearicus*), a special mention must be made of this rough-skinned greenish amphibian covered in darker patches. Like all amphibians, this toad needs water to reproduce and it takes advantage of the nature reserve's freshwater spots to lay its eggs and for the larvae to develop.*

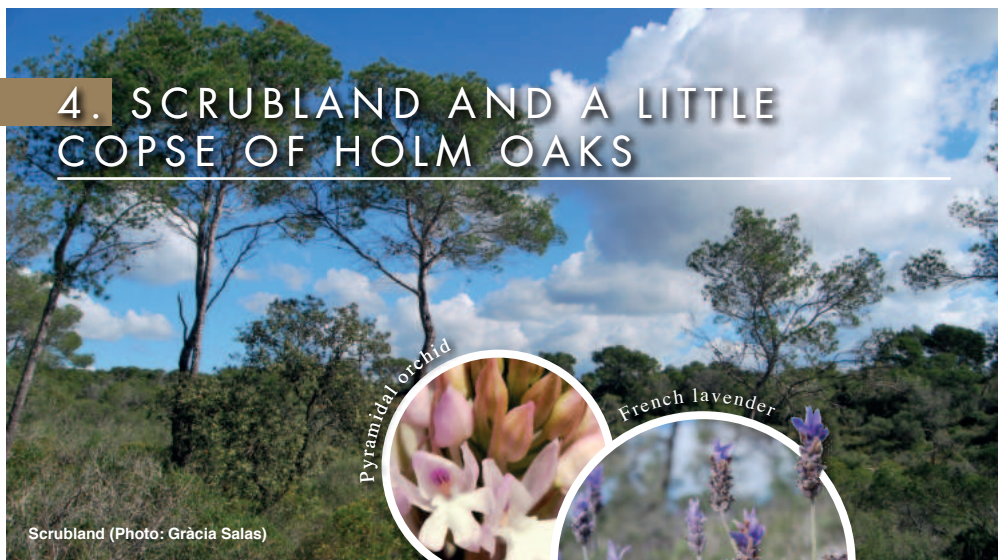
The Balearic green toad is mainly active at night. When the sun sets, it comes out of its hiding place, under stones, out of dry-stone walls or from among the vegetation. It feeds on insects and so it is very useful for farmers.

One of the most serious threats to the Balearic green toad is the loss of the habitat that it needs to reproduce. That is why the restoration of manmade water-related features like irrigation ponds not only helps to conserve items of ethnological heritage, but it also benefits protected species like this toad.



The balearic green toad (Photo: Samuel Pinya)

4. SCRUBLAND AND A LITTLE COPSE OF HOLM OAKS



Scrubland (Photo: Gràcia Salas)

Pyramidal orchid

French lavender

Sombre bee orchid

Leave *s'Hort d'en Metge* behind you and enter the scrubland or *garrigue*, where wild olives (*Olea europaea* var. *sylvestris*) prevail, accompanied by Phoenician juniper trees (*Juniperus phoenicea*) and Aleppo pines (*Pinus halepensis*).

French lavender (*Lavandula dentata*) is one of the shrubs that stands out particularly here. It is easy to recognize thanks to its serrated edged leaves and purple-coloured wheat-shaped flower heads, which bloom from winter through to summer. The white flowers of Montpellier cistus (*Cistus monspeliensis*), a rockrose with sticky leaves, are hard to miss in spring.



Thekla's lark

You can also find some species of a more emblematic plant family, the orchid. They may be smaller, but they are equally fascinating. The pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and sombre bee orchid (*Ophrys fusca*) are particularly common.

Because this is a shadier damper place, it is one of the few areas of Mondragó that still conserves the remains of an old holm oak wood. This means that species commonly found in more shadowy places grow here, like the Balearic cyclamen (*Cyclamen balearicum*), butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*), or evergreen honeysuckle (*Lonicera implexa*).

5. FARM FIELDS, PEASANT FARMERS AND STONE HUTS



Peasant farmer's hut (Photo: Gràcia Salas)

As you emerge from the scrubland, you will be confronted by an image typical of Mondragó Nature Reserve: crop-growing fields dotted with dryland trees (carob, almond and fig trees).

In front of the stone hut in Can Biga public estate, there is a table that can be used as a stopping-off point for a snack. Peasant farmers' huts (barraques) are small dry-stone buildings. This one is rectangular in shape and twice as long as it is wide, with a beamed roof. Half the hut was used as a bedroom and the other half was a stable for the draft animals. In one corner, there was generally a stove and the occasional cupboard built into the wall.

Another example of a peasant farmer's hut is known as a curucull or cone-topped one. This hut is square shaped and crowned on the outside with a conical dome made of stone slabs arranged in circles, covered in soil or gravel.

Sitting here, you can imagine a time when Mallorca was a poor island with a shortage of resources: an era when agriculture and farm work were the main source of production, mainly based on grain and dry-land trees.

Most of the population worked in the fields as day labourers in a system of subsistence farming. This led to the cultivation of new areas of hitherto unfarmed land. To do so, the soil had to be broken up or ploughed (romput in Mallorcan or roturado in Spanish), the origin of the word rota used to describe these fields.

A rota was a piece of scrubland with low productive potential, generally measuring one quarterada (or 0.71031 hectares) and belonging to an estate. Its soil tended not to be very rich and it was located far away from the estate's houses. Peasant farmers or roters were tenant farmers who were given a piece of scrubland or another unfertile parcel of land in exchange for clearing and cultivating it and paying a tithe or deume to the estate owner or estate manager.

After your short break for a snack, carry on along the same path. This winds rightward and links up again with the first part of the route. If you follow the signs, the route is easy to follow and, in no time at all, you will be back at s'Amarador beach. If it is summer, you will no doubt feel like a dip.



Crop field (Foto: Gràcia Salas)

