



wildlife

Réserve Naturelle Nationale – Séveraisse Valley

The Séveraisse Valley National Nature Reserve protects one of the last intact glacial valley systems on the western edge of the Écrins massif — a place where geology, altitude and water still dictate life more than human intervention ever has.

This is not a recreational alpine valley.

It is a cold, high-altitude ecological corridor, largely untouched, linking glaciers, torrents, cliffs and alpine meadows into a single functioning system.

A Valley Shaped by Ice and Water

The Séveraisse is a classic U-shaped glacial valley, carved deep into hard crystalline rock (Gneiss). What makes it exceptional is not its form, but its completeness:

- Active torrents fed by snowmelt and glaciers
- Scree slopes, moraines and avalanche corridors
- Alpine pastures grading into subalpine woodland
- Sheer rock faces and high cirques left largely unmanaged

Natural processes — rockfall, floods, seasonal ice — are allowed to occur freely here. This is increasingly rare in the Alps.

Biodiversity Driven by Altitude and Extremes

A Refuge for Cold-Adapted Species

The Séveraisse Valley acts as a climate refuge for species dependent on long winters, cold water and minimal disturbance.

Key characteristics:

- Short growing seasons
- Strong altitudinal gradients over short distances
- Clean, oxygen-rich waters

These conditions support species already disappearing elsewhere.

Birds of Cliffs, Scree and High Air

The valley is particularly important for alpine and cliff-nesting birds, including:

- Golden Eagle – breeding and hunting across the valley
- Bearded Vulture – using cliffs and open slopes
- Wallcreeper – tied to sheer rock faces
- Alpine Accentor – dependent on high-altitude habitats

These species require space, silence and vertical landscapes.

Mammals of the High Mountains

The mosaic of slopes, meadows and rocky refuges supports:

- Chamois and ibex on steep terrain
- Alpine marmot in high pastures
- Discreet predators using the valley as a movement corridor

These animals rely on seasonal migration within the valley, not fenced or fragmented terrain.

Water as a Biodiversity Spine

The Séveraisse torrent and its tributaries are central to the reserve's protection.

- Cold, fast-flowing waters
- Minimal pollution or artificial regulation
- Crucial habitat for aquatic invertebrates and amphibians

Healthy alpine rivers like this have become rare due to damming and water abstraction elsewhere.

Why National Protection Matters Here

The Séveraisse Valley is protected because:

- It preserves natural alpine processes largely lost elsewhere
- It functions as a climate refuge for cold-adapted species
- It connects multiple alpine habitats into a single living system
- Its ecological value would collapse with infrastructure expansion

Once altered, this type of valley cannot be reconstructed.

Exploring with Awareness

This is a place for slow exploration — walking, observing, listening.

The wildlife here survives not through abundance, but through balance.

Visitors are guests in a system still ruled by snow, rock and water.

