



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.

