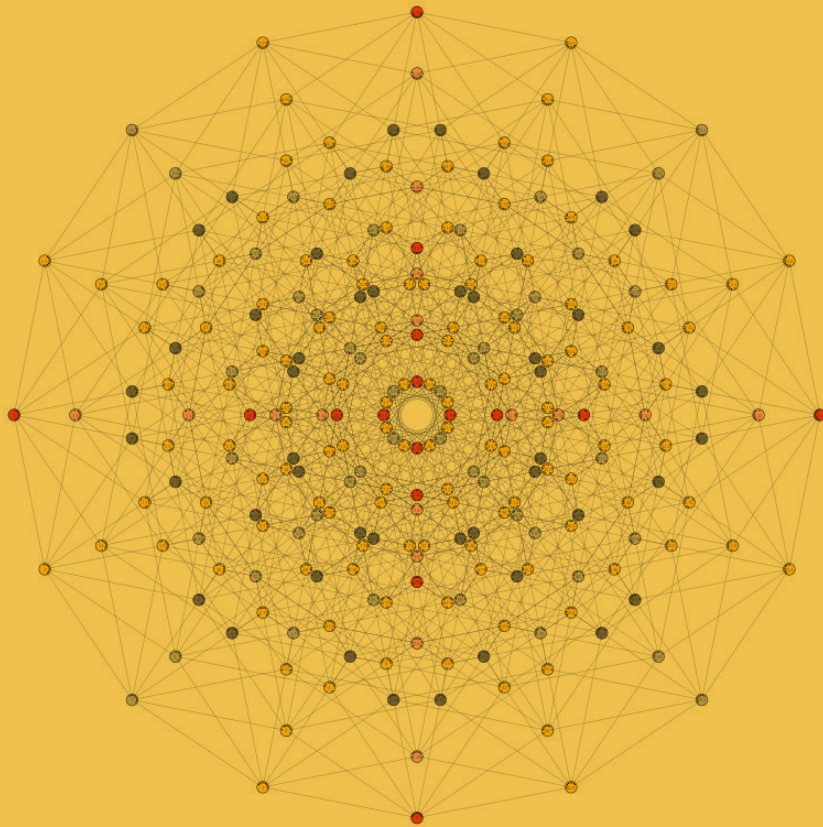


Wolf Hollow

Airhón





Airhón, the most extensive biodiversity and rewilding model in southern Europe

Airhón, the Iberian pre-Roman god of the waters and nature, lends his name to this **regenerative biodiversity project** which extends over 4,000 hectares in the **province of Salamanca** and is home to **1,500 head of native cattle**. In the space of just eight years, this rewilding initiative has demonstrated that that **free-range cattle, organic crops and the conservation of wild and predatory species not only can co-exist and be profitable**, but provide us with the only way to halt environmental degradation.

The project's developers, Inka Martí and Jacobo Fitz-James Stuart, do not claim to have invented anything, but rather to have patiently observed the natural cycles of life and the gratitude the ecosystem shows when we leave behind the long-established system of exploiting agricultural land and livestock. An old model which science has proven to have caused the extinction of 70% of the natural species formerly present in the Iberian Peninsula, which is also responsible for drying up the land, poisoning its waters, pastures and crops, as well as inflicting toxic impacts on human health and that of the planet.

It is the **largest hunting reserve in southern Europe** and reaps the benefits of the **ancient *dehesa* model based on the co-existence of animal and plant species**, inherited from the agriculture of the Vettons, who settled between the Duero and Tagus basins from the 5th century BC. The footprint this Celtic people left can still be traced through their natural water channels, food forests and archaeological remains.

With the bounties of the pastures as a means of sustenance and preserving the wolf as a key species in regulating the ecosystem, this eight-year endeavour has achieved an exceptionally healthy herd that lives in semi-freedom, thus limiting carbon emissions, and feeds solely on natural pasture and biological fodder during the months of extreme weather. Organic cultivation of self-regulating cereals has also been developed and the crops regenerate naturally year after year. This fertile land is rich in micro-organisms, aided by water retention in the phreatic zone. Countless species of wildlife have found sanctuary here, many of which are on the verge of extinction (the black and griffon vulture, wild

cat, black stork, eagle owl, great bustard, beech marten, ocellated lizard and red kite), and others that soon could be added to this list (the imperial eagle, crane, barn owl, Montagu's harrier, nightjar, hare, badger and otter).

And all under the watchful eye of the apex predator, **the Iberian wolf, who quietly regulates the population of roe deer, deer and wild boar.** The presence of the wolf, which returned to this territory south of the Duero in 2017, specifically to the valley known as *Wolf Hollow*, has made it necessary to take the care that the cattle deserve. And the result is that casualties from attacks have gradually decreased since the wolves reappeared and the number of losses sustained is now negligible.

The native bovine species, **the ancient Morucha breed**, also in danger of extinction, is blessed by an extraordinary ability to adapt to climate and coexist with predators, from which it is protected thanks to its agile bearing and the robustness of its genetically preserved horns. The wolf, a natural and well-fed actor in this ecosystem, does not represent any danger to the cattle, which

lives and breeds in the wild; nor does it represent any danger to sheep, provided they are cared for, watched over and protected, or to other domestic species, or even to humans. As experts assure us, the wolf is the great protector and regenerator of biodiversity who acts invisibly and silently: the wolf is not seen but we feel its presence.

In the views of international experts who have visited the project during intermediate phases, **the Airhón model is not simply a case of rewilding as it is restoring a real pre-existing wild system in the Iberian Peninsula** of which we should be proud, because Spain is a territory of great diversity and natural wealth that cannot be lost.

The ultimate aim of this project is to serve as an **example of extensive livestock farming to be followed in the peninsula as the only viable way to avoid the threat of desertification** that is looming over the whole of southern Europe. Its goals encompass the creation of an agro-livestock scientific research and training centre, seeking to share and extend its findings and experience across other parts of the peninsula.





