

# el Periòdic News

## INTERVIEW

### Salvador Ribas

DIRECTOR OF THE MONTSEK  
ASTRONOMY PARK

“On March 29, there will be a partial solar eclipse with 25-30% coverage, which will affect the brightness of the day”

IRINA  
Rybalchenko



The Montsek Astronomy Park is the main centre for research, education, and the dissemination of astronomy in Catalonia, offering a new form of tourism: Star Tourism.

The exceptional sky of Montsek (Spain, Catalonia, province of Lleida) and the willingness to turn it into a tourist destination are the reasons why it has been internationally recognised as one of the best places in the world for astronomical observations since 2013. Salvador Ribas, Director of the Montsec Astronomical Park, explains what Star Tourism is all about and shares with us the plans for the park's development.

—What is Star Tourism today? How was it developed?

—The Starlight certification is the first to unite science and tourism and aims to guarantee the quality of tourist experiences—including night landscapes, stargazing, and space views, as well as the associated scientific, cultural and environmental knowledge. The recognition of science as a tourist product and, at the same time, a working method in tourism provides the basis for the development of this standard.

The Starlight Certification System (Star Tourism) was created to improve the quality of tourist services worldwide and protect the night sky in Starlight Destinations.

Star Tourism is clearly growing in places where darkness and meteorological conditions allow astronomical observation activities.

In 2024 we reached 33,000 visitors, which indicates that interest in astronomical activities re-



MONTSEK ASTRONOMICAL PARK

mains very high.

—How do you plan to develop the tourist infrastructure of the park?

—The Montsec Astronomical Park is a project that has already been developed for the realization of activities in communication and scientific education. At the moment, we don't have additional space for our equipment, but we do foresee the improvement of some spaces within a few months, such as those dedicated to solar observation, or the start-up of a radio telescope that is financed with the participatory budget plan of Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya.

—Do you collaborate with universities in Catalonia and France?

—In our case, we have an agreement with the University of Barcelona and the Autonomous University of Barcelona so that their students can carry out teaching activities, specifically astronomical observation practices for subjects on this topic in their Physics degrees. In addition, almost every year, we host a

student from these universities for an internship in a company within our facility. Historically, we have collaborated with France on cooperative projects to disseminate astronomy and the dark sky—as we did with the Pireneus la Nit project that ended in 2021—and now we are trying to build a new project along the same lines with the partners of these past projects. We are currently preparing for a future project with the Pic du Midi.

—Two years ago, you told me that by 2026 it is expected to have almost all the equipment updated with the latest technology, and that the volume of investment between 2022 and 2026 is estimated at around \$1,200,000 euros. What actions have you carried out exactly?

—We have carried out a complete renovation of the Ull del Montsec planetarium with a one-of-a-kind mobile dome design that is also very exceptional and almost unique in Europe for the combination of projection systems that allow 3D vision. It even has an interactive system that allows the

public to intervene by deciding which object to visit. Beyond the planetarium, we have been able to convert our air conditioning system and now everything works with green energy, and we no longer have any system in regular operation that burns fossil fuels, emitting CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. These two actions have been very important, and we hope to add other improvements in materials and equipment that would allow us to keep the center as up-to-date as possible.

The Garden of the Universe or Garden of the Cosmos project is still a future goal at the moment. However, it must be said that we are gradually working on defining how it should be constructed, and to be able to launch this project in the next 5 or 6 years is very ambitious and will also be economically costly.

**—What are the plans for the park this year?**

—The Montsec Astronomical Park, located in the municipality of Àger, in the Noguera region, began its sixteenth season. This season will last until January 10, 2026, and will be marked by three astronomical phenomena of great relevance.

First of all, 2025 will be a year of maximum solar activity. Through their daytime experiences, visitors will be able to discover, with the help of an expert as-



MONTSEC ASTRONOMICAL PARK

tronomer, spectacular aspects of the Sun and enjoy a more dynamic observation of this star.

This year the Park will commemorate the centenary of the birth of Maria Assumpció Català, the first professional astronomer in Spain.

Finally, the Montsec Astronomical Park is a privileged place to observe several eclipses.

On March 29, 2025, a partial solar eclipse with 25-30% coverage was observed, causing the brightness of that day to change and shadows to be perceived as weaker. This eclipse served as a warm-up for the so-called “Iberian Triplet” of three consecutive solar eclipses that will occur between 2026 and 2028.

Among the new features that we are preparing, the following can be highlighted:



MONTSEC ASTRONOMICAL PARK

The Montsec Astronomical Park began its sixteenth season.

– The Astronomy Festival, which is held every year and which this year reaches its 11th edition. This festival will offer a varied range of scientific, cultural, and leisure activities, with the aim of disseminating science among society and promoting Montsec as an Star Tourism des-

tination.

– The “Music under the Stars” cycle, which is celebrating its 15th edition, will combine a visit to the park with a musical show by Catalan artists. The night visits allow attendees to enjoy music in a unique environment under a starry sky. ●

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## COORDINATOR'S REPROACHES TO THE EXECUTIVE

# «Band-Aids» to a wound that requires «urgent surgical intervention»

The manifesto of the April 5th protest calls for effective regulation of the housing market

EL PERIÒDIC  
ESCALDES-ENGORDANY

The Coordinator for a Decent Housing has published this Monday the manifesto of the next citizen demonstration, called for April 5th. In the text, the group recalls that «more than a year ago the Andorran people erupted against the abuse of large holders and speculators» and denounces the «complicity of the Government» in the management of the housing crisis.

According to the manifesto, that initial outburst has transformed into a consolidated movement that has given rise to «a network rooted within the Andorran people» with the aim of putting an end to a situation that they consider unsustainable. «The Government has tried to put Band-Aids on a wound that requires urgent surgical intervention», they point out, referring to measures that they consider completely insufficient.

The Coordinator believes that the mobilization should mark “the first blow on the table” to demand structural reforms such as the effective regulation of rental and sale prices, the substantial expansion of the public housing stock and a determined fight against real estate abuses. Among the immediate proposals, the manifesto calls for “regulating all rents in accordance with the real value of the housing and the purchasing power of the working classes”, as well as “prohibiting all evictions without a decent and affordable housing alternative”.

Another of the key demands is the “immediate” creation of a



The Coordinator refers to the need for the immediate creation of a public property registry.

public and accessible property registry, together with a housing census updated periodically. This tool, they claim, would allow us to identify “who is benefiting from the increase in prices” and put an end to the opacity of the market.



## COORDINATOR FOR DECENT HOUSING

“The movement seeks to give a voice to families who have had to leave the country or live-in pensions because they cannot find decent and affordable housing”

The manifesto also denounces practices that it considers fraudulent, such as ‘the child trap’ —a legal formula used to circumvent the limitations of rental contracts— and accuses certain owners of perpetuating “a speculative business” to the

detriment of the right to housing.

“The people are fed up with seeing the same people do and undo as they please,” the document concludes, while claiming the power of collective mobilization as the only way to force real change. The group assures that, with this movement, it seeks to give a voice to families who “have had to leave the country or live in pensions because they cannot find decent and affordable housing,” and insists that it is time for “the Government to take charge of the problem it has generated.” ●

## INTERVIEW ON RTVE

RTVE



The Head of Government, Xavier Espot, during the interview on the program 'Cafè d'idees' that took place this Tuesday.

# Espot disassociates the intervention of BPA from political pressure

The president denies that the patriotic police pressed to obtain data from some clients

AGÈNCIES  
ESCALDES-ENGORDANY

"If the BPA intervened at the time, it was not due to any pressure from Spain or the patriotic police, but because there was a note from FinCEN that said that BPA was a bank where there were high suspicions of massive money laundering". This is how forceful the Head of Government, Xavier Espot, has been when asked about Operation Catalonia during the interview he gave this Tuesday as part of the

program 'Cafè d'idees' on Ràdio i Televisió Española (RTVE).

In this way, Espot distanced himself from the accusations made against the government of the then president, Mariano Rajoy, and reiterated that, from his point of view, "at no time was there pressure or influence from the Spanish government to obtain BPA's intervention". However, he did not deny that the patriotic police had previously pressured the bank to obtain data from some customers, as evidenced by the published

recordings. Espot also recalled that at the time of the publication of the FinCEN note, "the lines to BPA were cut" and to the rest of the country's banking institutions, which put the collapse of the financial system at "clear risk", despite the fact that in the end "all deposits were returned and all jobs were preserved".

**"A CLEAR ADVANCE" IN THE DECRIMINALIZATION OF ABORTION** // Regarding abortion, he explained that for years they have been working on a solution that allows for a "cle-

ar advance" in the recognition of women's rights, while maintaining the institutional system. "We are working on a system where abortion is decriminalized and where there is support, so that abortion cannot be performed in Andorra, but can be performed abroad with a compensation of public services at all levels", he said. In this way, he added, the idea is that this solution is implemented this year legislation; that is, in the next two years, and thus put an end to the situation. ●