

extrimadura



## BIRDWATCHING ROUTES










BIRDWATCHING ROUTES IN EXTREMADURA



*European Bee-eaters*



*Black Redstart*

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REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OF EXTREMADURA

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## Introduction

Extremadura, with its wide range of habitats, from the high mountains of the Gredos to the plains of La Serena or Cáceres and Trujillo, and its strategic geographical situation within the migratory routes of many birds, has become a popular destination for birdwatching. The internationally renowned optics brand specializing in binoculars and telescopes, Swarovski, used by the birdwatchers around the world, has even decided to name its latest backpack model, designed for naturalists to carry optical materials in, Extremadura. The recent declaration of Monfragüe as a National Park, with the consequent publicity and funding this brings from the Ministry of the Environment, Rural and Marine Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism, has brought a significant and growing number of visitors to Extremadura, coming to observe many species of birds difficult to find elsewhere. However, Monfragüe is only one area within a well-conserved region that has many other natural areas well worth discovering. This birdwatching route guide aims to provide a simple and convenient introduction to other places in Extremadura that are not as well-known as Monfragüe National Park and that in some cases aren't even under any form of protection, but are full of natural resources that would delight any birdwatcher spending a few days in these areas.

We have tried to keep the routes simple, but without losing any detail. They are aimed at both birdwatchers from other parts of Spain or from other countries who may visit and as well as Extremaduran families who want to discover areas that have gone unnoticed until now. Each route includes the following information: a sketch of the route and a table with the route's most representative bird species and the best time to see them. This is divided into the following categories:

**Residents:** birds which stay in the region throughout the whole year.

**Summer visitors:** breeding birds which are in the region in spring and summer, migrating to their winter quarters at the end of summer.

**Winter visitors:** birds which don't breed in Extremadura but spend the autumn and winter months here.

**Passage migrants:** birds that pass through the region on migration from their breeding areas to the north of Extremadura to their winter areas further south and so normally pass through twice a year, before and after breeding.

Each route also includes the following information:

- **Location and access:** with the necessary information to be able to reach the starting point of each route.
- **Description of the route:** with GPS coordinates where the route forks or at points of interest to enable you to make the most of the route.
- **Ornithological value:** this gives details about the most exceptional birds you can see along the route, although there are always many more species in the area.
- **Best time to visit:** the best time to do the route or what you can find during it in each season.
- **Other environmental and cultural interest:** additional information about each area's resources and how you can find them.

Finally we would just like to express our hope that everyone who decides to do one of these routes enjoys a wonderful day in the countryside and that the information in this guide proves useful.

**Juan Pablo Prieto Clemente**

*Barn Owl*





## **Birdwatching best practices**

You must bear in mind that your birdwatching should not disturb birds or any other living creatures. Please remember to observe the following guidelines as you carry out these birdwatching routes:

- Avoid disturbing the birds during the breeding period. Try not to go close to nests because if an adult bird is frightened while it is incubating its eggs or when its chicks are young breeding may fail.
- Try to dress in discreet colours, which blend into the landscape and don't make a visual impact.
- Speak in low voices when you are walking along the route, enjoying the sounds of nature, particularly the birds' songs and calls, as many species can best be detected by their vocalisation.
- Wherever possible, walk the route rather than drive it, so you can make the most of the route and use all your senses.
- If you use optics (binoculars and telescopes) you won't need to get close to the birds and it will be easier to distinguish and enjoy the different species. It is also advisable to seek the services of specialised field guides.



# Index



	Page
1 Sierra de Gata .....	12
2 Valle del Ambroz .....	16
3 La Vera and el Jerte .....	20
4 Tajo internacional .....	24
5 Canchos de Ramiro / Portaje Reservoir .....	28
6 Monfragüe National Park .....	32
7 Arrocampo Reservoir .....	38
8 Sierra de San Pedro .....	42
9 Plains of Cáceres, Magasca and Trujillo .....	46
10 Villuercas .....	50
11 Diversion dam of the River Guadiana .....	54
12 Cornalvo and Los Canchales .....	58
13 Moheda Alta / Sierra Brava .....	64
14 Orellana Reservoir and Puerto Peña .....	68
15 Lakes and plains of La Albuera .....	72
16 Central Sierras of Badajoz .....	76
17 La Serena and Sierra de Tiros .....	80
18 Dehesas of Jerez .....	84
19 Arroyo Conejo / Campiña Sur .....	88



### Location and access

The route is in the region of Sierra de Gata, in the dehesa of the River Alagón and in the valley of the River Árrago, on the southern slope of the Sierra de Gata. You can start the route in the town of **Moraleja** (Cáceres), on the EX-108 road (Coria-Moraleja), where you take the road leading to the town of **La Moheda** and Borbollón Reservoir or from the EX-205, turning off towards Moraleja or going upriver in the valley of Árrago.



### Description of the route

The route is about 106 km long, from the town of Moraleja to the end of the suggested route and back, taking you on a mixture of roads and forest trails. It is intended to be done by car in one day, stopping at the most interesting observation points.

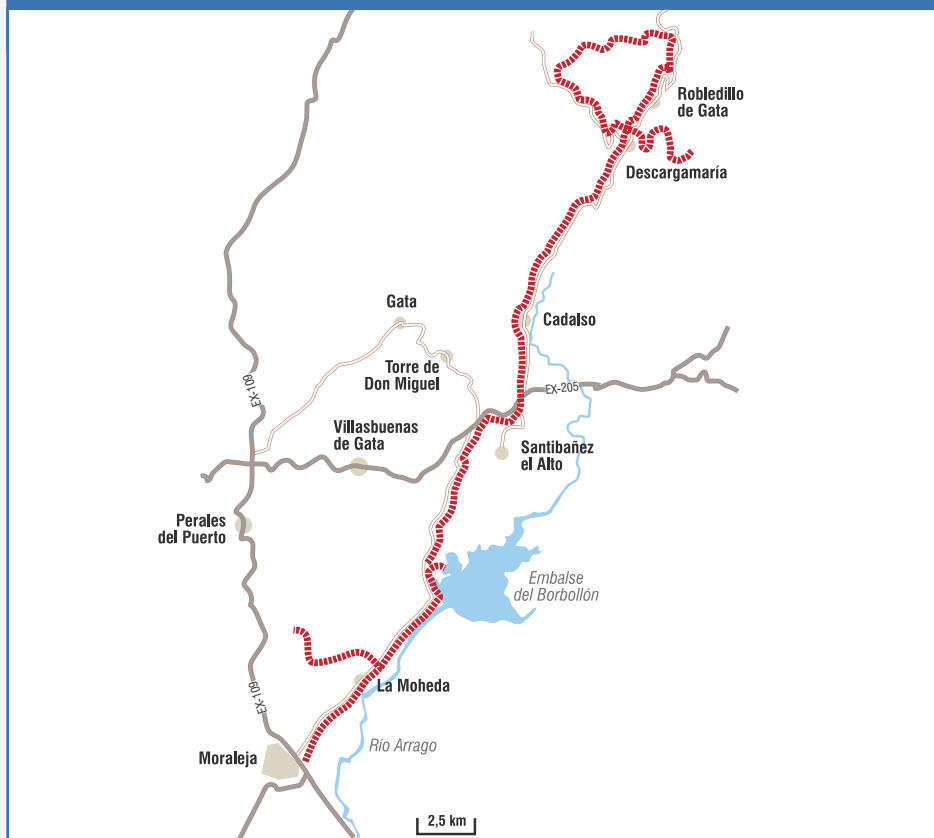
Part of the route goes through the dehesa, pastures and irrigated farmland of the River Alagón, in which the wintering population of Common Crane is noteworthy. Then it takes you up the River Árrago among shady groves of ash and alder trees, between mountains such as Bolla and Gomara, which are over 1100 metres high and where there is a large breeding population of Eurasian Black Vulture, with over fifty breeding pairs. The route peaks at Puertos Nuevo and Viejo, at the provincial border with Salamanca, in the Sierra de los Ángeles, an area of pines, heathers and brooms. Halfway along the route, between the mountains and the plains, the Holm and Pyrenean oak dehesas soften the contrasts between the peaks and the plains. The Borbollón Reservoir is an important site for many wintering water birds, such as ducks, geese, Great Cor-

morant, gulls and Common Crane, which use an islet – that of Parra Chica or Borbollón – as a regular roost during winter, as well as a breeding ground for White Stork, Cattle Egret and Grey Heron during the summer. Start the route in the town of **Moraleja**. From the EX-108 take the road leading to the town of Moheda and the Embalse de Borbollón reservoir. Turn off to the left at point (X:0703715, Y: 4442234), following the signs towards the reservoir of the Rivera de Gata. As you go along you will find mosaics of cornfields, pastures and dehesa where you can easily see Common Crane feeding or Black-winged Kite. The landscape is dominated by traditional tobacco drying sheds and, to the north, in the distance, you can see the mountaintops of the Sierra de Gata. Returning to the road turn left towards Borbollón Reservoir, declared a Special Protected Area for birds. Once you reach the campsite take the road to Hoyos and Villásbuenas de Gata, turning right at point (X:0705617, Y: 4445362). From here there is a path going around Borbollón Reservoir, where we suggest you leave your car and walk along the bank at dusk, after having completed the suggested route. It's a good place to watch Common Crane, moving from their feeding site to the islet where they roost. From one of the nearest points to the island you can see the birds on the banks, as well as Great Cormorant, which roost in the eucalyptuses.

Continue towards the EX-205 and turn right towards the town of Hervás, then turn left at the crossroads of Cadalso and Descargamaría. Go upstream in the valley of the River Árrago, shaded by a cool grove, where you can see the nervous flight of the Dipper. Once you have reached the pretty town of Robledillo de Gata, declared a Historical Artistic Ensemble, take the narrow road leading to Puerto Viejo mountain pass. At point



## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eurasian Black Vulture</li> <li>• Griffon Vulture</li> <li>• Bonelli's Eagle</li> <li>• Coal Tit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Stork</li> <li>• Egyptian Vulture</li> <li>• Ortolan Bunting</li> <li>• Tawny Pipit</li> <li>• Northern Wheatear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dunnock</li> <li>• Yellowhammer</li> <li>• Eurasian Bullfinch</li> <li>• Common Crane</li> </ul>	

(X:0715446, Y: 4446783) you will find the “Mirador de la Lagartera” viewpoint, where there is a good view of the narrow valley of Árrago and from where a Roman road starts, a small path that goes up the gorge towards the river’s source. Its slopes are dense, full of

black pine, stunted Holm oaks, oaks and enormous treelike heathers, an ideal spot to watch small scrubland birds: warblers, Dunnock, Robin, etc.

When you get to Puerto Viejo, at point (X:0715802, Y: 4470009), take the forest trail to the left. This trail goes



*Great Tit*

over an area of high peaks, dominated by plantations of black pine and thick bushes of heathers and broom. In this habitat you can find common summer breeding birds such as Ortolan Bunting, Northern Wheatear and Tawny Pipit as well as Yellowhammer, a winter visitor that can only be seen in this isolated mountain corner of Extremadura. You can also see Great Tit and Coal Tit in patchy clearings within the mountain pine forest. Scavengers such as Eurasian Black Vulture, Griffon Vulture and Egyptian Vulture, are also commonly seen flying over. The trail continues to the road of "Puerto Nuevo", at point (X:0710899, Y: 4467314), between the towns of Descargamaría and Ciudad Rodrigo (Salamanca). Along it you should turn off at the following points: Point (X:07149172, Y: 4469784). Turn right. Point (X:0714467, Y: 4469218). Turn right. Point (X:0713105, Y: 4468702). Turn right. Point (X:0711596, Y: 4468458). Turn left. When you reach the road turn left towards Descarga-

maría. The road twists and turns, giving views of steep valleys and slate hills, with junipers and stunted Holm oaks growing among their slabs. Eurasian Black Vulture is more common here, particularly in the shady spots of the **Gomara**. There is a good observation point of the mountain range from the road at point (X:0712815, Y: 4464117).

Once you reach Descargamaría take the road to Robledillo de Gata again, turning off to the right at point (X:0713912, Y: 4464947). The route goes up a steep slope towards the peak and **Chorrito viewpoint**, from where you can see a spectacular waterfall known as "**Chorro de los Ángeles**". The proximity of a rubbish dump (recently reopened and part of the rubbish dump network authorized by Extremadura's Administration) makes this site a perfect place to watch the incessant activity of large scavengers, particularly Griffon Vultures, which roost by the dozen in the slates of the waterfalls and crags of the "**Sierra de los Ángeles**".



## Ornithological interest

Due to the diversity of the habitats this route has many and varied ornithological interests. The wintering population of Common Crane stands out, with an estimated population of about 4000 birds. In winter the Black-winged Kite is common in the irrigated lands and dehesa of the rivers. Borbollón Island is the nesting site of, amongst other species, Cattle Egret (240 breeding pairs) and Grey Heron, which has its biggest breeding colony in Extremadura here, with 160 nests. There are over fifty breeding pairs of Eurasian Black Vulture in this region. Together with the northern groups in Hurdes and Granadilla its numbers reach 100 breeding pairs. You can also see other species such as overwintering Black Stork, although these habitats are not very favourable for them. In some mountain pine forests you can see Coal Tit and in the heather and broom thickets you can see the typical breeding birds of these mountain habitats, such as Northern Wheatear, Ortolan Bunting and Tawny Pipit, as well as characteristic scrubland species, such as Dunnock and Common Whitethroat. In the pine forests and deciduous woodland areas the birds of prey you can see include Booted Eagle, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Northern Goshawk, as well as Tawny Owl and Long-eared Owl.



## Best time to visit

This route can be done at any time of the year. In winter you can enjoy the spectacle of the wintering birds, mainly Common Cranes, drawn to the irrigated lands, dehesa and water bodies. In spring the summer birds return, such as Black Stork, Egyptian Vulture, Booted Eagle or Short-toed Eagle. Spring is also the breeding season, so you must not stray from the established route to avoid disturbing the birds during this sensitive period. Although part of the route goes through a mountain area it is very hot in summer, so avoid the hottest hours of the day if you do this route then, which are also less favourable for seeing birds.



## Other environmental and cultural interest

- **“El Chorrillo” Viewpoint** (Torrecilla de los Ángeles)
- **Historical-Artistic Ensemble of:** Gata, Robledillo de Gata, Trevejo and San Martín de Trevejo.

*Texts: Víctor Manuel Pizarro Jiménez*

*Northern Wheatear*





### Location and access

The **Valle del Ambroz** is in the centre-north of the province of Cáceres, bordered by the spurs of **Gredos** to the north and south and by the **River Alagón** to the west. The **River Ambroz**, which gives it its name, crosses the region diagonally, from the northeast to the southwest. The marked contrast of altitudes favours the presence of many ecosystems, from dehesa to plains to high mountains.

There is good access to all of the Valle del Ambroz, as the region is crossed from north to south by the A-66 motorway, also called the "Autovía de la Plata", as it runs parallel to the historic Roman road of this name. The A-66 enters the north of Extremadura through the picturesque Puerto de Béjar and leaves through the Valle del Ambroz in the south, in Plasencia.



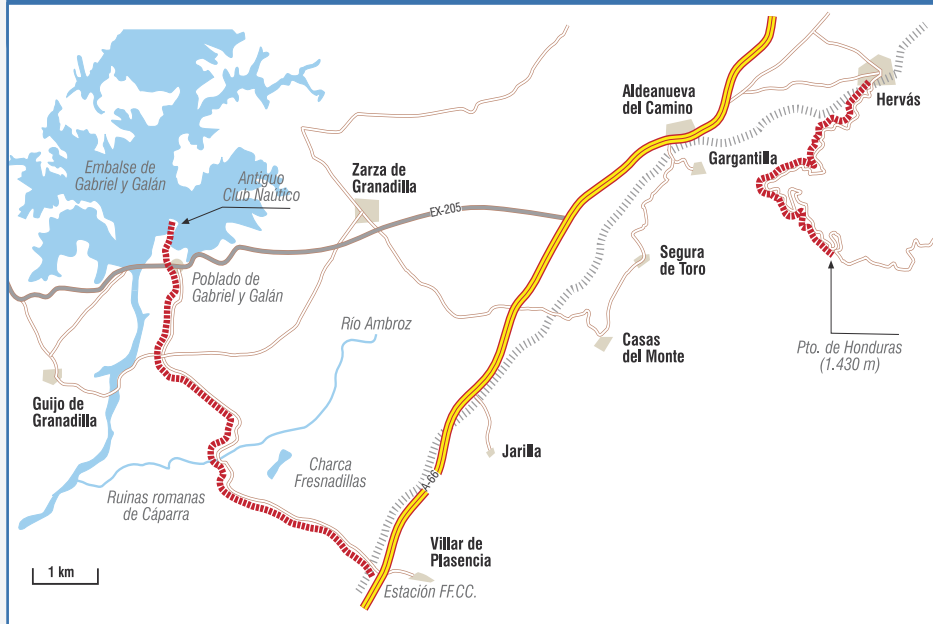
### Description of the route

The route suggested here has two separate parts: one is the **Puerto de Honduras**, a mountain route starting in Hervás, and the other is the dehesa between the Roman ruins of Cáparra and the Gabriel y Galán Reservoir.

The ascent up to Puerto de Honduras mountain pass is along a narrow road, with a lot of bends and little traffic, so you can drive slowly and easily and safely stop on the curbs. You go up from Hervás, at 700 m, to the mountain pass, at 1430 m, crossing different types of vegetation, from the oak and chestnut tree groves of Hervás to the broom thickets at the top. The route starts in Hervás, from where you should take the road towards Cabezucla del Valle, staying on it at all times. The species you can see are mostly forest species (Eurasian Spar-

rowhawk, Northern Goshawk, European Honey Buzzard, Hawfinch, Golden Oriole, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Short-toed Treecreeper, European Nuthatch, Eurasian Jay, Mistle Thrush, Pied Flycatcher, Western Bonelli's warbler), species of rocky places (Griffon Vulture, Peregrine Falcon, Golden Eagle, Rufous-tailed Rock and Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart, Rock Bunting) and scrubland species (Common Whitethroat, Dartford Warbler, Ortolan Bunting, Black-eared Wheatear, Woodlark). You can complement your ascent by car by covering sections on foot in forest areas or at the peaks. Once you have gone up the mountain pass you can return to Hervás or go down through the Valle del Jerte, through similar landscapes, but without the chestnut tree groves. The second part goes through a very different habitat: dehesa. It starts at the A-66 exit leading to **Guijo de Granadilla** and Gabriel y Galán Reservoir, next to the disused train station of **Villar de Plasencia**. You must pay attention to the access signs to this small road, as the entry isn't direct. Once you have started the route you will cross a typical dehesa, where you can see Common Crane in winter and Azure-winged Magpie, Hoopoe and other species throughout the year. There are many White Stork and Raven nests (sometimes occupied by the Common Kestrel) on the electricity pylons, although the electricity companies have recently started to get rid of them. The European Roller is also present, although scarce, normally found perched on electricity cables or rural buildings. 4.4 km from the start, to the left, another road starts, which leads to a livestock pool (be careful, as just before it there is another road to the left, which you don't want to take). You are now in an area of ash tree groves where you can see Black Stork throughout the year; Spoonbill and Great White Egret on passage; Northern Lapwing, Common Crane and Golden Plover in winter and

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Griffon Vulture, Eurasian Black Vulture, Northern Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon, Golden Eagle, Black-winged Kite, Black Stork, Grey Heron, Great crested Grebe, Stone Curlew, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Dipper, Dunnock, Azure-winged Magpie, Blue Rock Thrush, Dartford Warbler, Firecrest.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European Honey Buzzard, Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Egyptian Vulture, European Roller, European Bee-eater, Common Cuckoo, Pallid Swift, Common Whitethroat, Pied Flycatcher, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Ortolan Bunting, Golden Oriole.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common Crane, Osprey, Greylag Goose, ducks, Black-headed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Golden Plover, Northern Lapwing, Great Cormorant.</li> </ul>	

European Roller and Rock Sparrow in spring. However, the presence of many of these species is irregular and occasional. Returning to the previous road continue towards the Gabriel y Galán Reservoir, passing by the ru-

ins and **Roman Arch of Cáparra**. Next cross the **River Ambroz** and you will enter a treeless area, where you can see Stone Curlew and Golden Plover in winter, as well as Common Crane and Black-winged Kite. Keep on the same



*Pied Flycatcher*





*European Bee-eater*



*Black Stork*

road until it ends in the EX-205, next to the **Gabriel y Galán Reservoir**. We recommend you watch from the dam (there's a large car park on the right), where, downstream, there is a colony of Grey Heron in the black poplars, also the winter roosting area of Great Cormorant (if you are lucky you might see Black Stork and Osprey) and, upstream, you can see the large expanse of water of the reservoir. The best area to watch water birds is the southeast end of the reservoir, with the peninsula, where the **Club Náutico** is located, being a good site (recently reconverted into a sports centre). This is an excellent spot to see Common Crane and gulls returning to their roosts, and to watch ducks, geese and Great Crested Grebe in winter. The Eurasian Black Vulture breeds to the north of the reservoir, and is easily seen, and it was the best site for the Iberian Lynx in Extremadura.



## Ornithological interests

The diversity of the **Valle del Ambroz** means that you can see forest, mountain, scrubland, dehesa, farmland and aquatic birds all within a small area. In general, it is an area little visited by birdwatchers, mainly as it is unknown. The area doesn't have large populations of emblematic species, but does have great diversity, and also offers the possibility of discovering its rich monumental heritage and enjoying its beautiful scenery.



## Best time to visit

The suggested routes can be visited at any time of the year, complementing each other. The ascent to the Puerto de Honduras mountain pass is best undertaken in spring and summer, between March and September,

with the best time being between May and July. On the other hand, winter is the best time to cover the dehesa, and in particular, to see Common Cranes and water birds on the reservoir.



## Other environmental and cultural interest

The Valle del Ambroz offers visitors many areas of beautiful scenery, including the surroundings of La Garganta gorge, the pine forests of Granadilla and the dehesa of Oliva de Plasencia. There are many special trees in the region: the birch grove of Puerto de Honduras (near the top, on the northern slope), Acarreadero oak in Cabeza-abellosa (the biggest in the region), the enormous chestnut trees of Casas del Monte and Segura de Toro and La Fresneda cork oak in Aldeanueva del Camino.

Monuments of interest include the ensemble of **Hervás**, particularly its Jewish quarter and churches; the Roman ruins of Cáparra (with a centre of interpretation); the Palace of the Duques de Alba in **Abadía**; the spa complex of **Baños de Montemayor**; the town of **La Garganta**; and the abandoned walled town of **Granadilla**, now converted into an educational centre (it is advisable to check visitor opening times). Well-known typical products are cherries and chestnuts, **Casas del Monte** strawberries, kid goat meat, trout, sausages and the traditional pitarra wines. “**El Otoño Mágico**” (Magical Autumn) is a notable festival, which is celebrated in November throughout the region. Several towns and villages have colourful carnivals and theatrical works of Jewish origin are performed in summer in **Hervás**.

*Texts: Javier Prieta Díaz*



FROM THE MONASTERY OF YUSTE  
TO PUERTO DE PIORNAL

### Location and access

Extremadura is crowned by the peaks of Gredos. This granite mass spreads across three regions: **Valle del Ambroz**, **Valle del Jerte** and **La Vera**. The Valle del Jerte is in the centre, forming a large valley of 40 km protected by two large mountainous spurs: Traslasierra and the Valle del Ambroz to the north and Tormantos and La Vera to the south. The high areas are protected by the Natura 2000 network as SCI "Valle del Jerte y Sierra de Gredos", while a small area of the Valle del Jerte of 6800 ha has been declared a Nature Reserve, called "Garganta de los Infiernos". La Vera and the Valle del Jerte are unique within Extremadura, as they are the only high mountain areas here and have the best indigenous forests areas, chiefly of Pyrenean oak trees.

Access to both regions is by two roads that run through most of the towns and villages in each region. The Valle del Jerte is crossed by the N-110 between **Plasencia** and **Puerto de Tornavacas**, which continues towards Ávila. Most of the towns and villages of La Vera are situated along the EX-203, between Plasencia and Candelada (Ávila). To start the suggested route in **Cuacos de Yuste**, it is advisable to first go to **Jaraíz de la Vera**, either by the EX-203 from Plasencia (32 km) or by the EX-A1, taking the exit at **Casatejada**. Cuacos de Yuste is 5 km north from Jaraíz along the EX-203.

### Description of the route

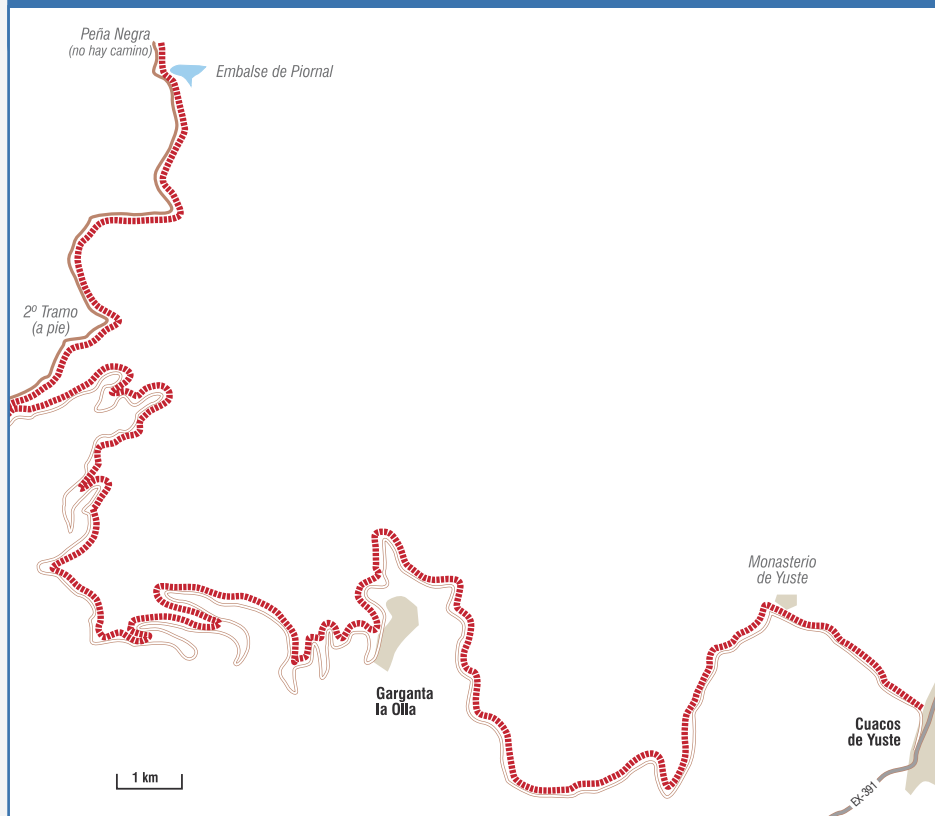


The suggested route consists of 22 km between **Cuacos de Yuste** and **Puerto de Piornal** mountain pass, to be covered by car, then another 5 km on to Peña Negra of Piornal, to be done on foot. The whole route is in the mountains, ascending from Cuacos at 600 m to Peña Negra at nearly 1500 m, across different types of vegetation, mostly oak groves along the road section and heath and broom thickets along the foot trails. The route takes you along narrow roads with little traffic, so you can drive slowly and calmly and easily and safely stop at the curbs.

The starting point is in Cuacos de Yuste, at the crossroads between the main road and the road leading off to the **Monastery of Yuste**. Follow this small road until you reach the monastery through a dense oak grove. A stop at the monastery or in its surrounding area will afford the first sightings of forest birds that you will see along the whole route (Hawfinch, Golden Oriole, Robin, Common Chaffinch, Great and Blue Tits, Short-toed Treecreeper, European Nuthatch, Eurasian Jay, Mistle Thrush, Long-tailed Tit, Blackcap, Carrion Crow, etc.). After the forest the route takes you through an area of rocky outcrops with low scrubland. In this area you can see Black and Black-eared Wheatears and Thekla Lark, with a spot next to a rock on the left hand side of the road that has a green triangle painted on it being a good place. The route takes you back into another forest, then between cherry and olive trees, interesting in winter for Song Thrush and Redwing and, some years, Bramblings. Further on the route crosses the **Garganta Mayor**, a mountain stream surrounded by shady alder trees, suitable for seeing Dipper and Grey Wagtail (or for bathing, as there is a natural pool here).

Just after this you will reach the picturesque village of **Garganta la Olla**. Here you will have to pay special at-

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Griffon Vulture, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Peregrine Falcon, Tawny Owl, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Thekla Lark, Crag Martin, Black Wheatear, Dipper, Dunnock, Azure-winged Magpie, Blue Rock Thrush, Dartford Warbler, Firecrest, Carrion Crow.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European Honey Buzzard, Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Common Cuckoo, European Nightjar, Eurasian Scops Owl, Pallid Swift, Black-eared Wheatear, Melodious Warbler, Spectacled Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Ortolan Bunting, Golden Oriole.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eurasian Woodcock, Goldcrest, Siskin, Redwing, Brambling.</li> </ul>

tention to keep to the route, which turns right towards **Piornal**. From here go up the narrow road to Piornal mountain pass for 12 km, which has sharp bends (about

a dozen), but is very beautiful, passing through a magnificent oak grove. Throughout this section you must drive slowly and carefully, stopping when you want at

picturesque points (springs, waterfalls, large chestnut trees) or when you spot birds of interest. At a certain height you will start to hear a lot of Western Bonelli's Warblers and the scarce Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Pied Flycatcher (better in areas with old trees) and if you are lucky you'll see birds of prey such as European Honey Buzzards and Eurasian Sparrowhawks. Once you have reached the mountain pass, beyond the forest and open ground, the route by car ends.

The section you have to do on foot starts with the first trail on the right after you have reached the top of the pass, which has a wide entrance and a cattle grid (kilometre point 16.7; coordinates 30-266050-4445600). However, we recommend you to go towards the small pine forest some 500 m to the left, where you may see Azure-winged Magpie, Coal Tit, Crested Tit and Firecrest during the breeding season (and sporadic sightings of the breeding Crossbill) as well as Firecrest and Siskin in winter (and occasionally Brambling and Fieldfare). Common Whitethroat is common in the area around the pine forest and Garden Warbler and Iberian Chiffchaff occasionally breed here. Returning to km point 16.7 the foot trail begins with a paved section and then continues for about 3.5 km along a dirt track to the reservoir. It crosses heath land at first and broom



*Spectacled Warbler*

thickets at the end, dotted with oak trees. In spring it is easy to see Dunnock, Woodlark, Nightingale, Wren, Dartford and Subalpine Warblers, Common Whitethroat and Rock and Ortolan Buntings. You must keep to the same track until you reach a small house ("Villa Martín"), where you should turn left. At this junction you can see Spectacled Warbler if you carry straight on, and even Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush in the rocks to the south. In spring and summer Lesser Kestrels come up from **Jaraíz de la Vera** to hunt in this area and in August and September you can see Montagu's Harrier on passage. The path to the left will take you to the reservoir, behind which you will see a large rocky formation, **Peña Negra**, which you will have to reach cross-country as there isn't a path. From here there is a magnificent view of the Valle del Jerte and

*Lesser Spotted Woodpecker*



you can see Rufous-tailed and Blue Rock Thrushes, Spectacled Warbler, Black Redstart, Common Kestrel and, if you are lucky, birds of prey such as Eurasian Sparrowhawk, European Honey Buzzard, Peregrine Falcon, Booted and Short-toed Eagles and Hobby. The route ends here and you must go back along the same path. If you go back by the village of Piornal look out for swifts, as large numbers of Pallid Swift breed here.



*Ortolan Bunting*

## Ornithological interests

The regions of **La Vera** and **Valle del Jerte** are home to unique species of birds within Extremadura, with the best regional representation of forest and mountain birds. They are mostly birds of northern areas (Carrion Crow, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Dunnock, Hawfinch, Mistle Thrush, Pied Flycatcher, etc.), but are complemented by certain Mediterranean mountain species, both forest (Western Bonelli's Warbler) and, in particular, scrubland (Dartford, Spectacled and Sub-alpine Warbler, Ortolan Bunting, Woodlark) and rock species (Crag Martin, Rufous-tailed and Blue Rock Thrushes, Black-eared and Black wheatears). Amongst the birds of prey, it is easy to find European Honey Buzzards, with a small presence of Peregrine Falcon, Hobby and Eurasian Sparrowhawks and the curious appearance of Lesser Kestrel and Montagu's Harrier in the high mountains.

## Best time to visit

The most of the routes of ornithological interest in Extremadura, this route is highly suitable to being done in **summer**. The best months to visit are between April and October, with May, June and July being particularly good. However, **winter** can be a good time to do the first part of the route, bringing new species (Siskin, Goldcrest, wintering thrushes). However, at this time there aren't usually many species in the final part, on foot, over the mountain scrubland. Another winter attraction is the presence of snow, which is common here then. In this instance you have to plan ahead and get information beforehand, as the Piornal mountain pass is normally closed to traffic when it snows.

## Other environmental

## and cultural interest

In **La Vera** and **Valle del Jerte** have places of great scenic beauty and many bathing areas. Just a couple of places we would recommend you to visit are **Los Pilonés** (Garganta de los Infiernos) and the **Cascada del Caozo** waterfall (going down from Piornal towards the River Jerte). There are also several special trees: the large **chestnut trees of Casas del Castañar** (along a sign-posted route starting in this village), **Solana oak** in **Barrado** and **Prado Sancho oak** in **Cabezuela del Valle** and the **Aldeanueva de la Vera pine tree**. The Puerto de Tornavacas mountain pass is very interesting to see other breeding birds such as the Skylark, Northern Wheatear and Red-backed Shrike. The towns and villages in the area, particularly those of La Vera, have good examples of traditional architecture. We recommend visiting **Garganta la Olla**, **Cuacos de Yuste** and its monastery (the final residence of Carlos V), **Jarandilla de la Vera** and its castle, converted into a National Parador, **Guijo de Coria** and **Madrigal de la Vera**. In Jerte, Tornavacas, Jerte and the **Cherry Museum** in **Cabezuela del Valle** are interesting.

As for typical products, any visit would be incomplete without trying the famous **Jerte cherries**, **La Vera paprika** and **chestnuts**. **La Vera's goat's cheeses** are also well-known, as are **Piornal's sausages**, **trout** and **farmhouse sweets and liquors**. Notable festivals include "**El Peropalo**" in Villanueva de la Vera (during its carnival), "**Los Escobazos**" in Jarandilla de la Vera (7 December), "**El Jarramplas**" in Piornal (20 January), "**Los Empalaos**" in Valverde de la Vera (Holy Thursday, during Easter) and "**El cerezo en flor**" - the cherry trees in blossom - across the whole of Valle del Jerte (date varies each year).

*Texts: Javier Prieta Díaz*



## Location and access

The route is in the southwest of the province of Cáceres, on the border with Portugal marked out by the River Tajo, a section of river known as River Tajo International and declared a Natural Park in 2006. The suggested route can be reached from Valencia de Alcántara by the N-521 (Cáceres-Portuguese border), turning off onto the EX-374 towards the town of Cedillo, or from the town of Membrío, by the CC-126. From the north you can reach it from the EX-117.



## Description of the route

The suggested route is a circular trip combining roads and dirt tracks. The route is designed to be done by car in one day, making strategic stops at the most interesting observation points.

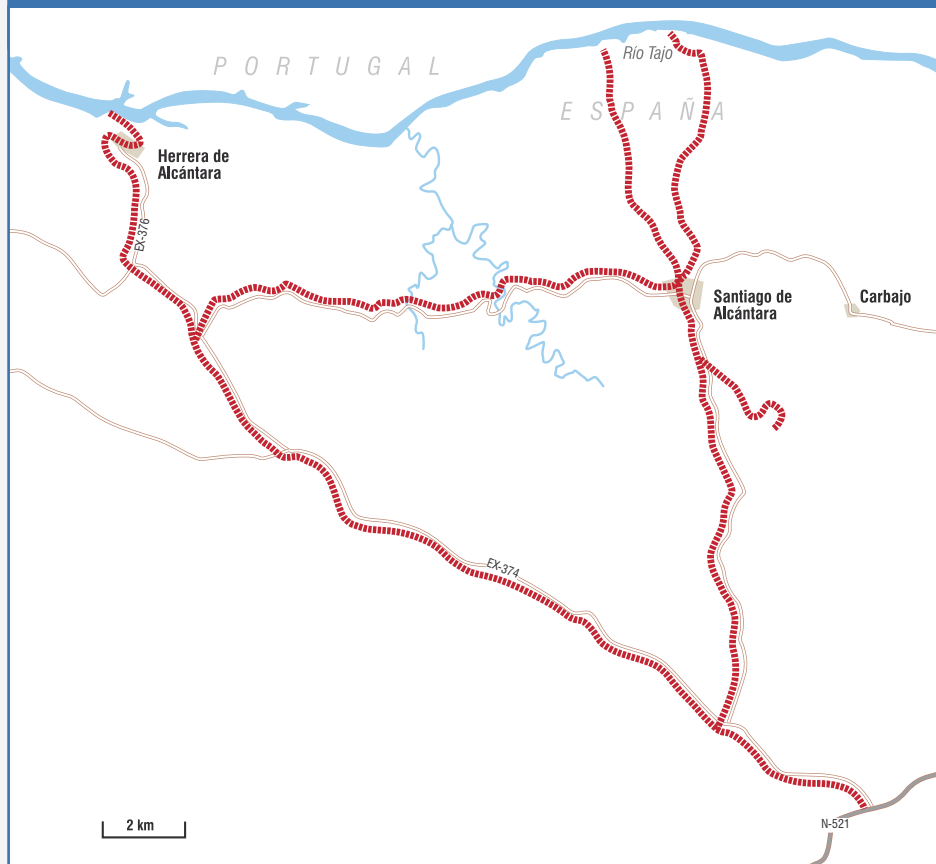
The route takes you across plains, with pastureland and vast areas of broom scrubland, rich in small game and so highly frequented by birds of prey that come from the nearby mountain ranges and riverbanks. As it is a livestock farming area, you can see various species of scavengers, such as Griffon Vulture, Eurasian Black Vulture and Egyptian Vulture patrolling the land in search of food. As you continue you will see dehesas of purely Holm or cork oak or a mixture of both, which contain a lot of livestock drinking pools that are frequented by Black Stork. It is common to see the silhouette of Red Kite, Common Buzzard and Short-toed Eagle perched above on the electricity pylons. Then the predominance of gentle undulating slopes gives way to the uneven and impassable riverbanks of Tajo International, thrust so violently and

spectacularly into the landscape that they are invisible from afar. In fact, from Spain you can see the towns and fields of Portugal but not the riverbanks of the Tajo, which are often only given away by the fog banks that cover the valley in winter. One of the largest breeding populations of Black Stork and Egyptian Vulture find refuge along the riverbanks, as well as other birds of prey, such as the Griffon Vulture, Eurasian Black Vulture, Golden Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, and Eagle Owl. The Spanish Imperial Eagle breeds on the neighbouring bank and in the nearby mountain ranges, completing the catalogue of birds that are sought after by birdwatchers. Away from the riverbank, the route goes up the Sierra de Santiago, which overlooks a vast dehesa landscape. If the large birds of prey in flight and the graceful silhouette of the Black Stork are spectacular, the flocks of tens of thousands of Common Wood Pigeons that winter in this area are no less so. They form clouds that fly to their feeding areas to eat the young, small cork oak acorns, or to their roosts, in the eucalyptus groves of the mountain ranges and riverbanks every day.

From **Valencia de Alcántara**, on the N-521, take the turning towards **Cedillo** on the EX-374 and then towards **Herrera de Alcántara** on the EX-376 to go down to the riverbanks of the Tajo International, where you can see the scenery in all its splendour and the most representative habitats of this protected natural area. At point (X:0636373, Y: 438969) there is a viewpoint next to the road overlooking the valley of the River Tajo. The wonderful shade that covers this area, with masses of strawberry tree, laurustinus, wild olive and olive groves that grow on slate terraces, make this place an unbeatable spot to see small scrubland birds, thrushes, Hawfinch and Eurasian Bullfinch, mainly in



## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spanish Imperial Eagle</li> <li>• Eurasian Black Vulture</li> <li>• Griffon Vulture</li> <li>• Bonelli's Eagle</li> <li>• Eagle Owl</li> <li>• Carrion Crow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black-winged Kite</li> <li>• Black Stork</li> <li>• Egyptian Vulture</li> <li>• Short-toed Eagle</li> <li>• Booted Eagle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dunnock</li> <li>• Eurasian Bullfinch</li> <li>• Common Wood Pigeon</li> </ul>	

autumn and winter, when there is a generous supply of fruits for the thousands of wintering birds. In the stretch towards Herrera de Alcántara you can see

flocks of Azure-winged Magpie as well as Black-winged Kite and Carrion Crow, a highly localized resident species in the region.



*Black Kite*

From here return towards the town of **Santiago de Alcántara** along the CC-37, crossing rivers such as the Alburrel, which twists between slate rock faces, before flowing into the River Tajo. It is easy to spot the striking Black Wheatear on the slates, always associated to rocky habitats. Once you reach Santiago de Alcántara go towards the **Centre of Interpretation of Nature “El Péndere”**, following the road signs. From here starts the short road towards **Geregosa Spring** (PR CC-59), 7 km long, leading to the banks of the Tajo and the famous medicinal spring. The route isn't difficult as it is well signposted and the road is in a good state. At point (X:0650063, Y: 43486053) continue straight on. Once you have reached the bank of the Tajo you will find some public facilities, such as a viewpoint and interpretative panels about the area. The site offers a good possibility of seeing riverside birds such as Grey Heron, Great Cormorant, Griffon Vulture, Black Stork, Egyptian Vulture, etc.

Returning to Santiago de Alcántara, take the CC-126 towards the town of Membrió. Leaving this town, take

the road on the left at point (X:0651072, Y: 4386209), which will take you to the spot known as “**Las Viñas**”. The route is easy and is sign-posted throughout (PR-CC 96). Once you reach the end of the road there are several public facilities, such as a car park, a viewpoint and a spectacular observation tower from which you can enjoy the beauty of the rugged scenery of the Tajo International. From the viewpoint you can easily see the slate rock faces that tower over the river where Griffon Vulture, Black Stork and Egyptian Vulture nest.

Take the CC-37 back to Santiago de Alcántara, which will take you back towards the N-521, the start and end point of this route. At point (X:0651077, Y: 4384412) take a road on the left that will take you to the summit of **Sierra de Santiago**. We recommend you leave your car at the foot of the mountain range and walk up to the viewpoint you will find at the top and that looks out over a spectacular dehesa landscape. On the way up you can see **Peña de los Barreiros**, some quartzite cliffs on which there is a colony of Griffon Vulture.



## Ornithological interests

The Spanish Imperial Eagle and Black Stork should be highlighted. They are species in “danger of extinction” and there are good numbers of breeding pairs, both in the mountain range and in the dehesa and riverbanks in the area. The Spanish Imperial Eagle extends eastwards from this area, following the slopes of the Sierra San Pedro and giving rise to the largest breeding group in Extremadura. The Black Stork also has many pre-migration gatherings spread over the pools of the dehesa and the riverbanks. The Eurasian Black Vulture, linked to the dense and impenetrable patches of Mediterranean scrubland, is present in large numbers in the area, also continuing on from the numerous colonies in the neighbouring Sierra de San Pedro.

It isn't difficult to find species such as Bonelli's Eagle, Golden Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Griffon Vulture and Eagle Owl, of which there are many pairs nesting in the safety of the cliffs and trees. Egyptian Vulture has one of its largest breeding populations in Extremadura here.

The excellent degree of conservation of the scrubland of the riverbanks and the shade of the mountain range provide shelter and food for a countless number of small species: Common Whitethroat, Robins, Duncocks, etc.

In the dehesa Black-winged Kite, Carrion Crow – very scarce and localized in the region – and numerous flocks of the argumentative Azure-winged Magpies are often present.

In winter the flocks of tens of thousands of Common Wood Pigeons that form spiralling clouds as they move around are spectacular. The region of the Tajo International, together with the Sierra de San Pedro, is by far the best area during winter in Extremadura. There are also large winter concentrations of Great Cormorant in the waters of the Tajo.



## Best time to visit

The route can be done at any time of the year. In winter you can enjoy the spectacle of the flocks of Common Wood Pigeon and in spring the summer visitors return: Black Stork, Egyptian Vulture, Booted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, etc. Spring is also the breeding period, so you must keep to the established routes to



*Bonelli's Eagle*

avoid disturbing the birds during this sensitive period. Summer is very hot, so avoid the middle of the day, which is also less favourable for watching birds. The pre-migration concentrations of Black Stork gather in this season.



## Other environmental and cultural interest

- **Dolmens** (Santiago de Alcántara, Herrera de Alcántara and Cedillo)
- **El Buraco**, cave with rock art (Santiago de Alcántara)
- **Berrea del ciervo** (Red Deer stag bellowing), in autumn.
- **Alcántara**, a town with outstanding religious buildings, such as the Church of Nuestra Señora de Almocóvar, the Convent of San Benito, the Church of San Pedro de Alcántara and one of the best-conserved Roman bridges.

*Texts: Víctor Manuel Pizarro Jiménez*

## 5 Canchos de Ramiro and Portaje Reservoir



### Location and access

Towns of reference for this route are **Torrejuncillo**, **Portaje**, and **Cachorrilla**, all within the region of Coria. To access the route we recommend you take the A-66 (N-630), taking the turning off to Torrejuncillo-Coria (EX-371) at Puerto de los Castaños (Cañaveral). Then once you reach Torrejuncillo go towards Coria (EX-109) and after just over 4 km turn left onto a local road which will take you to the towns of Portaje (5 km) and Cachorrilla (15 km; after turning off towards Pescueza). Pages 1:50,000 numbers 621 and 622 of the IGN.



### Description of the route

**1) Canchos de Ramiro:** Los Canchos de Ramiro (large rocky outcrops), together with the riverbanks and mountain ranges in the area (Sierras de la Garrapata, Solana, etc.) have been declared SCI and SPA for their exceptionally rich flora and fauna, forming part of the Network of Protected Natural Areas of Extremadura. Los Canchos, in particular, form a spectacular quartzite pass over the River Alagón, now dammed for the **Alcántara Reservoir**. The suggested route is 10 km long (there and back), so is perfect to be done in half a day, either on foot (recommended) or by car. Access to Los Canchos (or to Boquerón) is very simple: you just have to take a sign-posted path that starts in **Cachorrilla**. To be precise, take the road to Ceclavín and 200 m along, when you reach the **Ermita del Cristo** (chapel) and a small pool (29S-699309-442090), the path leads off to the right (called Camino del Chorrillo), passing through beautiful countryside of dehesa and riverbanks and leading to the rocky outcrops of Los Canchos.

**2) Portaje Reservoir:** This small man-made reservoir of great ornithological importance is very close to the towns of Portaje (4.5 km) and Torrejuncillo (3 km) and is reachable from them along asphalted roads. Altogether the suggested route is 17 km long, designed to be done by car in half a day. From the first town take the reservoir service track southwards for 2.5 km (next to the chapel Ermita del Cristo). At this point you will reach a crossroads (29S-70852-441903); turn left and, after going 800 m and crossing the **Ribera de Fresnedosa** riverbank, you will reach the reservoir (where you will see the Chapel of La Virgen del Casar). At the reservoir turn right, following the path that goes all the way around the left bank of the reservoir, and after crossing a bridge at one of its ends you will reach the town of **Torrejuncillo**. Before this, at one of the crossroads (29S-714624-441808), very close to the water, you can take another track that goes round part of the reservoir's right bank.



### Ornithological interests

**1) Canchos de Ramiro:** Large concentrations of large birds of prey nest in the steep quartzite crags of the pass. This includes a colony of Griffon Vulture (over 100 pairs) as well as several pairs of Golden Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Egyptian Vulture, Eagle Owl, Common Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon and Black Stork. Walking along the riverbanks there are typical dehesa species (Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Azure-winged Magpie, as well as many other passerine species associated with this Mediterranean habitat). The Spanish Imperial Eagle, Red and Black Kite and Eurasian Black Vulture also nest in the dehesa and mountain ranges in

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Griffon Vulture</li> <li>• Eurasian Black Vulture</li> <li>• Spanish Imperial eagle</li> <li>• Bonelli's Eagle</li> <li>• Golden Eagle</li> <li>• Grey Heron</li> <li>• Red-crested Pochard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Stork</li> <li>• Egyptian Vulture</li> <li>• Black Kite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common Wood Pigeon</li> <li>• Common Crane</li> <li>• ducks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aquatic birds</li> </ul>



*Green Sandpiper*

the area. In the reservoir it's possible to see numerous species of water birds, including Great Cormorant, Grey Heron and different species of duck.

**2) Portaje Reservoir:** This reservoir is one of the most important wetland areas for water birds (in terms of number and diversity) in the Extremaduran basin of the River Tajo, following habitat management activities (diversion dams at the ends, man-made islands, hides, etc.). During winter it supports, on average, more than 2500 birds of a great diversity of species (duck, grebes, coot, etc.). In the breeding season Red-crested Pochard are noteworthy, this being one of only a few breeding sites for this species in Extremadura, as well as the colony of Grey Heron and White Stork at the end of the reservoir.



### Best time to visit

This route can be done at any time of the year, particularly in the spring breeding period and in winter.



### Other environmental and cultural interest

**Environmental values.** Magnificent thick forests of Holm and cork oak cover the whole region, especially the dehesa and plains around the Ribera de Fresnedosa. This and other watercourses have wonderful ash tree forests along their banks.

**Ethnographic values,** examples of traditional architecture in the small towns and villages (Cachorrilla, Pescueza, Portaje, etc.), and in the typical agricultural constructions in the area (stone walls, huts, wells, etc.).

**Traditional festivals.** These include festivals that have been declared of Interest for Tourists: **Las Carantoñas** (Acehuche, 19-20 January), **Los Sanjuanés** (Coria, 24 June) and **Encamisá** (Torrejónillo, 7 December).

**Monuments.** Declared a site of interest for tourists, the historical-artistic centre of the city of **Coria** has one of the most outstanding collection of fine buildings in Extremadura (Roman walls and bridge, castle, cathedral, palaces, convents, etc.). The **Monastery-convent of Palancar** (Pedroso de Acim), defined as the "smallest monastery in the world", is a wonderful example of religious architecture.

*Grey Heron*



*Texts: Casimiro Corbacho Amado*





*Peregrine Falcon*

# 6 Monfragüe National Park



## Location and access

**Monfragüe** is roughly in the centre of the province of Cáceres, at the confluence of the rivers **Tajo** and **Tiétar**. It is at present the only **National Park** in Extremadura, with 18,118 ha under this protection. The park and its immediate surrounding area, a total of 116,151 ha, are protected by the Natura 2000 network as a SPA. The centre of the park consists of several small, parallel mountain ranges, between which flows the River Tajo. The River Tiétar and other lesser watercourses carve out deep gorges as they flow towards the Tajo, creating a spectacular system of rocky cliffs in which a huge number of birds breed. Nowadays the river courses are dammed up by the reservoirs of Alcántara, Torrejón-Tajo and Torrejón-Tiétar. Despite the area's low height, the uneven relief and the water barrier has meant that areas of Mediterranean forest and scrubland of extremely high value in terms of their fauna and flora have been conserved. But what really gives the area its value are the large dehesa areas that extend to the north and south of the National Park, providing an abundant food supply for Monfragüe's most valuable birds.

Access to Monfragüe is easy and well sign-posted. Within the park there is only one town, **Villarreal de San Carlos**, a municipality of **Serradilla**, which is small and completely connected to the park, accommodating the visitor centre and centre of interpretation. There are three roads you can take to get into the park. From the north, by the EX-208, about 20 km from **Plasencia** and 15 km from the EX-A1. From the south, also by the EX-208, but from **Trujillo**, about 50 km away, after going through **Torrejón el Rubio**. Or finally, from the northeast, by a small road leading off from the EX-A1,

the exit being by the River Tiétar. Also, from the south, the EX-390 connects the city of Cáceres with Torrejón el Rubio and the EX-385 connects the EX-208 with the A-5, passing through Jaraicejo.



## Description of the route

Most of the National Park is closed to visitors, with the area open to the public being relatively small. However, this area offers all the best of the birds of Monfragüe. In fact, there are some world famous birdwatching spots here, thanks to the ease of observing some emblematic birds in exceptional conditions.

Due to the restrictions the best way of enjoying a birdwatching trip to Monfragüe is to go round the main viewpoints, all along the road, well sign-posted and equipped with car parks. If visiting for several days the normal choice is to repeat the route round the viewpoints or to do one of the established walking routes in the park or the surrounding area. The species you can see in various places can vary slightly from year to year, as, like any biological phenomenon, they are subject to a certain dynamism.

The park's main viewpoints, from south to north, are: **Salto del Gitano-Peña Falcón**. At the entrance from Trujillo, this incredible rocky cliff is, without doubt, the most symbolic and most-photographed spot in Monfragüe. The community of birds it supports is equally amazing, with the biggest colony of Griffon Vulture in an area open to the public (over 100 pairs between both sides of the river and over 400 birds at times), Black Stork (2-5 pairs in recent years), Spanish Imperial Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Egyptian Vulture and Eagle Owl. It is also possible to see Golden

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grey Heron, Red-legged Partridge, Red Kite, Griffon Vulture, Eurasian Black Vulture, Northern Goshawk, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Golden Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Eagle Owl, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Black Wheatear, Crag Martin, Thekla Lark, Blue Rock Thrush, Azure-winged Magpie, Red-billed Chough, Hawfinch.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Stork, White Stork, Black Kite, Egyptian Vulture, Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Red-necked Nightjar, Alpine Swift, White-rumped Swift, Pallid Swift, European Bee-eater, Red-rumped Swallow, Black-eared Wheatear, Western Orphean Warbler, Subalpine Warbler Spectacled Warbler, Dartford Warbler, Golden Oriole</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great Cormorant, Dunnock, Eurasian Bullfinch, Redwing, Firecrest, Goldcrest, Siskin.</li> </ul>



*"Salto del Gitano"*

Eagle. Small birds you should look out for include White-rumped Swift and Black Wheatear.

**La Serrana.** At the entrance from Plasencia, here there are Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture and, at times, Bonelli's Eagle and White-rumped Swift.

**La Tajadilla.** Next to the Torrejón reservoirs, this has a hide, picnic area and large car park. It is a small gorge that enables good observations of Griffon Vulture and Egyptian Vulture, also being a good area to see Bone-

lli's Eagle. Black Stork and White-rumped Swift have recently established themselves here, but their presence could be temporary.

**La Báscula.** This is a good site to see the Eurasian Black Vulture and, if you are lucky, the Spanish Imperial Eagle.

**La Higuera.** This affords a pretty view of the River Tíetar, where you can see Black Stork and Egyptian Vulture. Eurasian Black Vultures breed on the opposite bank.

**Portilla del Tíetar.** At the park's northeast exit, although it is smaller than the Peña Falcón, it is another of Monfragüe's hot spots. It's an exceptional site to see, and hear, Griffon Vulture as well as Spanish Imperial Eagle, Eagle Owl (the best place in the park) and Egyptian Vulture.

We would also recommend you to follow the road towards La Bagazona and the EX-A1, driving slowly, or even walking carefully, as this section goes firstly through an old cork oak forest where Lesser Spotted Woodpecker breeds and, perhaps, the Iberian Chiffchaff. Next there is a dehesa area that is a favourite haunt of stags during their bellowing and where there is a colony of White Stork and Grey Heron in the west, next to the River Tíetar. The final part consists of des-

*Hoopoe*





*Griffon Vultures*

hesa and irrigated farmland and is of interest in winter due to the recent presence of noisy Common Cranes, as well as Brambling some years. You could complement your tour of the viewpoints mentioned earlier by doing the three main foot trails:

**Red route.** This is between Villarreal de San Carlos and the castle of Monfragüe. There are several options, with routes of between 10 and 16 km (between 3 h 30 min and 6 hours). It goes through a variety of areas, such as olive groves, rock rose patches, Holm oak groves and, in particular, a thick forest of strawberry tree and oaks in the shade of the castle. A visit to the **castle of Monfragüe** is a must, which you can also reach from the south via an asphalted road between Holm oaks and wild olives. The view from the castle is magnificent and is made even more enjoyable by the spectacular flight of the vultures and the possible presence of White-rumped Swift and Red-billed Chough.

**Yellow route.** This is between Villarreal and La Tajadilla, about 8.5 km and 3 hours there and back. This route goes through dehesa and rock rose patches.

**Green route.** Between Villarreal and Cerro Gimio, about 7 km and 2 h 30 minutes there and back. It goes through scenery typical of Monfragüe, ending at a viewpoint with a beautiful view.



## Ornithological interests

Monfragüe is possibly the best place to see birds, particularly birds of prey, in Extremadura. The following figures fully illustrate their variety and abundance. Perhaps the most characteristic species is the Eurasian Black Vulture, with a maximum of 339 pairs for certain and estimates of over 400 pairs. There are 12 established pairs of Spanish Imperial Eagle, with some recently settled near to the best viewpoints. There are more than 30 pairs of Egyptian Vulture and close to this number of Black Stork. The most visible bird of prey is, undoubtedly, the Griffon Vulture, of which there are 635 pairs for certain and estimates of almost 800. There are small numbers of Golden Eagle (6-7 pairs), Bonelli's Eagle (also 6-7 pairs) and Peregrine Falcon (3-4 pairs). There aren't any precise figures for other birds of prey, but several dozen pairs of Eagle Owl, Red Kite, Common Buzzard, Booted Eagle and Short-toed Eagle occur in Monfragüe, above all in the dehesa in the area. The Black Kite is a lot more common, with 150-200 pairs; but Northern Goshawk, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Black-winged Kite are much scarcer and more difficult to see.

Apart from birds of prey, other birds of interest are





*Spanish Imperial Eagle*

those of rocky habitats, such as White-rumped Swift, Red-billed Cough, Black Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Sparrow, Red-rumped Swallow and Black Redstart. The forest birds are less special, as most of them are common all over Extremadura, however, they include Western Orphean Warbler, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Iberian Chiffchaff, Hawfinch and Eurasian Bullfinch. Some birds of open and steppe environments are more important, easy to see in treeless areas of the park where the eucalyptuses are being eliminated. These are Black-eared Wheatear, Thekla Lark and Spectacled, Dartford, Subalpine and Sardinian Warblers.



*Sardinian Warbler*

The main artistic elements within the park are the castle of Monfragüe, the Bridge del Cardenal (sometimes submerged under the waters of the Tajo) and the pre-historic rock art, for which there are specific guided tours. Places of interest in the municipal areas just outside the park include the pre-Roman stelae and settlement of Torrejón el Rubio, the Convent del Santo Cristo and the ethnographical museum of Serradilla, the parish churches of Serrejón and Malpartida de Plasencia, Mirabel Castle and the traditional architecture of the Casas de Miravete. The monumental architecture of Plasencia and Trujillo are a bit further away. Food specialties are cheeses, honey, “migas extremeñas” (fried breadcrumbs) and large game dishes. Las Candelas in Torrejón el Rubio and Cristo de la Victoria in Serradilla are the most notable festivals. Regarding handicrafts, in some of the towns and villages in the area you can find wood and textile works (lace, traditional dress).

*Texts: Javier Prieta Díaz*



## Best time to visit

Spring, between March and May, is the best time to see all the variety of birds. However, it's also the busiest time for visitors, especially at the weekends and during the public holidays at Easter and in May. In any event, you can see characteristic species at any time of the year, although in July and August it is best to make the most of the first and last hours of the day, as the middle of the day is usually very hot. Autumn and winter offer the attraction of non-breeding species being present in the area. Finally, between September and October the spectacular bellowing of the many stag in the area takes place.



## Other environmental and cultural interest

As well as the birds you can see other animals in Monfragüe, such as approachable Red Deer, some tame foxes that frequent the viewpoints, elusive Wild Boar and, particularly in winter, Otters. On the other hand, there have not been any reliable sightings of the emblematic Iberian Lynx recently. Other attractions of Monfragüe are the scenery, spectacular in places, and the geological formations, with explanatory panels in the places of greatest interest. There are also two special trees: the European Hackberry of Lugar Nuevo (next to Villarreal de San Carlos, in Ojaranzo orchard, which has a circular trail and a small picnic area) and the Cork oak Abuelo de Toril (next to the road between Portilla del Tiétar and La Bazagona).

*Eurasian Black Vulture*







## Location and access

The Arrocampo Reservoir is in the northeast of the province of Cáceres, at the western border of the region of Campo Arañuelo and very close to Monfragüe. Today 687 ha of the reservoir and its surrounding banks are protected within the Natura 2000 Network with the category of SPA. An **Ornithological Park** has also been created in **Saucedilla** to make visiting the area easier.

**Arrocampo** Reservoir has such exceptional characteristics that it has become a unique site within Extremadura, with unusual birds that are difficult to see inland in most of the peninsula. The reservoir's function is to cool Almaraz nuclear power station, so the water level is constant; thanks to the constant pumping from the **River Tajo** it doesn't undergo the fluctuations that are typical of other reservoirs. As a result a lot of the bank is covered by masses of marsh vegetation. The higher than normal water temperature and the plains that surround it, used to grow irrigated crops, also favour the diversity of birds.

The reservoir is easily accessible as it is near to two major roads. From the north, from the EX-A1 between Navalmoral de la Mata and Plasencia, turn off towards Casatejada and continue to Saucedilla, where you will find the Ornithological Park Information Office at the southern end of the town. Coming from the south, from the A-5 between Navalmoral de la Mata and Trujillo, there are two options: you can take exit 190 towards Saucedilla or go through Almaraz, which has three exits from the A-5 between kilometre 193 and 200. The road between Almaraz and Saucedilla crosses one of the ends of the reservoir via a low bridge.

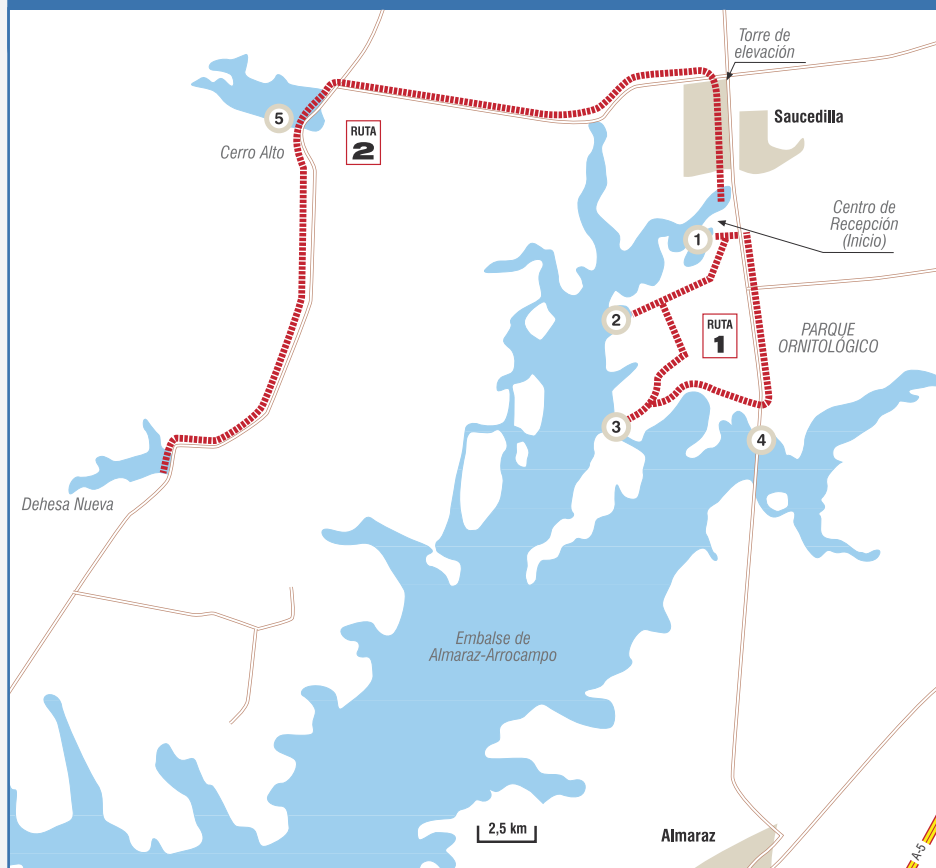


## Description of the route

The trip suggested is the two routes offered by the **Ornithological Park of Saucedilla**. **Route 1** is 4 km long over dirt tracks, with stops at four hides. It can be done on foot or by car, if the track is in an adequate state. **Route 2** is a short car journey between **Saucedilla** and a nearby irrigation pool. Both routes start at the **Information Office**, at the south end of the town of Saucedilla, next to a canal and a football pitch. Inside the office there is a panel describing the routes, which are easy to follow as they are well marked out and signposted. In total there are five hides, which are relatively small and, unless someone is using them, are kept locked. The keys can be borrowed from the Information Office, but this has slightly irregular opening times and days that aren't always adapted to the best times to see birds (dawn, for example). If you find the hides locked an alternative is to use the access ramps as viewpoints. Although certain species are mentioned here at each stop point in reality it's possible, with time and luck, to see these birds throughout the whole route.

Route 1 starts at the office and **Hide no. 1** is only 200 m further on. It offers a wide view and the possibility of seeing marsh birds such as Purple Swamphen, Water Rail, Little Bittern, Savi's Warbler and Squacco Heron. Continuing southwest you reach **Hide no. 2**, perhaps more interesting, with the difficult Great Bittern and Bluethroat present in winter and the Purple Heron, Bearded Tit and Penduline Tit in spring. Again going southwest you will find **Hide no. 3**, with a good view of the reservoir and its inner wall, a nesting site for White Stork and a resting place for Great Cormorants and herons. It's also a good place to see duck,

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grey Heron, Little Egret, Great White Egret, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron, Purple Swamphen, Great Crested Grebe, Common Coot, Gadwall, Marsh Harrier, Red Kite, Eurasian Black Vulture, Black-winged Kite, Penduline tit, Bearded tit, Red Avadavat.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White Stork, Eurasian Spoonbill, Black-crowned Night Heron, Black Kite, Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Lesser Kestrel, Gull-billed Tern, Red-necked Nightjar, European Bee-eater, Reed Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great Cormorant, Great Bittern, Osprey, Merlin, Golden Plover, Bluethroat, Reed Bunting.</li> </ul>	

Common Coot, Great White Egret and grebes. Returning eastwards you will reach **Hide no. 4**, located next to the road bridge. Although the main windows look over a mass of bulrushes populated by the usual marsh birds, the view towards the east is more interesting, towards an end of the reservoir that is a favourite haunt of Marsh Harrier and all species of heron. You can also watch from the road bridge, which has a large improvised car park and where you can also walk. The water extends on both sides of the bridge, and is a good place to watch birds in flight, such as herons (and bitterns), Gull-billed Tern and Osprey. Return to the starting point on foot via a path parallel to the road. You can vary the route by doing it in reverse, just visiting some of the hides or stopping as you choose along the banks.

**Route 2** also starts at the Information Office, crossing Saucedilla northwards and taking the last street on the left in the town. It continues along a paved and dirt track that passes through farmland, pasture and dehesa for 3.8 km. In this section it's possible to see Black-winged Kite and Great Spotted Cuckoo, among other birds. At the end of the track there is a large concrete tower (to raise the irrigation water), where you should turn left, staying on the right of Cerro Alto pool, where you will find **Hide no. 5**. There are remains of flooded dry Holm oaks within the pool, which in their day had a colony of Grey Heron and that now serve as



*Squacco Heron*

a roost for Great Cormorant and, occasionally, Great White Egret and Osprey. Route 2 ends at this point, however, Dehesa Nueva pool is about 2.5 km southwards and several kilometres after you cross another end of Arrocampo Reservoir. This expanse of water opens up new possibilities of seeing more aquatic birds: European Bee-eater during the breeding season; geese, Golden Plover and Stone Curlew in winter; and various birds of prey throughout the year. Finally, don't forget that the towns and villages in the area (Saucedilla, Casatejada, Almaraz) have colonies of Lesser Kestrel living in their churches, birds that abound throughout the route.

*Birdwatchers*





## Ornithological interests

Arrocampo Reservoir is the best place to see marsh birds in Extremadura. The biggest populations in the region, and sometimes the only ones, of various species can be found here, such as Purple Swamphen, Purple and Squacco Herons, Savi's Warbler and Bearded Tit. You are almost certain to see Marsh Harrier and it's possible to see Hen Harrier in winter. During the migration periods the richness of the species here is increased by the appearance of Bluethroat (present in winter), Sedge Warbler, Eurasian Spoonbill, Great White Egret and Little, Spotted and Baillon's Crakes. In general, amongst the aquatic birds the herons are best represented, with the possibility of seeing all the Spanish species. There is also a large group of rallidae (Purple Swamphen, crakes, Water Rail, Moorhen, Common Coot), ducks (particularly Gadwall and Mallard), Great Cormorants, storks and grebes. All these make Arrocampo, without doubt, the best place in Extremadura to watch marshland species.



*Osprey*



## Other environmental and cultural interest

There is a large expanse of dehesa between Arrocampo and Monfragüe. It's best to keep to the minor roads to enjoy them, such as that linking Serrejón and La Bazagóna or those leading to Toril. The hundred-year old cork oak tree "El Abuelo" (the grandfather) is in this municipality and the enormous Holm oak "La Marquesa" is in Navalmoral de la Mata. The ecological corridor of the pine groves of the River Tiétar is also nearby, with the only indigenous pine groves in Extremadura. They grow along the banks of the Tiétar in the municipalities of Talayuela, Casatejada, Majadas and Toril. Some of these pine groves shelter magnificent colonies of White Stork, Grey Heron and Black Kite.

The towns and villages in the area have small examples of traditional and monumental architecture, such as the parish churches of Saucedilla, Casatejada and Almaraz and the medieval castle of Belvis de Monroy, dating from the 13th and 14th centuries. You can also see the remains of another castle in Almaraz. Food specialities include cheeses, sausages, "migas extremeñas" (fried breadcrumbs) and large game dishes. The Romería de Rocamador in Almaraz (a religious procession) and the Carnivals of Navalmoral de la Mata are the most notable festivals.

*Texts: Javier Prieta Díaz*



## Best time to visit

Arrocampo can be visited throughout the year, although in July and August the high temperatures can be uncomfortable during the middle of the day. In these months we recommend doing the route at dusk or dawn. The biggest attractions in **spring** are watching the herons that breed here (Little Bittern, Purple, Grey, Squacco and Black-crowned Night Herons, with recent attempts by the Eurasian Spoonbill to breed) and marsh birds (warblers, including Savi's Warbler, Bearded and Penduline Tit, Purple Swamphen). In **winter**, if you are lucky, you can see Great Bittern and Osprey and there are numerous Marsh Harriers and Great Cormorants. Due to the exceptional conditions of the water temperature occasionally there are birds typical of the summer here in winter, such as various species of swallows, Squacco Heron and Little Bittern. During migration periods (August to October and March and April) there is a mixture of the species previously mentioned, plus the appearance of numerous birds on passage, increasing the ornithological richness of Arrocampo.



### Location and access

The route is in the region of the Sierra de San Pedro, on the border of the provinces of Cáceres and Badajoz, although this route is completely in the last. It starts from the town of Alburquerque, which can be reached from Badajoz by the EX -110, from Herreruela by the EX -324, from Aliseda by the EX -303, or from San Vicente de Alcántara by the EX -110.



### Description of the route

The route is 27.4 km long, there and back, from Alburquerque to the Castle of Azagala. It is best done partly by car and partly on foot, in one day. The most notable thing about this route is that it goes through a thinly populated area, which has not been altered by any large infrastructures (except for the Peña del Águila Reservoir). From the top of Sierra de Santiago you look over a large *dehesa* area flanked by mountain ranges of less than 600 m.a.s.l. (only Mount Torrico is higher than this, at 703 m.a.s.l.), with a few farmhouses dotted around them and hardly any electricity cables, thanks to the various actions to modify these carried out within LIFE projects by the General Directorate of the Environment. This means you can see many species of birds in a density that would be unthinkable in other areas of Europe. This interesting route in the Sierra de San Pedro goes through the most representative habitats of this protected natural area and, with a bit of luck, you will be able to see the most representative birds, as in the area of this route several pairs of *Spanish Imperial Eagle*, *Eurasian Black Vulture*, *Black Stork*, *Golden Eagle* and *Egyptian Vulture* nest.

The route starts from the town of **Alburquerque**, at the street San Antón, next to the bullring "plaza de toros" (X:0673458, Y: 4343090), (it is best to do this first part by car, as it is quicker and the asphalted road doesn't have a hard shoulder so could be dangerous to walk along). The first part of the route is along an asphalted road that runs between traditional stone walls and some wire fencing, next to small orchards and family farms set in a wonderful *dehesa* of Holm and cork oaks. The route goes along the side of the Sierra del Puerto del Centinela, which is very close by, on the right, and *dehesa* and plains on the left, with Mount Torrico of the Sierra de San Pedro in the background. (X: 0675300, Y: 4342685) At this point the turn off to the entrance of the **Convent de los Frailes Viejos** is on the right and at the top of the mountain range you can make out a large hollow known as "**El Ojo del Diablo**" (the devil's eye). Continue straight on along the road and at point (X:0676387, Y: 4342515) you will find the turn off on the right, in a eucalyptus grove, to the cork oak "**El Abuelo**" (the grandfather) which is 600 m away in a pretty livestock *dehesa*. Keep going straight on along the road, which now has a eucalyptus grove on the right and an orange orchard on the left. A little further on you will find the spring "**Elvira Vaca**" on the right, with a large pool in which you can refresh yourself on hot days. From here you will have a good view of a large part of the Sierra de San Pedro and a magnificent Holm oak in front of you. Continue along the road to point (X:068547, Y: 4341837), where you should turn left. Here you will find a slate sign with "al Castillo" (to the castle) written on it.

It is best to leave your car here and continue on foot, as some sections of the road are in a bad state, not suitable for cars, and as it will also then be possible to

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spanish Imperial Eagle</li> <li>• Eurasian Black Vulture</li> <li>• Griffon Vulture</li> <li>• Bonelli's Eagle</li> <li>• Common Stonechat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Stork</li> <li>• Egyptian Vulture</li> <li>• Short-toed Eagle</li> <li>• Booted Eagle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dunnock</li> <li>• Eurasian Bullfinch</li> <li>• Common Wood Pigeon</li> <li>• Common Crane</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Osprey</li> <li>• Pied Flycatcher</li> <li>• Spotted Flycatcher</li> </ul>

see more species of birds and enjoy the nature around you. By this point you have already done about 6 km of the route, with about 12 more to go, out and back, which can be done in a few hours, stopping to eat something at midday. Continuing straight on down the road you will see several pig farms and a lot of sheep. There are also some slate signs with "al Castillo" (to the castle), to help you find the way. When you reach

point (X: 0678840, Y: 4343035) you will find a sign saying "**Ermita de los Santiagos**" (a small chapel which is worth visiting) and a sign with "al Castillo" on the right, which you should follow. After a fair walk between *dehesa* with varying densities of trees and going past a large Iberian pig farm you will reach point (X: 0683882, Y: 4342860), where there is another fork in the road, signposted "el Pantano" to the right and "al



Castillo" to the left. You can clearly see both from here: the castle is on top of the low Sierra de Santiago and the reservoir is within the gully of the valley of the River Albarragena. Go left and continue on until you reach the castle. It is 13.7 km from the start of the route in Alburquerque to here and the road up to the castle is private so it's a good spot to stop for a picnic lunch, enjoy the view and rest a little before starting back. From the Castle of Azagala there is a good view of most of the Sierra de San Pedro and its spurs. You can also see Mount Torrico and the mountain ranges Sierra de Los Leones, Sierra del Puerto del Centinela, Sierra de La Caraba, Sierra Fría, etc.



Spanish Imperial Eagle

prey are *Short-toed Eagle*, *Booted Eagle*, *Egyptian Vulture* and *Eurasian Sparrowhawk* and in the historical centre of Alburquerque there is a large breeding population of *Lesser Kestrel*. Nocturnal species include *Eagle Owl*, a rock-dwelling species that lives in large numbers in the rocky cliffs, even in the area close to the town. The most abundant owl is *Little Owl*, which can be found at dusk in most open Holm oak groves and the areas of granite rocks. *Tawny Owl* can be found in the thickest Holm oak groves and *Barn Owl* in various farmhouses in the area and in some of the old, ruined houses in the town.

Other common species in the area are *European Nuthatch*, closely linked to the mature cork oak groves and very frequent in the area around the cork oak "El Abuelo"; *Azure-winged Magpie*, a very pretty colonial corvid associated with *dehesa*; *Woodlark*, the lark species most closely connected to wooded areas in Extremadura, easily detected by its melodic song, *Hoopoe*, *Common Cuckoo*, *Nightingale*, *Great*, *Blue* and *Long-tailed Tits*.



## Ornithological interests

The jewel of this route is, without doubt, the *Spanish Imperial Eagle*, of which there are four breeding pairs in a 15 km radius from the route. It is also easy to see *Eurasian Black Vulture*, which has a large breeding population in the area; *Black Stork*, which, as well as breeding in the area, uses the end of the reservoir as a gathering area before migration; and *Bonelli's Eagle*, of which there are several pairs nesting in the cliffs and trees. However, *Peregrine Falcon* is very scarce; it nested in the gully of the Albarragena for some years, but now it's only possible to see in winter. In contrast, *Golden Eagle* can frequently be seen at any time of year, as can *Griffon Vulture*, which has a large breeding population and so can easily be found right from the start of the route. Other frequently seen birds of

Eurasian Black Vulture (behind) and Griffon Vulture



## Best time to visit

This route can be done at any time of the year and won't be disappointing in any season, although you should take some considerations into account.

There are more species to observe in spring and summer, as there are various migratory species in the area in these seasons, such as *Black Stork*, *Egyptian Vulture*, *Booted* and *Short-toed Eagles*. However, you must bear in mind that spring is the breeding period, so you must keep to the route to avoid causing any disturbance that could affect the breeding success.

This area is very hot in summer, so avoid the middle hours of the day (which are also the hours in which the





Cork oak "El Abuelo"



Common Stonechat

birds are less active and so it's difficult to see them). The stag rutting occurs in autumn and it's easy to hear the bellowing and crashing of antlers on the banks of the reservoir. From some look-out posts it is also easy to watch the event if you have good optical equipment (telescopes or binoculars).

Winter is the hunting season. The farms that surround the route in the area of the castle and the reservoir are private farms dedicated to big game hunting and hunts often take place between November and February. As a result you should check in the village if there are any hunts happening and you shouldn't do the route if there are.

#### Don't forget:

*Don't disturb the people who live or work in the surrounding area. Most of the farms that surround the route are private farms so you must not leave any gate open or disturb the livestock.*



### Other environmental and cultural interest

The **stag rutting season** is at the end of August and in September (the date can vary according to the climatic conditions), commonly known in Extremadura as the "*berrea*" (bellowing). The males fight to keep the harem of females with which they mate, becoming more confident at this time and leaving the thick cover of the forests for the open plains and *dehesa*.

It's worth making the 600 m deviation from the route to see the **cork oak "El Abuelo"** (the grandfather). This magnificent cork oak was designated an "outstanding tree" by the botanist Diosdado Simón Villares.

**Ethnographic interest:** In the surrounding area there are a lot of traditional constructions built using local

materials which are worth stopping to have a look at, such as stone walls, traditional huts, stone ovens, pigsties, etc.

**Mushrooms:** in autumn you can find a lot of species of edible mushrooms in the area, including *Boletus aereus*, *Boletus edulis*, *Macrolepiota procera* and, less common, *Amanita caesarea*.

**Rock Art:** there are a lot of expressions of rock art in the area, such as the paintings of La Cruz de San Blas, or in the gully of the castle. There are also others in various small caves in the crags in the area, but these are more difficult to get to. There are numerous megalithic monuments in the area around San Vicente de Alcántara and Valencia de Alcántara, with almost a hundred dolmens and menhirs.

**Castles,** apart from the Castle of Azagala, which this route takes you to, there are three more castles you can see nearby:

**Castle of Luna** in Alburquerque, to which you can take a guided tour.

**Castle of Mayorga** in the farm Galana de Mayorga, which is on the road that connects La Codosera and San Vicente de Alcántara. This is a private farm but a minor road crosses the bottom of the farm, leading to Alcorneo, which will take you up to the castle, set in well-conserved countryside.

**Castle of Piedrabuena,** in the *dehesa* of Piedrabuena, you can reach this castle via an asphalted road that connects the road from San Vicente de Alcántara to Alburquerque with the road that connects Alburquerque and Herrerueta. The castle is very well conserved but is privately owned, so you can't go inside.

*Texts: Juan Pablo Prieto*

## 9 Plains of Cáceres, Magasca y Trujillo



### Location and access

A large plateau extends to the south of the River *Tajo*, cleaved by the Rivers *Almonte* and *Tamuja*, forming a gently undulating landscape, used mainly for livestock farming in the pastures and for growing rain-fed cereal crops. The route runs between the towns of **Cáceres**, **Santa Marta de Magasca** and **Trujillo**.

It is most easily accessed via the A-58 (formerly the N-521), which connects Trujillo and Cáceres. The main road to Cáceres is the A-66, whether coming from Mérida or from Plasencia. To reach Trujillo, take the A-5 from Mérida or Navalmoral de la Mata. If you are starting out from **Monfragüe National Park** there are various routes you can take, along less busy roads through beautiful countryside. As you leave Torrejón el Rubio you will find a crossroads from where you can head towards Trujillo along the EX-208 or to Cáceres via the EX-390.



### Description of the route

The route starts at the exit off the A-58 onto the CC-99 towards *Santa Marta de Magasca*. If you are travelling from *Cáceres* this exit is 7 km after the turning to *Sierra de Fuentes* (on the right) and from *Trujillo* the exit is 10 km after the road crosses the *River Gibranzos*. Once you are on the CC-99 continue along this road for 14 km until you reach the town of *Santa Marta de Magasca*, after having passed the deep valley of the River *Tamuja*. Just after you enter the town, past the bus stop, take the road on the left that goes around the town. The route goes through an area of *dehesa* first and then goes down to the banks of the *River Magasca*

before again crossing a vast area of pastures and farmland. 8 km from *Santa Marta de Magasca* you will reach a junction at which you can turn towards *Monroy* (22.2 km away) or to *Trujillo* (23.8 km). If you choose the first option you will get to the spectacular valley of the *River Almonte* (18 km from the junction), after going through areas of pastureland and some open

*dehesa*. If you go towards *Trujillo* you will reach the EX-208, 18 km from the junction, which will take you directly to the town. The route ends in the historical centre of Trujillo, where you will continue to see interesting birds.

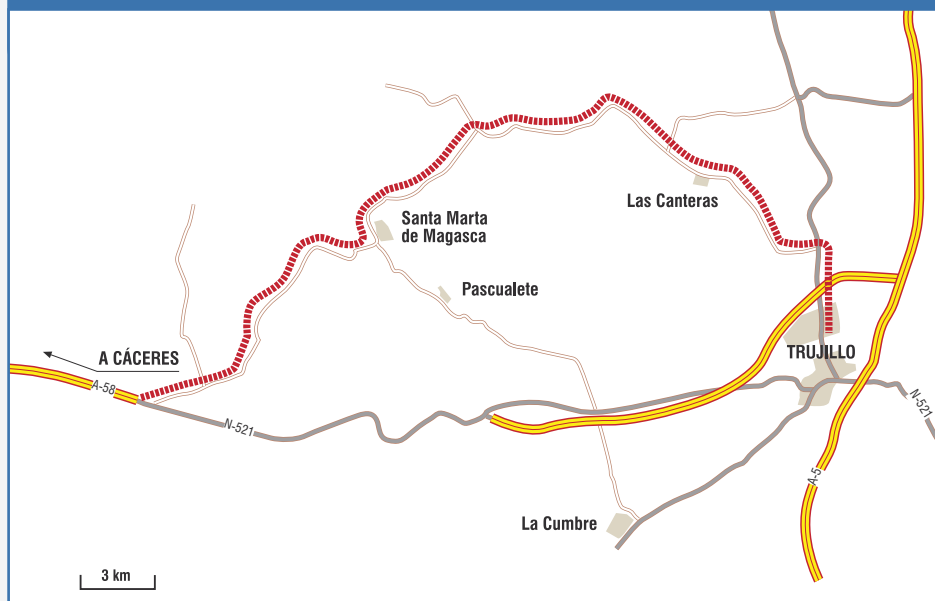


### Ornithological interests

This route goes through one of the most interesting areas in the region for birdwatching, not by chance crossing four areas that have been designated as Special Protection Areas for birds (SPA “*Llanos de Cáceres y Sierra de Fuentes*”, SPA “*Magasca*”, SPA “*Riveros del Almonte*” and SPA “*Colonias de Cernícalo primilla de Trujillo*”).

The complete route will allow you to see a great diversity of species in the most representative habitats of the region, with a clear predominance of natural pastureland and rain-fed cereal crops, interspersed with areas of Holm oak grove *dehesa* and scrubland (mostly broom and Spanish lavender). The main scenic contrasts arise around the river valleys, where there is an abrupt change from the dryness of the plains to the leafiness of the river courses, whose steep sides are completely covered by a dense vegetation of Holm oaks and wild olives.

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great Bustard</li> <li>• Little Bustard</li> <li>• Pin-tailed Sandgrouse</li> <li>• Black-bellied Sandgrouse</li> <li>• White Stork</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesser Kestrel</li> <li>• Montagu's Harrier</li> <li>• European Roller</li> <li>• Short-toed Lark</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern Lapwing</li> <li>• Golden Plover</li> <li>• Meadow Pipit</li> <li>• Skylark</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern Wheatear</li> <li>• Black-eared Wheatear</li> <li>• Whinchat</li> <li>• Tawny Pipit</li> </ul>

There is a complete representation of steppe bird species in the areas of pastureland, with the populations of *Calandra* and *Thekla* Larks, *Corn Bunting* and *Spanish Sparrow* standing out for their abundance, which you can see throughout the route. Other species in this area include the *Little Owl*, *Great Spotted Cuckoo*, *Hoopoe*, *Common Stonechat*, *Zitting Cisticola*, *Spotless Starling*, *Southern Grey Shrike* and *European Bee-eater*. If you stop your car and look carefully you can also spot other birds that are present in smaller numbers, such as *Short-toed Lark* and *Black-eared Wheatear*.

You can see *Great Bustards* at any time of year, but they are easier to spot in spring when they are in display. It's

advisable to station yourself in high areas with good visibility and scan around the area using binoculars or a telescope to find these birds in these extremely vast areas. *Little Bustards* are also very abundant, although they can pass by unnoticed in the areas where the pasture or cereal crops have grown very high. Their insistent call during the mating period usually gives away their presence, as well as the sound they make in flight, which is a spectacular sight when they are in large flocks.

It's best to stay in one place or walk around to see other pastureland species, such as *Pin-tailed Sandgrouse*, *Black-bellied Sandgrouse* and *Stone Curlew*; you could follow the drovers' trails that cross the route, for example.



Male Montagu's Harrier

There are also large numbers of *European Roller* and *Lesser Kestrel*, with some of the nesting boxes on the electricity poles being occupied by these species.

Colonies of *Montagu's Harrier* have established themselves in various sections of the route, nesting in the cereal fields next to the road. They are intensely active from May onwards, when the first chicks hatch.

At the end of spring and start of summer the populations of *migratory locust* and other orthoptera are at their highest numbers and the birds feed on this resource. You can often see *European Rollers*, *kestrels*, *Black Kites* and other birds that feed on the thousands of invertebrates that can be found on the road alighted on the electricity poles and cables and on the wire fences near to the roads, where they are much more visible than in the pastures. This also forms the basis of the diet of the *White Stork* and *Cattle Egret*, species that form large colonies in the few trees in the area.

You shouldn't be surprised to see *Eurasian Black Vulture*, *Griffon Vulture*, *Raven* or *Egyptian Vulture*, as the large numbers livestock feeding on these pastures

offer a source of carrion for these scavengers. This area provides the main food supply for the large colonies of *Eurasian Black Vulture* that nest in the **SPA "Sierra de San Pedro"**. In the same way, large birds of prey, such as *Spanish Imperial*, *Golden* and *Bonelli's Eagles* hunt in this area, attracted by the abundance of prey (rabbits, hares and partridges).

During the autumn passage there are large numbers of *Northern Wheatear*, *Black-eared Wheatear*, *Tawny Pipit*, *Pied Flycatcher*, *Whinchat* and *Yellow Wagtail*, which you can often see from the road.

In winter species such as *Golden Plover*, *Northern Lapwing*, *Hen Harrier*, *Meadow Pipit*, *Skylark*, *White Wagtail* are common and even *Black-headed* and *Lesser Black-backed Gulls*, which fly around the many livestock pools. Large flocks of finches, mainly *Goldfinch*, *Linnet*, *Greenfinch* and *European Serin* gather in the large areas of thistles and other plants with seeds attractive to birds.

In the *dehesa* and scrubland areas that you'll find before you reach the rivers *Tamuja* and *Magasca* the bird species change notably, with *Common Buzzard*, *Booted Eagle*, *European Turtle Dove*, *Azure-winged Magpie*, *Blackbird*, *Mistle Thrush*, *Subalpine Warbler*, *Sardinian Warbler*, *Dartford Warbler*, *Blue Tit*, *Great Tit*, etc. being common in this habitat. On the slopes down to the riverbanks the vegetation is usually much thicker and more wooded, almost impenetrable. Some birds of prey exploit the safety of this thick cover to nest in (*Black Kite*, *Short-toed Eagle*, *Eurasian Sparrowhawk*, *Eagle Owl*), along with *Black Stork* and typical forest species (*Common Wood Pigeon*, *Eurasian Jay*, *Wren*, *European Nuthatch*, *Short-toed Treecreeper*, *Melodious Warbler*). In the rocky outcrops of the slopes you can also find *Blue Rock Thrush*, *Black Wheatear* and *Rock Bunting*.

Along the river courses the presence of birds that nest on bridges is of interest, such as *Crag Martin* (easy to spot on the bridge over the *River Tamuja*), *Red-rumped Swallow* and *House Martin*. There are good numbers of *Little Ringed Plover*, *Green Sandpiper*, *Common Sandpiper*, *White Wagtail* and *Grey Wagtail* on the sand and gravel banks, incessantly moving up and down the river.

At the end of this route you reach the town of **Trujillo**, one of only a few urban centres that have been declared a SPA, due to its large colonies of *Lesser Kestrel*. As you explore the streets of its historical cen-



Calandra Lark



Montagu's Harrier

tre you can see many of this species in flight, making their characteristic sound. You can also visit the breeding colonies that can be found in Plaza Mayor, the Convent of San Francisco, the Parador Tourist Hotel, Encarnación Street and the Palace of Albaida, the Palace of Luís Chaves and Plaza de Toros (this bullring is located in the outskirts of the town and has the biggest colony). You can also enjoy watching the many pairs of *White Stork* that build their nests on the roofs and bell towers of the historical buildings and have become one of the symbols of Trujillo. The breeding population of *Pallid Swift* is also worth mentioning, which shares the habitat with the *Common Swift*.



### Best time to visit

**Spring** is the best time to do this route, as the birds in these areas include many summer visitors. It is also interesting in **winter**, when the winter visitors are present. The beauty of the steppe landscapes and their huge contrast with the river valleys makes this route a pleasure at any time of the year, even summer (avoiding the middle hours of the day).

Due to the low volume of traffic on the roads you can drive slowly so you can spot the birds more easily.

You mustn't stay too long in the areas around the nesting colonies (Montagu's Harrier, White Stork, Lesser Kestrel, Cattle Egret) and it's advisable to keep a safe distance away to avoid disturbing the birds.



### Other environmental and cultural interest

You should visit **Cáceres**, a city that has been declared a World Heritage Site. It has a very beautiful historical centre, which is in an excellent state of conservation, as well as a variety of cultural attractions.

**Trujillo** also has a lot of tourist appeal; within its historical centre you can visit the Jewish quarter, Church of San Martín, Church of Santiago, Arabic Castle and the museums of Pizarro and of Cheese and Wine.

In Cáceres you can also visit the *Centre of Environmental Education "Olivar de los Frailes"*, which has a lot of information about the protected areas in the region. In the town of **Sierra de Fuentes** you can visit the *Centre of Recuperation of Fauna and Environmental Education "Los Hornos"*.

Texts: Atanasio Fernández García



### Location and access

This route is in the mountainous massif of the Sierra de Las Villuercas, in the southeast of the province of Cáceres. The suggested route starts in the town of **Guadalupe**, which can be reached, from the north, from the A-5 (Navalmoral de la Mata) by the EX-118; from the south, from the N-430 by the EX-116 and the EX-102; from the east, from the A-5 (Miajadas); and, from the west, from Talavera de la Reina.



### Description of the route

The route is about 54 km long, out and back, along a mix of roads and forest trails, from the town of Guadalupe to the end of the suggested route. It's designed to be done by car in one day, stopping and taking short walks at the most interesting observation points. The route goes through varied habitats. At first it takes you towards the sources of the Rivers Guadalupejo and Ibor, between thick of groves of alder, ash, hazel and black poplar trees, then it goes up the mountain of Pico Villuercas, the highest point in the region at 1601 m.

The route starts in the town of **Guadalupe**, taking the small road that leads towards the viaduct of the abandoned railway line. Turn right at point (X:0299392, Y: 4368912), which coincides with a hairpin bend. From here the route takes you along a dirt track up the **River Guadalupejo**, a protected natural area that has been declared an Ecological Corridor. As you go along you will discover a very well conserved riverine grove which is good for woodpeckers: *Great Spotted*, *Green* and *Lesser Spotted*. It's also possible to see *Dipper*

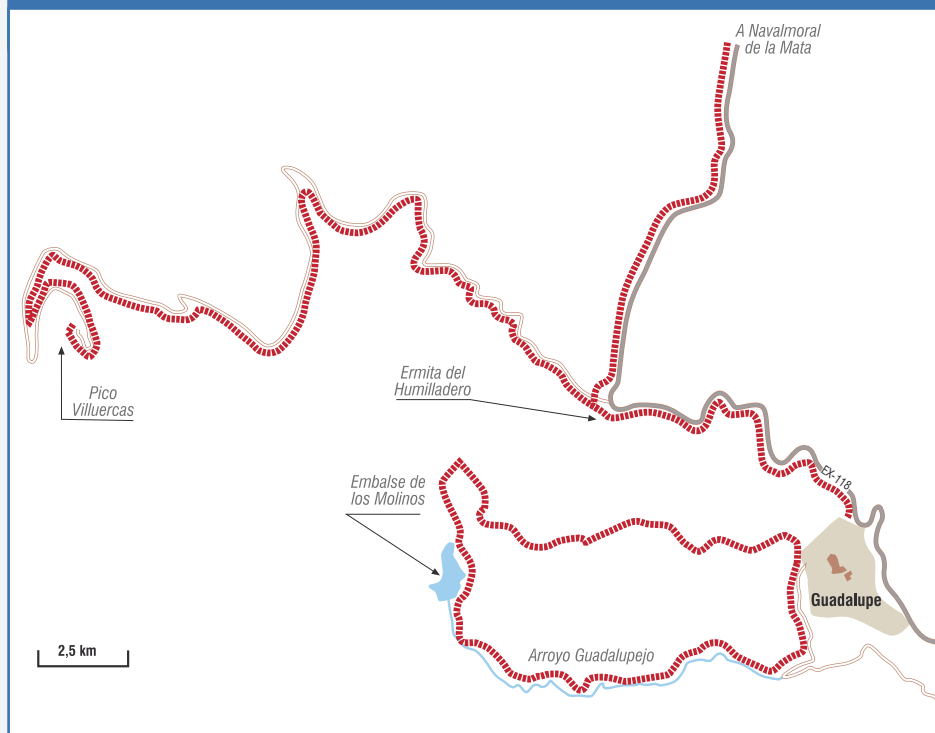
here, flying rapidly over the currents, hopping over the stones or diving in the clean, transparent water that is so essential to its survival. It has a small population in these mountain ranges. As well as the natural and scenic values of the area you can also enjoy the presence of **flourmills, and blacksmiths**, associated with the prosperity of Guadalupe and its monastery, declared a Historical-Artistic Ensemble and a World Heritage Site, respectively. The route takes you to **Los Molinos Reservoir**, from where there is a magnificent view of the area known as **Los Hoyicíos**, the source of the River Guadalupejo. *Griffon Vulture*, *Egyptian Vulture* and *Peregrine Falcon* nest in the quartzite crags of this spot. Continue along the track and turn right at point (X:0296656, Y: 4370768). From here you go upwards, skirting the mountain range, to admire one of the route's most spectacular views: a mosaic of leafy Pyrenean oak, chestnut, black pine and gall oak groves and riverbank groves of alder, ash and poplar trees. The scenery is even more spectacular in autumn, when the deciduous trees turn golden. In spring and summer it's possible to see *European Honey Buzzard*, which has a small breeding population in this area, the most southern in all of Spain. Continue along the track until you reach Guadalupe.

From here you should take the EX-118 towards Navalmoral de la Mata, then turn left at point (X:0297920, Y: 4371232) and take the road known as "**la Carrera del Caballo**". This beautiful route runs next to the **River Ibor** along the **Camino Real**, a centuries-old pilgrimage road from Madrid to Guadalupe. The nearby **Humilladero** is worth visiting, a Mudejar style chapel where pilgrims knelt down on seeing the Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe for the first time.

We would recommend you carry on by car, parking



## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eurasian Black Vulture</li> <li>• Griffon Vulture</li> <li>• Bonelli's Eagle</li> <li>• Coal Tit</li> <li>• Red-billed Chough</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Stork</li> <li>• Egyptian Vulture</li> <li>• European Honey Buzzard</li> <li>• Short-toed Eagle</li> <li>• Booted Eagle</li> <li>• Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush</li> <li>• Alpine Swift</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dunnock</li> <li>• Alpine Accentor</li> <li>• Eurasian Bullfinch</li> <li>• Common Wood Pigeon</li> </ul>	

next to the sawmill located at point (X:02979900, Y: 4372083), to then continue on foot along the bank of the River Ibor, where it's possible to see – or hear – the **Western Bonelli's Warbler**, restricted to the mountain tops of the Sistema Central, Villuercas and Sierra

de Tentudía in Extremadura. You can also see other species of birds typical of deciduous woods and groves: *Golden Oriole*, *Girl Bunting*, *Nightingale*, *Eurasian Jay*, *Long-tailed Tit*, etc. With a bit of luck you will also see some indigenous species such as



the *Iberian Frog*, *Schreiber's Green Lizard* and *Roe Deer*, which will bark at you from the thickness of the chestnut groves.

Go back to your car when you reach the point where the path starts veering away from the river. From here return to the turning off point, then take the narrow road that leads up to a military base (now disused) and the highest point in the region: **Pico Villuercas** (1.601 m). As you go upwards you will see an obvious change in the vegetation, with the forest masses of chestnut, pine, Pyrenean oak, gall oak and whitebeam being progressively substituted by the junipers, brooms and heathers of the mountains, where the conditions are more hostile towards vegetation. The geological beauty of the scenery and its extraordinary relief is equally striking; called **Appalachian relief**, it is a peculiar succession of parallel valleys and mountain ranges, with many folds, faults and residual rocky areas. It is a perfect nesting habitat for lots of species: *Griffon Vulture*, *Bonelli's Eagle*, *Golden Eagle*, *Peregrine Falcon*, *Black Stork*, *Egyptian Vulture*, *Eagle Owl*, etc.

As a curious aside it's worth mentioning that the road up to the summit forms the dividing line of waters between the basins of the Tajo and Guadiana in such a way that the currents that flow on the left belong to the Guadiana (Rivers Guadalupejo, Ruecas, Gargáligas,



Castle of Cabañas

etc.) and those on the right to the Tajo (Rivers Viejas, Ibor, Almonte, etc.).

Park your car on the left at point (X:0295440, Y: 4371720) to visit "**Pozo de la Nieve**". This huge well, dug out of the rock, was filled with ice during winter in order to conserve the food and medicines of the Monastery and town of Guadalupe. From here you can see the vast landscapes of the valley of the **River Guadalupejo** and the low mountain range of **Rañas de Cañamero**.

Once you reach the summit it isn't difficult to see characteristic species of mountain scrubland and rocky outcrops, including: *Black Wheatear*, *Black Redstart*, *Dunnoch*, *Alpine Accentor*, *Blue Rock Thrush* and *Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush*, a rare breeding summer species that only nests in these mountain tops in Villuercas. You can also hear the shrill carousels of the *Alpine Swifts*, a species that has important breeding areas in these mountain ranges, and the jubilant calls of the flocks of *Red-billed Chough*, a bird which has an irregular and localized distribution in Extremadura.

Eurasian Black Vulture



## Ornithological interests

Due to the diversity of the habitats this route has many and varied ornithological interests. The summer visitors that breed here stand out, such as the *European Honey Buzzard*, *Black Stork*, *Booted Eagle*, *Short-toed Eagle*, *Blue Rock Thrush*, *Alpine Swift* and *Egyptian Vulture*. The deciduous forest masses are the perfect habitat for nocturnal birds such as the *Tawny Owl* and there are isolated groups of *Coal Tit* in the pine groves. *Western Bonelli's Warbler* and *Lesser Spotted Woodpecker* are common in the best conserved mountain forests. *Peregrine Falcon*, *Golden Eagle*, *Bonelli's Eagle*, *Eagle Owl* and *Griffon Vulture* nest in the crags and rocky outcrops, among other species. Numerous species, such as the *Black Wheatear*, *Black Redstart*,

*Dunnock, Alpine Accentor, Blue Rock Thrush* and Rufous-tailed *Rock Thrush*, can be found in the summits, between the rocks and the creeping bushes. The *Spanish Imperial Eagle*, which still doesn't breed regularly in this region, shares the habitat with another large scavenger, the *Eurasian Black Vulture*, which started to nest in these mountain ranges just over a decade ago, in what appears to be an expansion from the colonies of Monfragüe. Pairs now nest in the most northern enclaves of the region, giving almost spatial continuity to the colonies of Monfragüe.

routes, you must not stray from the established route to avoid disturbing the birds during this sensitive period. Although part of the route goes through a mountain area it is very hot in summer, so make sure you drink plenty of fluids and protect yourself properly from the sun, avoiding the middle hours of the day, which are also less favourable for watching the birds. In autumn the colour of the deciduous trees, with their golden and yellow hues, marks this region culturally and scenically.



### Best time to visit

It can be done at any time of the year. Spring is the most productive season, with good daytime temperatures and the return of the summer birds: *Black Stork, Egyptian Vulture, Booted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, European Honey Buzzard*, etc. Spring is also the breeding season and, as a general recommendation for all the



### Other environmental and cultural interest

- Monastery and town of Guadalupe
- Chapel del Humilladero
- "Pozo de la nieve" well

*Texts: Víctor Manuel Pizarro Jiménez*

*Peregrine Falcon*





## Location and access

The *River Guadiana* is dammed by a diversion dam as it flows past the city of **Badajoz**, a small regulation dam that keeps the level of the river practically constant. Downstream from the diversion dam the River Guadiana returns to its natural form and 6.5 km later the *River Caya* flows into it on its right side. Both banks of the river are reached from Badajoz.



## Description of the route

You can make an ornithological trip along the River Guadiana along either of its banks, as both have good access and present lots of opportunities for bird-watching.

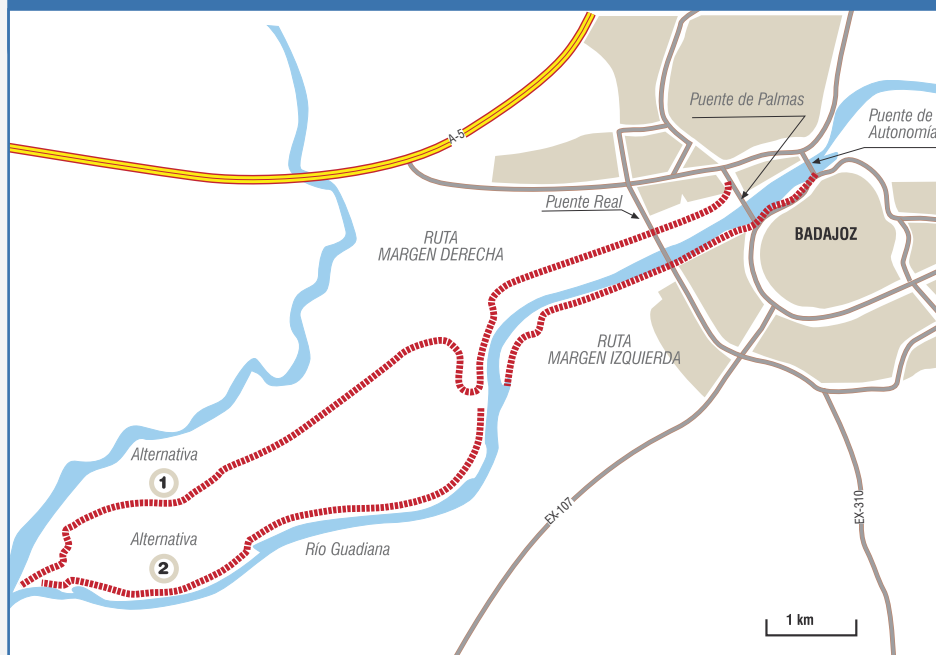
### ROUTE ALONG THE LEFT BANK

**Section 1.** The route starts at the bridge “**Puente de la Autonomía**”, which is the first of four bridges over the Guadiana as you go downstream. It can be reached without problems from any point of the city, as it is one of main exit routes towards Cáceres by the EX-100 via the ring road (Ronda de la Circunvalación). The way up to the bridge is at the junction of the streets Suárez Figueroa, Morales, San Antón and Joaquín Costa, where you will find a roundabout presided over by the unmistakable sculpture of “*The Three Poets*”. From the bridge you can enjoy excellent views of a section of the river where its course narrows, coinciding with the River Zapatón flowing into it from the left and the River Gévorra from the right, a bit further up. There are also excellent views of the *Arabic Castle* (Alcazaba) and the *Old Centre of Badajoz*. From the head of the bridge you

can comfortably travel along the bank, reaching a section over 800 m long that has been perfectly conditioned for its recreational use (benches, terraces, viewpoints, landscaped areas) and that affords magnificent views of the river, completely isolating you from the hustle and bustle of the city. Keep going along this path until you reach the bridge known as **Puente Viejo** or **Puente de Palmas**, opposite **Puerta Palmas**, a monumental gate that formed part of the wall that surrounded the city in ancient times and which is one of the symbols of Badajoz. Puente Viejo is a footbridge, so it's perfect for birdwatching, giving an exceptional viewpoint. It's possible to see many species in the water and the thick vegetation along the banks, as well as birds in flight over the river. Next the route continues parallel to the riverbank until you reach the third bridge, **Puente de la Universidad**, where the footpath ends and a narrow track starts that goes through river groves for 1 km. The track ends at **Puente Real** (the fourth bridge), easily recognisable due to its central pillars, over 80 m high, and radial support braces. The first section along the left bank, which is 1.9 km long and can only be done on foot, ends at this point.

**Section 2.** At the junction of the Calle del Paseo Fluvial and the Avenida del Guadiana a dirt track leads off that goes under the bridge **Puente Real** and that, 250 m later, joins an asphalted road that runs parallel to the river. The road is 1800 m long and ends at a roundabout after the building of Badajoz Canoeing Club. This section of the route can be done by car, stopping to watch birds or take short walks. The route can also be done on foot, following the path between the asphalted road and riverbank, which lets you get closer to the water and vegetation of the riverbank. A dirt track

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cattle Egret</li> <li>• Little Egret</li> <li>• Grey Heron</li> <li>• Common Coot</li> <li>• Mallard</li> <li>• Common Sandpiper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reed Warbler</li> <li>• Great Reed Warbler</li> <li>• Sand Martin</li> <li>• European Bee-eater</li> <li>• Black-crowned Night Heron</li> <li>• Little Bittern</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesser Black-backed Gull</li> <li>• Black-headed Gull</li> <li>• Common Snipe</li> <li>• Great Cormorant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Squacco Heron</li> <li>• Wood Sandpiper</li> <li>• Osprey</li> <li>• Water Pipit</li> </ul>

leads off from the roundabout, 270 m long, which leads to the wall of the diversion dam, where you will find an excellent viewpoint for birdwatching. You can end the route here or continue downstream on foot along a dirt track.

### ROUTE ALONG THE RIGHT BANK

You will find a roundabout in the Avenida de Elvas (going towards Portugal and coinciding with the N-V), in the section of the road between the bridges **Puente de la Universidad** and **Puente Real**, on which you

must take the third exit (to the left), following the sign saying “*Cañada Sancha Brava*”. Once you’ve gone under the Puente Real continue along the road until you reach a turning on the left (about 1250 m from the bridge) and a dirt track will take you to another asphalted road that runs along the riverbank until it reaches the wall of the diversion dam. From here there are two options you can take. The first is to continue downstream along a dirt track in good condition that runs parallel to the riverbank for about 7 km, until it reaches the mouth of the *River Caya*. The other possi-



*Great Cormorant roost*

bility is to take the dirt track that leads out from the diversion dam and takes you to an asphalted road (passing a ham factory on the left). From this point follow the road until it crosses a small ford, at which point the road turns into a dirt track. Keep on this track and after 1250 m you will reach a fork where you should take the path to the left, which will take you to the banks of the *River Guadiana* and, just after, the mouth of the *River Caya*.



### Ornithological interests

The **diversion dam** of the River Guadiana has been declared a **Special Protection Area for birds (SPA)** due to its importance for numerous species of birds. One of its main attractions are the breeding colonies of herons, in which more than 2000 pairs of *Cattle* and *Little Egret* congregate, accompanied by other species, such as *Black-crowned Night Heron*, *White Stork* and *Grey Heron*. The main colony can be found just downstream from the diversion dam, in the trees on several islands in the middle of the river. Other smaller colonies can be found dispersed over several areas of the river between the diversion dam and the bridge **Puente Viejo**, also on wooded islands. From March to the middle of July these areas are spectacular due to the multitudes of birds that cover the trees and their incessant activity, much greater after their chicks have hatched. The nesting population of *Black-crowned Night Heron* is considered to be one of the most im-

portant at a regional level. In the rest of the year these areas are also communal roosting sites for *Cattle* and *Little Egret*, with thousands of birds gathering together, sharing the area with large flocks of *Eurasian Jackdaws* and *Spotless* and *Common Starlings*.

It is also possible to observe another three species of *heron* of great interest in this section of the River Guadiana: *Purple Heron* (nesting in the dense giant reed thickets along the riverbanks), *Squacco Heron* (more frequent in passage and even in winter) and the *Great White Egret* (more and more regular in the area).

At the end of August the first *Great Cormorants* begin to arrive at the river and their population continues to increase, reaching its maximum in winter. You can see them in many sections of the river, fishing or sunning themselves, with the bridge Puente Viejo being a very good place to observe them at your leisure. The main roosting site for the *Great Cormorants* is on an island 1200 m downstream from the bridge Puente Real, upon which several hundred birds gather. The site can be easily recognised as all the branches of the trees are dyed white as a result of the amount of bird droppings and it's visible from both banks of the river. The vegetation along the riverbanks is particularly exuberant between the diversion dam and the mouth of the *River Caya*, where the course recovers its most natural appearance, with thick willow copses in which birds such as *Golden Oriole*, *Penduline Tit*, *Nightingale*, *Cetti's Warbler*, *Melodious Warbler*, *Wren*, *Long-tailed Tit* and *Common Chaffinch* nest.

The giant reed thickets, often mixed with willows, form



another of the most interesting habitats for birds, although due to their dense cover it's easier to hear their song than to see them. Species such as *Little Bittern*, *Water Rail*, *Common Moorhen*, *Great Reed Warbler*, *Reed Warbler*, *Red Avadavat* and *Common Waxbill* are common in the breeding season. The presence of *Bluethroat* and *Common Chiffchaff* stand out in winter. *Purple Swamphen* occurs in the area of the diversion dam. In the open waters between the bridge **Puente de la Autonomía** and the wall of the diversion dam the presence of various species of duck is noteworthy, such as *Mallard*, *Northern Shoveler*, *Gadwall* as well as *Common Coot*. In summer, on passage, *Osprey* move up and down the deepest waters, trying to capture fish. Other species, typical of the shallower waters and islands, which you can see without difficulty, are *White Wagtail*, *Grey Wagtail*, *Common Sandpiper*, *Green Sandpiper*, *Black-winged Stilt* and *Common Snipe* (in winter).

It's also worth highlighting the birds that nest on the sandy riverbanks, such as the *Sand Martin*, *European Bee-eater* and *Common Kingfisher*, which have some of their largest colonies in the gravel areas near the road that leads to the **River Caya**.

The two viewpoints located at either end of the wall of the diversion dam and the downstream section are, without a doubt, the most interesting areas of the route. On good days it's possible to see more than 15 different species just from the wall of the diversion dam.

In winter, as the day progresses, the diversion dam becomes a site of concentration of *Lesser Black-backed Gulls*, with over 2000 individuals congregating here at times, also accompanied by *Black-headed Gulls*. The bridge **Puente Viejo** has a large colony of *House Martins* as well as several pairs of *Alpine Swift*, which are an amazing sight to see flying nearby.



Cattle Egret



### Other environmental and cultural interest

The city of **Badajoz** has excellent cultural attractions that can be combined with the birdwatching trips. We would recommend visiting the **Arabic Castle** or **Alcazaba**, and **Plaza Alta**, the most emblematic place in the historical centre. You can also visit the **Latin-American and Extremaduran Museum of Contemporary Art** (MEIAC), the **Provincial Archaeological Museum** of Badajoz or the **Museum of the City "Luís de Morales"**. You can discover a lot of Badajoz's heritage values wandering around its streets, such as the bastions of the defensive wall that surrounded the city in ancient times, its main entrance gates (**Puerta de Mérida**, **Puerta Palmas** and **Puerta Pilar**), the Mudéjar houses, churches and convents, its many squares and parks, etc.

It's always a good decision to plan a visit to the city to coincide with the main festivals, such as the **Feria de San Juan** (24 June), the religious processions of **Semana Santa** (at Easter), the celebration of the **Carnivals** (one of the busiest and most enjoyable in Spain) or the commemoration of the foundation of Badajoz by the Arabs during the **Festival Al-Mossassa Batalyaws** (between September and October).

*Texts: Atanasio Fernández García*



### Best time to visit

**Spring** is a good time to visit the areas that have large colonies of *herons*, such as the river groves, which are also full of the song of numerous species. In **winter** you should visit the roosting sites of the *cormorants* and *egrets*. Any time of year is good to see the birds in the area around the diversion dam.



## Cornalvo Reservoir



### Location and access

This route is at the heart of **Cornalvo Natural Park**, which is situated between the Vegas del Guadiana and the spurs of the Sierras de San Pedro and Montánchez. It goes through the municipal areas of Mérida and Trujillanos (Badajoz).

It's best to access the route from the "Autovía de Extremadura" (A-5), continuing along it until you reach the town of **Trujillanos**, taking exit 334 (towards Madrid) or 325 (towards Mérida). Before you enter Trujillanos you will find a roundabout, where you should take the first exit, to the right, which will take you straight to **Cornalvo Reservoir**.

*Hoopoe*



### Description of the route

This birdwatching route starts from the Centre of Interpretation of Cornalvo Natural Park, which we strongly recommend you to visit and where you can get more information about this protected area and other possible routes. About 7 km from the Centre of Interpretation you will find a turning on the right that will take you to the **Dam** of Cornalvo Reservoir. If you have come this far by car you must park here before you get to the dam and continue on foot. The route goes around the reservoir, always following the paths. Start by crossing the wall of the dam, and then continue along a path that takes you first through a thick cork oak grove and then through more open areas with views of the reservoir. You will reach the end of the reservoir after about 2800 m, at which point you will have done almost half the route and will start going back towards the starting point. From the end to the wall of the dam the route goes along a path that is in a good state and which keeps parallel to the reservoir. The whole route round the reservoir is 6800 m long; although when the water level is low you can take different routes, shortening the distance, particularly in the end section.



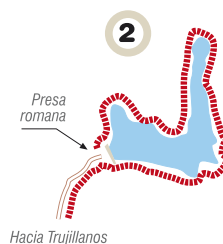
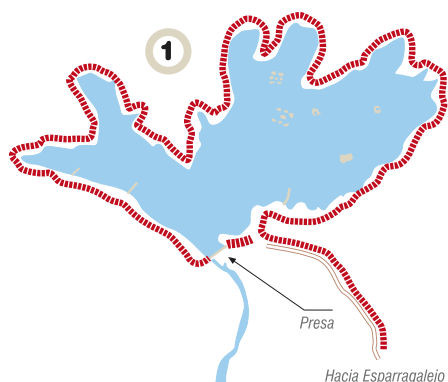
### Ornithological interests

Cornalvo Natural Park was one of the first areas to be declared a Special Protection Area for birds (SPA) in Extremadura, called "Embalse de Cornalvo y Sierra Bermeja".

The predominant habitats between the Centre of Interpretation and Cornalvo Reservoir are rain-fed cereal



## Sketch of the route and selected species



2,5 km

### Residents

### Summer visitors

### Winter visitors

### Passage migrants

## CORNALVO RESERVOIR

- European Nuthatch
- Short-toed Treecreeper
- Hawfinch
- Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

- Black Stork
- Nightingale
- Melodious Warbler
- Booted Eagle
- Black Kite

- Dunnock
- Eurasian Bullfinch
- Common Wood Pigeon
- Common Teal
- Gadwall

- Spotted Flycatcher
- Pied Flycatcher
- Common Redstart

## LOS CANCHALES RESERVOIR

- Cattle Egret
- Grey Heron
- Great Crested Grebe
- Common Coot
- Mallard
- Common Sandpiper
- Little Ringed Plover

- Little Tern
- Gull-billed Tern
- Black-winged Stilt
- Collared Pratincole
- Whiskered Tern

- Lesser Black-backed Gull
- Black-headed Gull
- Common Crane
- Pintail
- Eurasian Wigeon
- Greylag Goose

- Eurasian Spoonbill
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Red Knot
- Greenshank
- Grey Plover
- Turnstone
- Wood Sandpiper
- Osprey

fields, olive groves and open *dehesa* of Holm oak groves. 2.3 km from the start you will reach a bridge over the **River Albarregas**, where there is a dense wooded area and it's worth stopping here to watch birds. Large pools of water usually remain in summer attracting numerous species to drink (*warblers, tits, finches, larks*). In the cereal fields and pastures that extend from the bridge to **Cortijo de Campomanes** it's possible to see *Montagu's Harrier, Black-winged Kite, Little Owl, Stone Curlew, Little Bustard, Southern Grey Shrike, Zitting Cisticola* and *Thekla Lark*.

It's good to have a telescope with you when you reach the dam as the water birds are normally in the middle of the reservoir. The most frequent species are *Mal-lard, Northern Shoveler, Common Teal, Gadwall, Pin-tail, Eurasian Wigeon, Common Coot, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Great Cormorant, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-headed Gull* and *Little Ringed Plover*. If you are lucky you can see *Black Stork* feeding on the banks, one of the emblematic birds of this protected area. In the shallower



Hawfinch

areas (such as the islands, islets and the shoreline) you can see several species of *waders*, the diversity of which is much greater during the autumn passage (from July to October), and which include *Black-winged Stilt, Common Redshank, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper* and *Little Ringed Plover*.

Little Owl



A path begins at the end of the dam that goes up into a thick cork oak grove where you can see typical forest species such as *European Nuthatch*, *Short-toed Treecreeper*, *Nightingale*, *Wren*, *Common Chaffinch*, *Eurasian Bullfinch*, *Hawfinch*, *Blue*, *Crested and Great Tits*, *Blackbird*, *Common Wood Pigeon*, *Eurasian Jay*, and *Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers*. In the areas predominated by bushes (mostly rock rose patches and moorland) it's easy to find species typical of this type of vegetation, such as *Sardinian* and *Dartford Warblers* and *Dunnock* (the latter only in winter). Once the path leaves the slope the density of Holm and cork oaks lessens, with *dehesa* areas appearing that alternate with scrubland and pastures, and it's easier to see the birds. *Spotted Flycatcher*, *Azure-winged Magpie*, *Hoopoe*, *Woodlark* and *Woodchat Shrike* occur in the *dehesa* areas. With more open visibility it's easier to see breeding birds of prey (*Booted Eagle*, *Common Buzzard*, *Short-toed Eagle*, *Black Kite*) and other species that search for food in the *dehesa* such as *Griffon Vulture*, *Eurasian Black Vulture* and even *Spanish Imperial Eagle*.



Grey Heron

## Los Canchales Reservoir



### Location and access

Los Canchales Reservoir is in the province of Badajoz, to the northwest of the towns of **La Garrovilla** and **Esparragalejo**, and was built over Lácara Brook, a water course that originates in the Sierra de San Pedro and flows into the left side of the River Guadiana. It can be reached from the EX-305 between Montijo and Nava de Santiago, with two entrances between kilometre points 8 and 13 that lead towards the western area of the reservoir. You can also get to the reservoir via a track that starts in the outskirts of **Esparragalejo**. It is recommended to reach it from the EX-209 as it goes through the town of **La Garrovilla**, where you will find a sign-posted asphalted track that leads straight to the wall of the dam, the perfect starting point for a birdwatching trip.



### Best time to visit

The route is interesting at any time of year, but spring is the best time to watch the birds associated with forests and *dehesa*. The reservoir has a greater diversity of species in winter and at the end of summer.



### Other environmental and cultural interest

**Hide at Muelas Reservoir.** This small regulation dam is about 7 km from the turning that leads to Cornalvo Reservoir, continuing along the asphalted road, and has a birdwatching hide where you can see many species.

**Cornalvo Dam** has been declared a National Monument, as it is one of the best-conserved hydraulic works from the Roman era.

A cultural visit to the city of Mérida, a World Heritage Site, is the perfect complement to the birdwatching route around Cornalvo Natural Park.



### Description of the route

The route starts in La Garrovilla, reaching the wall of Los Canchales Reservoir after about 7.5 km along an asphalted road. This first section is of great interest as it crosses land used for the dry-farming of cereals, sunflowers and olive trees. In the area around the reservoir there are several information panels about visiting regulations and routes to follow.

The rest of the route goes along a dirt track around the reservoir, over 23 km long, built above the maximum

flood level of the reservoir and which enables you to go all the way around it.

About 80 m before you reach the dam take the road on the right, just before the car parking area and the **Centre of Interpretation** of the Hydrographic Confederation of the Guadiana, leading straight down to the banks of the reservoir. The first stop is 800 m along, at a man-made dyke that flows into the reservoir and has a hide at its end. You'll reach the end of the reservoir about 4 km further on: an area of shallow water where you can still see the winding branches of Lá-cara Brook. When the water level is very low you can take an alternative track that significantly reduces the length of the route. The route continues along the right bank of the reservoir, passing two of the islets most used by the birds, situated opposite a group of man-made islands. Next the track goes away from the reservoir and momentarily takes you to the EX-305 (Montijo-La Nava de Santiago) where you must go 1770 m towards Montijo until you reach a track on the left that will lead you back to the reservoir. Follow the track until you reach a small dam built in one of the reservoir's islets and 600 m later you will find a dyke to observe the birds and a path along the bank that you can go along on foot and that goes up a thick scrubland slope. The last 3 km of the track goes up a small hill before arriving at the wall of the dam, where the route ends.



## Ornithological interests

Los Canchales Reservoir has been declared a Special Protection Area for birds (SPA) and is also recognised as a **"Wetland of International Importance"**. It has highly favourable conditions for numerous species of birds, as it has large areas of shallow water, diverse types of vegetation associated with water (bulrush and giant reed thickets, grasslands and formations of spurge, ashes and willows) and is surrounded by Holm oak *dehesa* and large areas of irrigated and rain-fed farmland. The Hydrographic Confederation of the Guadiana has also carried out numerous activities to favour the presence of birds, such as the construction of islands, pools and lakes, dykes, water retaining dams and improvements to the habitat, etc.

During the breeding season the populations of colonial birds that nest on the islands are important, including large numbers of *Collared Pratincole*, *Gull-billed Tern*, *Little Tern* and *Black-winged Stilt*. Other water birds also nest here, such as *Mallard*, *Gadwall*, *Common Coot*, *Little Grebe*, *Great Crested Grebe* and *Black-headed Gull*. There are also breeding pairs of *Whiskered Tern* and *Black Tern*.

During the autumn passage many species and large concentrations of birds gather here. The presence of *waders* is noteworthy, with the possibility of seeing *Dunlin*, *Little Stint*, *Curlew Sandpiper*, *Red Knot*,

Turnstone





Common Cranes



### Best time to visit

*Ringed Plover, Common and Spotted Redshanks, Greenshank, Grey Plover, Turnstone, Wood Sandpiper and Bar-tailed Godwit.* The concentrations of *White Stork* on the banks are spectacular in summer, with over 500 birds. It is considered to be one of the most important areas for the wintering and passage of the *Eurasian Spoonbill*, which has even bred in the reservoir.

In winter the *waterfowl* are of interest (*Mallard, Pintail, Eurasian Wigeon, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Common Pochard, Common Teal, Greylag Goose*), with over 10,000 birds, as well as concentrations of *Lesser Black-backed Gull* and *Black-headed Gull* and a wintering flock of *Common Crane* of more than 1500 birds, which roost on the banks of the reservoir.

You can also see very interesting species in the rain-fed farmland and *dehesa* around the reservoir (birds of prey, steppe species) and it's also good to stop at the frequent patches of Kermes oak, myrtle and wild olive, as they usually shelter several passerines (*Subalpine, Western Orphean and Melodious Warblers, Black Wheatear and Rufous Bush Robin*).

This route is good at any time of year but you must bear in mind that the species you will find depends on when you visit. Unlike other places the summer months are very interesting for birdwatching.



### Other environmental and cultural interest

**Mouth of the River Aljucén.** If you take the EX-209 towards Mérida you will find the course of the River Aljucén after you have gone past the town of Esparragalejo It's a very good place for birdwatching (*Squacco Heron, Purple Swamphen and Purple Heron*) and has a hide.

**Dolmen of Lácara.** This interesting collective tomb is to the north of Los Canchales Reservoir. It is a large tomb in an excellent state of conservation and dates from the Calcolithic period. It is reached by following the EX-214 from La Nava de Santiago to Aljucén.

*Texts: Atanasio Fernández García*



### Location and access

This route goes through the areas known as **Zona Centro** and **Vegas Altas del Guadiana**, in the centre-east of Extremadura, taking you over land within the municipal areas of **Obando**, **Navalvillar de Pela**, **Vegas Altas** and **Madrigalejo**. The old *dehesas* here hardly retain any traces of the vast original area they used to occupy due to the transformation caused by the implementation of the Irrigation Plan of Zona Centro. However, on the other hand, this has also given rise to the appearance of new species.

You can reach the start of the route via the EX-116 that connects Navalvillar de Pela to the south with Guadalupe to the north. Coming from the south you will find the road of the canal on the left, from which you can reach Cubilar reservoir, where the route starts. You can reach Navalvillar de Pela via the N-430, which starts from the A-5 at Torrefresneda to the west and continues until the province of Ciudad Real to the east.



### Description of the route

The route is 37 km long, from Cubilar reservoir to **Sierra Brava** reservoir. It can be done in a day, alternating travelling by car with short walks, and finishing at lunchtime at Sierra Brava, where, after eating, you can go for a walk along the banks to the end of the reservoir, where you will see the most species. You will find different habitats along the route, most highly transformed and used for agriculture, making a very wide range of bird species easy to spot. Starting from a small reservoir surrounded by *dehesa* this route will take you past different crops, such as corn, wheat, bar-

ley, fruit trees...and rice. This last deserves special attention as it is grown by flooding, which, by creating a mass of shallow water, attracts numerous waders and water birds in search of food, as well as serving as a roosting area for large flocks of *Common Cranes*, *Black-tailed Godwits*, *Marsh Harriers* and *Hen Harriers*. The route also goes by *dehesa* and pastures, ending at a reservoir (Sierra Brava) in the middle of a large plain. Start from point X: 286357, Y: 4.346.346 at Cubilar Reservoir. It's worth walking a little in the area around the reservoir and watching the numerous species of *ducks* and *geese*, *herons* and *egrets* and *waders*, in the area from an elevated point (the wall of the dam makes a good viewpoint) with a telescope. Most of these birds use this area as a roosting site in winter. There are also a large number of *Common Cranes*, so birdwatchers will find the view from the dam at dawn in winter a wonderful spectacle.

Continue by car until you pass above the canal and at point X: 286.435, Y: 4.345.535 turn left, around the canal. From here you will see different cereal crops on your right and up above the riverside forest that flanks the River Cubilar, with *dehesa* in the background. Keep on the canal track, scattered with stone pine trees that form the lookout points for many of birds of prey, such as *Eurasian Sparrowhawk*, *Common Kestrel*, *Black-winged Kite* and *Common Buzzard*. When you reach point X: 289.100, Y: 4.344.836, where the track crosses the EX-116 that connects **Navalvillar de Pela** and **Guadalupe**, turn right, towards Navalvillar de Pela. From the road you will see rice fields on the left and livestock *dehesa* on the right. At point X: 288.196, Y: 4.343.543 you'll find the entrance to the *dehesa* "Dehesa de Zarzalejos", an alternative route you could follow to see *Black-winged Kite*, *Common Buzzard*,



## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mallard</li> <li>• Gadwall</li> <li>• Northern Shoveler</li> <li>• Black-winged Kite</li> <li>• Common Buzzard</li> <li>• Marsh Harrier</li> <li>• Common Kestrel</li> <li>• Great Bustard</li> <li>• Little Bustard</li> <li>• Black-bellied Sandgrouse</li> <li>• Pin-tailed Sandgrouse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Stork</li> <li>• Booted Eagle</li> <li>• Montagu's Harrier</li> <li>• Gull-billed Tern</li> <li>• Collared Pratincole</li> <li>• European Bee-eater</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common Crane</li> <li>• Greylag Goose</li> <li>• Pintail</li> <li>• Black-tailed Godwit</li> <li>• Hen Harrier</li> <li>• Short-eared Owl</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garganey</li> <li>• Common Shelduck</li> <li>• Ruddy Shelduck</li> <li>• Avocet</li> <li>• Osprey</li> </ul>

*Azure-winged Magpie*, etc. and family groups of *Common Cranes* foraging and eating acorns in winter. But continue onwards to point X: 284.836, Y: 4.338.512

where you will find a path with a birdwatching hide on the left, via which you can reach a large irrigation pool where you see lots of water birds. Beneath this pool, in

the extensive crop fields, a large number of *Common Cranes*, *Greylag Geese* and *Marsh Harriers* roost in autumn and winter.

Continue to point X: 284.720, Y: 4.336.634, where, on the left, you will find the **Centre of Interpretation Mo-heda Alta** (within the 150 ha of the Periurban Park of Conservation and Leisure), which is worth visiting. Take the road on the right to Gorbea farm, leaving the asphalted road and going by a magnificent mature *dehesa*, evidence of the habitat that existed before the irrigation system was established. After the *dehesa* you will see rain-fed cereal fields and rice fields that serve as roosting places for *Common Cranes* and *Marsh and Hen Harriers*. When you reach point X: 280.287, Y: 4.335.636 turn right and continue on until you leave the village of **Vegas Altas** to your right and reach point X: 276.936, Y: 4.333.062 where you cross the EX-102 and turn right towards **Madrigalejo**. Go past this village and continue along the road, which leads to **Zorita**, but, at point X: 269.288, Y: 4.341.724 turn right and after barely 800 m you will get to Sierra Brava reservoir, the end of the route. It is worth taking your telescope and taking the path around the reservoir that starts on the left before the dam, where you can see many species of water birds.

Short-eared Owl



Common Waxbill



## Ornithological interests

The most representative species is, perhaps, the *Common Crane* (in autumn and winter). You can see over 30,000 birds in the various roosting sites in this area, many of which have been ringed, with it being possible to read those that have a colour code. Other species that are important in winter for their number in the pools and reservoirs are *Greylag Geese*, various species of ducks, such as *Pintail*, *Gadwall*, *Northern Shoveler*, *Red-crested Pochard*, *Common Pochard*, *Tufted Duck*, *Common Teal*, and other water birds, such as *Great Crested*, *Little* and *Black-necked Grebes*. In the rice fields you can see *Common Snipe* and other waders such as *Black-tailed Godwit*, *Ringed Plover*, *Black-winged Stilt*, *Golden Plover*, *Little Stint*, *Dunlin*, and *Common*, *Green* and *Wood Sandpipers*. Amongst the wintering birds of prey *Red Kite*, *Merlin* and *Short-eared Owl* are important. It's also possible to find *Northern Goshawks* and *Eurasian Sparrowhawks*, as well as *Common Buzzard*, the number of which increases in winter with the arrival of birds from the north. Curiously, several *Black Stork* stay in the area throughout winter, without migrating to warmer sub-Saharan lands.

Birds that breed in the area include *Black-winged Kite*, *Gull-billed Tern* (Sierra Brava), *Collared Pratincole*, *Marsh Harrier*, *Montagu's Harrier*, *Red Avadavat*, *Common Waxbill*, *Azure-winged Magpie*, *Common Kestrel*, *Lesser Kestrel* etc. You can see species typical of steppe areas in the plains surrounding Sierra Brava reservoir, such as *Great Bustard*, *Little Bustard*, *Stone Curlew*, *Black-bellied Sandgrouse* and *Pin-tailed Sandgrouse*.

Species that are rare elsewhere in Extremadura appear in passage here, such as *Bluethroat*, *Garganey*, *Avocet*, *Common Shelduck* and *Ruddy Shelduck*.

Other species have been recorded in the area, such as *White-fronted Goose*, *Bean Goose*, *Squacco Heron*, *Whiskered Tern*, *Great White Egret*, *Glossy Ibis*, *Eurasian Curlew* and *Osprey*.



## Other environmental and cultural interest

**The Holm oak “El Convenio”** stands out amongst the others in the *dehesa* due to its height. Sadly it has now dried up. The sale and division of Gorbea farm was agreed beneath its branches, and in olden days it was also here that farming advice was given.

***Serapias perez-chiscanoi***, a species of orchid, is easy to find in the area around the Centre of Interpretation Moheda Alta. The species is classed as In Danger of Extinction in the Regional Catalogue of Endangered Species of Extremadura and was discovered by the Extremaduran pharmacist José Luis Pérez-Chiscano.

**Other orchids**; there are other species of the genus *serapias* in the area such as *Serapias lingua*, *S. vomeracea*, and other genuses such as *Ophrys tenthredinifera*, *O. conica*, *Orchis morio*, etc.

*Texts: Juan Pablo Prieto Clemente*



## Best time to visit

This route can be done at any time of year, as many interesting species reside in the area. However, in autumn and winter the large number of birds such as *Common Crane* (the largest density in the peninsula throughout winter), *Greylag Geese*, *Black-tailed Godwits*, *Northern Lapwings*, etc. will delight any bird-watcher, with hardly any effort, without leaving the route.

Spring is also a good time; as well as the nesting species that come to the area numerous passage migrants appear until well into April.

European Bee-eater



# 14 Orellana Reservoir and Puerto Peña



## Location and access

**Orellana Reservoir** is the last of the three large reservoirs that regulate the River Guadiana upon its entry into Extremadura and it can be found between the regions of **La Serena** and **Vegas Altas del Guadiana**, in the province of Badajoz. The landscape is dominated by the water collected in the reservoir, which is flanked by medium-height mountain ranges (Sierra de Pela, 724 m; Sierra del Castillo, 697 m) that stand out over vast areas of *dehesa*, pastures and rain-fed crops. The main road to it is the **N-430**, from which you can reach the towns of **Orellana la Vieja** (taking the BA-105), **Navalvillar de Pela** and **Casas de Don Pedro**, from where you can easily get to **Talarrubias** and **Puebla de Alcocer** via the EX-115, EX-103 and BA-137.



## Description of the route

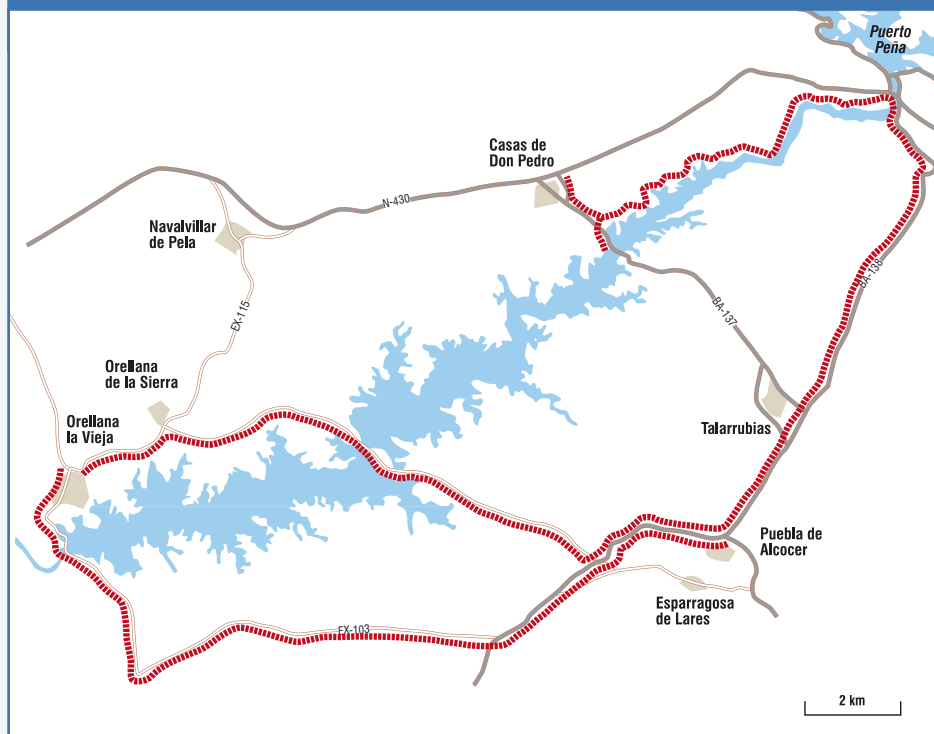
**Section 1. Casas de Don Pedro-Puerto Peña.** The route starts in the town of Casas de Don Pedro, where you should take the BA-137 that goes around the town to the east, continuing on towards Talarrubias. Barely 1 km after you've passed the last houses of the town you will find a junction with an asphalted road that runs parallel to the Canal de las Dehesas. You can make a small diversion from the route and turn right at the junction, to the Diversion Dam of Casas de Don Pedro, an interesting place to watch water birds. To reach it you must drive along the canal service road for about 2250 m until you reach a dirt track on the left (opposite one of the regulation sluice gates) that goes down to the diversion dam, although it's a good idea to park

your car at the canal and go down the 500 m to the bank on foot, so you don't frighten away the birds. Then go back to the junction with the BA-137 and continue all the way along the canal service road (15 km), until you reach a junction at which you can return to the N-430 or go to "Puerto Peña" campsite. Next to the campsite you'll find the Centre of Interpretation of the Rock-dwelling Fauna of Puerto Peña, with interesting information panels and remote control cameras to observe the birds of the rocky crags. Continue along the route, leaving the Canal de las Dehesas behind and continuing towards Valdecaballeros along a road that crosses under the N-430. Immediately after this you will reach the Viewpoint of Puerto Peña, where you should stop to watch the birds of the rocky crags of Puerto Peña mountain pass.

**Section 2. Puerto Peña-Puebla de Alcocer.** After the viewpoint continue towards Peloeche-Herrera del Duque, crossing the wall of the dam of García de Sola and then 200 m later take the turn off on the right onto the BA-138 towards Talarrubias. Without going into the town, continue until the road joins the EX-103 towards Puebla de Alcocer. In the outskirts of Puebla de Alcocer, on the left hand side of the road (800 m after the petrol station) you will find the ruins of the Convent of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción, in which there is a spectacular colony of *Lesser Kestrel*. You could also go for a walk around the town and up to the castle, where it's possible to see many birds.

**Section 3. Puebla de Alcocer-Cogolludo-Orellana la Vieja.** Continue along the EX-103 towards Orellana la Vieja and Castuera and about 3.8 km from Puebla de Alcocer you will find a dirt track in a good state that

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great Bustard</li> <li>• Little Bustard</li> <li>• Bonelli's Eagle</li> <li>• Golden Eagle</li> <li>• Griffon Vulture</li> <li>• Calandra Lark</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Stork</li> <li>• Egyptian Vulture</li> <li>• Lesser Kestrel</li> <li>• Montagu's Harrier</li> <li>• European Roller</li> <li>• Little Tern</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meadow Pipit</li> <li>• Common Teal</li> <li>• Eurasian Wigeon</li> <li>• Tufted Duck</li> <li>• Black-necked Grebe</li> <li>• Lesser Black-backed Gull</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern Wheatear</li> <li>• Black-eared Wheatear</li> <li>• Osprey</li> </ul>

leads off on the right, just after you pass the junction to Esparragosa de Lares. Keep on this track and, about 12 km later, you will reach the area of Cogolludo, where a bridge crosses Orellana Reservoir. Continue on for another 8 km and you will reach the road that connects Navalvillar de Pela and Orellana la Vieja (Ex-115), where you should turn left and carry on until you get to the latter town.

**Section 4. Orellana La Vieja-Puebla de Alcocer.** From Orellana la Vieja take the EX-115 towards Campanario and La Coronada, going past the wall of the dam of Orellana Reservoir, and after about 5 km you will reach the junction with the EX-103, which will take you straight to Puebla de Alcocer. If you wish you could also get there via the livestock track that leads off from the same junction and runs parallel to the EX-103.



## Ornithological interest

All the suggested routes are within the Special Protection Area for birds (SPA) “**Embalse de Orellana y Sierra de Pela**”, which was one of the first places in Extremadura to be given this recognition. Orellana Reservoir was also included in the List of Wetlands of International Importance of the Ramsar Convention, due to the value of its habitats and the species present. The diversion dam of **Casas de Don Pedro**, in the first section of the route, is well worth visiting, where large numbers of water birds, particularly duck, gather in summer and winter. There are man-made islands for colonial species to nest on and in spring you can find *Little Tern*, *Gull-billed Tern*, *Black-winged Stilt*, *Collared Pratincole* and *Little Ringed Plover* in this area. The breeding of *Gadwall* is highly notable. The route along the “canal de las dehesas” towards **Puerto Peña** mountain pass mainly crosses areas of *dehesa* and pastures, where you can see typical species such as *Black-winged Kite*, *Common Buzzard*, *Bonelli's Eagle*, *Booted Eagle*, *Black Kite*, *Common Crane*, *Azure-winged Magpie*, *Hoopoe*, *Woodchat Shrike*, *Thekla Lark*, etc. There are excellent views of Orellana Reservoir at all times from the canal road, including the end section (which looks like a river when the water level is low) and some interesting islets. It's a good idea to stop in some places with good visibility and try to locate the birds with a telescope. These are mainly duck and herons, as well as colonial species that nest on the islands. About 5 km before the camp site there is an enormous colony of heron, with over 2000 pairs, of *Cattle Egret*, *Little Egret*, *Black-crowned Night Heron*,



Griffon Vulture

*Grey Heron*, *Squacco Heron* (only confirmed in some years) and *White Stork* nesting here. The colony is on a large island covered in tamarisks, on which you can also see *Little Ringed Plover*, *Black-headed Gull*, *Gull-billed Tern* and *Little Tern*. You can get to the bank of the reservoir via a track sign-posted by the owners of the farm. When the water level drops at the end of summer you can see groups of *Black Stork* in this area of the reservoir, with over 100 birds on occasions.

This first section ends at Puerto Peña viewpoint, one of the most spectacular sites in Extremadura for birdwatching. It's the only spot in which up to 4 pairs of *Black Stork* nest in the same crag, which are also accompanied by birds of prey, such as *Bonelli's Eagle*, *Griffon Vulture* (over 20 pairs), *Egyptian Vulture*, *Peregrine Falcon* and *Common Kestrel*. It's easy to see other species typical of rocky crags, such as *Black Wheatear*, *Blue Rock Thrush*, *Alpine Swift*, *Crag Martin*, *Raven* and *Red-billed Chough*. There is also a winter sighting of *Wallcreeper* in this area and the presence of *Alpine Accentor* is regular at this time.

There's very little traffic in the second section of the route so you can enjoy a quiet drive until you reach **Talarrubias**, going past diverse habitats (*dehesa*, olive groves, pastures) and leaving the rocky crags of Puerto Peña and the Sierra de los Golondrinos behind you. One of the sites you should visit is the colony of *Lesser Kestrel* in the ruins of the **Convent de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción**, which supports over 40 pairs, which are possible to watch at your leisure. *White Stork*, *Little Owl*, *Barn Owl*, *Common Swift* and *Pallid Swift* also nest in the building. You can go up to the castle of **Puebla de Alcocer** to complete your day, where there is the possibility of seeing numerous rock-dwelling birds, as well as some incredible views of the regions of La Serena and La Siberia.

Puerto Peña







*Black-headed Gulls*

The third part of the route leaves the road for a quiet track that goes through pastures and *dehesa* until it reaches **Cogolludo**, a curious spot where the course of the River Guadiana is squeezed between two mountain ranges, with a bridge connecting both banks. The mountain ranges, covered by dense vegetation of Holm and cork oaks, wild olives and strawberry trees, are crowned by quartzite crags where *Eagle Owl*, *Egyptian Vulture*, *Black Stork*, *Golden Eagle*, and *Bonelli's Eagle* nest. There is also a small colony of *Red-billed Chough*, which is usually accompanied by *Eurasian Jackdaws*. There is a large colony of *House Martins* in the spans of the bridge of Cogolludo, which also nest in the cliffs along with *Crag Martins*. There are excellent views of the reservoir and its birds from the bridge. In winter numerous ducks are present (*Mallard*, *Northern Shoveler*, *Gadwall*, *Pintail*, *Eurasian Wigeon*, *Common Teal*, *Greylag Goose*, *Common Pochard*, *Tufted Duck*, *Red-crested Pochard*) and large flocks of *Common Coot*, *Great Crested Grebe*, *Little Grebe* and *Black-necked Grebe*. Large numbers of *Great Cormorant*, *Lesser Black-backed Gull* and *Black-headed Gull* also roost here.

The last section is the best for watching steppe species, as most of the route along the EX-103 goes through areas of natural pastureland and cereal fields. During the breeding season you can easily see such emblematic birds as *Great Bustard* (with the possibility of seeing individuals displaying), *Little Bustard*, *Lesser Kestrel* and *Montagu's Harrier*, the latter has a large breeding colony that can be seen from the road. It's also easy to see *European Roller* (common on electricity poles), *Hoopoe*, *Little Owl*, *Stone Curlew* and, with a bit more time, *Pin-tailed Sandgrouse*, *Black-bellied Sandgrouse* and *Collared Pratincole*. *Calandra Lark*, *Thekla Lark*, *Zitting Cisticola*, *Corn Bunting* and

*Spanish Sparrow* are abundant in the pastures. In winter *Golden Plover*, *Lapwing*, *Meadow Pipit* and *White Wagtail* are present here.



### Best time to visit

The best time for the steppe areas and rocky crags is spring, as most of the bird species are summer visitors and aren't present in winter. However, the reservoir supports more species and in a greater number both during autumn passage and in winter, with the concentrations of moulting duck particularly notable.



### Other environmental and cultural interest

The most well known of the traditional festivals is "**La Encamisá**" in Navalvillar de Pela, which is celebrated every year on 16 January in honour of Saint Antón Abad. At nightfall hundreds of horses, lavishly adorned, parade around the town's streets, among bonfires, attracting a huge crowd of local people and visitors. The festival has been declared one of Regional Tourist Interest.

The ruins of the ancient city of **Lacimurga Constantia Iulia** can be found in the vicinity of Cogolludo, a Roman settlement of a sub-urban and rural nature, which deserves a leisurely visit.

The **schematic rock paintings** that can be found in the farm "Hoyo de Pela", in the municipal area of Orellana la Vieja, are very interesting.

*Texts: Atanasio Fernández García*



## Location and access

The reference points for this route are the towns of La Albuera and Valverde de Leganés, both of which are very close to the capital of the province, Badajoz. The best way to reach the area is via the N-432 (Badajoz-Granada), which you can take towards La Albuera either from the city of Badajoz itself, from the north, or from Zafra via the A-66, from the south. Pages 1:50,000 numbers 801 and 802 of the IGN.



## Description of the route

The suggested birdwatching route is composed of two parts, according to the different geographical location and, above all, ecological characteristics that define each part (lakes and steppe plains, respectively). **Lakes of La Albuera:** These endorheic (closed drainage) natural wetlands are the best representation of this type of habitat (temporary Mediterranean lakes) in Extremadura. The area called “Complejo Lagunar de La Albuera”, consists of a series of temporary Mediterranean lakes and ponds (Lagunas Grande, Llana, Marciega, Chica, del Burro, del Carril and other, smaller ones), small areas of saline steppe habitats and open *dehesa* of Holm oaks. It has been declared a Site of Community Importance (SIC) and an Area of International Importance for water birds (Ramsar site). Along with the agricultural plains between this town, Badajoz and Valverde de Leganés (see later) it also forms part of the SPA “Llanos y Complejo Lagunar de La Albuera”. The birdwatching route suggested to access the complex of lakes starts in La Albuera and can be done in half a day, partly by car, partly on foot. Take

the N-432 southwards from this town, towards Zafra, and after about 6 km, at kilometre point 29.400 (at this point there is an information panel about the natural area; 29S-694770-428368) turn left onto a small dirt track. Park your car by the road and walk straight along the track for about 2 km, which will take you to the centre of the complex of lakes formed by Lagunas de la Marciega, Laguna Grande and Laguna Llana, all of which are amongst the Holm oaks of Dehesa del Caballo. Next go back to your car and about 100 m further down the road you will find another track on the left that will take you to the lake Laguna Chica, about 1 km distance, going past the farmhouse Cortijo de las Nateras Altas. The lake called Laguna del Burro, which is very shallow, is reached by the road called Carril de las Vacas, which is also a left turn off the N-432, at kilometre point 27.300 (29S-693025-428479). Park your car by the road again and after walking for 1.7 km you will see the lake on the right. Other lakes belonging to this complex can be found next to the N-432, at kilometre points 31.500 (Laguna del Carril) and 33.000 (Laguna de La Gitana). **Steppe Plains of La Albuera-Valverde de Leganés:** the suggested birdwatching route (20 km) goes through these agricultural and pseudo-steppe plains and takes half a day (by car and on foot). Broadly speaking, it consists of the local road between the towns of La Albuera and Valverde de Leganés (BA-006; 15 km). When you reach the first town drive through it along the former N-432 and when you reach a cereal silo you will find the afore-mentioned local road on the left. From this point in the town, after 5700 m, when you reach a pig farm about 200 m from the road on the right, park your car and, on foot, turn right down the track called Carril del Conde (which leads off in both directions from the road, 29S-

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great Bustard</li> <li>• Little Bustard</li> <li>• Black-bellied Sandgrouse</li> <li>• Stone Curlew</li> <li>• Black-winged Kite</li> <li>• Great Crested Grebe</li> <li>• Little Grebe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Montagu's Harrier</li> <li>• Lesser Kestrel</li> <li>• European Roller</li> <li>• Western Orphean Warbler</li> <li>• Black-winged Stilt</li> <li>• Whiskered Tern</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common Crane</li> <li>• Hen Harrier</li> <li>• Golden Plover</li> <li>• Ducks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eurasian Spoonbill</li> <li>• Garganey</li> <li>• waders</li> </ul>

683726-428685). This livestock track will take you to the area known as **El Adobal**, a magnificent representation of the typical agro system that dominates this natural area, rain-fed crops (vineyards, cereals) and irrigated ones (alfalfa, sunflowers, etc.). We would recommend you to walk about 3-3.5 km, to a large irrigation pool on the right of the track (Charca de El Adobal), which is very close to the junction with the track Carril de las Lanas. Towards the left of the road, the track takes you to the spot called El Campillo-Valde-sevilla (2 km). Once you have finished these walking routes, go back to the road and drive towards Valverde de Leganés. After 3.2 km, and after a big left-hand bend, a new track leads off to the right (29S-680654-428723) that will lead you to a large half-ruined farm (Cortijo de la Campana; about 250 m from the road). You can stop and go for a walk at any time along this

track, and also enjoy the steppe habitat that is characteristic of the region. When you return to the road go towards Valverde de Leganés again (the end of this route; 6.5 km), stopping and walking a bit more should you so wish.



### Ornithological interest

**1) Lakes of La Albuera:** The community of aquatic birds that reside in this series of wetland areas over the course of the year is of high diversity and value in conservation terms, with different communities and/or species depending on the season. In total more than 150 species of birds have been recorded here, demonstrating the importance of this wetland system. In spring or the breeding season the typical species nest-

ing in the area are *Great Crested Grebe*, *Little Grebe*, *Common Coot*, *Gadwall* and *Mallard*. The community of breeding waders is important, with species such as *Black-winged Stilt*, *Collared Pratincole* and *Northern Lapwing* (with this being one of the few breeding sites of this species in the region), as well as *Whiskered Tern*. *Marsh Harrier* also breeds at the lake some years. In winter there are large populations of different species of wildfowl (*Greylag Goose*, *Common Teal*, *Pintail*, *Northern Shoveler*, *Eurasian Wigeon*, *Red-crested Pochard* and *Common Pochard*, which breed some years). The area is also a traditional area for *Common Crane* to winter and feed in (over 1000 individuals), using the lake Laguna Grande to roost. Passage migrants include some flocks of *Eurasian Spoonbill*, *Black and White Storks*, *Garganey* and waders (*sandpipers*, *Redshank*, *Ruff* etc.). In the Holm oak *dehesa* around the lakes there are breeding species such as *Black-winged Kite*, *Booted Eagle*, *Common Buzzard*, *Azure-winged Magpie*, *Western Orphean Warbler*, *Hoopoe*, as well as many other bird species.

**2) Plains of La Albuera-Valverde de Leganés:** The pseudo-steppe agro system here is one of the best representations of this type of environment in Extremadura, despite the small area it covers, with most "steppe bird" species having been recorded here. The birds that breed here include *Great Bustard* (250 birds in spring and over 1000 in winter), *Little Bustard*, *Black-bellied Sandgrouse*, *Stone Curlew*, *European*



Young Montagu's Harrier

*Roller*, *Montagu's Harrier*, *Lesser Kestrel*, *Calandra Lark* and *Short-toed Lark*. In winter the area also provides shelter for wintering groups of *Hen Harrier*, *Merlin* (with interesting communal roosts), *Northern Lapwing*, *Golden Plover*, *Skylark*, *Meadow Pipit*, among other species. In the few patches of *dehesa* and scattered Holm oaks still present in the area there is a large population of *Black-winged Kite* (one of the biggest in the region with 10-15 pairs) and *Long-eared Owl* also breeds in these cultivated *dehesas*.



### Best time to visit

This route can be done at any time of the year, except, maybe, the middle of the scorching summer. However,

Great Bustard



it's recommended to do it in spring (March-May) or winter (December-February). Bear in mind, however, that in the winter the state of the tracks is often very poor, due to the clayey nature of the land, mud and water. Also we should mention that it's only in years of normal rainfall, with plenty of rain in autumn and spring, that the lakes contain water throughout the rainy period; if not, they can remain completely dry for the whole year.



*Female Pin-tailed Sandgrouse drinking*



### Other environmental and cultural interest

**Environmental interest.** The **Ribera of Nogales-Los Limonetes**, which crosses the SPA, has been declared a SCI for the value of its indigenous fish and the good state of conservation of its riverside corridors (ash, oleander and spurge groves). The nearby lime-rich mountain ranges (**Sierra de Alor, Monsalud, María Andrés**, etc.) are home to botanical endemics and rich groups of orchids. Along the road from Valverde de Leganés to Badajoz there is an interesting **mixed forest of Holm and cork oaks and stone pines**, with abundant species of birds of interest (*storks, kites, Booted Eagle, Long-eared Owl, Tawny Owl*, etc.). Bada-

joz rubbish dump, on the same road, is another area with a large number and diversity of birds.

**Historical-cultural interest.** The historic areas of **Badajoz** (Arabic castle (Alcazaba), walls, medieval bridge, cathedral, churches, old centre, museums), **Olivenza** (Ajuda bridge, fortress, barracks, churches, Portuguese traditional and religious architecture, ethnographic museum) and **Zafra** (castle-palace, convents, plazas, traditional architecture) are worth visiting. In Valverde de Leganés and Barcarrota there are many **megalithic monuments** (dolmens and menhirs), which the respective town councils have published leaflets about for visitors.

*Texts: Casimiro Corbacho Amado*

*Dusk at the Lakes of La Albuera*







### Location and access

This route is in the centre of the province of Badajoz. Towns that can be used as reference points are Almendralejo, Alange, Oliva de Mérida and Hornachos. There are many easy ways to reach it: both from the A-5 Madrid-Badajoz (E-90) and the “Autovía de la Plata” (A-66). Pages 803, 804 and 830 of the IGN.



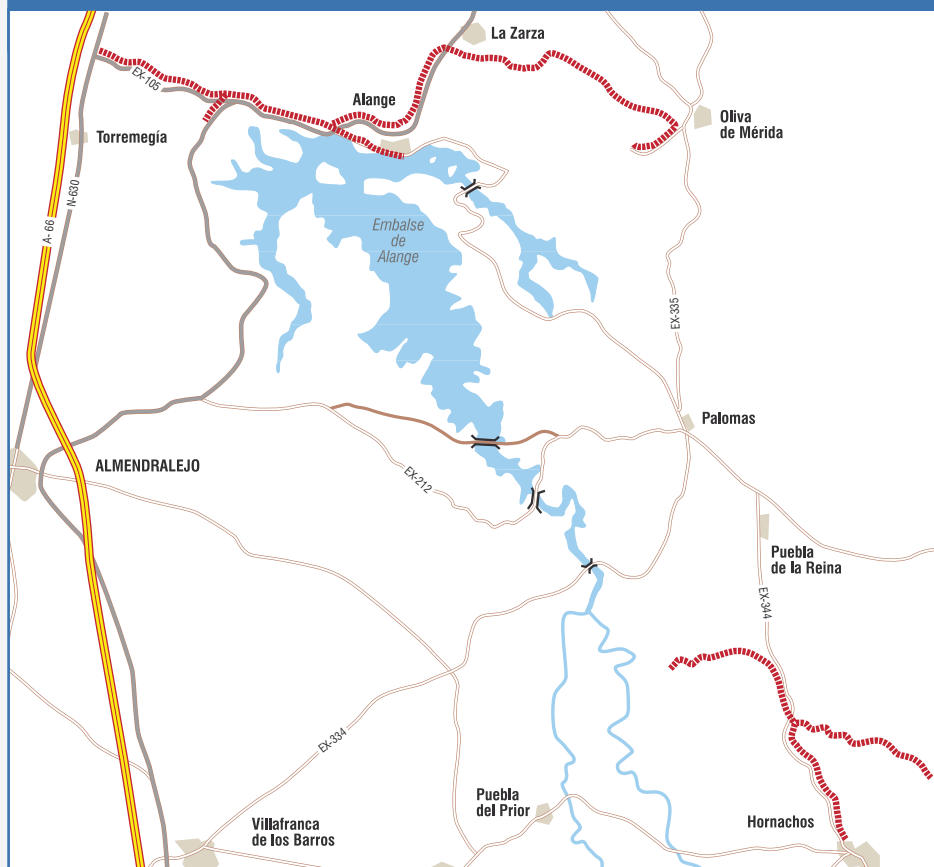
### Description of the route

The route suggested here is a long one, due to the places of ornithological interest being spread out and the links necessary between them. It is designed to be done by car, with short walks, over two whole days. You could start the route by visiting the “**Church de la Purificación de Almendralejo**”, a religious building declared an SPA as it is home to a large colony of *Lesser Kestrel* (over 100 pairs). Afterwards continue onwards along the historic road “Vía de la Plata” towards Mérida, crossing the fertile plain of Tierra de Barros between vineyards and olive groves. 2.5 km after the town of Torremejía and before the Puerto de Sevilla mountain pass that divides the mountain range turn right (EX-105: Alange-Don Benito). By this point you will already be in the foothills of the mountain ranges that make up the area to be visited in this route, the SPA of “**Embalse de Alange y Sierras Centrales de Badajoz**”. Specifically, you will be going round the **Sierra Grajera (Grande and Chica)**, covered by thick sun-loving bushes (mastics, wild olives, rock roses, etc.), after having left behind **Sierra Moneda**. As soon as you have passed this mountain range, a little over 4 km from the start of the road, you will reach a junction

at which you should turn right towards Almendralejo. Stop 500 m later, where you will find the **Lake of Melchor Gómez**, on the right, next to the road, before an enormous solar park. This small wetland area, covered by aquatic vegetation (*Scirpus*, *Eleocharis*, *Juncus*), only contains water after very wet winters. Next continue along the previous road and, just over 4 km further on, you will reach the enormous dam wall of **Alange Reservoir**; go across it and stop in the car park on the right, right under the crags of the **Hill of the Castle of Alange** (this point can also be easily reached straight from Mérida, via the EX-089 Mérida-Alange). At this perfect birdwatching spot we recommend you walk along the track that goes along the southern side of the castle to **Alange** (2 km). Along this track, which affords magnificent views of the reservoir, there is an **archaeological site** from the Calcolithic period that you could also stop at. There is also a good birdwatching walk along the road on top of the dam. Once you’ve finished here continue along the EX-105 towards **La Zarza** (6 km), after going round the northern side of the castle and then leaving behind the spurs of Sierra de Peñas Blancas on the right, whose opposite end is the next destination. Just before La Zarza and after crossing Calera Stream, turn right onto the town’s ring road (ZA-30), continue for 1.9 km and, at the highest point of the road (29S-742435-430013), where there is a turn off into the town down an asphalted road, turn right again, onto the road known as Camino Juan Bueno (“Janbueno”). This will take you to the **Mines of Tierrablanca** de La Zapatera (kaolin or sericitic slate, used to whitewash walls), a part of the route in which you can enjoy magnificent views of **Sierra de Peñas Blancas**, covered by olive groves in rows (or on slopes) and almond trees and stony



## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Griffon Vulture</li> <li>• Bonelli's Eagle</li> <li>• Golden Eagle</li> <li>• Eagle Owl</li> <li>• Blue Rock Thrush</li> <li>• Black Wheatear</li> <li>• Rock Bunting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Egyptian Vulture</li> <li>• Alpine Swift</li> <li>• Black-eared Wheatear</li> <li>• Whiskered Tern</li> <li>• Black-winged Stilt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alpine Accentor</li> <li>• Common Crane</li> <li>• Great Cormorant</li> <li>• Lesser Black-backed Gull</li> <li>• Black-headed Gull</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eurasian Spoonbill</li> </ul>

ground, crowned by quartzite crags. Once at the Mines, an enormous opencast mineral pit, a pair of small roads lead off on the right (29S-743796- 429979), but

continue along the main road (to the left), going between the mine's embankments. Once you have gone past these and the mine itself the road goes down op-

posite the Cave de la Zapatera in **Sierra de Juan Bueno** and narrows; keep on it for about 400 m until you reach a dirt track in a good state (29S-74422-430019). Turn right onto this track and continue to **Oliva de Mérida** (6 km), keeping the afore-mentioned mountain range always on your left, highly degraded by forest repopulations of eucalyptus. You will reach a road, at the exit of the town, with the old chapel "**Ermita del Espíritu Santo**", in ruins, opposite, in which there is a fine colony of Lesser Kestrel. Now turn right towards Palomas (EX-335), parallel to the **Cañada Real Leonesa Occidental** trail; after 2 km turn onto the route of the old road, crossing Higuereja Stream and stopping in the rest area beneath the crags of **Sierra Utrera** ("butrera"). As the name suggests (*butrera* means vulture nesting site) the mountain range is home to a large colony of vultures, as well as other large birds of prey (see later). After a well-deserved birdwatching stop continue along the road to Palomas (10 km), towards your destination: Sierra de Hornachos (25 km). If you wish, you could make a quick trip onto the sun-bathed areas, covered by magnificent wild olive groves between rocky crags. For this, after going over **Puerto de Palomas** mountain pass and

leaving behind the Chapel of San Isidro, a short distance (200 m) later a track leads off on the right from which you can enjoy spectacular and different views of Sierra de Peñas Blancas. Back on the road, when you reach Palomas go towards Puebla de la Reina (EX-210) and, from there, to Hornachos (EX-344). The natural area "**Sierra Grande de Hornachos**" (SPA, SCI and ARI), a birdwatching destination of the first order, has an exceptional richness of birds. We suggest two walks, over the two ranges that make up this magnificent mountain range: Sierra de Pinos and Sierra Grande. From Hornachos, at the lower part of the town, next to a pillar at the junction of several roads, take the EX-344 towards Puebla de la Reina. Then after 2.8 km take the track on the right (29S-75382-427412), 100 m before the entrance (on the left) to the Chapel of San Isidro, where you will find an information panel. Go 2.2 km along this track and when you reach a junction (29S-755364-4275325) turn right. This track (best done on foot), which affords magnificent views, will take you to the **Umbría de Sierra Grande**, covered by dense Mediterranean forest and scrubland, dotted with stony areas and crowned by enormous quartzite crags. You can continue along this track, using the wire fence that goes along it on the right as a reference (passing some tracks that lead off on the left) for 4-5 km, until you reach some attractive cork oak groves. Return along the road towards Puebla de la Reina, and after the mountain range crosses Bejarano Valley, providing pretty views, after a little over 4 km leave the road, turning left down the road signposted to the rural house Sierra del Mampar (29S-752791-4277720). Park at the edge of this road and walk around the spectacular **Sierra de Pinos**, marked out by numerous crags and covered by an impenetrable Mediterranean forest. Once you get back to your car this birdwatching route is finished. Of course, if you are coming from Puebla de la Reina these two routes can be done in reverse.

*Black Kite*



### Ornithological interest

The mountain ranges that occupy the centre of the province of Badajoz (Sierras de San Serván, Grajera, Peñas Blancas, del Conde-Vistalegre, Manchita and Hornachos), are authentic "ecosystem-islands" in a highly degraded agricultural environment, and boast a

**community of large birds of prey** as the main ornithological value. Throughout the route and at each one of the suggested observation points and/or walking routes (Hill of the Castle-Dam of Alange, Mines of Tierra Blanca, Sierra Utrera, Sierra Grande and Sierra de Pinos), you can see birds of prey. The populations of *Bonelli's Eagle* (10 pairs), *Golden Eagle* (9 pairs), *Egyptian Vulture* (8 pairs) and *Griffon Vulture* (over 100 pairs) are very important in conservation terms. Other important species (*Short-toed Eagle*, *Eagle Owl*, *Common* and *Lesser Kestrels*, *Eurasian Sparrowhawk*, etc.) as well as those that are of more general interest (*Black Kite*, *Booted Eagle*, *Common Buzzard*) can also be seen along the route. Other species of interest include *Black Wheatear*, *Black-eared Wheatear*, *Blue Rock Thrush*, *Rock Bunting*, *Western Orphea*, *Dartford* and *Subalpine warblers*, amongst others closely linked to rocky crags, Mediterranean forests and *dehesa*. In winter species such as *Alpine Accentor* appear, as well as a small population of *Common Crane* that feeds in the *dehesa* and roosts in the reservoirs. On the wall of the dam of Alange the biggest breeding colony of *Alpine Swift* in Extremadura is established (over 300 birds; and they are also present in some mountain crags in the area), as well as a large number of *House Martins*, *Eurasian Jackdaws*, etc. In the wetlands of the area, particularly Alange Reservoir (difficult to access as it is so large), a large group of *water birds* can be found throughout the whole year, but mainly in winter (grebes, rails, ducks, herons, gulls, terns, cormorants, etc.) but also during the breeding period (particularly colonial ducks and waders). *Black-winged Stilt*, *Little Grebe* and *Common Coot* regularly breed in the Lake of Melchor Gómez, and occasionally *Whiskered Tern*, *Collared Pratincole* and *Northern Lapwing*. The community is enriched by other species (chiefly waders) during the migration, which can also include *Eurasian Spoonbill*. In short, there is a great ornithological richness here, as befits a diverse and heterogeneous area.



*Black-winged Stilt*



## Other environmental and cultural interest

**Environmental interest.** There is another series of **Natural Areas of the Natura 2000 Network** in the area (SCIs Guadiana alto, River Matachel, River Palomillas; SPAs Colonia de primillas de la Iglesia de Guareña (*Lesser Kestrel*) and Cornalvo Natural Park; you can find more information at <http://www.extremambiente.es>). The area also has interesting botanical values, such as the best and almost only Spanish populations of the geranium "**Geranio de roca**" (*Erodium mouretii*), and excellent populations of **Orchids** and **Daffodils** (*Narcissus* spp.). **Molinos Reservoir** (Hornachos) is another area you could visit (roosting area for *Common Crane*, concentrations of *Black Stork*, *ducks*, etc. after the breeding season).

**Historical-cultural interest.** The mountain ranges mentioned have, without exception, one of the best collections of **schematic rock art** in the Southwest of Spain. There is a sign-posted route in La Zarza to visit the famous "**Rock paintings of La Calderita**". The historical areas or **monumental centres** of Mérida (World Heritage Site), **Alange** (Roman thermal springs-spa, Castle, parish church, chapels) and **Hornachos** ("Moorish enclave": Arabic castle (alcazaba), pillars and fountains, orchards and irrigation channels, ancestral houses, chapels) have outstanding historical interest. The **Mudejar churches** of Palomas, Puebla de la Reina and Hornachos are also worth visiting.

*Texts: Casimiro Corbacho Amado*



## Best time to visit

Spring is the perfect time to do this birdwatching route, for the richness of both the fauna and botanical species (see later). However, the middle of winter (December-February) also offers pleasant rewards.



### Location and access

La Serena is a region in the east of the province of Badajoz. Its main distinguishing features are the vast plains that dominate the landscape. The **River Zújar** and its tributaries cut across this plateau of slates, with a gently undulating relief. The plateau is flanked by a series of mountain ranges to the south and east, which are less than 950 m high and covered by dense vegetation of Mediterranean forest and scrubland.

It's best to follow the EX-104 to visit the area, using the town of Villanueva de la Serena as a reference point. This road goes through the region's main towns, including **La Coronada, Campanario, Castuera** and **Cabeza del Buey**. You can also reach the area from the N-430, via Acedera (BA-105, towards Orellana la Vieja), Navalvillar de Pela (EX-115, towards Orellana la Vieja) or Casas de Don Pedro (BA-137, towards Talarrubias and Puebla de Alcocer).



### Description of the route

This route is about 77 km long, of which 53 km are along roads in a good state and with little traffic, while the rest goes along tracks that are perfectly passable for a normal car.

**Section 1.** From Campanario to the EX-035. The route starts in the town of Campanario, which you can reach via the EX-104 from Villanueva de la Serena. Just before this road enters the town turn left onto the EX-349, which leads towards La Serena Reservoir. After 850 m you will find a junction with the EX-115 towards Orellana la Vieja, but continue straight on along the same road, which takes you into one of the most beautiful

steppe areas in La Serena. First you will pass the chapel "Ermita de Piedra Escrita" (km 5.5), then you will go over the River Guadalefra (km 6.1), finally reaching the EX-103. Turn left towards Orellana la Vieja and Puebla de Alcocer and after 1200 m you will find a right turn, continuing along the BA-035. After 3 km you will go past the ends of Zújar Reservoir and another 3 km later you will reach a junction at which you should turn right towards Cabeza del Buey (keeping on the BA-035).

**Section 2.** From the BA-035 to the chapel "Ermita de Belén". This section is 22 km long, along a very straight road that goes through pastures and crop fields. It is popularly known as the "Carretera de las Golondrinas" (swallow road). The road ends back at the EX-104, where you should turn right towards Castuera. After 3.7 km and once you have gone past the small village of Almorchón, you will find a turning on the right that leads to the Chapel of Belén.

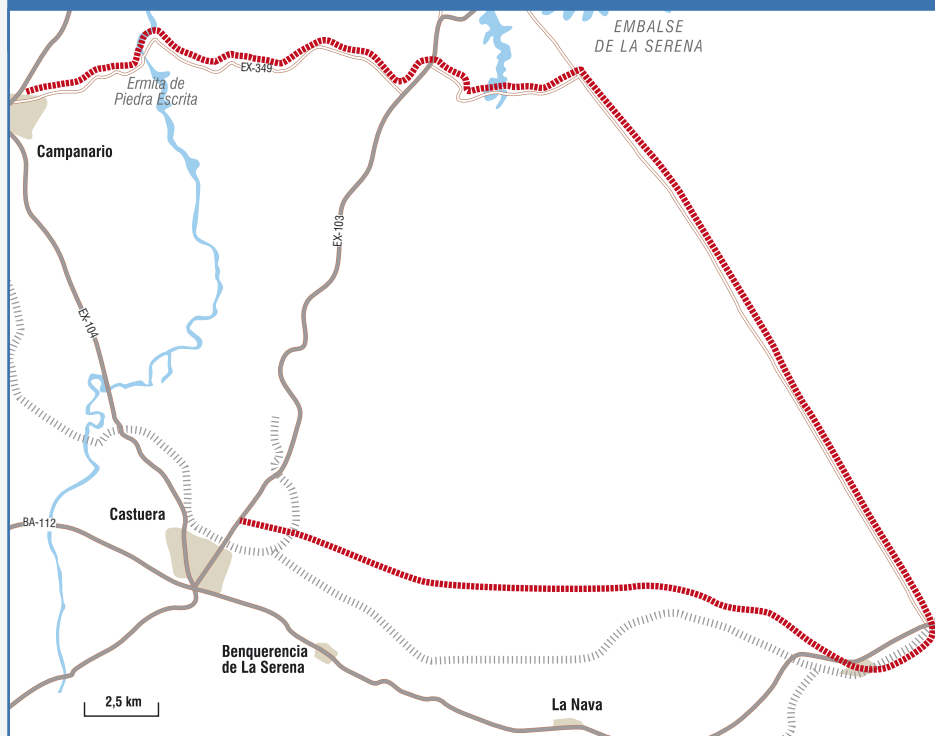
**Section 3.** From the Chapel of Belén to Castuera. From the Chapel of Belén the route continues along a dirt track for over 25 km, which you should keep going straight along. The first 5.5 km run parallel to a railway line, then it splits away from this to continue through pastures situated in the northern side of the mountain range. The track takes you to Castuera, ending at the EX-104, next to the town's cemetery.



### Ornithological interest

La Serena is, without doubt, one of the steppe areas of greatest value in the Iberian Peninsula, both for its size and the importance of its habitats and the species present. The birds associated with the pastures and rain-fed crops are superbly represented here, with some of

## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great Bustard</li> <li>• Little Bustard</li> <li>• Pin-tailed Sandgrouse</li> <li>• Black-bellied Sandgrouse</li> <li>• Bonelli's Eagle</li> <li>• Golden Eagle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black Stork</li> <li>• Egyptian Vulture</li> <li>• Lesser Kestrel</li> <li>• Montagu's Harrier</li> <li>• European Roller</li> <li>• Short-toed Lark</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lapwing</li> <li>• Golden Plover</li> <li>• Common Crane</li> <li>• Meadow Pipit</li> <li>• Skylark</li> <li>• Hen Harrier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern Wheatear</li> <li>• Black-eared Wheatear</li> <li>• Whinchat</li> </ul>

them reaching large populations with a great importance in terms of conservation. As a result of all this, it has been declared a Special Protection Area for birds (SPA); it is also the largest protected area in Extremadura, covering over 150,000 ha.

There are lots of possibilities of seeing steppe birds in **sections 1 and 2**, as these go through some of the best

areas of plains. *Thekla Lark*, much more abundant than *Crested Lark* in this area, is one of the most frequent species, present throughout the route. It's easy to see a lot of birds perched on the wire fences, stone walls and "dientes de perro" (dog's teeth – the name given to the quartzite outcrops in the region, which are over 2 m high in some cases), such as *Black-eared*

*Wheatear*, *Southern Grey Shrike*, *Corn Bunting*, *Hoopoe*, *Little Owl* and *Red-legged Partridge*. The lack of trees means that the birds use electricity poles and cables a lot to perch on, a good way of seeing *Lesser Kestrel*, *Common Kestrel*, *Common Buzzard*, *Short-toed Eagle* and *European Roller* as you go along the route. The *Calandra Lark* can be found in the pastures and fallow fields, given away by its song and rapid flight, and it's also possible to find the *Short-toed Lark* in some areas, mainly in fallow fields. Given the scarce tree cover you should pay special attention to the areas that have bulrush or thyme groves or bushes (brooms, wild olives, hawthorns, Iberian Pears, brambles), where you will find other species, such as *Goldfinch*, *Linnet*, *Zitting Cisticola*, *Common Stonechat*, *Melodious*, *Spectacled*, *Sardinian* and *Western Orphean Warblers* and *Rufous Bush Robin* (the latter two particularly in patches of wild olive). Colonies of *Montagu's Harrier* have established themselves in some cereal crops, in which you may also find pairs of *Marsh Harrier*.

*Pin-tailed* and *Black-bellied Sandgrouse* are also frequent in both sections, two emblematic species of steppe areas, although to see these birds it's best to stop your car and try to hear them in flight, as their call is very loud and easily recognisable. At dusk it's easier to see or hear the *Stone Curlew* which is much more abundant than you would imagine.

*Great Bustards* could surprise you at any moment along the route, particularly in the section of the BA-035, where there are many possibilities in spring of seeing them in display. *Little Bustards* are more spread

out in the area and in the breeding period you should look for them in the crop fields and less grazed pastures. They are much more easy to find if you listen out for the males giving out their strange call to mark their territory.

You can see species such as *Mallard*, *Little Ringed Plover*, *Green Sandpiper*, *Common Sandpiper*, *Common Kingfisher* and *White Wagtail* in the rivers and streams you will find along the way. In larger rivers (Zújar y Guadalefra) *Little Egret*, *Little Tern*, *Black-headed Gull* and *Lesser Black-backed Gull* are also present. In the summer months large numbers of species usually gather in the pools that still have water and it's worthwhile dedicating time to checking these spots.

Old buildings are also interesting sites for birds, as their hollow spaces and roofs are used by many species to nest in, with colonies of *Lesser Kestrel* establishing themselves here, as well as pairs of *White Stork*, *Little Owl*, *Scops owl*, *European Roller*, *Eurasian Jackdaw*, *Hoopoe*, *Spotless Starling* and even *Red-billed Chough*. *Cattle Egret* usually patrol around the areas with livestock.

*Northern Wheatear*, *Black-eared Wheatear*, *Whinchat*, *Willow Warbler* and *Tawny Pipit* are abundant on passage. But the most spectacular change in the composition of the birds present occurs in winter, when large populations of species such as *Golden Plover*, *Northern Lapwing*, *Hen Harrier*, *Meadow Pipit*, *Skylark* and *White Wagtail* come to the pastures. Some of the resident species become gregarious in this period and move around in flocks, such as the *Spanish Sparrow*, *Goldfinch*, *Linnet* and *Calandra Lark*. Although it's usually found in the *dehesa* the *Common Crane* establishes its roosting areas in small pools in the middle of the plains.

**Section 3** of the route starts at the chapel "Ermita de Belén" and goes through pastures and crop fields but along most of the route you also have views of the northern side of the Sierra de Tiros, which extends from the vicinity of Almorchón to Castuera. The mountain ranges are covered by dense vegetation, with Mediterranean forest (with Holm and cork oaks) predominant in some areas and rock rose patches in others and open *dehesa* normally appearing at the lowest parts of its slopes. Large quartzite crags stand out along the mountain tops. This complex network of habitats notably enriches the composition of the bird

*Thekla Lark*







*Lesser Kestrel*

should always keep your distance.

communities, with typical forest species establishing themselves (*Black Kite, Common Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Mistle Thrush, Nightingale, Eurasian Jay, Azure-winged Magpie, Woodchat Shrike, Wren, Rock Sparrow, Common Chaffinch and Hawfinch*) and those representative of crags, such as *Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear, Crag Martin* and *Alpine Accentor* (in winter). The huge importance of the mountain ranges for the nesting of *Bonelli's Eagle, Golden Eagle, Egyptian Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Eagle Owl, Peregrine Falcon* and *Black Stork* is worth highlighting, species that find a safe refuge in the quartzite rock faces and feed in the steppe areas.



### Other environmental and cultural values

The **Centre of Interpretation of Nature “Comarca de La Serena”** is in **Castuera**, which has diverse information panels and an interesting audiovisual. It's next to the “*Museo del Turrón*” (fudge museum), a typical product of this town, which we also recommend you to visit. In Castuera there are also several factories of the famous “*Queso de La Serena*” cheese, with denomination of origin, produced in a traditional way from raw Merino sheep's milk.

When you have finished the route you could continue along the EX-104 towards **Cabeza del Buey** and visit the **castles of Benquerencia de la Serena and Almorchón** (of Almohade origin, from the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries), and even carry on to the castle of **Zarzacapilla**. Thanks to their exceptional locations you can enjoy extraordinary views from them.

After Benquerencia de la Serena you reach Puerto Mejoral, a small town in which ADENEX has a **Nature Centre** and an excellent hide to watch the passage of the cranes when they fly from the *dehesa* to their roosting areas at dusk.

*Texts: Atanasio Fernández García*



### Best time to visit

This route never disappoints at any time of the year, although you can see a greater number of birds in spring and winter. In summer the birds are more active at dawn and you should avoid doing the route in the middle of the day. The yellow and ochre hues of the parched pastures are also spectacular.

We would recommend you to keep to the roads and tracks and not go into the pastures and cereal fields. This precaution is even more important in spring, as you could disturb the birds that nest in these habitats. When you see groups of Great Bustards displaying you



### Location and access

The route is in the *dehesas* of Jerez de los Caballeros, in the southwest of the province of Badajoz, where you can find one of the largest and best-conserved forest masses of Holm and cork oaks in the Iberian Peninsula. The suggested routes start from the town of Jerez de los Caballeros, which can be reached from the north and south via the N-435; from the east and west via the EX-112, from the A-66 (Zafra) and Villanueva del Fresno, respectively.



### Description of the route

The route goes over a mix of asphalted roads and dirt tracks, and is about 105 km long, of which only 10 km are on tracks. The suggested route starts from the town of **Jerez de los Caballeros** and ends back at it. It's designed to be done by car in one day, stopping and going for short walks at the most interesting observation points. Apart from the irrigated crops in **Ardila** and **Valuengo Reservoir**, the route mainly goes through landscapes dominated by Holm and cork oaks, in single species or mixed expanses, forming open woodland or *dehesa* or denser and more wooded formations, often accompanied by Iberian Pears. This natural region of the mountain ranges of Jerez de los Caballeros reveals the essence of Extremadura's countryside in all its splendour: the *dehesa*. A vast sea of Holm and cork oaks with numerous mature forests in an excellent state of conservation carpets the undulating relief of the Extremaduran spurs of Sierra Morena. Together with the neighbouring Andalusian regions it constitutes the biggest continuous expanse of

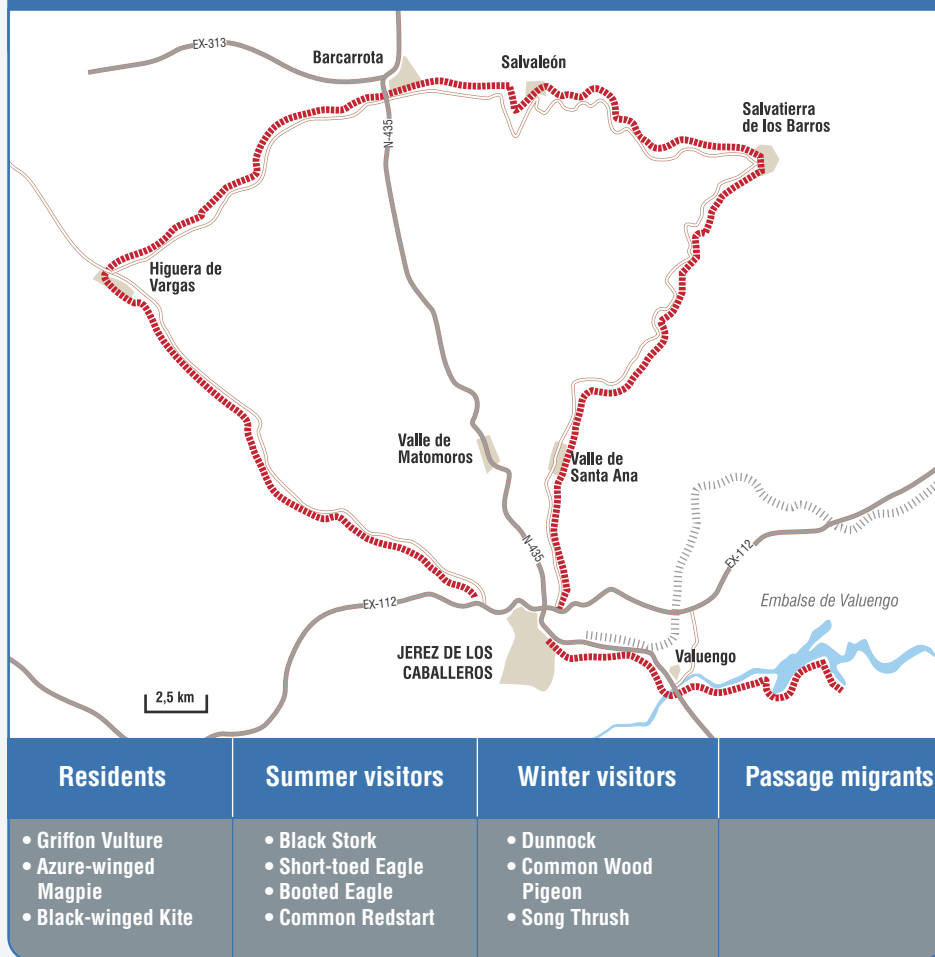
sclerophyllic (drought-tolerant) forest in the southwest of Spain. In fact, this region is the main reserve of indigenous trees in Extremadura, with about 350,000 ha, which represents 40% of the total wooded area in the region; about 100,000 ha belong to the *dehesas* of Jerez de los Caballeros. The quality of its forests and *dehesas* and the richness of the breeding species, such as the *Black Stork*, have made it deserving of its declaration as a Special Protection Area for birds.

The route starts in the town of **Jerez de los Caballeros**, taking the N-435 towards Fregenal de la Sierra. Turn left before you cross the bridge over the River Ardila, at point (X:0699392, Y: 4241573), onto the road that leads to the town of Valuengo. From here take the road on the right at point (X:0700264, Y: 4242231) to Valuengo Reservoir.

When you reach the reservoir, from the wall downstream, you can see *Grey Heron*, *Little Egret* and *Great Cormorant* fishing or sunning themselves on the slates. With a bit of luck and patience it's quite possible to see an *Otter* playing in the water. From here continue along a dirt track that goes around the reservoir, affording views of wide areas and corners where you can see large wintering concentrations of duck (*Mallard*, *Eurasian Wigeon*, *Northern Shoveler*) as well as *Common Coot*, *Great Cormorant*, *Great Crested Grebe* and *Little Grebe*. A large group of *Great Cormorant* roost in the eucalyptuses on the opposite bank and at the end of summer it's possible to see groups of *Black Stork* gathered together before undertaking their migratory journey back to Africa.

The route ends at the end of the farm La Parrilla, from where you should return to Jerez de los Caballeros via the same route. From here take the EX-112 towards **Oliva de la Frontera** before turning right towards the

## Sketch of the route and selected species



town of **Higuera de Vargas** at point (X:0691600, Y: 4244694). The close relationship between wildlife and traditional production systems in balance with the environment is clearly evident along this route. The benign winter temperatures make any walk through the *dehesa* very pleasant, where you can often see the pruning teams and charcoal kilns, laborious constructions used for the traditional production of excellent quality charcoal that has made the town of **Zahinos** famous. Along with this is the true source of the farming richness of the towns of these mountain ranges: the

Iberian pig, whose time in the mountains is critical for its fattening up and the refinement of its cold meats and hams, popularly known as "*pata negra*". As you proceed you will see *Azure-winged Magpies*, strangely very scarce, and *Lesser Spotted Woodpecker* and *Common Redstart*, an uncommon summer breeding bird that has its main population in this area of Extremadura, in the more mature, dense and better conserved forests. When you reach **Higuera de Vargas** turn left onto the EX-311 towards the N-435 and from here, turn right towards the town of **Barcarrota**. From

here take the road towards the towns of **Salvaleón** and **Salvatierra de los Barros**, a famous pottery town that is worth visiting. The scenery along the route is spectacular, as it goes along the shady side of “**Sierra de Peña Utrera**”, with some huge cork and gall oaks and beautiful views towards the valleys surrounding the “**Sierra de Valbellido**”, on whose rocky crags you can see *Griffon Vultures*. Once you reach Salvatierra take the BA- 3021 towards **Valle de Santa Ana** and the N-435, probably the most spectacular part of the whole route. For a little over 25 km the road goes through a tree-covered landscape in which it isn't uncommon to see *Black Stork* gliding to lower heights or fishing in some stream or pool in a *dehesa*.



### Ornithological interest

The Holm and cork oaks are home to rich communities of birds, being of special interest for endangered species such as the *Black Stork*, which finds seclusion in these vast wooded areas during the breeding period. In winter a small fraction of the population remains here, in pairs or small groups scattered around the innumerable livestock pools in the area, and in summer striking post-breeding concentrations gather before the migration back to sub Saharan Africa. In spring the area

welcomes *Booted Eagle*, *Short-toed Eagle* and other summer visitors from Africa, along with a long list of thousands of small birds that go unnoticed, hidden in the branches of the trees. The noisy *Azure-winged Magpies* are very common in the Holm oak groves, where they establish their breeding colonies, as are *White Stork*, *Common Wood Pigeon*, *Common Cuckoo*, *Mistle Thrush*, *Spotless Starling* and *Hoopoe*. Over the years the hundred-year-old Holm and cork oaks of the most mature forests give refuge in the holes of their trunks and branches to a huge number of animal species. As a result nocturnal birds are particularly abundant, such as *Tawny Owls* and *Barn Owls* and mammals such as the *Genet* and *Garden Dormouse*. These mature forests are the favoured habitat for the *Lesser Spotted Woodpecker* and *Common Redstart*. Valuengo Reservoir has large wintering concentrations of *Great Crested Grebe* and the eucalyptuses on its banks are used as a winter roost by *Great Cormorants*. One of the first records of this species as a breeding bird was in 1993.



### Best time to visit

This route can be done at any time of the year. As with other routes spring is the best season, with good temperatures during the day and the return of the summer visitors: *Black Stork*, *Booted Eagle*, *Short-toed Eagle*, etc. Spring is also the breeding period, and as a general recommendation for all the routes you must not stray from the established route to avoid disturbing the birds during this sensitive period. It is very hot in summer, so make sure you drink plenty of fluids and protect yourself properly from the sun, avoiding the middle hours of the day, which are also less favourable for watching the birds.

*Booted Eagle*



### Other environmental and cultural interest

- **Historical-Artistic Ensemble** of Jerez de los Caballeros
- **Pozo de la nieve**, **Castle** and **pottery museum** of Salvatierra de los Barros.

*Texts: Víctor Manuel Pizarro Jiménez*



*Black-winged Kite*



# 19 Arroyo-Conejos Reservoir and Campiña Sur



## Location and access

The towns that act as reference points for this route are Llerena and Azuaga (start and end of the route) in the south of the province of Badajoz, both of which are on the N-432 (Badajoz-Granada). The area is easily reached from the “Autovía de la Plata” (A-66), turning off to these towns when you reach Zafra. Pages 1:50,000 numbers 855, 856, 877 and 878.



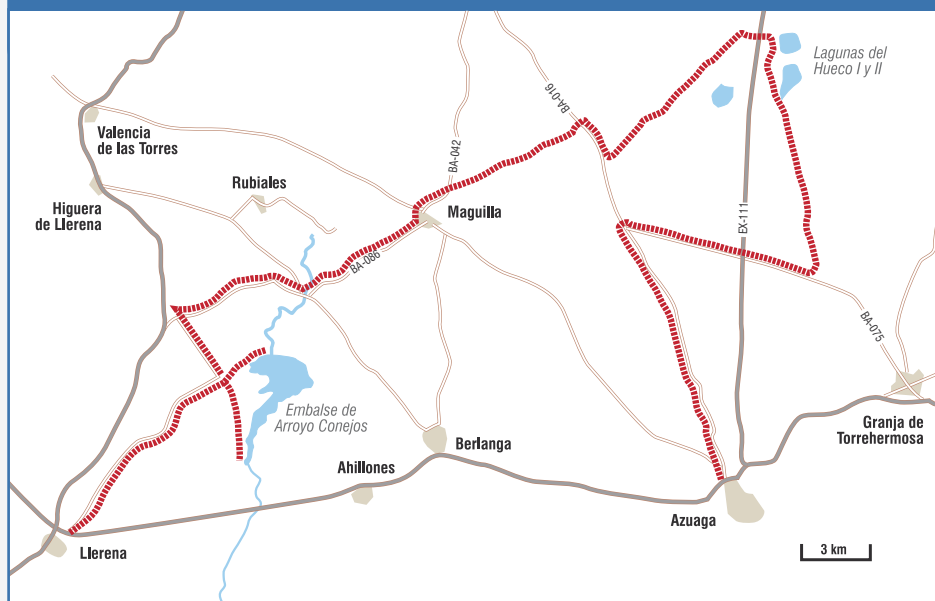
## Description of the route

The route goes through the SPA “**Campiña Sur y Embalse de Arroyo Conejos**”, an enormous plain used for growing cereal crops (+250,000 ha) in the south of Extremadura, which is very important for its populations of birds, particularly steppe and aquatic species. The suggested route is long and thorough, a little over **80 km**, designed to be done by **car** in one **whole day**. It starts in **Llerena**, where you should take the local road (Carretera de los Labradores or del Pantano) that leads to the dam wall of Arroyo Conejos or Llerena Reservoir (12.5 km). We suggest you visit the end of the reservoir as well, for which you have to go back along this road for 2.8 km until you reach a crossroads (30S-242988-4244234); at this point turn left and after 3.5 km you will reach the course of Conejos Stream and the end of the Reservoir. Then return to the crossroads but this time keep going straight on, until you reach the end of the road (2.5 km.) and **Caserío de Casas de Pila** (30S-241322-4246132), a typical example of the rural houses of La Campiña. Once there, turn right down a small local road, the BA-086 (Llerena-Maguilla), the first part of which runs along the

trail “**Cañada Real Soriana**”. After crossing the *dehesa* “**Dehesas de Las Tiendas, Casablanca and Malajuncia**”, which support large populations of *Common Cranes* in winter, and travelling for 6.5 km, you will reach a crossroads of small local roads right at the point that the Conejos stream flows by, downstream of the dam. Once you have reached this point go towards the small town of Maguilla; just after taking this road you will leave behind you the house **Cortijo del Tío Piche** on top of a hill on the left and some disused mines. After driving for 6.5 km between olive groves, vineyards and cereals and crossing the stream “**Arroyo de las Veguillas**”, lined by a magnificent elm grove that has been declared a SCI, you will reach the aforementioned town. Once in **Maguilla** and after you have gone through the town, take the road Campillo de Llerena (BA-042). 1.5 km along this road, when you reach a large open bend (30S-253122-425145) an asphalted road leads off on the right (Carrera or Camino de Zalamea), which you should go down until you reach an intersection (6.5 km) with the road **Campillo-Azuaga** (BA-016). During this part of the route and until you reach the end you will be crossing a vast plain and fertile agricultural land (olive groves, vineyards and cereals), with small areas of Holm oak *dehesa*, dotted with country houses and whitewashed pigeon lofts. At any point along this route it's possible to see steppe birds (*Great Bustard*, *Little Bustard*, *Black-bellied Sandgrouse*, *harriers*, etc.) or flocks of *Common Crane* (both in the *dehesa* and in the middle of the plains), so we would recommend you look around the vast area at length in search of these species, stopping whenever you choose. Once on the road mentioned earlier turn right, towards Azuaga, and after 2.8 km (30S-259756-4252775) leave this inter-town road, turning left onto



## Sketch of the route and selected species



Residents	Summer visitors	Winter visitors	Passage migrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great Bustard</li> <li>• Little Bustard</li> <li>• Black-bellied Sandgrouse</li> <li>• Stone Curlew</li> <li>• Black-winged Kite</li> <li>• White Stork</li> <li>• Red-billed Cough</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gull-billed Tern</li> <li>• Little Tern</li> <li>• Collared Pratincole</li> <li>• Black-winged Stilt</li> <li>• Montagu's Harrier</li> <li>• Lesser Kestrel</li> <li>• European Roller</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common Crane</li> <li>• Hen Harrier</li> <li>• Merlin</li> <li>• Golden Plover</li> <li>• Ducks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garganey</li> <li>• Black-eared Wheatear</li> </ul>

an asphalted road (**Carretera de Palomero or Pista de los Alcornoques**). This road is a little over 7.5 km long and will take you to another road (EX-111: Azuaga-Zalamea de la Serena) after turning right within its vicinity, when the road crosses a dirt track (30S-266159-4256465). Just before you reach the turning you will cross a **cork oak copse**, with mature trees, planted several decades ago, an atypical scene in these plains of cereal crops. When you reach the EX-111 and have crossed it take the track that starts right opposite the crossroads; after going 250 m along this turn right at the first crossroads with another track you

find (30S-26654-428368), taking this new track southwards. Where the road crosses these tracks and in the surrounding area you will find several temporary lakes (**Lagunas del Huevo I and II, del Lentiscal, Tres Chicas, Juan Andrés**), another typical feature of La Campiña and very important, although in most instances they have been highly altered by drainage processes, agriculture, mismanagement, etc. In any case, after periods of heavy rainfall they can shelter interesting species of water birds (see later), particularly during winter and on passage. Once on the track follow it for 10 km until it ends at the local road BA-075 that



*Pin-tailed Sandgrouse flying*

leads from **Granja de Torrehermosa** to the roads previously mentioned (EX-111 and BA-016). In this last section of the route you will have crossed some of the most favoured areas in the whole region for steppe birds in general and *Great Bustards* in particular. Once on the road mentioned before, right at the junction where you find another lake (**Laguna del Aiguacil**) turn right, following the road for 4.5 km until you reach a small *dehesa* (**Dehesa de Llera**, a favourite haunt of *Common Crane*) where this road crosses that of Azuaga-Zalamea. Once here you have two options, depending on whether your “ornithological expectations” have already been fulfilled or not; you can turn left towards Azuaga (9 km) to finish the route in this town or you can go straight on, continuing your birdwatching route a little further. If you choose the second option, after crossing the EX-111, keep going straight on along the same local road for 5.5 km, until you get back to the road of Campillo (BA-016). Once here, and after crossing another good area for *Great Bustards*, turn left onto this road and then carry on to the final desti-



### Ornithological interest

nation of this route, the town of **Azuaga** (12 km). If you wish you could make small diversions off the suggested route and back again at some of the other junctions with main roads along the route (we strongly advise you not to take secondary roads due to their bad state, especially after it has rained recently).

There are many and varied ornithological attractions that are worth highlighting in this region in the south of Extremadura. The Arroyo-Conejos Reservoir is another of Extremadura’s wetland areas that has been classified as being of great importance for **water birds**. The community of colonial species is important during the breeding season, which regularly nests on the reservoir’s islands: *Gull-billed Tern*, *Collared Pratincole*, *Little Tern* and *Black-winged Stilt*. Along with these species *Great Crested Grebe*, *Little Grebe*, *Gadwall*, *Mallard*, *Common Coot*, etc. also breed in the area. In winter this water body is used by large groups of water birds, including *Greylag Goose*, *Common Teal*, *Northern Shoveler*, *Eurasian Wigeon*, *Red-crested Pochard* and *Common Pochard*. During passage species such as *Eurasian Spoonbill*, *Garganey* (particularly in the spring passage), large groups of *White Stork* and different species of **waders** occur, both in the reservoir and in the temporary lakes dotted around the cereal fields of La Campiña. *Common Crane* makes great use of the *dehesa* and plains (feeding areas) as well as the wetlands (roosting areas). In terms of numerical importance La Campiña is the second most important area for this bird in Extremadura, supporting flocks of more than 10,000 individuals. In this respect Arroyo-Conejos Reservoir can provide a perfect site to watch the cranes coming back to their roost from the *dehesas*, which are located to the west of the reservoir. You will

*Little Grebe*





Lesser Kestrel

get excellent views of this noisy and spectacular event from its wall. As regards the **steppe bird species**, together with the Plains of Cáceres and La Serena, La Campiña Sur is one of the main refuges in Extremadura for these. As breeding birds the presence of *Great Bustard* (over 500 individuals and over 1000 in winter), *Little Bustard*, *Black-bellied Sandgrouse*, *Stone Curlew*, *European Roller*, *Montagu's Harrier*, *Calandra Lark* and *Short-toed Lark* are noteworthy. Throughout winter *Hen Harrier*, *Merlin*, *Northern Lapwing*, *Golden Plover*, *Skylark*, *Meadow Pipit*, among other species, occur. *Lesser Kestrel*, abundant throughout the region, has established large breeding colonies in urban areas (the colony of the Church of Llerena has been declared a SPA) and in rural buildings, along with *European Roller* in the latter. *Red-billed Chough* is another characteristic and abundant species in the area, closely linked to the former lead mines, now disused. Lastly, there are interesting species of birds linked to the dispersed **dehesa copses**, such as, apart from the *Common Cranes* already mentioned, *Black-winged Kite*, *Azure-winged Magpie* and *Long-eared Owl*.



### Best time to visit

Although this route can be done at any time of the year, we would recommend doing it in spring (March-May) or in winter (December-February), but taking special care in this period due to the bad state of the roads (mud and water).



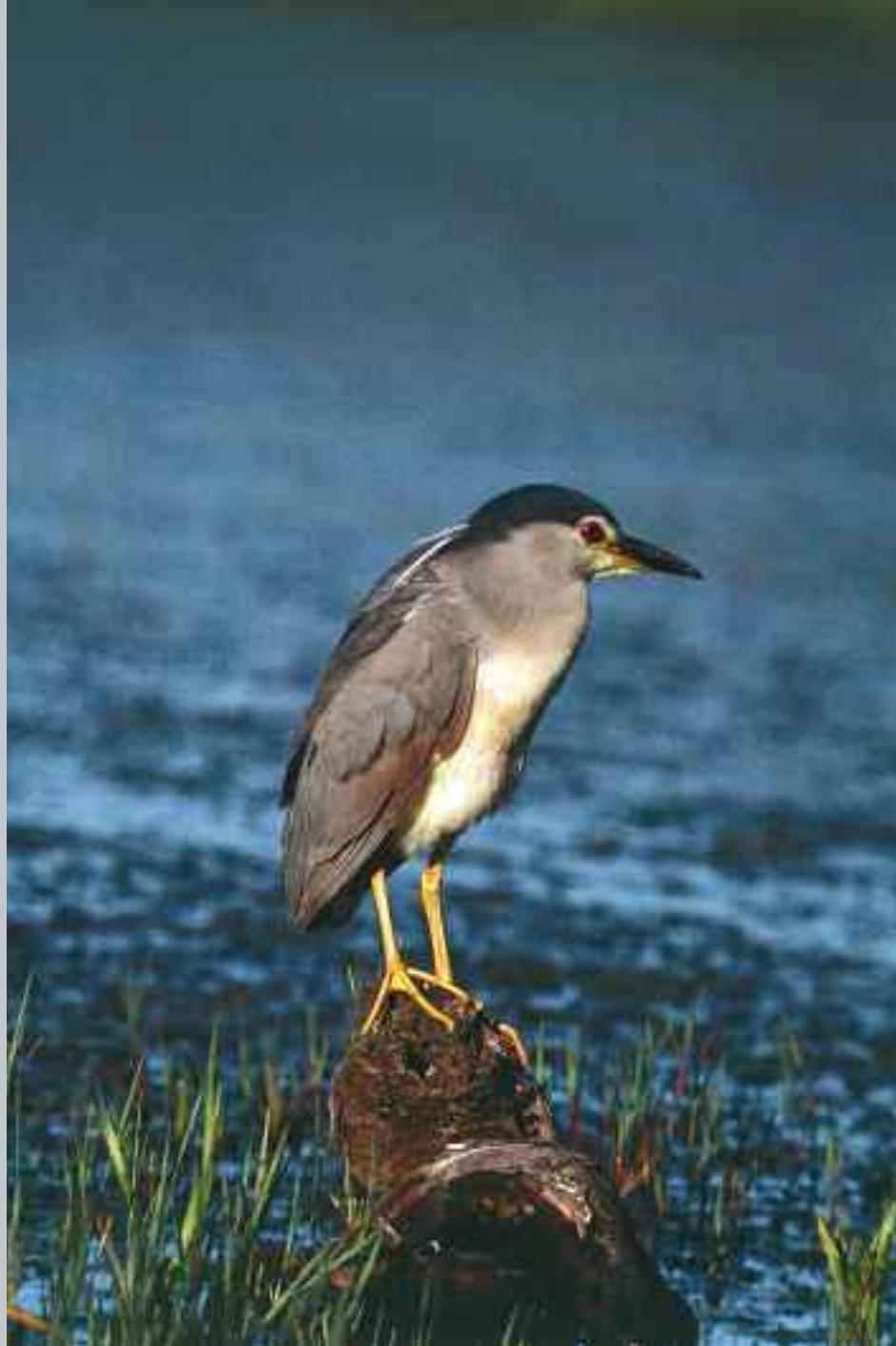
### Other environmental and cultural interest

**Environmental interest.** In the region or the surrounding area you can find several **Natural Areas of the Natura 2000 Network** in Extremadura, such as the SCIs of the upper sections of the headwaters of the Rivers Matachel, Retín and Bembézar; the Elm grove of the Veguillas stream (Maguilla) and the Sierras de Bienvenida and Capitana (Bienvenida). The "**Mine de la Jayona**" (Fuente del Arco) has been declared a Natural Monument, having been restored and prepared for visits (more information at <http://www.extremambiente.es>).

Lastly, **Sierra del Recuero** and the spurs of Sierra Morena (Azuaga) are home to large birds of prey.

**Historical-cultural interest.** Monumental centres of Llerena (Church of Nuestra Señora de Granada, Plaza Mayor, Mudejar houses, walls) and Azuaga (Castle of Miramontes, Church of Nuestra Señora de la Consolación, chapels, ancestral houses). Mudejar style churches of Granja de Torrehermosa, Berlanga and Valverde de Llerena. Impressive examples of the area's Roman and Arabic past are the **Theatre and Roman city of Regina** (Casas de Reina) and the **Arabic castle (Alcazaba) of Reina**, respectively. In Cardenchoa, a municipal district of Azuaga, there are several megalithic monuments, including a menhir within the urban area itself.

*Texts: Casimiro Corbacho Amado*



*Black-crowned Night Heron*

## NOTES

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*Common Chaffinch*



## NOTES

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