

Río Pedro gorges



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Location and access

105km southwest of Soria city, in the Tierra de Ayllón. From Soria take the N-122 to San Esteban de Gormaz and then the N-110 nearly as far as Ayllón in Segovia province. Before reaching Ayllón take the road on the left signposted Tiermes. Head for Cuevas de Ayllón and/or Ligos. The area is 150km from Madrid on the Autovía de Burgos (A-1).

Status: No special protection. Within IBA 076, Tiermes-Caracena, part of the SEO/Birdlife Important Bird Area network.

Terrain: Karstic gorges among slopes covered with Mediterranean scrub and young Holm Oak and Juniper copses. Good riverine woods.

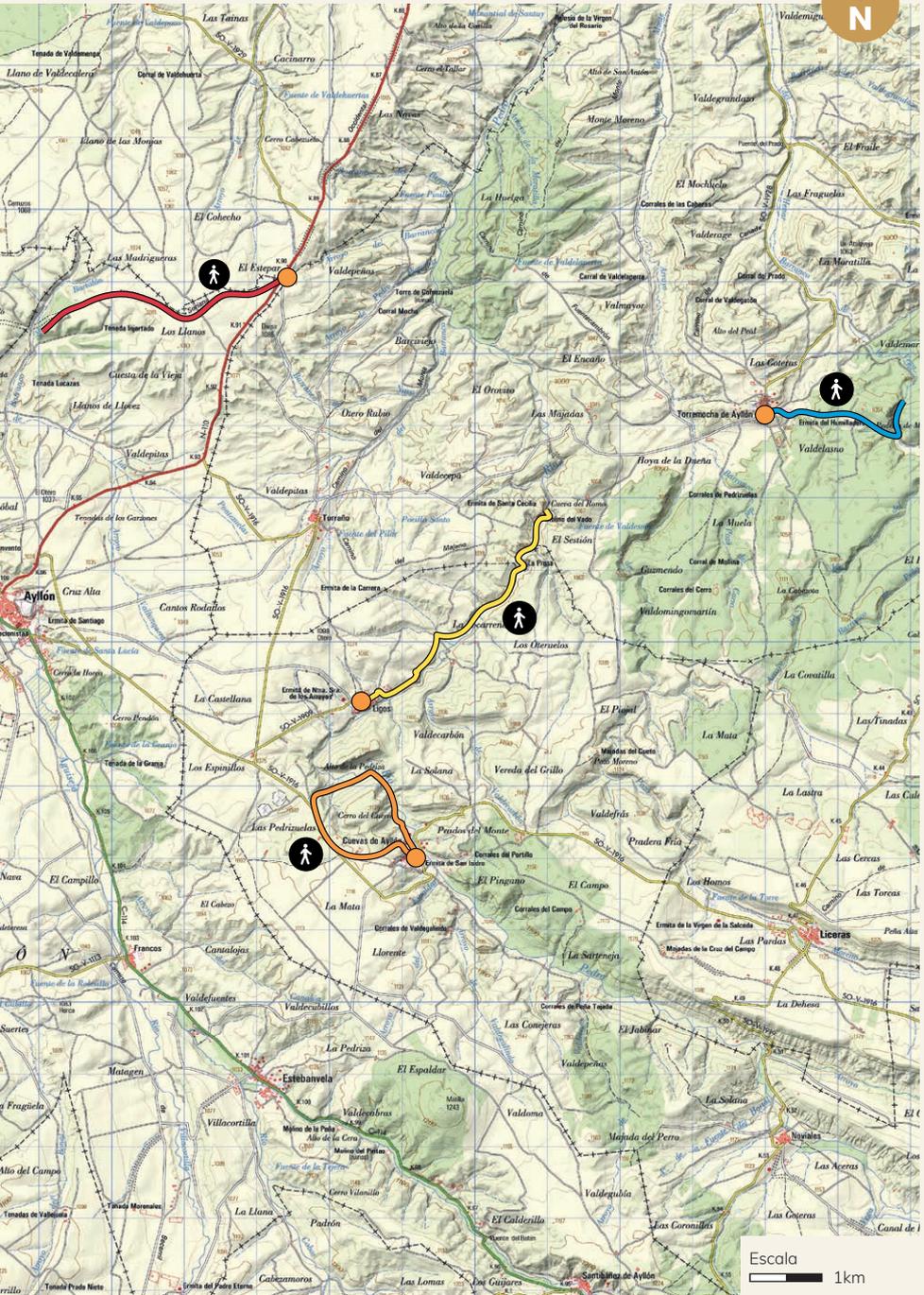
Access by: Own vehicle.

Ease of access: Medium. There are no roads or tracks at various points of the gorges so prevailing conditions will determine accessibility.

Visit duration: Very variable. Lengthy for extensive visits taking in all the diverse gorges. Visits of one or two hours to specific points are feasible.

Timing: The gorges and valleys are best visited in spring.

Comments: Tracks tend to be in poor condition so particular care is needed during the rainy season. Take care especially during the Roe Deer hunting season – essentially all spring days – by wearing conspicuous clothing, not camouflage. This will make little difference to birding provided you are quiet and do not approach nests.



- Itinerary 1
- Family itinerary A
- Itinerary 2
- Family itinerary B
- Itinerary on foot
- Itinerary by car
- Start Itinerary

Site description and itineraries

The year 1833 would have been a bad year for an imaginary Sorian 'nationalist' since it was when the minister Javier de Burgos decided to redraw provincial boundaries more in accord with the times. He established the boundaries that exist to this day. In this process Soria lost much territory in the north – Cameros – and to the south – the Duchy of Medinaceli, but gained parts of Burgos and Segovia. In particular, this ancient land of Ayllón became part of Soria province, for reasons that remain unclear.

Such considerations mean nothing to the wildlife and the enchanting nature of these landscapes. Here you find one of the most attractive of the gorges that descend from the Iberian System into the Duero depression. The area offers small meadows, Juniper and Holm Oak woods and expanses of Everlasting Plants (*Helichrysum* sp.) with beautiful stands of Black Poplars, Aspens and White Poplars in the gorge bottoms. Once the river Pedro has crossed the village of Cuevas de Ayllón and its surrounding red sandstones, so characteristic of the basal platform of the Sierra de Pela, it reaches the Cretaceous limestones of the Ligos pavements, one of the grandest geological formations to be seen in Soria.

The river changes course at Ligos through nearly 90 degrees, from west to north, heading for the Duero. Before this it runs through a series of cuttings comprising a small gorge that starts at Ligos but is more striking in the Torraño hinterland, at the Vado windmill, or Torraño windmill as it is popularly known.

We propose two routes, to be followed wholly or in part as desired. Unless otherwise stated, routes here and elsewhere are intended for exploration on foot.

1 **The first leaves Cuevas de Ayllón**
on a track running parallel to the left bank of the river. Here you will notice that the river bank is hard to follow because a good part of the tracks and paths have been worn away. It is only impassable when the river is very high, however. You reach a point opposite the Ligos pavement after about one kilometre. A road on the left bank

ascends the slope and joins the local road, along which you can return to Cuevas. It is well worth stopping at the highest point to view the pavements.

2 **The second route leaves Ligos**
along a track above the left bank of the river. This leads after some 4km to Torraño mill and traverses all the main habitats of the area, including a small paramo where Dupont's Lark still occurs. It is possible to walk along the bottom of the gorge from the mill until it becomes impassable. Retrace your route or, if two cars available, walk to where you have left one at the bridge across the river Pedro on the road that links Torraño with Torremocha de Ayllón.

What birds to see and when

Winters are hard in these valleys and paramos. It is really only in the juniper woods in the northeast that there is much activity then, given the attraction of wintering birds to the juniper berries. Good numbers of thrushes, blackbirds, Azure-winged Magpies and tits may be seen here. This is also when Griffon Vultures and Eagle Owls begin their breeding season.

By February some slight environmental changes begin to be apparent, with the arrival of some Woodlarks in any of the open woodlands of the area or of Crag Martins on the cliffs. Nuthatches, recent colonists here, are among the most active and noisy occupants of the riverine woods, alongside Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers.

The starting pistol for spring is fired in March. Wintering birds begin to depart and other species arrive, including Serins and Black Redstarts, which are partial migrants in this region. The Egyptian Vulture, that characteristic bird of the gorges, arrives in March; several pairs traditionally occupy the rock faces, where they can readily be observed. These same escarpments are reoccupied at this time by birds that have abandoned them for the autumn and winter and are now drawn back to the crevices and crannies by the urge to reproduce. They include Choughs and Jackdaws, although the latter especially are ever more scarce here and elsewhere in Soria, perhaps



Eagle Owl

Bubo bubo

a consequence of the decline in sheep flocks. Ravens take possession of the gorges and provide early warning of the appearance of a Golden Eagle, which they pursue with unrestrained fury. The occasional Peregrine Falcon can also be seen here.

More species appear as the spring progresses: Blue Rock-thrushes, Rock Sparrows, Stock Doves, Common Kestrels and, the last of all to arrive, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrushes. On account of all these, the cliffs are a hive of activity in May and June, as the breeding season reaches its peak. Later still, there are new arrivals of such birds as Griffon and Egyptian Vultures until July and/or early August, as individuals fledged elsewhere leave their nests.

The complement of valleys, fields and uplands allows for spectacular birding here. On the uplands, specifically the

paramo de Torraño, along with Dupont's Larks there are Black-eared Wheatears, Greater Short-toed Larks, Tawny Pipits, Ortolan Buntings, Spectacled Warblers and Orphean Warblers. The last of these also quite common in the juniper scrub. Meanwhile, the banks of the río Pedro resound to a chorus of many species that arrive around this time. They include Nightingales, Common Chiffchaffs, Robins, Spotted Flycatchers, Golden Orioles and both Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes.

If the urge to see more remains, there are Montagu's Harriers on the fields around Ligos and Torraño, as well as Common Buzzards, Booted Eagles and the occasional Sparrowhawk and Short-toed Eagle. It now only remains to get up at dawn or stay late into the evening in order to hear the Red-necked Nightjar, a scarce species in Soria but recently found



here alongside the commoner European Nightjar. Scops Owls will also be evident, these still being common in the riverine woods.

Other nearby places for family-centred visits

A **Viñas Viejas gorge at Torremocha de Ayllón.** The gorge at Torremocha de Ayllón is highly accessible, so much so that extra care is needed during the nesting season so as not to cause too much disturbance. Take the good track north of Torremocha that leads to the Morcuera to Licerias road. The small limestone gorge appears on the left after some two kilometres, concealed behind good-sized junipers. The site is known locally as the Barranco de Bocalavoz. The typical rupestral avifauna described above is also found here: Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Red-billed Choughs, rock-thrushes and Eagle Owls, all on two large escarpments. The foot of the gorge is always dry, the parent stream lacking water even in the rainiest seasons.

B **Western Cañada Real Soriana.** This traditional drove road appears in all its splendour at the provincial boundary with Segovia, where it retains its original width and extent. It is within the intensely cultivated farmlands of Ayllón district, where it represents the only area of natural vegetation. As such it provides refuge, foraging space and nesting habitat for such open-country birds as Skylarks, Calandra Larks, Crested Larks, Northern Wheatears, Linnets and Yellow Wagtails, among others. The most interesting observation here would be a sighting of a male Little Bustard. These occupied their display sites all along the Cañada from mid-April until late June but only one bird was present in 2016. The species is disappearing before our very eyes.

CHARACTERISTIC SPECIES

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Breeders

Griffon Vulture, Golden Eagle, Egyptian Vulture, Booted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Sparrowhawk, Montagu's Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Common Kestrel, Red-legged Partridge, Little Bustard, Eagle Owl, Little Owl, Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Greater Short-toed Lark, Dupont's Lark, Skylark, Woodlark, Crag Martin, Tree Pipit, Tawny Pipit, Black-eared Wheatear, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Blue Rock-thrush, Bonelli's Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Nuthatch, Red-backed Shrike, Rock Sparrow, Spanish Sparrow.

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Winterers

Hen Harrier, Merlin, Meadow Pipit, Fieldfare, Redwing.

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Migrants

Ring Ouzel, Alpine Accentor.