

Jalón juniper woods at Chaorna

14

Location and access

From Soria city take the A-15 as far as Medinaceli, from where you take the A-2 Zaragoza in the Zaragoza direction as far as Arcos de Jalón. From there take SO-P-3008 to Chaorna. The road continues to Judes and Irucha. From Chaorna you can also take a good quality track to Sagides.



Status: Comprises the “Sabinares del Jalón” special conservation zone (ES4170057). This 19,068ha EU-designated site also includes the Laguna de Judes, site SO-31 in the Inventory of Wetlands of Special Interest of Soria province.

Terrain: Copses of Spanish Juniper *Juniperus thurifera* on hillsides, valleys and limestone escarpments.

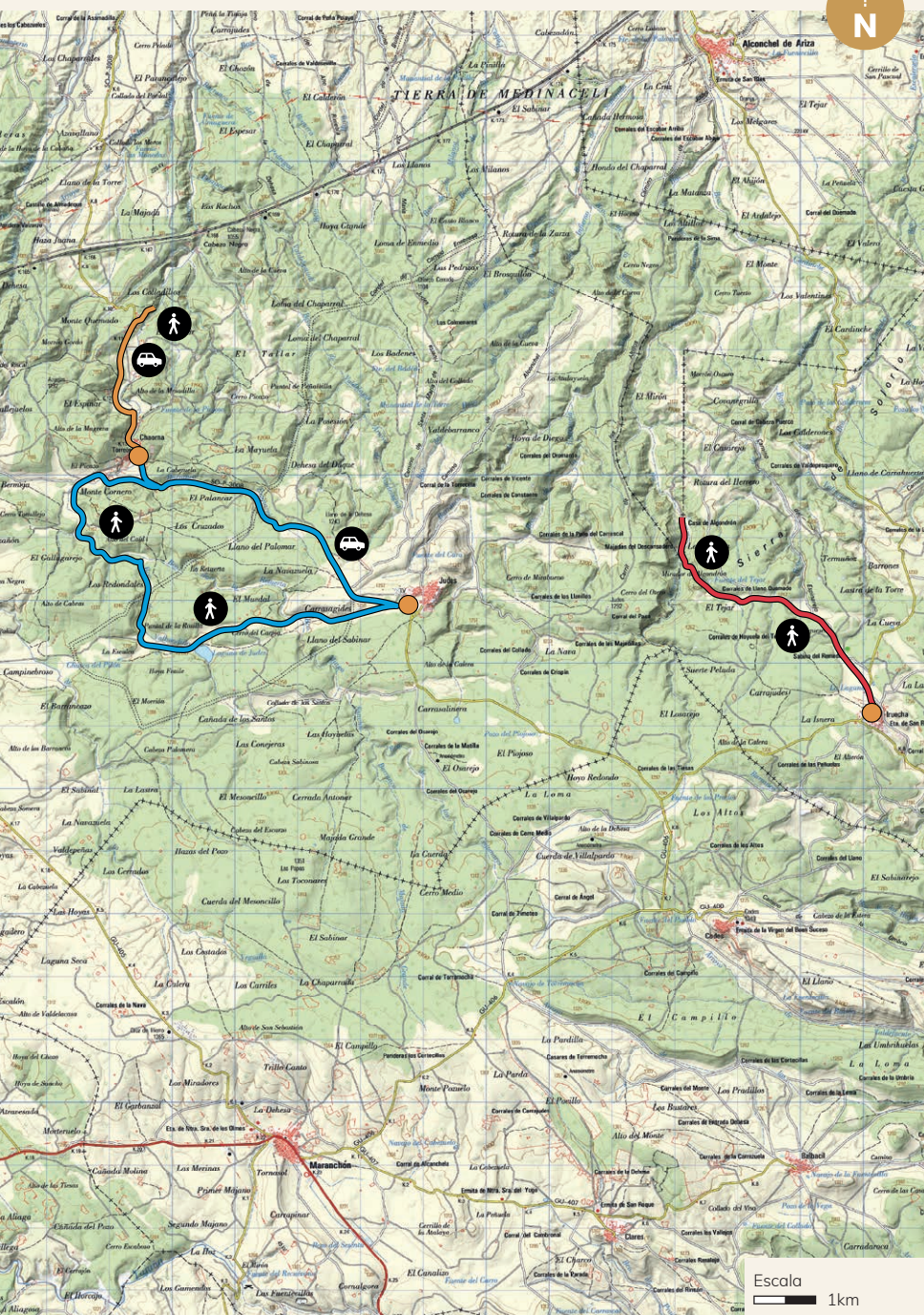
Means of access: Own vehicle. Inaccessible by public transport.

Ease of access: Juniper woods are generally quite open but these are unusually dense. Together with the calcareous substrate it means that progress may be difficult away from any tracks.

Visit duration: The main recommended itinerary may be completed in 3–4 hours, including stops to watch birds. A longer route would take 5–6 hours.

Timing: In contrast to the other sites, the best time to visit is in winter. This is because the fruiting junipers then attract large numbers of thrushes and other birds. Summer is comparatively quiet.

Comments: The poor signposting – except along the GR path – and the poor condition of the paths make it inadvisable to wander from the road or the few available tracks.



Itinerary 1

Family itinerary A



Itinerary on foot



Itinerary by car

Family itinerary B



Itinerary on foot



Itinerary by car

Escala
1km

Site description and itineraries

This southeastern corner of the province appears covered by a very important expanse of Spanish Junipers. These are well separated from the main juniper woods of Soria, which are in centre-west of the province. The southeastern woods extend into northern Guadalajara. They are characterised by their good state of conservation and higher tree density than elsewhere, despite some losses of important areas in recent years to agricultural expansion and forest fires. The woodland extends across a good part of the slopes of these valleys, which include small canyons at various locations, which support very interesting fauna.

This last feature is evident at Chaorna village itself, whose eastern end is backed by a large rock wall. Chaorna in any case merits a visit on account of its location and architecture, water having played an important role in its development. The karstic nature of all this northern sector of the Sierra del Solorio has resulted in a terrain that is full of streams, rivers and upwellings, whose flow is conditioned by the intensity of the seasonal precipitation.

This being so, there may or may not appear the Laguna de Judes, the only lake of karstic origin in Soria province. It occupies a depression west of Judes but this is normally empty. It only floods during very rainy periods, which generally occur here from January to March. Water upwells from below so the lake may be empty one day and nearly full the next. In similar fashion, it may dry up very quickly since water is lost to the substrate and not just by evaporation.

1 The proposed route is intended to run through part of the Juniper woodland to the surroundings of the Laguna de Judes, by way of the Arroyo de Valhondillo. Head southwestwards from Chaorna along the road towards Sagides, leaving this to take a track that, between some small farms, enters the woods. By remaining on this track you reach the Laguna de Judes after some five kilometres. You can retrace your route or extend it to 13 kilometres by continuing eastwards to Judes, returning to Chaorna along the road.

What birds to see and when

In November the nearby fields and woodlands are emptying of birds. Even in the Holm Oak woods, adjacent but lower down, there is little movement even in a good acorn year. The Junipers however may be bustling with winter thrushes, which stopover here on their postnuptial migration. Of the thrushes only the Mistle Thrush nests in the Junipers. At this season, however, there arrive thousands of Redwings – the most abundant thrush – Song Thrushes and Fieldfares. Some Ring Ouzels occur, in areas adjacent to rocky hillsides. Hawfinches and Chaffinches also appear, in good numbers. All these guarantee plenty of activity until February, when these birds begin to return north.

March tends to be poorly attractive since the high altitude means that summer visitors are slow to arrive. Snowfall in March or April is not uncommon. The first arrivals at the Somáen gorge are the Crag Martins. The Griffon Vulture population of the district fluctuates but these birds are a constant presence, there being much interchange between the large colonies of the meseta and the smaller ones of the Sorian stretch of the Jalón valley. Woodlarks are the most obvious birds in the Juniper woods at this time, their songs resounding everywhere.

April sees the arrival of a myriad species, headed by Bonelli's, Subalpine and Orphean Warblers, together with Hoopoes, Wrynecks in areas with trees, Tawny Pipits and Black-eared Wheatears in more open parts and both Rufous-tailed and Bue Rock-thrushes on the escarpments. Booted and Short-toed Eagles appear from mid morning, as day warms up.

The birdlife at the Laguna de Judes depends on what time of year it may hold water. If this is in March–April you may find a Grey or Purple Heron, ducks such as Mallards or Garganeys, or some wader such as a Green Sandpiper or Common Redshank. Only Mallards and Little Grebes may nest here, but there is very little information available.



Mistle Thrush

Turdus viscivorus



Other nearby places for family-centred visits

A **Arroyo Almuquera/Cabeza Negra.** The stream at Chaorna flows gently between small farms, over largely level ground. In spring some species that are otherwise scarce locally may be seen here. They include Nightingales, Wrens, scrub-warblers and Golden Orioles. However, two kilometres further on the stream drops through a splendid and colourful ravine that ends at a distant escarpment called Cabeza Negra. This last section has, however, lost a great deal of its enchantment since the high speed Madrid–Barcelona train (AVE) runs through it.

The first stretch of the ravine is easily observable. You can leave your car near some sheep pens alongside the road and make a careful approach to the edge. Here the Junipers have largely given way to Holm Oaks. Red-billed Choughs, Ravens, Carrion Crows and Jays are evident and, with luck, you may see one of the Golden Eagles that retain a constant presence in these valleys.

B **El Algodrón.** The homestead and ravine lies five kilometres west of Iruecha. Access is via a good signposted track, although you are advised not to take your car along the final stretch, within the valley. The ruined house seemed to have served as a retreat for the monks of Huerta monastery, who used to seek refuge from the summer heat in this cool valley. The monks chose well since here you readily feel at one with nature. The birds of the Juniper woods have been mentioned above but here there is also a breeding population of the Common Redstart, otherwise typical of the juniper woods of the provincial centre. Strange to say, though, two other species that are also typical of central Soria, the Crested Tit and Azure-winged Magpie, do not occur here.

CHARACTERISTIC SPECIES

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Breeders

Egyptian Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Short-toed Eagle, Sparrowhawk común, Golden Eagle, Booted Eagle, Eagle Owl, Wryneck, Crag Martin, Common Redstart, Mistle Thrush, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Blue Rock-thrush, Spectacled Warbler, Orphean Warbler, Golden Oriole, Red-billed Chough, Hawfinch, Ortolan Bunting.

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Winterers

Meadow Pipit, Fieldfare, Redwing, Siskin.

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Migrants

Ring Ouzel.