

Itinerary

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## Tiermes

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### Arroyo de Montejo

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#### Location and access

100km southwest of Soria city. From Soria take the N-122 to San Esteban de Gormaz, from where you follow the SO-P-4003 to Montejo de Tiermes. From Madrid take the A-1 and then the N-110 as far as Ayllón and then the SO-135 to the Tiermes archaeological site. This is in the middle of the zone although the core area of interest is at Montejo de Tiermes.



**Status:** No special protection, despite a long but unsuccessful campaign to register the area as an SPA. Within IBA 076, Tiermes-Caracena, part of the SEO/Birdlife Important Bird Area network.

**Terrain:** This part of the Sierra de Pela foothills is a succession of slopes and valleys covered with Cistus scrub and Pyrenean Oak regrowth. The rivers and streams have sculpted the triassic sandstone landscape to form a very characteristic landscape of red rock formations.

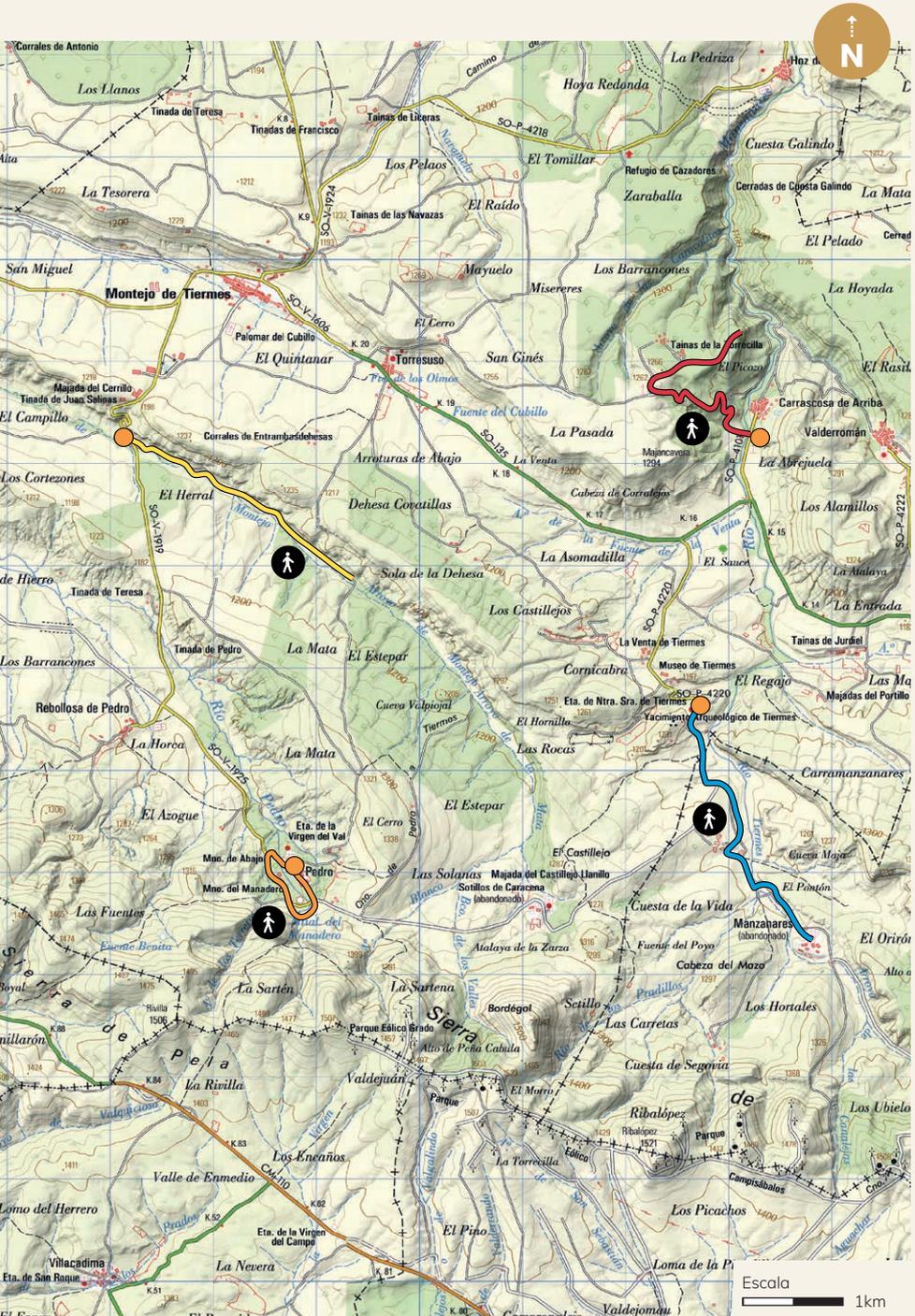
**Means of access:** Own vehicle.

**Ease of access:** The tracks are generally in very poor condition and driving in the wet season is not advisable.

**Visit duration:** This extensive area makes for visits to specific points or longer excursions on foot or by bicycle that will take at least half a day.

**Timing:** Spring or autumn visits are recommended. Winters are harsh and poor in species. The area is not as hot in summer as in some other parts of the meseta but bird activity is much reduced then.

**Comments:** Here as in many other sites beware of game drives during the general hunting season, October–February, and of Roe Deer hunting during April–August. Hunters turn up almost anywhere. It is also surprising that although the Tiermes archaeological site is of the the greatest importance it is currently in a state of neglect if not abandonment. For example, it is unfenced so anyone can enter, sheep graze there, and the Sotillos de Caracena/Manzanares road crosses it.



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

## Site description and itineraries

Tiermes district has one of the lowest population densities within the markedly depopulated province of Soria. Various villages that were formerly dedicated to subsistence cereal cultivation and whose inhabitants grazed abundant sheep flocks are nowadays completely abandoned. Land abandonment has enabled a very substantial increase in forest cover, including at its best some pine plantations as well as regrowth. However very often the outcome has been extensive *Cistus* scrub formations that greatly impede transit on foot across such areas.

That said, the most striking and noteworthy features from the birding viewpoint are the widespread sandstone ridges that run between the source of the river Manzanares and Tiermes, and also between the archaeological site and Cuevas de Ayllón, along the Arroyo de Montejo. This is where we need to head for in search of the rich community of rupestral birds that occurs there, notably including such carrion eaters as Griffon and Egyptian Vultures and Ravens. We suggest two routes:

**1** A three-kilometre route running from the Tiermes archaeological site following the GR86 path markings as far as the abandoned village of Manzanares. Rupestral species apart, several small mixed woodlands of oaks and Aspens here are attractive to many birds, particularly in spring.

**2** For another option take the road leading from Montejo de Tiermes towards Pedro. It is notable how the sandstone cuttings are completely invisible from Montejo since the escarpments all face south, with level expanses of cultivation and pasture on the northern sides. The road descends to the Montejo stream, where the recommended route begins. Take the track upstream along the right bank, which offers unimpeded views of all the escarpments. Please keep to the track, especially during the January to July nesting season, since the vulture nests are plainly visible and sensitive to any disturbance from close approach. SEO-Soria found 121 breeding Griffon Vulture

pairs here in 2018, the second largest colony in Soria after the Cañón del Rio Lobos.

## What birds to see and when

**December/January.** The first national census of Griffon Vultures, organised by SEO in 1979, found just 60 pairs in the entire province. Had the declining trend that then affected this species continued it would surely have disappeared as a nesting species here. We mention this lest the familiar sight of its enormous form be taken for granted, now that the bird is no longer endangered. The 'abanto', as the Griffon is known colloquially over much of Soria, performs its annual courtship on clear days in December and January. At this time, the lifelong partners fly together in close formation, repair their bulky nests and mate enthusiastically on the rock faces.

Either of the two recommended routes allows you to enjoy this spectacle and there is the additional benefit that for once there is no need for an early start. If you are inclined to linger until dusk on such anticyclonic days you quite probably will hear the territorial calls of Eagle Owls. Seeing the birds themselves is harder but not impossible since at this time they are sometimes active before it is quite dark. The Eagle Owl is another species that has increased considerably.

**March.** Although the Griffons are the greatest occupants, in every sense, of the skies of the region, they share these with their African cousins, the Egyptian Vultures, which arrive in March. These are quite easily seen, even by visitors to the Tiermes archaeological site, since several pairs nest here. Here too you can see some other species that make the escarpments their home, that also arrive from March onwards. Crag Martins are the first arrivals, although these absent themselves temporarily during any prolonged wet or cold spells. The songs of male Blue Rock-thrushes, relative newcomers here, are heard from late March as these reclaim their territories. Now too the Ravens are busy repairing their nests and the occasional pair of Peregrine Falcons, very scarce here, establishes its eyrie.



Griffon Vulture

*Gyps fulvus*

**April.** Jackdaws were probably very common here once, nesting in all the rock faces of the area, but these have now disappeared. There remains only the odd pair of Red-billed Choughs, also declining steadily. Rock Sparrows though remain numerous and may now be seen investigating the crevices in which they will nest. Spotless Starlings too, long known locally as 'tordos', are here and may occasionally be mistaken for Blue Rock-thrushes. The Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush appears from the end of the month: it is a spectacular sight, with its multicoloured plumage especially as it performs its parachuting display flights. As if all this were not sufficient, a new inhabitant has found accommodation in the recesses of the cliffs. These are the Red-rumped Swallows, first found nesting here early this century and now well established. One pair nested within the ruins themselves, in a cave alongside the 'Puerta del Oeste' but the nest failed, perhaps on account of the close human presence, and the site was abandoned permanently.

**May.** A key month, throughout which the breeding season provides unflinching

interest, from those birds that begin late to those, such as the vultures or falcons, that have well-grown chicks by now. Remember, once again, not to approach nests closely or otherwise cause disturbance, for any reason.

We almost forgot to mention the ubiquitous Black Redstarts, probably the most abundant passerines in the rocky scree, and the Northern Wheatears that also select rocky areas, scree and buildings.

**June.** The busiest month everywhere; on the escarpments, in the riparian growth and in the woodlands. Fledged young of many species are about during the first fortnight, during which the heat is still not too oppressive here. Griffons and Egyptian Vultures still have young in the nest, until July and August respectively, but other species are now at a key stage of their breeding cycles.

Many other birds guarantee an entertaining time in the surrounding areas. Red-backed Shrikes, Hoopoes, Bee-eaters, Green Woodpeckers, Golden Orioles ..... who said that Spanish birds aren't showy?



## Other nearby places for family-centred visits

**A** **Source of the Río Pedro.** Pedro village lies at the foot of the Sierra de Pela. The source is just before the village, a karstic upwelling that disgorges a good quantity of water during rainy periods. The nascent river Pedro tumbles rapidly through the village outskirts, forming small rapids and waterfalls. The course is marked by dense growth of Aspens and other poplars as well as small orchards and meadows separated by hedgerows with abundant Walnut trees. This is a very good area for woodland birds such as Robins, Wrens, Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, Chaffinches and tits. An excellent spot for a rest or picnic in spring and summer.

**B** **Pyrenean Oakwoods of Carrascosa de Arriba.** The valley of the river Manzanares (Adanta) is one of the most splendid throughout its length, from its source at the eponymous village to its confluence with the river Caracena (Adante) at Fresno de Caracena. The valley flanks are covered with impressive woodlands of Portuguese and Holm Oaks at Carrascosa and Valderromán.

The largest Portuguese Oaks are on the slopes west of Carrascosa, which you can reach along a trail that crosses the river in the direction of Torresuso, before you get to Carrascosa. A stroll along this trail or an inspection of the valley from the upper levels of Picorzo peak, preferably both, is recommendable. At times the Portuguese Oaks house a roost of Griffon Vultures, Ravens, Carrion Crows and the occasional kite. The commonest birds there year-round include Nuthatches, Jays, Chaffinches and tits. In spring these are joined by Bonelli's, Subalpine and Orpheat Warblers. In autumn good-sized flocks of Woodpigeons and Mistle Thrushes are evident, particularly in good acorn years.

# CHARACTERISTIC SPECIES

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## Breeders

Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, Booted Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Common Kestrel, Red-legged Partridge, Eagle Owl, Little Owl, Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Greater Short-toed Lark, Dupont's Lark, Skylark, Woodlark, Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Tawny Pipit, Dunnock, Black-eared Wheatear, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Blue Rock-thrush, Bonelli's Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Nuthatch, Red-backed Shrike, Rock Sparrow, Spanish Sparrow, Crossbill.

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## Winterers

Hen Harrier, Merlin, Siskin.

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## Migrants

Dotterel, Cranes.