

Fuente Arenaza juniper woods and gorges



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Location and access

Sur de la provincia. En el In the centre-south of the province, near the river Duero. The entry point to this region is at Recuerda or in the south via the villages of Mosarejos or Galapagares. Take the SO-100 to Berlanga de Duero and from there the SO-152 as far as Recuerda. You can also reach Recuerda from Burgo de Osma on the SO-160.

Status: No special protection.

Terrain: Small limestone gorges – generally dry – eroded by the Fuente Arenaza stream, among extensive Juniper woods.

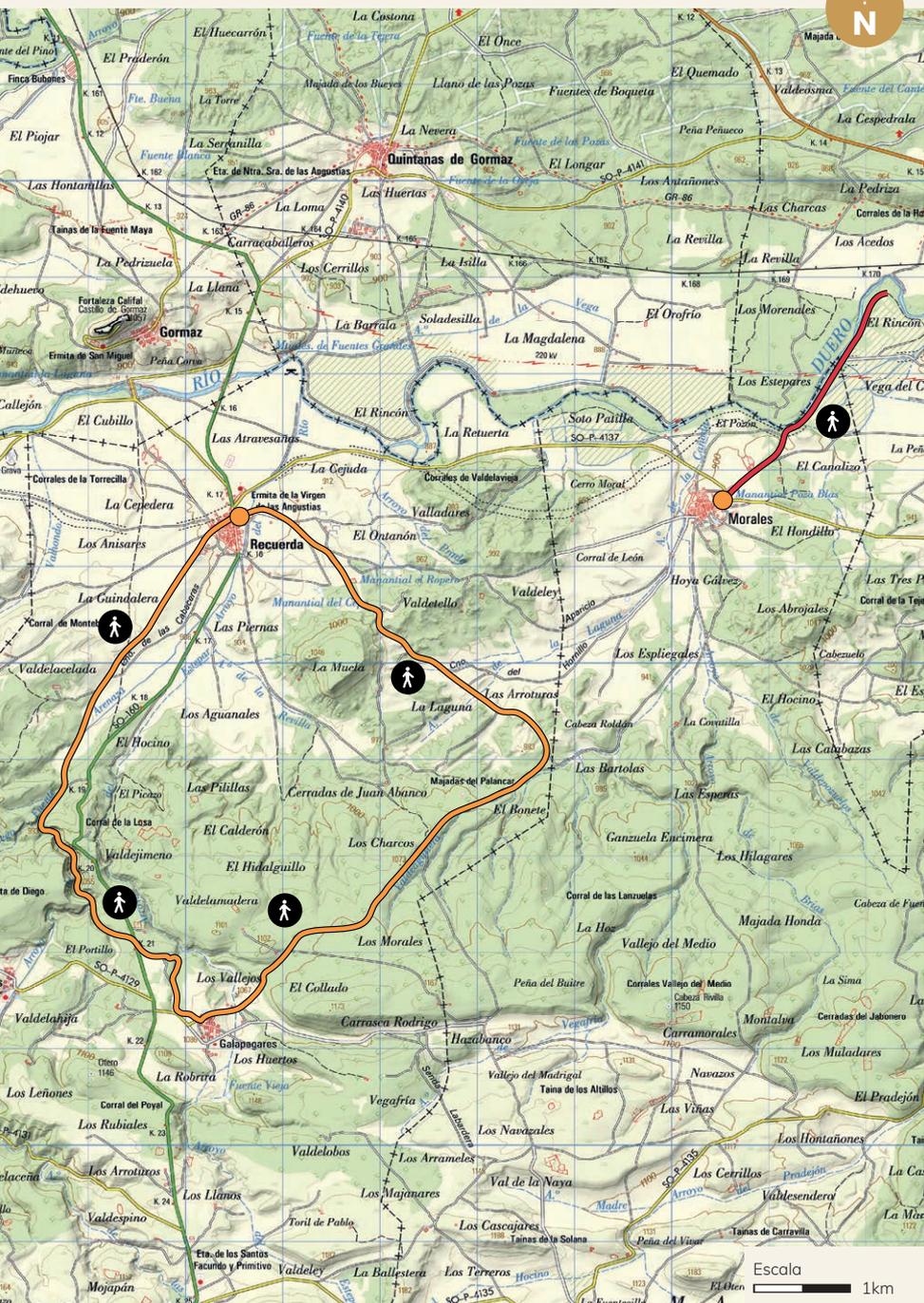
Means of access: Own vehicle. There is no public transport to these villages.

Ease of access: Easy. A good network of roads and paths gives access to the proposed routes.

Visit duration: Variable as preferred. The proposed route may take five or six hours, there and back.

Timing: Spring and autumn are ideal for seeing the most typical species. Winter too can produce interesting observations of wintering birds associated both with the rocky areas and the junipers.

Comments: One of the least known parts of the province. Such villages as Mosarejos, Galapagares, Brías and Abanco are almost, if not quite yet, abandoned. They therefore offer no public facilities of any kind.



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

Site description and itineraries

Anyone reviewing closely all the routes and itineraries that we suggest in this book will note the obvious abundance of small gorges that score this landscape. Rivers and streams, generally draining limited watersheds or practically dry, have eroded small cuttings in the limestone layers from diverse geological periods in this zone. The only rivers with permanent water are those that originate from the Sierra de Pela. Those that start further south, for example those streams located between Pico San Cristóbal and the descents towards Berlanga, only carry water along particular stretches and/or during exceptionally wet periods. It is thus normal to find this part of the Fuente Arenaza stream dry.

This is the most attractive gorge and the best for birds in this area, along the stretch between Mosarejos and the exit towards Recuerda. Other similar gorges are that of the Arroyo del Estepar, running from Galapagares, and that of the Arroyo de Brías at that village. All these are very different from other closer gorges, around Caracena or Vildé, since they are embedded within one of most extensive Juniper woods of this part of the central Duero basin. They cover some 3,500 hectares of regenerating woodland, although a few years ago some hundreds of hectares were incinerated by a forest fire.

I The main route will take you along the Fuente Arenaza stream, the most interesting option as we have said, which should be straightforward since it has long formed part of the GR86 long-distance trail. The path runs from Recuerda towards Galapagares. You can start at Recuerda or further along where cultivation gives way to Junipers.

Once at Galapagares, if you wish to extend the route to take in the Juniper woods, the best option is to take the road that leads northeast from there towards Morales. Quite soon, after some three kilometres, turn off on the road leading towards Recuerda.

Another interesting option, if time is limited and for a quick overview of the area, is to stop on the crest of the road between Recuerda and Mosarejos, between km-20 and km-21. Recent

roadworks have led to the abandonment here of a part of the former road, nearly alongside the highest part of the gorge. Sad to say, others have taken the opportunity to dump rubbish into the gorge here, as visible below. It is advisable not to linger too long in order not to disturb or flush any birds that you may see just below this viewpoint.

What birds to see and when

Thus far in this book we have not given much attention to nocturnal birds. In fact these are relatively scarce in Soria province and especially so in this area. Following the disappearance of Barn Owls from nearly all the villages, and the increasing scarcity of Little Owls, only the Scops Owls in the small woods and the Eagle Owls in the gorges seem to be doing well. Eagle Owls in fact occupy more sites than was the case 20 or 30 years ago and it is not unusual to find them in apparently unsuitable locations, as they take advantage of the solitude of our lands. The male Eagle Owls begin to call in December.

We referred above to the viewpoint or 'mirador' on the Recuerda/Mosarejos road. This is a ideal place to wait quietly and silently at dusk on calm winter evenings for Eagle Owls to appear. While you wait you will see the Griffons on the gorge walls, engaging in their early matings; Red-billed Choughs and the ever-scarcer Jackdaws. The arrival to roost of small flocks of Rock Sparrows and, if you are very lucky, perhaps an Alpine Accentor. These accentors are common in winter in the northern sierras of the province but they occur only very locally in these southern gorges.

Until a few years ago a pair of Golden Eagles could also be seen from the same viewpoint. One of their nest sites was on the facing gorge wall. This pair has since disappeared, for reasons unknown. Golden Eagles have poor breeding success in Soria province and their population has shown a series of ups and downs in recent years, on account of a range of factors. Where they occur they can be observed displaying in January and into February, given their lengthy courtship period.



Golden Eagle

Aquila chrysaetos

Also in winter, if the fruit crop has been heavy it is advisable to visit the Juniper woods, which then attract scores of thrushes. Redwings, Fieldfares, Song Thrushes and Mistle Thrushes can easily be seen here, the first of these in particular. Only the Mistle Thrush remains here year-round.

The gorge avifauna has already been detailed in other site accounts above. The various species arrive in turn as the spring advances. The Crag Martins are first, followed by the Blue Rock-thrushes, a pair of Egyptian Vultures and then the Rufous-tailed Rock-thrushes. Ring Ouzels are frequent on passage in April. The gorge is a wonder to behold in April but the Juniper woods do not lag behind. The warblers are especially noteworthy, this being where the Orphean and Subalpine Warblers attain their highest provincial densities. Alongside them are the Bonelli's Warbler and, offering a splash of colour, the Common Redstart, which is scarcer here than in similar places north of the Duero. The Dartford Warbler is also common in the less dense Juniper clumps, whether or not intermixed with gorse or stepic vegetation. The Sardinian Warbler too has become common here in recent years: this, the typical Mediterranean scrub-warbler, is quite scarce in Soria and it has one of its provincial strongholds here.

Other nearby places for family-centred visits

A Morales Juniper woods. Near Morales, between the village and the river Duero, a number of Juniper copses have withstood the spread of cultivation. Here you can see the same species described for Juniper woods above. The presence of some magnificent examples of junipers have encouraged us to recommend these woods. In particular, there is a well-preserved juniper, called 'La Pica' by the locals, that is nearly 15 metres tall and three metres in girth. It is included in the inventory of noteworthy trees of Soria province. There are other smaller but still good-sized trees nearby. The closeness of the river makes for a richer bird diversity than elsewhere.

B Valpierre and Pradejón gorges. The great Juniper wood of this district extends very close to Berlanga de Duero. Gorges created in the limestone terrain by the Arroyo de Pradejón, the Arroyo de Valpierre and the final stretch of the river Talegones converge here. The gorges are small but together they still offer all the rupestral bird species that nest in Soria province. Access is via a good track from Berlanga de Duero that leads to the margin of two gorges after crossing the river Talegones. The



Berlanga carrion dump is barely one kilometre from here, as reflected in the number of vultures that repose and nest

here. The Black Vulture appears here with some regularity and the Spanish Imperial Eagle has also been noted.



CHARACTERISTIC SPECIES

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Breeders

Egyptian Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Golden Eagle, Booted Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Eagle Owl, Wryneck, Dupont's Lark, Crag Martin, Common Redstart, Mistle Thrush, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Blue Rock-thrush, Subalpine Warbler, Spectacled Warbler, Orphean Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Nuthatch, Red-billed Chough, Jackdaw, Ortolan Bunting.

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Winterers

Hen Harrier, Alpine Accentor, Dunnock, Fieldfare, Redwing, Siskin, Hawfinch.

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Migrants

Ring Ouzel.