

Parameras of la Perera

Madruédano



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Location and access

From Soria city take the SO-100 to Berlanga de Duero and then the SO-132 as far as Lumías and the heights of La Lastra, on the road that links Atienza with El Burgo de Osma. Heading for El Burgo you will encounter the turn-off for Madruédano in Sauquillo de Paredes and that for La Perera in Nograles. The area is approached from Madrid via the N-110 as far as Ayllón and then the SO-135 to Retortillo.

Status: No special protection. The Altos de Barahona SPA extends further west than its name suggests to take in all the paramos of Retortillo de Soria, a key site for Dupont's Lark in the province. These present paramos, a natural extension of the above, were however excluded. A proposal to include the present site in a new SPA, to be called Tiermes-Caracena, on account of its importance for Dupont's Lark and such other species as the Egyptian Vulture, was not taken forward.

Terrain: Extensive parameras with a few small patches of cultivation and scattered Holm Oaks. There are small limestone scarps, such as that of Fuente Arenaza, but not the large gorges found further down.

Means of access: Own vehicle.

Ease of access: Easy. These are public roads and there is no fencing. The land was divided up into smaller plots a few years back, these marked by a network of pointless tracks running here and there all over the zone. Please keep to the tracks.

Visit duration: As desired, although a full survey on foot would take 4–5 hours.

Timing: Spring visits, in May and June in particular, are undoubtedly ideal. Summers are hot and winter visits are ill-advised given the harsh climate and lack of birds then.

Site description and itineraries

Just as we commented in Site 5 regarding how little known and isolated that area is, what can be said about this present site and its villages: La Perera, Madruédano, Modamio and Nograles among others? These too are all but abandoned, and may be cut off for days during snowy winters. They come to life to some degree only in summer when some former residents return. This is largely because these uplands are barely cultivable. Aerial photos of the stone boundaries of the former fields on the limestone paramera suggest a lunar landscape. Most of these fields now form part of the paramera since their small size makes cultivation uneconomical. This 500–600 hectare paramera, contiguous with the great paramo of the Alto de la Lastra in Retortillo, is one of the most attractive of the province. Along with this large expanse of paramos – bounded in the west by the Caracena canyon – there are small copses, of Holm Oaks mainly, at various stages of regeneration.

The only more or less extensive cultivated areas are between Pozuelo and La Perera. There is also an escarpment zone between La Perera and Modamio, with a small but gorgeous Aspen wood in that little valley.

1 Our recommended approach to the paramo is from Madruédano, ascending via the road that flanks this hilltop village to the west. This road runs for three kilometres before it reaches the limits of Caracena district, into which the division of the land into plots did not proceed. Stop here on the road, especially if you are trying to detect Dupont's Lark.

2 If you intend to walk, shortly after reaching the paramo look for a track that heads northwards towards a modern sheep byre. The paramo is full of old stone sheep corrals and byres, nearly all them in ruins unfortunately. You can walk along this road to search for Dupont's Lark and the other steppe bird species. Curious to say, the paramo here is known locally as 'la pesadilla' – the nightmare. The description may be

merited on some windy days and during the winter cold. The paramo is scattered with small parapets intended to shelter shepherds during such conditions. However, keen birders can expect some very enjoyable encounters here.

3 Before or after visiting this area you can stop in Modamio and walk northwards along the track that descends to the north along the right margin of the Fuente Arenaza stream towards La Perera. The distance is five kilometres but it offers a chance to see the birds of practically all the local habitats. The solitude alone makes the walk worthwhile.

What birds to see and when

You might assume that all the summer migrants will have arrived here by the end of April. This is just a supposition since spring comes late to these lands. The new season can only really be said to have arrived when the explosion of birdsong includes the 'sweet-sweet-sweet, dee-dee' of the Ortolan Bunting, from its perch on some small tree or shrub.

The good thing about steppe fauna is that it is often readily observable, with little by way of obstruction. The ability of Dupont's Larks to make themselves invisible is therefore all the more remarkable. You can hear the song but cannot guess where the singer is perched. Fortunately for us, not all species are so evasive. Skylarks sing incessantly overhead and both Thekla Larks and the numerous Black-eared Wheatears perch conspicuously on the stone walls and corrals. As you progress you will come across Greater Short-toed Larks, Tawny Pipits, Linnets and, where there is some scrub, the occasional Spectacled Warbler. Here too you may encounter two of the scarcer steppe species. The Stone-curlew, known locally as 'plovers', are one of these. They are summer visitors here, arriving in early or mid April. They used to be very common, being well known to the shepherds, especially at dusk. Less numerous are the Black-bellied Sandgrouse that overfly the entire district, overlapping with those that used to occur on the Lastra paramo at Retortillo or on the paramo



Black-Bellied Sandgrouse

Pterocles orientalis

on the other side of the Caracena gorge towards Cañicera and Valderromán, and further south towards Villanueva de Gormaz and Vildé. These used to be common but barely two or three pairs survive here and their future prospects are not encouraging.

The paramo is not simply a place where you can see steppe birds. Raptors are much in evidence. A nearby pair of Golden Eagles hunts the area throughout the spring, alongside Booted and Short-toed Eagles. Griffon Vultures are numerous and the occasional Egyptian Vulture is attracted to the remaining livestock byres at Madruédano.

Summer is hot and scorching, although you may see a variety of family groups of birds if you start very early. As time passes and once well into August you can attempt to find some interesting passage migrants. This is a reliable site

then for Dotterels. The vantage point of San Cristobal de Madruédano also sometimes sees the passage of scores of Honey Buzzards, numerous Black Kites, Booted and Short-toed Eagles and the occasional Black Stork or Osprey. Autumn proper brings little new but a stroll through the copses around La Perera, Madruédano or Nograles promises good observations of woodland birds.

Other nearby places for family-centred visits

A Pozuelo. Reached via a good road from La Perera – or from Mosarejos to the northeast. One km short of Pozuelo a track leads to some ruins. The going may be poor if it has rained. It is hard to imagine that the



ruins were inhabited up to 50 years ago but their desolate appearance alone makes the visit worthwhile, if only from a sociological or cultural viewpoint. House Sparrows abandon villages when the people leave but Rock Sparrows and Black Redstarts remain in residence. An extensive cultivated area to the north has its typical species whereas to the south and, especially, to the west, in the Arroyo de Valhondo, you can once again find the paramo birds, including Dupont's and Greater Short-toed Larks, Black-eared Wheatears and Ortolan Buntings.

B La Perera. Nearly all the course of the Arroyo de Fuente Arenaza is dry with the exception of the stretch adjacent to this village and within the small gorge through which the access road passes. The adjacent copse of poplars and aspens here deserves careful scrutiny, offering ideal opportunities to see common species. Here, in a habitat that is a marked contrast with the arid surroundings, you can find Nuthatches, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Robins, Red-backed Shrikes, Song Thrushes and others. There is also a notable concentration of nesting Spotted Flycatchers, a scarce species elsewhere in Soria.

CHARACTERISTIC SPECIES

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Breeders

Golden Eagle, Griffon Vulture, Montagu's Harrier, Common Kestrel, Red-legged Partridge, Stone-curlew, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Stock Dove, Eagle Owl, Little Owl, Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Crag Martin, Greater Short-toed Lark, Dupont's Lark, Calandra Lark, Thekla's Lark, Woodlark, Tawny Pipit, Black Redstart, Black-eared Wheatear, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Blue Rock-thrush, Subalpine Warbler, Spectacled Warbler, Orphean Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Woodchat Shrike, Red-backed Shrike, Red-billed Chough, Raven, Rock Sparrow.

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Winterers

Hen Harrier, Merlin.

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Migrants

Dotterel, Meadow Pipit, Ring Ouzel, Common Redstart, Whinchat.