

## Itinerary

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# Parameras de Rello and La Hoceca

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### Location and access

There is ready access to Rello via Barahona on the C-106, which you may reach via Almazán, or via Jadraque if coming from Madrid. From elsewhere in Castilla you can also follow the Riba de Escalote, via a series of local roads from Berlanga de Duero.



**Status:** Entirely within the Altos de Barahona SPA.

**Terrain:** A small calcareous gorge immersed within the paramos that link the meseta with the foothills of the Southern Iberian Range.

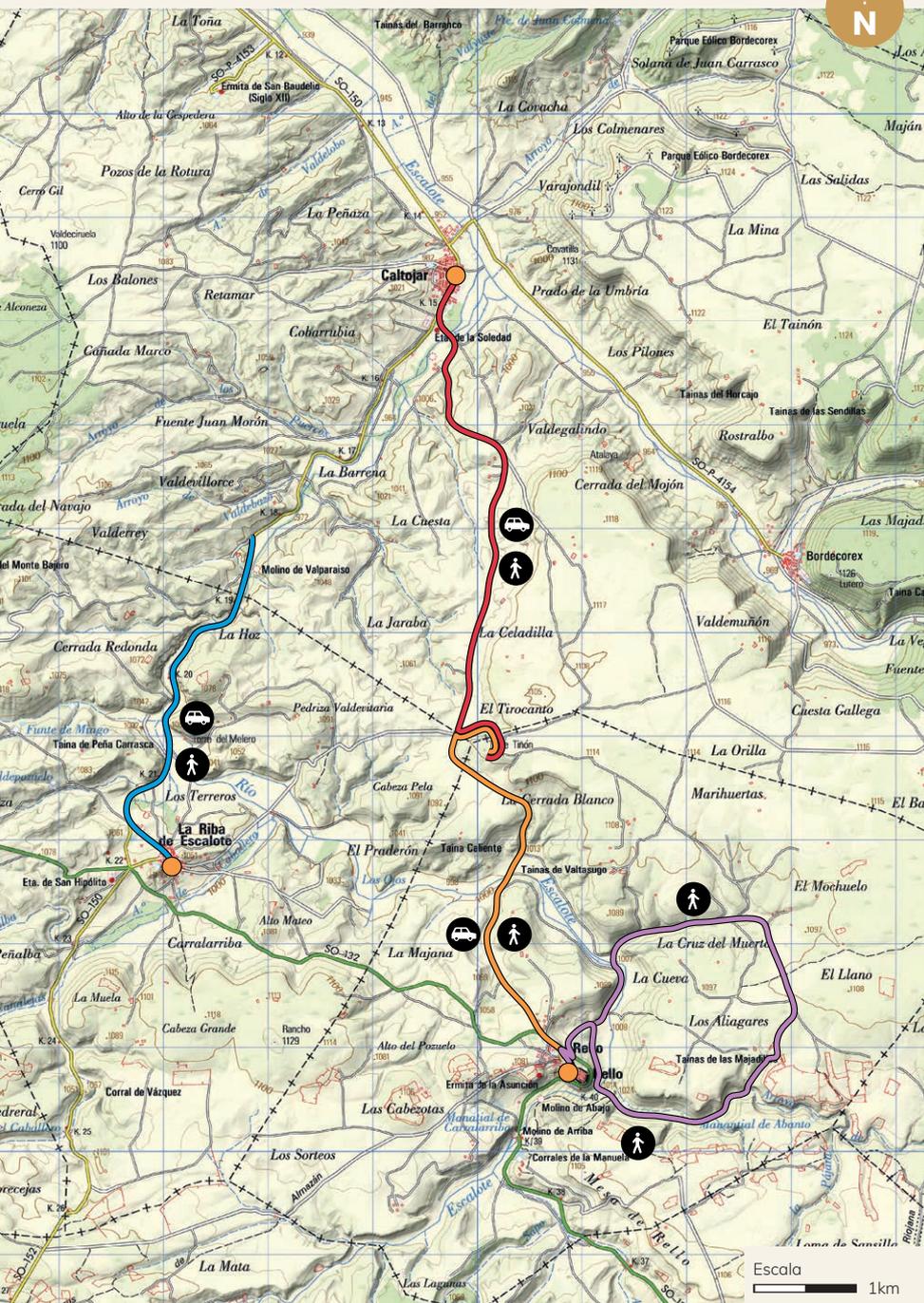
**Means of access:** Own vehicle.

**Ease of access:** Easy. Public roads and unfenced land.

**Visit duration:** A full survey will take five or six hours.

**Timing:** Mid-spring, May and the first half of June, is ideal for seeing the steppic birds. Winter visits are inadvisable on account both of the cold and the lack of birds; even some 'residents' of the meseta, such as the Stonechat, Blue Rock-thrush, Woodlark and Black Redstart, are absent then.

**Comments:** Great care to avoid disturbance is advised when following the valley floor given the low height of the gorge walls, where some Griffon and Egyptian Vultures nest.



- Itinerary 1
- Family itinerary A
- Family itinerary B1
- Family itinerary B2
- Itinerary on foot
- Itinerary by car
- Start Itinerary

## Site description and itineraries

Soria is one of the last refuges of Dupont's Lark, the province accommodating of its largest populations. This is especially evident on these southern paramos, where extensive 'fallows' persist both on the cenozoic paramos of the meseta or on the eroded expanses of mesozoic terrain. The Duero tributaries have formed small valleys across both surfaces, some including gorges or small canyons according to the hardness of the rock. One of these streams, the Arroyo de la Hoceca, originates at Alpanseque to join the waters of the Escalote near the walled village of Rello. Alongside the rupestral avifauna – and this is an ideal site to see both Rufous-tailed and Blue Rock-thrushes and, formerly, Black Wheatears – the main attraction is the surrounding paramos. Here resides one of the most outstanding Dupont's Lark populations in Soria province. Here too may be seen Stone-curlews, the small Little Bustard population that returns to these chilly lands on late April or early May and, with considerable luck, the some of the few remaining Black-bellied Sandgrouse.

**T**he proposed route starts at Rello, following the section of the GR86 long-distance path that leads towards Marazovel-Alpanseque, ascending for three kilometres along the floor of the Hoceca valley – termed the Hoz Seca on many maps and Hocecilla in others. You reach a point where tracks ascend from the right bank of the stream up to the paramo. From here you return to the starting point crossing broad expanses of paramo and small patches of cultivation, via a track initially that later becomes a drivable road.

## What birds to see and when

We have already commented that spring is the best time to enjoy the diversity of birds that occupy this site. These are by no means only the steppic and rupestral species.

**A paradise for scrub-warblers.** A short early morning walk in May through the

riparian woodland of the river Escalote below Rello as far as the valley floor, with its scrub-covered sides, offers a chance to see nearly all the scrub-warblers that then occur in the Iberian Peninsula. Of these, only the Common Whitethroat does not stay to breed but it is common on passage. The remainder do nest here, and in good numbers. Blackcaps and Garden Warblers confine themselves to the cool Aspen woodlands. The valley floor accommodates Subalpine and Orphean Warblers, at one of the highest densities of anywhere in the northern half of the Peninsula. Sardinian Warblers have appeared in recent years, these hot southern valleys being one of their few strongholds in Soria. Dartford Warblers seem scarcer but are still not uncommon. The same applies to the Spectacled Warblers, locally termed Broom Warblers on account of their affinity for these shrubs. Such other species as Melodious Warblers, Woodchat Shrikes and Ortolan Buntings also make use of the shrubby paradise that has developed on the floor and slopes of the valley. All this makes a May or June visit an authentic delight.

**Dupont's Larks.** Given that we have said that this is one of the best sites for Dupont's Larks not just in Soria but in the whole of Spain, it is only fitting that we suggest when best to see them. Bear in mind though that this can be very difficult, giving the skulking and crepuscular behaviour of this species. It should be noted that use of call or song playback to attract the birds is strictly forbidden. Scientific investigations have shown conclusively that such use may result in nesting failure for some pairs, in which the male may smash the eggs in its own nest possibly for fear another neighbouring male might have fathered the clutch.

Detecting, if not seeing, Dupont's Larks is straightforward, thanks to its highly characteristic, far-carrying and drawn-out call .... 'pu-cheeee.....'. However, the peak in territorial song activity comes an hour and a half before dawn. It can be heard as early as February on clear, calm days. By March song activity increases, becoming general in April, but peaking in May and during the first half of June. Although song peaks before dawn this is not to say that the birds are silent in



Dupont's Lark

*Chersopilus duponti*

daylight. They sing airborne as do other larks but most daytime song is from perches on the ground or hidden from view atop some shrub-sheltered stone. Patience is called for when trying to locate such song perches, some of which are often very close to the tracks that cross the paramo.

Dupont's Larks are very hard to see in summer, when the heat leads to reduced activity, as in most other species. However, a small resurgence in their song occurs from mid September/October, ending in November/December. By those dates a visit to the paramo may prove frustrating since you may see few birds even on fine days.

An occasional Little Bustard may also be heard between mid May and mid June, unfortunately one of the

last few remaining birds perhaps, since this species shows every sign of disappearing not just from here but also from many places in Spain, unless measures are taken to conserve them, which does not appear to be happening.

Our final recommendation is to visit the paramos in late summer, between 20 August and 20 September approximately. Species diversity then increases with the presence of such passerine migrants as martins, swallows, wagtails and Whinchats. In particular, the Dotterel then regularly selects the paramos as stopover locations during its journey from its nesting places in the Arctic tundra to its North African wintering grounds. Flocks (trips) of up to 30 have been recorded between Rello and Barahona.



## Other nearby places for family-centred visits

**A** **La Riba de Escalote gorge.** The river Escalote continues northwards and, after passing through the village of La Riba de Escalote and collecting the waters of the Salobral spring, it runs through the gorge that it has carved. The road that links the area with the Tierras de Berlanga also passes through this gorge. The river always has water and Mallards, Water Rails and reed warblers inhabit the riparian growth, although these are not always easy to see. The more interesting feature is then perhaps the proximity of the colonies of rupestral birds that inhabit the gorge, from Griffon Vultures and the noisy Jackdaws and Red-billed Choughs to Crag Martins, Rock Sparrows and both Rufous-tailed and Blue Rock-thrushes.

**B** **Torre Tiñón.** From Caltojar in the north or from Rello, you can take a good quality track to the Torre Tiñón, one of the arab watch-towers of the district. This one has been restored and, with care, you can climb to the top from where a large part of the paramo is in view. You can see for many kilometres all around, making this a good watchpoint for seeing Griffons and other raptors, as well as hearing Dupont's Larks. Other steppic birds of the area, such as Tawny Pipits, Greater Short-toed Larks and both Northern and Black-eared Wheatears may be detected in spring or summer, with Skylarks, Rock Sparrows, Carrion Crows and Linnets present year-round.

# CHARACTERISTIC SPECIES

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### Breeders

Golden Eagle, Egyptian Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Montagu's Harrier, Common Kestrel, Red-legged Partridge, Little Bustard, 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, Woodchat Shrike, Black Redstart, Black-eared Wheatear, Black Wheatear (extinct), Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Blue Rock-thrush, Subalpine Warbler, Spectacled Warbler, Orphean Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Red-billed Chough, Jackdaw (extinct), Raven, Rock Sparrow.

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### Winterers

Hen Harrier, Merlin.

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### Migrants

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