

Farmlands and wetlands of Barahona–Alpanseque

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Location and access

55km southeast of Soria city. Take the A-11 Madrid road as far as Almazán, and then the CL-101 to Barahona. From Madrid there is easy access along the old historic route from Jadraque, both to Barahona and to Alpanseque.



Status: The entire area is within the Altos de Barahona SPA. Two lagoons are included in the List of Wetlands of Special Interest of Castilla y León: the Laguna del Ojo (SO-19) and the Laguna del Sabuco – listed as the Laguna Cerrada- (SO-18).

Terrain: Small dewponds – locally called 'navajos' – and endorheic lagoons, surrounded by cereal cultivation.

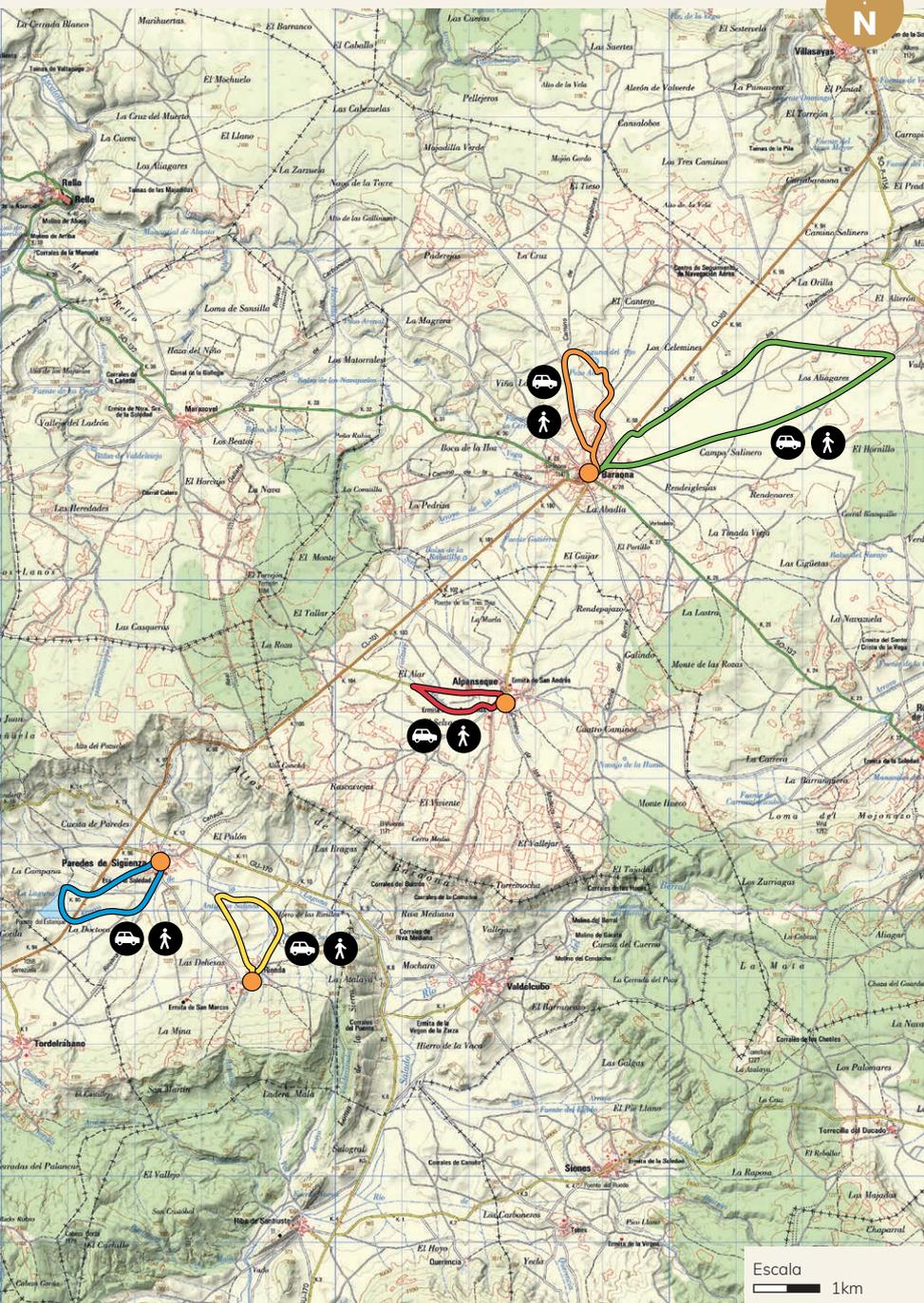
Means of access: Own vehicle.

Ease of access: Easy. All roads are of public access.

Visit duration: As preferred, this being a very accessible area. Two to three hours are needed to visit all parts.

Timing: It is important to ascertain whether or not there have been heavy rains during the preceding winter/spring. This being so the wetlands will be full and visits from late January until late spring will be worthwhile. Visits from July to October are also offer the chance of seeing flocks of Great and Little Bustards.

Comments: Barahona is a regional centre that has seen better days, as is the case unfortunately over much of the province. The area is quite windy, something to bear in mind when planning a visit if such conditions are forecast.



- Itinerary 1
- Family itinerary A
- Itinerary 2
- Family itinerary B
- Itinerary 3
- Itinerary on foot
- Itinerary by car
- Start Itinerary

Site description and itineraries

The SPA, which is characterised by the dwarf shrub paramos where you can see Dupont's Lark, may be named after Barahona. However, the hinterlands of these two villages have long been devoted to cereal cultivation, sprinkled with quite a few lagoons and dewponds locally known as 'navajos'.

We cannot resist mentioning that the 14th century Prince Juan Manuel when describing this area in his book on hunting wrote: "Don Juan says that of all places where he has been he has never seen anywhere better for all types of falconry, and especially for exercising large falcons, than between Barahona and Paredes etc.", "Thereabouts are many ducks, herons, cranes and Barn Owls, making for very pleasing hunting; in summertime there are numerous Stone-curlews and Little Bustards, and always many hares and partridges..."; "Between Barahona and Paredes there is a stream and lakes where there are many ducks, a good spot for falconry". Nearly 600 years later much has been lost and there are rather fewer species than the Prince found, but we can still identify and see those locations.

The lagoons are not signposted. Very often it is the birds of their surroundings that are of interest, rather than those on the lagoons themselves.

1 You should start with the Laguna del Ojo. Like the others this is an endorheic lagoon, with no feeder stream or spring, and it has suffered in the past from vegetation clearance and deepening of the basin. You should explore the surrounding pastures as well as the two large pools that form nearby in wet years. One of these is between the lake and the local road.

2 The other and the larger of the two is between the road and the track that leads to Pinilla del Campo. In very wet years, such as occurred in 2001, 2003, 2013, 2015 and 2018, the latter pool amounts to a lagoon and is ideal for seeing waterbirds.

3 There are a couple of small pools near Alpanseque but a stream, the

Arrojo Madre, downstream of that village is of greater interest.

What birds to see and when

In accordance with Prince Juan Manuel, we here consider species that already characterised this area hundreds of years ago.

Cranes. These have a stopover site during their spring migration in the fields around the Laguna del Ojo, provided that it holds water. Some good-sized flocks may stage here between mid February and mid March. They are much less likely to appear during the postnuptial migration when the land and wetlands are largely dry, given the absence of any summer rain.

Plovers. Hundreds of (Northern) Lapwings can be seen from late February through the whole of March. Once again, the pastures and fields around the Laguna del Ojo are the best places to see them, often in mixed flocks with Golden Plovers. The autumn passage, as with the Cranes, is much less significant but they can be seen in November especially. The attraction of this area to Lapwings sometimes leads to the occasional pair remaining to nest, this and the Monteagudo reservoir being the only provincial sites where they may do so.

A Sociable Lapwing was present here for over two weeks in March 2018. This rare Asian species is being reported wintering in the Peninsula increasingly often. Some Dotterel have also been seen with the Lapwings in March. The Dotterel finds good stopover sites here and in many of the paramos and fields of southern Soria province. It occurs sporadically in March and April but is a regular presence in August–September.

Ducks. Virtually all dabbling duck species may be seen in these wetlands. The most interesting are the Garganeys that appear on the second, unnamed, large pool mentioned above. Ducks are present from February until late April. From May onwards there only remain the Mallards that stay to nest on all the lagoons as well as by pools and small streams.



Great Bustard

Otis tarda



Grey Herons. The Laguna del Ojo is the only site in the province where the Grey Heron has been proved to have nested, although it is suspected to have done so at the Laguna del Sabuco. These sporadic nesting attempts are no doubt linked to the nearby colony, a few kilometres away, at the Laguna del Madrigal, Guadalajara (see below). Grey Herons may be seen year-round, even in summer.

Other waterbirds. Spring is best for waterbirds, again particularly in years with heavy rains. Of these, waders will be the most obvious and many common species can be seen here, Ruffs and Common Redshanks being the most numerous. Waders can be seen from mid March to mid May. The first rails appear in mid March. The three common rails – the Moorhen, Common Coot and Water Rail – nest at these lagoons. This is one of the highest elevations at which Coots nest in Spain.

Another breeding species is the Marsh Harrier, some two or three pairs nesting in the marginal vegetation at the Laguna del Ojo, even when it is dry. We must also mention the White Stork, a common non-breeding migrant here. Sizable stork flocks choose to roost on the church at Barahona, especially in August and September.

Great Bustards. Great Bustards begin to appear here from mid June. They are males of the Madrid region population that abandon their nesting grounds to head north to more elevated and cooler areas such as this. The numbers of overwintering Great Bustards here have declined in recent years. The reasons are unclear but it is known that males are increasingly remaining in their breeding areas thus avoiding the increased mortality, from diverse causes, that is suffered by those that do migrate. Alpanseque was the best place to see Great Bustards during the 1990s, and many locals remembered that they nested there in the not too distant past. The best site is now between Barahona and Pinilla del Olmo, from mid June to early October, viewed from the road that links the two villages.

Little Bustards. Good-sized flocks of Little Bustards, derived from the population of nearby plains and paramos, could also be from the road mentioned above in late summer and early autumn. Numbers have declined markedly in recent years, in keeping with the population decrease reported widely in Spain. During the early 1990s there were still flocks of up to 100 but nowadays you are lucky if you see 30.

Other nearby places for family-centred visits

A **Laguna de Madrigal.** This lagoon lies barely five kilometres beyond the Guadalajara provincial boundary, once past the village of Paredes de Sigüenza. This is a permanent lagoon, mainly covered by a dense reedbed. It is barely five metres from the road, the main drawback being that there is scant opportunity to park there. This is the largest regional lagoon, at seven hectares. A Grey Heron colony has become established here and there are always such waterbirds as Common Coots, Little Grebes, Mallards and Marsh Harriers.

B **Salinas de Rienda.** These disused salt pans, that are still in quite good repair, are also near Paredes de Sigüenza. They are readily accessible and a very good place to see such locally uncommon breeding species as the Black-winged Stilt and Little Ringed Plover. Many commoner species, including the Yellow Wagtail, Zitting Cisticola and Corn Bunting, attain high densities here. Spring is the most promising time for a visit but since there is some water year-round something surprising may turn up at any time.

CHARACTERISTIC SPECIES

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Breeders

Mallard, Montagu's Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Common Kestrel, Red-legged Partridge, Moorhen, Common Coot, Water Rail, Little Bustard, Stone-curlew, Little Owl*, Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Greater Short-toed Lark, Dupont's Lark, Calandra Lark, Skylark, Woodlark, Tawny Pipit, Rock Sparrow.

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Summering non-breeders

Great Bustard, Lesser Kestrel.

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Winterers

Hen Harrier, Merlin, Meadow Pipit.

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Migrants

White Stork, Black Stork, Wigeon, Shoveler, Gadwall, Teal, Garganey, Crane, Lapwing, Golden Plover, Dotterel, Common Redshank, Ruff, Green Sandpiper.

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Rarities

Sociable Lapwing, Glossy Ibis.