

## Upper Bordecorex valley

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### Location and access

65km south of Soria city. From Soria take the A-11 motorway for Madrid and leave at exit 65, heading for Yelo-Miño. From Madrid take the same motorway and leave at the exit for Medinaceli-Fuencaliente, continuing via Ambrona to Miño.



**Status:** No special protection apart for the Laguna de la Sima, which is included as SO-19 in the regional inventory of wetlands of Castilla y León. The protection gained by the lagoons from inclusion in this inventory is nominal, given that this lagoon has often seen its vegetation burned and it is degrading year after year without anything being done to conserve or protect it.

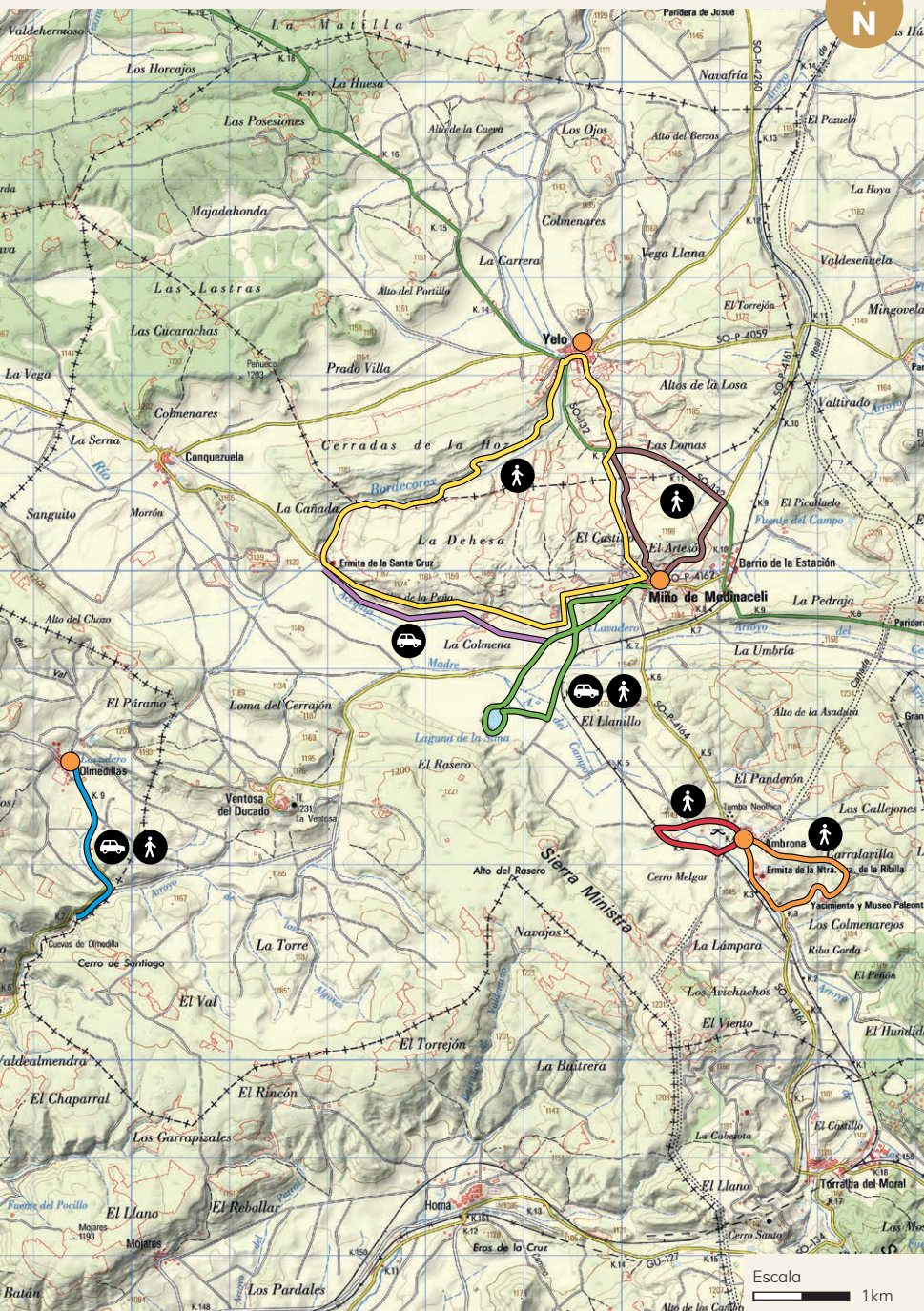
**Terrain:** The varied habitats include the broad central plain that featured one of the largest lagoons in the province, the Laguna de Conquezueta, until the mid 20th century. This is now farmland but still accumulates water during very rainy periods. The basin is fringed to the south by various limestone hills whose habitats are suitable for steppic birds despite being partly marred by infelicitous reafforestations and a windfarm. There are Pyrenean Oak copses on sandstone outcrops in the north.

**Means of access:** Own vehicle.

**Ease of access:** Easy. All roads and tracks are public.

**Visit duration:** Variable. Two to three hours are sufficient to take in the main areas but more time is needed if you are to visit the Bordecorex valley, as we recommend.

**Timing:** The site is at an altitude of 1,100–1,200m and so winters are very cold here. Nevertheless, December and/or January visits, continuing to late April and early May, are worthwhile if the former Laguna de Conquezueta has accumulated water. As for other sites, late spring is the most rewarding period.



Escala 1km

- Itinerary 1
- Family itinerary A
- Itinerary 2
- Family itinerary B
- Itinerary 3
- Family itinerary C
- Itinerary 4
- Itinerary on foot
- Itinerary by car
- Start Itinerary

## Site description and itineraries

The nearby Ambrona valley and this valley of the river Bordecorex have together been recognised as a centre of prehistoric culture, as a result of investigations and some excavations of the many archaeological sites found there. Neolithic remains are the most evident and it appears that some of the settlements found here may have been on stilts, given the extension, depth and persistence of the extensive sheet of water that once filled this endorheic basin.

The Laguna de Conquezuela is no more than a memory now, having been drained during the mid 20th century by means of a canal, which passes water into the nascent river Bordecorex, which then flows towards Yelo. Now and then, however, periods of heavy rain fill the basin faster than the canal can drain it, and the lake reforms partly, below the Santa Cruz hermitage. This has occurred during not a few years of the present century, a sizable lake having been formed in 2018 by the abundant rains of February and March.

The Laguna de la Sima persists but is very small and, being a typical endorheic lake, it dries up for long periods. It is a shame that it has suffered environmental degradations such as fly-tipping and, especially, the burning of the marsh vegetation. This lagoon is not signposted so use the maps to locate it.

**1** An itinerary with several stops that allows you to see the birds of the area should begin at Miño de Medinaceli, visiting the cane-brakes north of the village.

**2** A second stop at the Laguna de la Sima and a third stop in the vicinity of the Santa Cruz hermitage.

**3** An intermediate stop is advised if the Laguna de Conquezuela has water since there are then good viewing opportunities along the Miño to Conquezuela road.

**4** For birding on foot a recommended circular route can include Miño to the hermitage along the roadside, thereafter descending along the right

bank of the river Bordecorex to reach the GR86 path, following this back to Miño de Medinaceli.

## What birds to see and when

**Winter.** Although this is a cold area there are plenty of days with anticyclonic weather, when splendid sunshine follows a frosty start, during which some interesting birds may be found. Such species as the Brambling, Yellowhammer, Hawfinch, Siskin and thrushes are not uncommon here then, with Spanish Sparrows also appearing in recent years. These last are given to nomadic movements in winter and roosts of over 100 birds may form around the Laguna de la Sima.

The formation of the Conquezuela wetland during rainy winters guarantees the presence of waterfowl, especially Teal, Pintail and Mallard, that appear right away. As January and February progress they are followed by herons, storks and some early passage waders, notably Green Sandpipers and flocks of Lapwings. Cranes and geese are also recorded here but to a lesser extent than at some other regional wetlands such as Barahona.

**March–April.** Aquatic birds continue to draw attention. Waders are more numerous since small plovers and shanks join the sandpipers and Lapwings, some remaining until the wetland dries up entirely, usually in early May. The attention is then drawn by the rupestral birds on the sandy outcrops nearby: Egyptian Vultures, Common Kestrels, Crag Martins, Rock Sparrows, Ravens, Red-billed Choughs and both Blue and Rufous-tailed Rock-thrushes. We should not forget the Laguna de la Sima which holds water longer and attracts small numbers of Mallards, Little Grebes, Common Coots, Water Rails, Moorhens and Great Reed Warblers.

**May–June.** The nearby oakwoods are slow to come into leaf, sometimes not until the end of May. These are regenerating woods, with few mature trees, but they still offer an interesting avifauna, including some species of typically more northern distribution in



Common Redshank

*Tringa totanus*

recent years. Tree Pipits, Song Thrushes and Red-backed Shrikes may be seen here. It has been curious to witness how at the same time as some northern species have spread southwards there have also been arrivals from the south, such as the Sardinian Warbler and Spanish Sparrow.

An even more considerable list will result if you visit some of the nearby paramera areas, to find Thekla and Greater Short-toed Larks, Tawny Pipits, Spectacled Warblers and Black-eared Wheatears.



## Other nearby places for family-centred visits

**A** **Cuevas de las Olmedillas.** A partial venture into Guadalajara province allows you to see these curious limestone formations where prehistoric human remains have been found. The right bank of the river is in Guadalajara province but the left bank lies in Ventosa del Ducado district, Soria. Rupestral bird species are predominant here. Griffon Vultures, Golden Eagles, Red-billed Choughs and good flocks of Jackdaws are present year-round, with Crag Martins and both rock-thrushes evident in spring. Eagle Owls can be seen here and also at Conquezuela.

**B** **Ambrona.** The neighbourhood of Ambrona village offers two places of interest. The first is the surroundings of the paleontological site there. After viewing this you can continue along the access road into the paramo. You should at least hear Dupont's Larks and see other steppic species. Thereafter, for something completely different, there is the picnic site in the poplar copse alongside the village. Aside from the recreational area, the spring by the trees allows the ready observation of many common birds, such as Golden Orioles, Blackcaps, Robins and Collared Doves.

# 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, Tree Pipit, Tawny Pipit, Blue Rock-thrush, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Red-backed Shrike, Nuthatch, Rock Sparrow, Spanish Sparrow.

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### Winterers

Hen Harrier, Merlin, Meadow Pipit.

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### Migrants

White Stork, Black Stork, Wigeon, Shoveler, Gadwall, Teal, Garganey, Osprey, Crane, Lapwing, Golden Plover, Dotterel, Little Ringed Plover, Common Ringed Plover, Common Redshank, Greenshank, Ruff, Green Sandpiper, Black-headed Gull, Roller.