

Avenales ravine



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Location and access

From Soria city take the A-15 to Medinaceli, and then the old N-II in the Zaragoza direction, leaving at exit 154 heading for Lodarés and Jubera. Continue on the N-II as far as the village of Somaén, the starting point of this route. You can also start from Velilla de Medinaceli, whose access road you will have passed several kilometres back, on the right.

Status: No special protection.

Terrain: A small limestone gorge excavated by the Arroyo del Salobral de Avenales, between the abandoned village of that name and the river Jalón at Somaén.

Means of access: Own vehicle. Neither village is served by public transport.

Ease of access: Straightforward. There is a track that becomes a partly signposted path, allowing easy access.

Visit duration: Variable according to preference. The proposed itinerary would take 5–6 hours there and back.

Timing: Spring and autumn are ideal for seeing the typical species but some interesting observations are also possible in winter.



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

Site description and itineraries

The Jalón basin in this part of Soria province offers a succession of valleys and small gorges, carved into the limestone rocks of this part of Iberian Range. The rivers and streams all the way along the right bank of the Jalón are especially significant. They all descend, north to south, from the spurs of the Sierra del Solorio.

The river Blanco, the most important of these and the most permanent watercourse, given that it is fed by springs that drain a good part of the Paramo de Layna, appears here. So does the much more modest sized Salobral de Avenales brook, whose bed is often dry. The Jalón itself takes the form of a mountain river, with rapids, in this sector although it is much constrained by works that have held it back between the double railway line and the main road.

All these rivers have formed gorges and ravines of variable spans. The largest and most attractive rock walls are those at the end of the Avenales ravine and in the surroundings of Somaén vilage. The village itself merits a visit on account of its attractive traditional layout and location. The river banks have hardly any noteworthy arboreal growth, unlike the slopes that are covered by a lush Holm Oak wood throughout this sector.

The main itinerary runs along the Avenales ravine, between that village and Somaén. You can walk there and back since the distance is barely three and a half kilometres each way. However, those who enjoy walking will prefer a circular route. For this, starting from Somaén, you come to Avenales. From there a track heads westwards which brings you to Velilla de Medinaceli two kilometres further on. From Velilla take the local road that descends to the old main road in the Jalón valley, offering views from an elevated position of an excellent tract of Holm Oak woodland as well as the rocky valley scarps. It may be worth a diversion before this stage to the old Velilla hydroelectric station, a small dam that feeds the chief hydroelectric plant of the river Blanco.

Once on the old main road you can continue to Somaén, stopping at the old mill half a kilometre before the village, to

view the large cave that has been the site of interesting records of such birds as Wallcreepers during the autumn–winter period.

What birds to see and when

Such rivers as the Jalón and Blanco have seldom featured in our itineraries. Only the river Caracena offers similar characteristics. We mention this because the present site offers observations of the birds of fast-flowing rivers, the Dipper in particular. The Jalón does experience periods of sparse flow but it never dries up entirely in this sector. The Dipper disappears below Arcos de Jalón and Santa María de Huerta, on account of water contamination by these villages and the absence of steep gradients with their typical waterfalls. The Dipper can thus only be seen along the present stretch, where it is becoming ever scarcer.

Male Dippers can already be heard singing in January as they dispute their territorial limits with each other. They nest as early as March. Eagle Owls also begin to call during January–February. There is a sizable Eagle Owl population throughout this district, although the birds often keep a low profile. Together with Griffon Vultures, a few Red-billed Choughs and small woodland birds, they help to enliven months in which bird diversity is generally sparse.

By March the Crag Martins will have arrived. They are present all year in some nearby areas but not here. The same largely applies to the Blue Rock-thrushes on the screes, although the occasional individual may overwinter. Most of them leave early in November, returning during February–March. The same months see the courtship displays of two of the most spectacular raptors of the ravines, the Golden Eagle and the Peregrine Falcon. The eagle occurs in the Avenales valley and the falcon on the Jalón escarpments. Once again we remind you of the importance of not disturbing the gorge birds near their nests, at a time when there is a risk that they will abandon their clutches.

The beginning of nesting by the eagles and falcons coincides with the arrival of the Egyptian Vultures: typically a



Dipper

Cinclus cinclus

pair settles near Somaén. Another of the most characteristic species of this ravine also appears now on the same large escarpment near this village, near the vulture-whitened rocks. It is that great aerial performer, the Alpine Swift, otherwise found regularly in Soria province only in the Cañón del Río Lobos. It is delightful to see these swifts and hear their far-carrying calls. They are here alongside Rufous-tailed Rock-thrushes, Red-rumped Swallows and House Martins; the rupestral species that are the great attraction of this site. Many other summer visitors will have arrived in May and June. Scrub-warblers are a particular highlight of

the woods and hillsides. Nearly all the species nest here, the exception being the Whitethroat that only appears on passage. There is a good population of the Sardinian Warbler, a very local species in the province. Subalpine and Orphean Warblers frequent the oakwoods, the latter also alongside Dartford and Spectacled Warblers on the hillsides between Avenales and Velilla and with Blackcaps, and the scarcer Garden Warblers, along the Jalón and in the last stretch of riverine woodland of the Arroyo del Salobral. The density of Bonelli's and Melodious Warblers, among other woodland species, is very noteworthy.



Other nearby places for family-centred visits

A **La Chorroneira waterfall.** The river Blanco is a minor marvel. We have described its upper reaches in another site account (12). Here, above Velilla de la Medinaceli, the river tumbles between rocks of precipitated limestone, forming a small waterfall 'La Chorroneira'. Access is signposted from Velilla, where you should leave your car. This will be a typical stroll producing such common birds as Goldfinches, Linnets, Corn Buntings, Stonechats, Wrens, Blackbirds and Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers. The poplar plantation around the waterfall has such birds as Golden Orioles, Bee-eaters and Turtle Doves in spring. Worth a visit.

B **Jubera.** The river Jalón passes through rocky stretches between Lodaes and Jubera before reaching the sector covered above. Jubera, a modern village by regional standards, is also a good birding location. A tarmac track leaves the village, climbing the slopes and passing under the motorway, in the direction of the abandoned village of Valladares. You may opt to go all the way there, viewing a mediterranean landscape of a succession of crop fields, scrub and small copses. However, just a stroll along the tarmac track serves to find the typical scrub and hillside species of the area, particularly the Dartford and Sardinian Warblers, Northern and Black-eared Wheatears and Blue Rock-thrush. If you take the track to the ruined castle you will enjoy views of the whole valley. Sightings of Griffon Vultures and Golden Eagles are practically guaranteed here all year round.

CHARACTERISTIC SPECIES

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Breeders

Egyptian Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Short-toed Eagle, Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Golden Eagle, Booted Eagle, Eagle Owl, Wryneck, Crag Martin, Alpine Swift, Turtle Dove, Grey Wagtail, Dipper, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Blue Rock-thrush, Spectacled Warbler, Orphean Warbler, Sardinian Warbler Nuthatch, Golden Oriole, Red-billed Chough, Hawfinch, Ortolan Bunting.

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Winterers

Woodcock, Meadow Pipit, Alpine Accentor, Siskin.

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Migrants

Wallcreeper, Bullfinch.