

Vildé rock formations and gorge



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Location and access

70km from Soria city, in the centre-west of the province. From Soria take the SO-100 as far as Berlanga de Duero and then the local road through Aguilera and Morales to reach Recuerda. From here take the Fresno de Caracena road and the turn-off to Vildé. Access is also possible from Burgo de Osma or San Esteban de Gormaz via Rasa and the Caracena road, passing through Navapalos.

Status: No special protection, despite a long but unsuccessful campaign to register the area as an SPA. Within IBA 076, Tiermes-Caracena.

Terrain: Originally level terrain in the Duero valley where erosion has given rise to a diversity of Cretaceous outcrops. These have witnessed how the rivers have created small gorges or canyons that break up the uniformity of these lands. At this point the lower reaches of the river Caracena have created one of the grandest of the gorges of this region.

Means of access: By car to the surrounding villages, such as Vildé, Villanueva de Gormaz and Fresno de Caracena. Thereafter on foot or by bicycle, given the poor state of the tracks.

Ease of access: Easy. However, strong footwear is advisable on the stony pavements, where there are a lot of loose rocks.

Visit duration: The core area can be seen in two or three hours.

Timing: Spring is best but visits at any time of year, even midwinter, are worthwhile.

Comments: A small reservoir in the centre of the gorge overflows the riverside path making it seemingly obligatory to continue along the bordering slope, practically at the foot of the escarpment. This is not advised during the breeding season when you may disturb the nesting birds there. You can take a short detour instead.



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

Site description and itineraries

Cretaceous limestone domes are a frequent feature of this part of the Duero valley and nearly all result in rather similar landscapes. The Burgo de Osma formation, dissected by three rivers: the Ucero, Abi6n and Sequillo, is nearby, as are those at Berlanga de Duero, eroded by the river Escalote, and Paones. However, the Vild6 gorge is certainly the most spectacular of all. At the eastern end, Gormaz castle, separated from the core area by the river Duero, is no less magnificent.

The process by which the river Caracena began to wear away this limestone pavement began millions of years ago and continues today. Erosion has revealed the the calcareous substrate and grazing pressure has kept it practically bare of tree cover. The remaining vegetation is nonetheless of interest. Many slopes support a varied cover of herbaceous perennials and such shrubs as brooms. Such expanses are the habitat of steppic species, including Dupont's Lark and the Black-bellied Sandgrouse, which have outpost populations here at some distance from their larger concentrations in the southern paramos.

The landscape contrast here is between the canyon of splendid, if not very high escarpments cut by the river and the riparian growth that carpets the riverbed, except for an 800m stretch where a small, century-old, irrigation reservoir fills the gorge from side to side, adding further diversity. The tree cover here, a favoured refuge of a great variety woodland birds, comprises tall, shapely, Black and White Poplars. We recommend two routes:

1 From the fountain side of Vild6 village square take the unmarked path southwestwards that leads to the right bank of the river. Continue through the gorge as far as the reservoir dam, which you should cross to the left bank. As mentioned above, it is undesirable to continue along the escarpment margin for fear of startling and flushing all the birds there. Instead return to Vild6 along a track on the left that heads eastwards, crossing a good stretch of the limestone pavement with its typical birds.

2 The other route starts at Villanueva de Gormaz. A track from the village crosses the limestone pavement to the river, upstream of the reservoir and where you can see some of the tree cover. Unless the river is high you can cross to the left bank where a small path leads to Fresno. You can continue along this path to explore the central area of pavement, and see some of its typical byres and corrals, returning along a parallel track to Villanueva.

What birds to see and when

May is the best month in which to see all the breeding species in all habitats. Nearly all will have arrived by the beginning of the month and the clamour of song in the gorges and on the paramo is overwhelming. The Blue Rock-thrushes, several pairs of which nest here, will have been singing strongly on the escarpments since mid March, with their relatives the Rufous-tailed Rock-thrushes taking over in May.

Meanwhile, in the riparian growth, the Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Golden Oriole, Robin, Cetti's Warbler and Bonelli's Warbler vie with each other to make themselves heard. Griffon and Egyptian Vultures continue their nesting, the latter with eggs or very small chicks, the former with larger chicks. Nesting by the entire range of other rupestral birds is also in full swing.

Undoubtedly, however, the arrivals on the slopes of the limestone pavement are especially noteworthy. Ortolan Buntings appear here from mid-April onwards, their beautiful song a constant feature in some areas. They are also among the most frequent birds encountered on the slopes between Navapalos and Fresno. Black-eared Wheatears precede them and also occupy stony areas, or the corral walls. Arrivals include Greater Short-toed Larks and Tawny Pipits, these joining the Dupont's Larks that still occur here. We have already commented on the difficulty of seeing these last but their fluting song can be heard at daybreak in May and early June.

This paramo is not only worth a visit in spring. The scarce Dotterel may turn up here in late August or throughout



Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus



September. The area seems very attractive to Dotterels, which occur nearly annually, although you need to be alert to their characteristic and far-reaching call. Listen too for the 'churr' of the Black-bellied Sandgrouse, a few of which a few survive here, moving between the paramo and cultivation further south, towards Villanueva de Gormaz. The reservoir and escarpments together still offer a good range of species during this period, some of them on passage and others summer visitors that are still present. There are nesting Mallard, Moorhens and Water Rails at the reservoir. A few Cormorants begin to appear in autumn, along with Grey Herons, Kingfishers and Common Sandpipers.

Species diversity declines as the autumn progresses. Among wintering species Meadow Pipits appear on the paramera; Common Chiffchaffs, and Siskins in some years, occur in the riverine woodland, and the call of the occasional Alpine Accentor is heard on the escarpments. Crag Martins, Black Redstarts and Blue Rock-thrushes disappear progressively – let us know if you see any of these in winter. However, just as all seems quiet we are approaching the courtship period of the Griffons and the ululations of the Eagle Owls can be heard on clear nights in December and January. As you can see, there is always something of interest here year-round.

Other nearby places for family-centred visits

– **The Duero gorge at Gormaz.** In geological terms this lies within the same area as the limestone pavement but the river Duero imposes its own character on this small gorge. The river is held back here by the Bubones hydroelectric plant. A road leads to a fountain alongside a fish farm – that is in use contrary to what some maps indicate – alongside which a track leads through this gorge. Griffon Vultures are a constant presence here alongside such other rupestral birds at Choughs, Ravens, Common Kestrels and rock-thrushes. The widening of the river at this point has enabled the establishment of small islets of emergent vegetation that are very attractive to such aquatic birds as Marsh Harriers, Mallards, Kingfishers and Grey Herons. The last Little Bitterns of Soria province used to occur here.

– **The river Duero at Navapalos.** The recent establishment of a small hydroelectric plant here has involved a widening of the river, encouraging the presence of certain waterbirds. According to season you may find Cormorants and herons, various waterfowl, Kingfishers, Little Grebes, Sand Martins and Marsh Harriers, as well as abundant reedbed passerines such as Reed and Cetti's Warblers and Wrens. All these are readily observable from the bridge, which is also a good viewpoint for raptors. Look towards the slopes around Navapalos since the hundreds of hectares of apple orchards on the northern side of the river have greatly reduced the ornithological merit of that area.

CHARACTERISTIC SPECIES

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Breeders

Little Grebe, Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, Booted Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Common Kestrel, Marsh Harrier, Red-legged Partridge, Eagle Owl, Little Owl, Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Greater Short-toed Lark, Dupont's Lark, Skylark, Woodlark, Crag Martin, Tawny Pipit, Black-eared Wheatear, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Blue Rock-thrush, Bonelli's Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher, Nuthatch, Red-backed Shrike, Rock Sparrow, Spanish Sparrow, Ortolan Bunting.

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Winterers

Great Cormorant, Hen Harrier, Merlin, Meadow Pipit, Siskin, Reed Bunting.

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Migrants

Black Stork, Dotterel, Osprey.