

40 sites for practising ecotourism in the province of Cáceres. Diputación de Cáceres



for practising  **ECO TOURISM**
in the province of
Cáceres

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40 sites for
practising
ecotourism in
the province of
Cáceres

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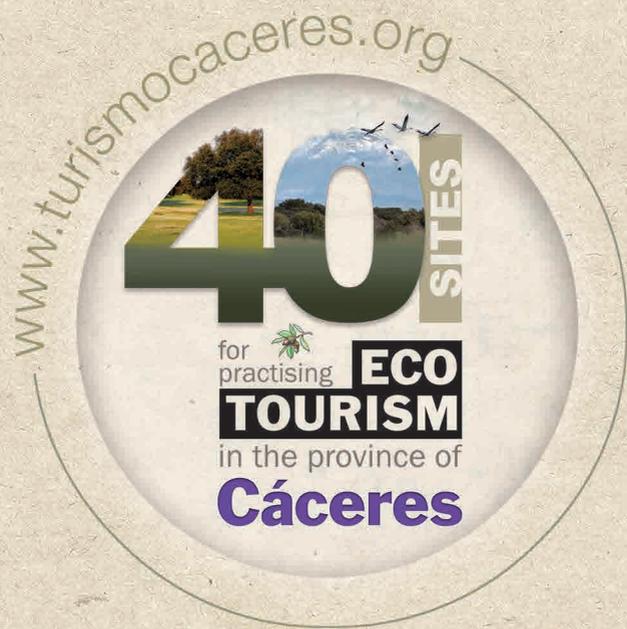
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We have grown more and more accustomed to travelling without losing sight of our car GPS device, or even the one built into our mobile phone. We tell them our destination and they automatically show us the quickest way to get there. It is a marvellous thing not to have to worry about it, but how many places do we overlook in our hurry to get somewhere else? Probably more than we dare think of.

That is the reason behind the conception of this guide. We want to invite you to take one, two, ... as many breaks in your journey as you wish. In many cases the sites we suggest will surprise you, while in others they will provide new clues as to your final destination, or even an excuse to come back. Everything we propose, whether it is a viewpoint, a rocky space, a defile, a river bank, a path or a bathing area, shares in the region's ecological value. All these spaces offer us something meaningful and, therefore, worth trying to enjoy and understand.

There is no doubt that in the province of Cáceres there are many more excellent sites than the 40 we have selected for this first edition. Nevertheless, each one of our suggestions has a very special message that we hope to have passed on accurately. Our aim has been very simple: bringing to your attention places that, although they may have been invisible to you on your way somewhere else, justly deserve to be a destination in themselves. They are generous towards the visitor, and in most cases protected areas.

Notwithstanding, beyond all acronyms and categorisations, what we want to do is to urge you to look around in a different way, at a different pace, and contribute to these sites' development and preservation.

A little help with EU and local terminology

ZEPA

A ZEPA (Zona de Especial Protección para las Aves) is a Special Protection Area (SPA) for Birds. The ZEPAs are part of the Natura 2000 network (the European Union network of nature protection areas).

LIC

An LIC (Lugar de Importancia Comunitaria) is a Site of Community Importance (SCI). The LICs are likewise part of the EU Natura 2000 network.

Dehesa

The *dehesa* is an ecosystem derived from the Mediterranean woodland that results from the application of agroforestry. It consists of spacious clearings punctuated by holm and cork oaks, with a substratum of pasture land and scrubland. It plays an important role in livestock and game grazing, while offering other forest resources, such as cork and wood.

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40 SITES

for practising **ECO TOURISM**
in the province of **Cáceres**



SERVICIO DE TURISMO
DIPUTACIÓN DE CÁCERES

SITES

01 to 06

40 SITES
for practising **ECO**
TOURISM
in the province of
Cáceres

ORANGE ZONE



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Canchos de
Ramiro



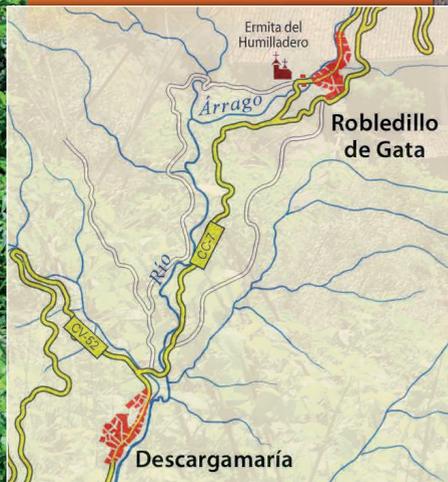
Robledillo de Gata Descargamaría

Robledillo, Site of Cultural Interest under the category Historic and Artistic Sites

LIC Río Árrago y Tralgas, LIC Sierra de Gata
ZEPA Sierra de Gata y Valle de las Pilas

01

Water, orchards, birds and the experience of walking around a space where time has stood still for many years.



THE ESSENTIALS

Natural pools.

Its wines were mentioned by Cervantes in The Exemplary Novels.

The Museum of Olive Oil.

Olive oil with DO (Guarantee of Origin) Gata Hurdes.

Between Las Hurdes region and neighbouring Portugal, the Sierra de Gata is the natural step that separates and serves as a transition between the southern and northern Iberian Plateaus. The change in altitude, together with climatic variations that become more obvious as we go north, account for the exceptional biodiversity of these mountains.

Aside from its scenic values and cultural heritage, it is worth mentioning its villages. They merge into the landscape and, loyal to their traditions, are examples of how life and sustainable development can be in perfect harmony with the environment.

From Robledillo de Gata to Descargamaría the hike along the 4 km path is easy and quiet. We

walk alongside a river where there are no dams, waterwheels or any other impediment that might hamper its flow. In areas close to the river banks, olive groves, vineyards and pine forests alternate with orchards. The orchards are well cared for and their products, of excellent quality, are mostly intended for self-consumption.

Robledillo de Gata and Descargamaría are the only two villages in our province whose waters flow into the Duero basin, into the River Malena or Malavao to be precise.

Both villages are surrounded by the ZEPA Sierra de Gata y Valle de las Pilas (ZEPA being a Special Protection Area for Birds), where we find one of the region's most important colonies of black vulture with more than fifty pairs. They nest on

big cork oaks and pines, and can be seen flying over the valley of the River Árrago, sometimes in the company of griffon and Egyptian vultures. Other birds of prey also frequent are the short-toed eagle, the booted eagle or the common buzzard.

In the streets of Robledillo de Gata we encounter the following species nesting in the singular buildings: black redstart, spotless starling, tawny owl, crag martin, barn swallow, common blackbird or grey wagtail.

Along the bank groves that line the course of the River Árrago, which are densely populated by willows and alder trees, birds give themselves away by their song. Such is the case with the melodious notes of the golden oriole, the



Sparrowhawk

Great spotted woodpecker

Pyrenean oak

Badger

common nightingale or the wren. The Iberian emerald lizard and the salamander can also be found in this habitat. The richness in fish of the River Árrago is also worthy of mention. In its waters there are many indigenous species, such as barbel, *Squalius alburnoides*, bogue or *Iberochondrostoma oretanum*. But there is no doubt that the most valuable and singular species is the colmilleja del Alagón (*Cobitis vettonica*), a fish endemic to the River Alagón basin that has in this spot one of its more important strongholds.

The perfect integration of landscape and village life is something that stays with the visitor. The Sierra de Gata presents us with a scene where development and a sense of being outside any temporal frame go hand in hand.

Castañar de San Martín

San Martín de Trevejo, Site of Cultural Interest under the category Historic Sites
ZEPA Sierra de Gata y Valle de las Pilas
LIC Sierra de Gata

02

An ornithological symphony in the most extensive chestnut wood of our region.



In the northwest of the province of Cáceres, very close to the Portugal border, the Sierra de Gata presents us with a group of villages that possess an important cultural baggage. San Martín de Trevejo is among the most representative.

It dates from the 4th century, and many battles were fought in its surrounding area. To the extent that in the 12th century the son of King Alfonso VII felt it necessary to repopulate the area with residents from the León and Galicia Kingdoms. This might have been the birthplace of the “a fala”, a curious language spoken even today in some of the villages of the Jálama mountain.

It is worth noticing this village's excellent state of preservation, its houses made of adobe and wood and its narrow and steep streets, along

which runs the water used in the land irrigation system.

Beyond the streets of San Martín de Trevejo, starting at the Pilón de las Huertas, an old cobbled road ascends towards the Santa Clara mountain pass. It is a pleasant walk. We leave the village behind and, after crossing a beautiful meadow, encounter Los Abuelos, two magnificent chestnut trees that hold our full attention. They are the entrance to the Castañar de los O'Soitu, as the place is called in the local fala. It is probably the largest chestnut wood in Extremadura. We are already at an altitude of 900 m, very close to the summit of the Santa Clara pass, as well as to the adjoining province of Salamanca.



Chestnut tree



Holly tree



Wildcat



Goshawk

THE ESSENTIALS

Roman road.

Casa del Comendador.

Ermita de Santa Cruz (chapel).

Local *bizcochos* (typical sponge cakes made with sweet flour).

The baskets of San Martín.

The presence of this marvellous wood in the enclave is not fortuitous, several ecological factors come together to make it possible. Among them are the high humidity and frequent rainfall, as well as the depth of its soil, which is rich in organic matter and has a high water-retention capacity. It is also important to note that, because of the way its slope is facing, the wood gets the sun only for a few hours a day, which is especially relevant during the hottest months. The predominant species in the wood is the chestnut tree, represented by some very big specimens. Other species of interest are holly tree, wych elm, hazel, whitebeam, field maple or birch.

Under the chestnut trees there are exotic orchids

and several herbaceous plants endemic to the Sistema Central mountains. The tree hollows give shelter to threatened chiropteran species, such as Bechstein's bat or barbastelle, as well as some carnivorous mammals, like the genet, the polecat or the wildcat.

Many forest birds live in the chestnut tree groves, although sometimes it is difficult to see them among the profusion of branches and leaves. Great spotted woodpeckers, Eurasian nuthatches, treecreepers, wrens and robins keep our company as we walk. Among the birds of prey, it is worth mentioning the European honey buzzard, the goshawk or the booted eagle. But we must take advantage of the forest clearings to try to see them.

Sierra de Dios Padre

LIC Sierra de Risco Viejo

03

A vantage point right at the heart of our province that offers unimpeded views and has Villanueva de la Sierra at its foot.



THE ESSENTIALS

Gazpacho made with bread and pennyroyal.

Tree Festival.

In the parish church, a Christ figure blackened by a fire and another one articulated.

Statue to the Unknown Soldier by Mariano Benlliure.



Jay



Black vulture



Short-toed eagle



Pyrenean oak

Villanueva de la Sierra is a small village located in the south of the Sierra de Gata region, 30 km away from the town of Coria and at a very short distance from Las Hurdes region. Originally it could have been a fort, dated from the time of the Vettones, a pre-Roman people of possibly Celtic ethnicity. Many singular things can be found in this village, among them the Fuente del Bardal, a fountain whose valued water comes from the Sierra de Dios Padre subterranean springs, and is still today a reference point for the village residents. They love their land and are proud to be the first community ever to have declared a Tree Day in 1805, an initiative led by the village

parish priest. The Sierra de Dios Padre is distant enough from any other elevations to give a sense of spaciousness. Any given day, more than twenty villages can be seen from its summit, a number that increases to sixty or seventy on clearer days. Some of these villages, like Gata or Candelario, are at a distance of more than 70 km by road. This mountain was reforested in 1920 with the pines and eucalyptus that now cover parts of it. They replaced an oak wood in which, according to 14th century documents, bears were seen. We set out along the El Bardal street that leads us to the village entrance. After 600 m we

take a turn to the right, and continue until coming to yet another crossroads, where we turn right once again. This path will take us to the Roca Serrana, "roca" meaning crag. At a distance of 4 km from the village, we can see a sign inviting us to continue the ascent to the mountain summit, where the chapel is. In the last section of our walk the vegetation that predominates is that of scrubland. The Sierra de Dios Padre is at the heart of the LIC Sierras de Risco Viejo (where LIC stands for Site of Community Importance). It is part of the Natura 2000 network and encompasses the mountains linking Pozuelo de Zarcón and La Pesga. Despite having undergone a noticeable transformation in the last decades,

these mountains still preserve natural habitats of great interest, among them oak woods, heathland, chestnut groves or *dehesa*, as well as luxuriant river banks with alder trees and willows. From an ecological point of view, they have many things in common with the neighbouring Sierras de Las Hurdes and Granadilla, and offer similar values. Likewise, they have a colony of black vulture, with a population of around ten pairs, and the scarce black stork finds in them the quietness it needs for nesting. One of the most representative birds of prey in these woods is the European honey buzzard, whose peculiar soaring makes it easy to detect.

Borbollón Reservoir

ZEPA Embalse de Borbollón
LIC Río Árrago y Traigas

Los Pajares: Site of Cultural Interest under the category of Sites of Ethnological Interest

04

Cranes know perfectly well which is the best place to take shelter from the rigours of winter.



In the northwest of the province of Cáceres, near Santibáñez el Alto and 10 km away from Moraleja, we come across the Borbollón Reservoir, a big lake that the visitor can fully enjoy. It is an oasis of clear waters and quiet shores where ornithology and fishing can be combined with swimming or the practice of aquatic sports.

We reach the reservoir by the EX-108 road that starts in the town of Coria and goes north. Before arriving at Moraleja, a diversion to the right will take us directly to the reservoir camp site, which is an excellent starting point for any exploration of the terrain.

The reservoir, built in 1954, has a maximum capacity of 84.7 hm³. The area is known as El Borbollón, due to the presence of a spring where water gushed out of the earth. Located at the foot of the Sierra de Gata, the reservoir gathers all the waters of the western part of the region. Its main source is the River Árrago that rises from El Manadero (literary “The Well Head”), in the municipal area of Robledillo de Gata, and lends its waters to the irrigation system and the production of electricity before flowing into the reservoir.

The Borbollón Reservoir is surrounded by the pasture land and oak *dehesa* that stretch



Greylag goose

Crane

Black kite

Otter

THE ESSENTIALS

Colony of Herons on the reservoir island.

The cranes.

Los Pajares.

Aquatic activities.

between the Sierra de Gata slopes and the River Alagón meadows, interrupted only by some irrigated crops.

The reservoir has been declared a Special Protection Area for Birds (ZEPA), due to the significant presence of bird species in the area, both in winter and spring. One of its most characteristic and valuable features is the Isla de Parra Chica, an island placed almost at the centre of the water mass with an area of approximately 20 ha. In spring the island trees harbour a big colony of herons (cattle egret, little egret, grey heron, night heron and common spoonbill), joined by white storks and black kites. In the winter it becomes an

important roost for cranes, more than 6000 specimens that fly over the reservoir at dawn and dusk offering a magnificent spectacle. In the latter season it is also common to see the following species: great cormorant, black-headed gull, lesser black-backed gull or greylag goose.

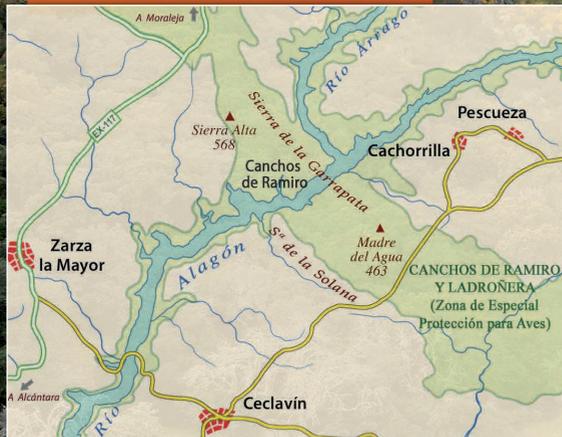
Halfway up between the lake and the village of Santibáñez el Alto, we find Los Pajares. This is an old architectural ensemble for agricultural and cattle raising purposes that has been wholly preserved and in 2010 was declared a Site of Cultural Interest by the Extremadura Government, being classed under the category of Sites of Ethnological Interest.

Canchos de Ramiro

LIC Canchos de Ramiro
ZEPA Canchos de Ramiro y Ladronera

06

That this is virgin terrain, still little trodden and exploited, is something the imperial eagle breeding in the area knows well.



The ZEPA Canchos de Ramiro y Ladronera is a Special Protection Area for Birds that occupies 23,119 hectares. Located in the west of the province of Cáceres and south of the Sierra de Gata, it stretches almost from the Sierra del Arco to the Portuguese border. It encompasses the following mountain ranges: Sierra de Caballos, Sierra de la Garrapata, Sierra de la Solana and Sierra Ladronera. They are all part of an important natural corridor that crosses the province of Cáceres from Villuercas, across the Parque Natural de Monfragüe and into Portugal.

The patches of Mediterranean woodland, the vegetation on the River Alagón banks, the *dehesa* and the rocky outcrops provide this space with an immense environmental wealth. Right after the Árrago tributary flows into the Alagón, two enormous quartzite cliffs go down into the waters

on both sides of the river, narrowing its bed. They are known as the Canchos de Ramiro, and are right at the heart of the ZEPA.

In this enclave, the rocky areas serve as a nesting habitat for emblematic species, such as griffon vulture, Egyptian vulture, black stork, Bonelli's eagle, peregrine falcon or golden eagle. By paying close attention, we can discover other less striking birds that are nevertheless also of great interest, like the red-billed cough, the black wheatear or the white-rumped swift. The black vulture and the Spanish imperial eagle can be also seen flying across these skies. They both nest in the Mediterranean woodland of nearby hillsides, and are among the most sought by ornithologists who visit the area. In the winter, there tend to be roosts of wood pigeons that sometimes hold gatherings of thousands of specimens.

Some slopes preserve excellent samples of Mediterranean woodland, with predominance of cork oaks and dense thickets of strawberry trees, heather, *Viburnum tinus*, *Phillyrea angustifolia* and rock rose. This, together with the variety of fish and chiropteran species that characterise it, has no doubt influenced the decision to declare this site an LIC (Site of Community Importance).

In the little tributaries of the River Alagón, sheltered from the water fluctuations of the Alcántara Reservoir, there are dense thickets of spurge, a plant typical of river shores with a marked low water period. In these spaces, because of the water shallowness and the presence of pools, it is not rare to see a black stork feeding from the streams.

The Portaje Reservoir is located at less than 15 km in a straight line from the Canchos

de Ramiro and is one of the most interesting wetlands in Extremadura due to its ornithological values. The colonies of herons (grey heron, little egret, cattle egret) and white storks, the important populations of *Anatidae* and waders (especially during the winter) and the concentrations of migrant spoonbills make the place remarkable.

In the woods and *dehesas* of the surrounding lands it is not uncommon to see the wild boar, the mongoose, the badger or the genet. Between the villages of Cachorrilla and Pescueza, there is the Aula de la Naturaleza de los Canchos de Ramiro, where interpreted visits are regularly organised.

All of which, combined with the patrimonial offer of towns like Coria, Ceclavín or Montehermoso, assure us of a memorable visit.

THE ESSENTIALS

Portaje Reservoir.

Traditional gold and silver work of Ceclavín.

Chanfaina, *cochifrito* and *migas* (traditional dishes).

The Gorra de Montehermoso (traditional woman's hat).

Fluvial cliffs in the Sierra de la Garrapata.



Booted eagle



Imperial eagle



Griffon vulture



Black stork

SITES

07 to 14

40 SITES
for practising **ECO**
TOURISM
in the province of
Cáceres

BLUE ZONE



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La Meancera



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Chorro de La Meancera

Volcán del Gasco-Site of Special Scientific Interest
ZEPA-LIC Las Hurdes

07

Steep slopes, waters with no fixed course, impossible meanders. In Las Hurdes nature creates patterns of its own.

THE ESSENTIALS

“Pumice stone” handicrafts.
Several bathing areas.
The Volcán del Gasco.

Located in the north of the province of Cáceres, between the Ambroz valley and the Sierra de Gata, Las Hurdes region encompasses a series of towns, villages, landscapes and hamlets. In the last decades, anonymous visitors, as well as famous writers and filmmakers have spoken at length about its beauty and distinctive character.

El Gasco is a small hamlet of less than 170 inhabitants that belongs in the municipal district of Nuñomoral. Because of its special location, a visit to El Gasco is a must for those who enjoy unadulterated nature and value well preserved tradition. Next to it rises the sierra that presents a crater known as the Volcán del Gasco. The crater owes its name to the

pumice appearance of some of the rocks found in the area, backing the volcanic hypothesis of its origin; while another hypothesis points at a meteoric impact. But the theory that is gradually gaining ground is the one that attributes its origin to the previous presence of a smelting furnace on the site, the reason why it was declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 2003.

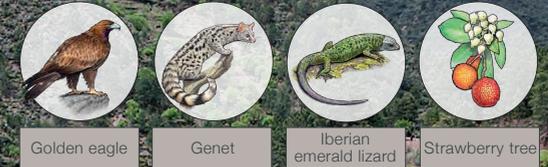
Around El Gasco streets we encounter several streams. They are full of the beautiful meanders, easily accessible bathing areas and spectacular waterfalls that characterise some of the Cáceres geography. Among the waterfalls, the Chorro de la Meancera, situated just 3 km away from the hamlet, deserves

special mention. Setting out from the square, we take an easy, signposted path that will lead us to the waterfall. In the gorge of the same name, the water falls in several steps from an altitude of more than 100 m. At any time of the year the waterfall is worth a visit but it is most impressive of all in the rainy months.

On the steep slopes of the valleys through which the River Malvellido and the Meancera stream flow, the vegetation consists mainly of holm oaks, often forming patches of stunted trees. The soil scarcity in these rocky terrains makes it difficult for the vegetation to grow, although in many areas there are also strawberry trees, heather and juniper. Because they have to compete for the light, holm oaks and strawberry

trees concentrate their branches and leaves on their crowns creating “hollow woods”, so that the rocks underneath appear covered by moss and lichen.

On the river banks, there are scattered ash trees and willows that only rarely form big groves. This is the habitat of the Iberian emerald lizard. The transparent waters allow us to see the abundant *Squalius alburnoides*, a little fish present in river stretches of a certain depth. In these inaccessible rocky spaces, nest the black stork and the golden eagle, while the black vulture prefers denser woods and big, isolated trees. We must be attentive in order not to miss these birds flying over the valleys.

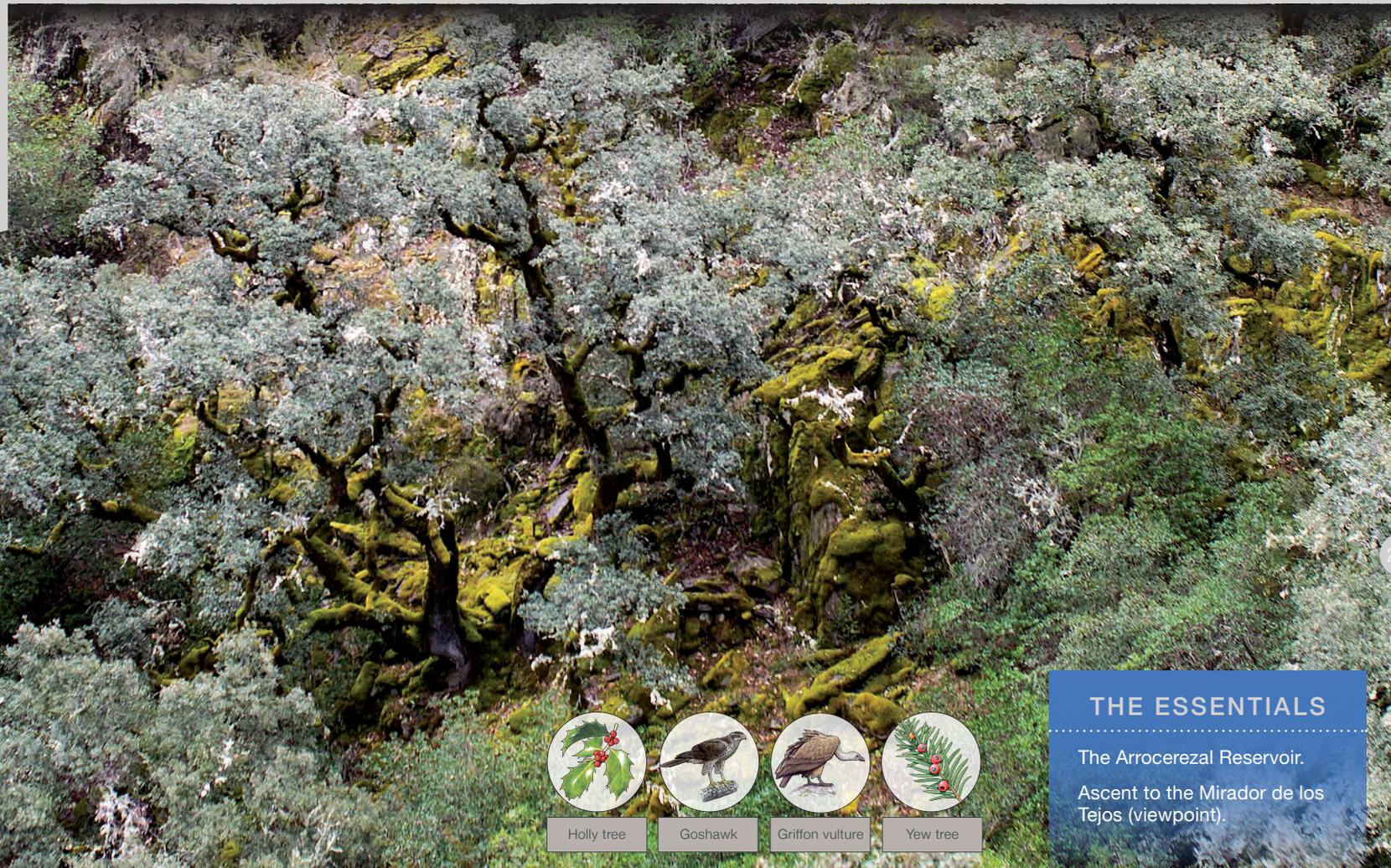
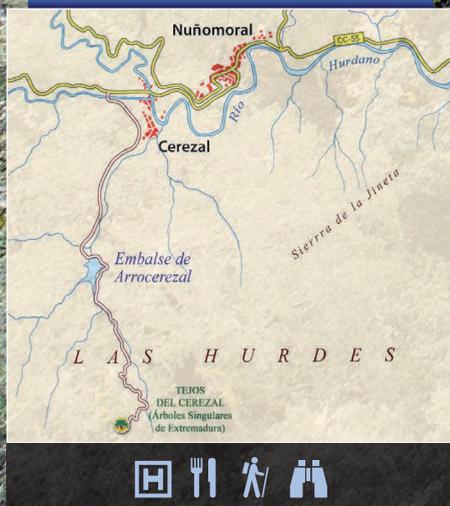


El Cerezal. Valle de Los Tejos

Singular Tree Tejos del Cerezal
ZEPA-LIC Las Hurdes

08

A fairytale landscape: the slopes of Las Hurdes, covered by a vanishing population of yew trees that stand over mossy stones.



THE ESSENTIALS

The Arrocerzal Reservoir.

Ascent to the Mirador de los Tejos (viewpoint).



Holly tree



Goshawk



Griffon vulture



Yew tree

The magical nature attributed to Las Hurdes region extends to its landscapes and flora. In Extremadura there are now less than 230 specimens of yew tree left, and 56 of them can be found in the Valle de los Tejos (i.e. Valley of the Yew Trees), where the hamlet known as El Cerezal is.

Celtic druids attributed certain powers to the yew, and used it in spells and for making ointments. The yew tree has been included in the Regional Catalogue of Threatened Species, within the category of In Danger of Extinction, due to its scarcity in the region. Extremadura is at the edge of the yew tree geographical distribution range, and therefore this conifer

can be found only in enclaves that meet very specific ecological requirements.

The yew trees of El Cerezal have been declared a Singular Tree for being the best preserved specimens in the region, and, for that reason, deserving special protection.

They can be found among the dense vegetation of the Arroyo del Cerezal headwaters, in a thick holm oak grove, where they coexist with big strawberry trees, holly trees, the tree-like *Viburnum tinus*, tree heath and wild cherry trees. Because there are no branches, underneath we can see the scattered rocks delicately carpeted by the green fern and moss that occasionally decorate tree trunks as well.

The valley is within the Nuñomoral municipal area, and the path that takes us to it is in itself highly enjoyable. From Nuñomoral we set out for El Cerezal, and, once there, follow a well-signposted path leading to the Arrocerzal Reservoir, built on the stream of the same name as a water supply for the villages of Nuñomoral, Cerezal and Rubiaco. We go round the reservoir edge and take an uphill walk of 3 km that shares its first stretch with La Vereda del Correo, an old path of more than 10 km that ends in the village of Caminomorisco.

On our way there, the rocks, stream, trees and moss outline a magical landscape. Nowadays we are not going to encounter wolves, but it is

not rare to see big birds of prey, such as black and griffon vultures, golden eagles, black storks or Egyptian vultures. As for mammals, there are plenty of hiding places for badgers, genets or wildcats, and we are likely to see the footprints and trails of the many wild boars.

A zigzag path that goes up steeply for more than 1 km will take us to the Mirador de los Tejos, a viewpoint that offers spectacular panoramic views of the hillsides where the yew trees live, right at the source of the Arroyo del Cerezal.

Our effort will be rewarded, since from there we can enjoy the essence of Las Hurdes landscape.

Meandro El Melero

ZEPA-LIC Las Hurdes
ZEPA Embalse de Gabriel y Galán
LIC Granadilla

09

This meander, that seems to push the laws of physics to the limit, offers us one of the most memorable images in the province of Cáceres.



If there is something representative of the province of Cáceres, something that makes it immediately identifiable, it is El Meandro El Melero, a spectacular meander of the River Alagón that serves as a natural boundary between Cáceres and Salamanca. It can be found at the eastern end of the Sierra de Gata, in the region of Las Hurdes.

The nearest village is Riomalo de Abajo, a hamlet that belongs to the municipality of Caminomorisco and is an excellent starting point for our visit to that whimsical turn of the river. Riomalo offers us instances of architecture typical of Las Hurdes, as well as a chance to

get our strength back before we begin our walk, although this is not going to be particularly long (less than 3 km) nor strenuous.

Very soon after leaving Riomalo de Abajo, we come across a natural pool on the River Ladrillar. From there, a road will take us to the meander area. We can either go by foot or by car, although Las Hurdes distinctive landscape will make a more lasting impression if we walk. The road is signposted and lined by pine and chestnut trees. It leads to a viewpoint known as La Antigua, from which we can enjoy an incomparable view of the meander, that fluvial feature that in the rainy season transforms itself



Golden eagle Black vulture Black stork Pinus pinaster

into an islet. The dusk is the best time of day for our visit. Before reaching the viewpoint, there is also a fork that offers us the possibility of approaching the meander itself. The view of El Melero from this vantage point, against the backdrop of the Sierra de Béjar, is a must for all visitors to the north of our province. Nevertheless, El Melero does not only invite contemplation. It also offers us the opportunity to travel down the river by canoe or catamaran, to fish or even do some birdwatching. From La Antigua we have a wide panoramic view of the river and the mountains that

surround it. It is an ideal spot to see the following species of birds: black stork, black vulture, griffon vulture, booted eagle or short-toed eagle. If we are lucky enough, we can even see deer feeding on the river shores, especially at dusk. We highly recommend a visit to the deserted hamlets of Arrofranco and Martinebrón, ideally in the rutting season. Las Hurdes is a region where nature and man have always progressed hand in hand. There is no doubt that images like that offered by El Melero meander will leave their indelible mark on the visitor's memory.

THE ESSENTIALS

Mirador La Antigua (viewpoint) at dusk.

Visits to Arrofranco and Martinebrón.

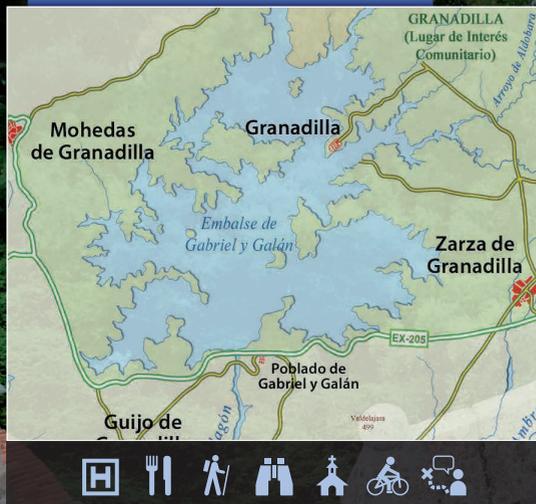
Journey down the river by canoe or catamaran.

Around Granadilla

ZEPA Embalse de Gabriel y Galán
LIC Granadilla

10

A beautiful deserted village whose surrounding area is brimming with life. Whichever way we approach it, we find ourselves immerse in a theme park.



Granadilla is a small village located in the north of the province of Cáceres that belongs to the region of Trasierra-Tierras de Granadilla. It was founded by the Moslems in the 9th century, and it became a strategic point on the busy road known as the Vía de la Plata. This village spreads over the hill top of a peninsula on the Gabriel y Galán Reservoir. It was never flooded as a result of the construction of the reservoir, but in 1965 it was evacuated due to the fact that the water had covered its low-lying fertile lands, where the orchards and crops were. Afterwards, the sierras were reforested with pines, and therefore it also lost its pastures. Granadilla is number three in the ranking of best preserved Spanish walled towns, behind Ávila and Lugo, and the only one with no

constructions outside its walls. Its historical and patrimonial value, its castle and surroundings make of this deserted town an exceptional place, and it was declared a Historic and Artistic Site by the Spanish Ministry of Culture in 1980.

Most of the land seen from the battlements of Granadilla is part of The Natura 2000 network. The reservoir, the *dehesas* around it, the pine woods and the mountains that stretch towards the boundary with the province of Salamanca are under its protection. Two great spaces meet here, the LIC Granadilla and the ZEPA Embalse de Gabriel y Galán.

The ZEPA is remarkable in that it harbours an overwintering population of more than 2000 cranes. They feed in the *dehesas* during the day



Black stork



Black vulture



Crane



Eurasian teal

and sleep in the reservoir islands during the night. In the evening, the flight of their flocks over the water is a fine spectacle. The ZEPA Embalse de Gabriel y Galán is also an important wintering space for many species of *Anatidae*, among them, mallard, Eurasian teal, shoveler or greylag goose. On the sierra hillsides there is a colony of black vulture, and from Granadilla it is not rare to see those enormous birds crossing the skies.

As for the LIC Granadilla, until quite recently one of its most valuable treasures was the presence of the Iberian lynx. Currently, at the heart of the sierra there is a captive breeding centre for Iberian lynx, which is playing a crucial role in the recovery of the world's most endangered species of feline. Around the reservoir, in the Granadilla

area we encounter *dehesas*, olive groves, farmland and conifer woods. They offer shelter not only to deer and wild boars, but also to stone martens, badgers, foxes and mongooses. Forest birds deserve special mention. The great spotted woodpecker, the goshawk, the sparrowhawk, and the hawfinch can be easily seen, the same as numerous birds of prey.

Granadilla is a beautiful town where human intervention has been constantly felt since its foundation. The construction of the reservoir that flooded the River Alagón valley and the reforestation of the surrounding mountains with conifers drastically changed the landscape. Nevertheless nature has taken care of itself and overflows with life once again.

THE ESSENTIALS

Roosts for cranes in the Gabriel y Galán Reservoir.

Visit to the now deserted and reconstructed village (except Mondays).

Dehesas of the Ambroz valley.

Visit to Abadía.

Arco de Cáparra.

Castaños del Temblar

Singular Tree Castaños del Temblar
LIC Sierra de Gredos y Valle del Jerte

11

Five impressive chestnut trees competing in a small space for the honour of being the oldest, the biggest, the most thoroughly sculpted by nature.

THE ESSENTIALS

The stone bull of Vettone origin in the Segura de Toro square.

The Celtic wine presses.

A walk among the chestnut trees.

The mushrooms.

Visit to the Templar castle.

Segura de Toro is a small village situated on a slope of the Tras la Sierra mountains, in the Ambroz valley, and has all the ingredients of mountain villages. It rises over steep terrain and is surrounded by chestnut trees, oak trees and heather. Segura is one of the oldest villages in the region, and because of its low population it has remained very much the same for decades. In its main square, Plaza Mayor, there is the stone sculpture of a bull dating from the 6th century BC. It gives the village its name, and is of Vettone origin. The gorges around Segura de Toro are also very special, in particular those known as La Grande and La Ancha, both tributaries of the River Ambroz.

Very close to La Grande runs the Arroyo del Temblar, the brook that gives their name to the five spectacular chestnut trees on its bank.

Because of their dimensions, age and impressive presence, these chestnut trees have been declared a Singular Tree, becoming part of the Extremaduran protected areas network. It is very rare to find specimens of such characteristics so close to each other.

Each has also its own name: El Retorcío, El Hondonero, El Menuero, El Bronco and El del Arroyo. Although they have many features in common, their names match their particularities according to trunk shape, fruit size or distance from the stream.

El Hondonero and El del Arroyo are truly exceptional. El Hondonero has an estimated age of 700 years and both a height and top of around 25 m, while El del Arroyo could be more than 800 years old. These chestnut trees are on private land, and, although in principle travellers enjoy the right of way, it is important to keep in mind that this is not so between October and January, as the owners think it appropriate to preserve the fruit harvest taking place during those months. The site where these natural wonders stand is easy to reach. Leaving Segura de Toro by the road that goes to Casas del Monte, we soon find a zigzag path that climbs up among alder, chestnut and oak trees, and then climbs down to the Arroyo del Temblar, in whose

vicinity those tree specimens live. It is a pleasant walk and it should not take more than one hour, although it is important to be aware of the time of the year when access to the land is barred. If during our walk we happen to look at the sky, we can be pleasantly surprised by the sight of a sparrowhawk or a European honey buzzard. In the trees, forest birds always keep our company: Eurasian nuthatch, short-toed treecreeper, wren, lesser spotted woodpecker or jay. If we lower our gaze, we are likely to see different species of wild mushrooms like Amanita cesarea or Boletus edulis. In gorges and their surrounding areas, the land is covered by alder trees, willows, maples and fern.



Montpellier Maple



Chestnut tree



Sparrowhawk



Lesser spotted woodpecker



Puerto de Honduras

Monte Público Castañar Gallego - Protected Landscape

LIC Sierra de Gredos y Valle del Jerte

12

The road linking the two main valleys in the north of the province offers us marvellous views of them, and so much more than that.



In the north of the province of Cáceres is common knowledge that the moment snow appears the Honduras mountain pass will be closed to traffic. This pass presents us with some of the most impressive views of the province northern area. It brings together two big valleys: the Valle del Ambroz and the Valle del Jerte. There is an ascent of approximately 17 km coming from both sides, 5 degrees being its average gradient, maintained for almost the whole route. With such characteristics it is easy to understand why this mountain pass is so highly appreciated by cyclists.

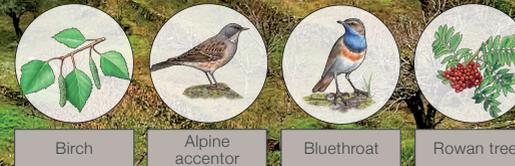
The Puerto de Honduras can be reached from Hervás. This village is a referent in the Ambroz valley because of its privileged position and patrimonial value, both of which recommend it

as a tourist resort of the highest level. Its Jewish quarter is considered to be one of the most attractive spots of our country.

The Ambroz valley opens towards the northwest, which makes it colder and more humid than the Jerte valley. This determines the predominant vegetation in each, as we can readily observe as we cross the Honduras mountain pass.

At the beginning of the ascent, we move among chestnut trees that, gradually, as the altitude increases, give way to oak trees, better adapted to endure low temperatures and better equipped to thrive in poor soil.

It is worth making a first stop at the Castañar Gallego that has been declared Land of Public Utility, becoming a Protected Landscape. It is one of the best preserved chestnut groves in the



Birch

Alpine accentor

Bluethroat

Rowan tree

southern Iberian Peninsula, a perfect place for botany lovers and those who enjoy collecting mushrooms, or just simply for an enjoyable walk under the chestnut tree tops, which are more than 20 m high. As we approach the summit, the trees become scarcer and are replaced by Pyrenean broom, a species perfectly adapted to the cold. It has yellow flowers that decorate the mountains slopes in the spring.

Though before getting to the top, there is still something else for us to discover, the birch grove of the Puerto de Honduras. Because they form the bigger and better preserved group in Extremadura, these birches have been declared a Singular Tree; the birch being some of a rarity in this autonomous region, and much more common in northern Spain. Around them there are rowan trees, willows and other species of great interest.

From the highest point, at an altitude of 1440 m, we can enjoy spectacular views onto the two valleys, with the massif of Gredos in the distance.

In spring and summer, the most representative bird species in the Pyrenean Broom patches are bluethroat, ortolan bunting and dunnock. While in winter, the Alpine accentor is one of the few species that remain in this habitat.

Upon starting the descent, we are very soon aware of the presence of oak trees. After a few kilometres, we will encounter vegetation typical of a warmer climate. The Gredos mountain range protects the valley from cold northern winds. This, together with the abundance of what is mainly meltwater, creates a microclimate that favours the exceptional settling of species like the cherry tree, which is a distinctive mark of the valley.

THE ESSENTIALS

The cherry tree in blossom and, naturally, its cherries.

Birch woods.

Nearby bathing areas very little frequented.

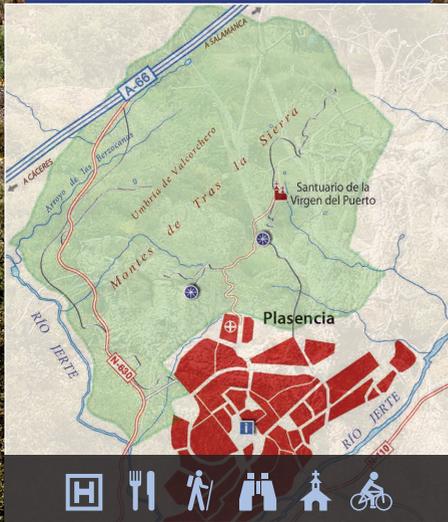
Hervás' Jewish quarter.

Valcorchero

Monte Valcorchero - Protected Landscape
LIC Sierra de Gredos y Valle del Jerte

13

A landscape, both delicate and memorable, that invites walks and contemplation. The landscape we all would have liked to paint.



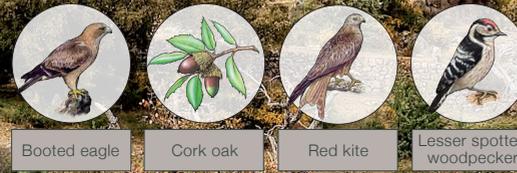
In Extremadura, those places that because of their aesthetic and cultural values deserve special protection are declared Protected Landscapes. At present there are only two spaces that hold that title: the Monte Valcorchero (since 2005) and the chestnut tree grove known as the Castañar de Gallegos, located in the municipality of Hervás (since 2015).

The Monte Valcorchero is a public mountain with an area of 1184 ha. It belongs in the municipal district of Plasencia and is part of the Sierra del Gordo.

It is mostly populated by the cork oaks that give it its name (the Cork Valley), although there are also holm oaks, oak trees and ash trees, among many other species. We are in a space of high aesthetic value, a landscape that appears to have

been expressly painted for the enjoyment of those who walk through it. The cork oaks that live in the spaces left by the granite outcrops give some roughness to the scenery and are the main reason why it has been declared a Protected Landscape.

These mountain slopes were traditionally used as arable land, pasture land, and a source of wood and coal. But there used to be also a granite quarry that provided the stone for the construction of many of the Plasencia houses. These uses and enterprises left their mark on this land, contributing to its important ethnographical heritage with shepherd huts, pigsties, fountains or the old paved road that linked the city of Plasencia to the Ambroz valley. The remains of the aqueduct, built by the stonemason Juan de Flandes in the 16th century, are also an



important patrimonial asset. Its role was to bring to Plasencia the water from the Cabezabellosa springs. Jumping back in time, the Boquique cave offers us samples of man's contribution to his environment since the Neolithic period. The decorated ceramics are among the most outstanding objects found on the site.

The Monte Valcorchero is thus a beautiful mountain that offers great environmental and patrimonial assets, while being easily accessible from the city of Plasencia. We only have to follow any of the several recommended routes. Among the most attractive there is the one starting at the Hospital Virgen del Puerto that goes through a picnic area. Taking the remains of the old aqueduct as a reference point, we reach the Santuario de Nuestra Señora Virgen del Puerto, from which we can enjoy a fantastic view of

Plasencia. Valcorchero is a little paradise when it comes to birdwatching. In just one day it is possible to encounter more than 30 different species. Its wide-ranging views of the valley make it likely for us to see any of the following birds in flight: golden eagle, short-toed eagle, griffon vulture, common buzzard, booted eagle or red kite. Its spectacular wooded areas, where cork trees alternate with pasture land, granite rocks, bush (broom, hawthorn, wild rose, etc.), and its small wetland areas (pools, springs and livestock watering places) make up a complex mosaic that is suitable for birds. Some of the most representative species are the black wheatear, the common chaffinch, the woodchat shrike or the western Orphean warbler. Equipped with a bird guide and a pair of field-glasses, we can certainly make of this route an exciting adventure.

THE ESSENTIALS

The shallots festival.

Romería al Santuario del Puerto (procession and festival).

Visit to the Boquique cave.

Villarreal de San Carlos

Monfragüe National Park
Monfragüe Biosphere Reserve
ZEPA Dehesas de Monfragüe and its surroundings
LIC Monfragüe

14

Being on the threshold of the Monfragüe National Park, this village has become an excellent host that offers information and welcomes the visitor.



Hackberry



Griffon vulture



Tit



Gum rock rose

THE ESSENTIALS

International Ornithological Tourism Fair (FIO).

Trips around the park in electrical 4x4.

Its reception and interpretation centres.

The shepherd huts.

Route to the Arroyo Malvecino, the Fuente de los Tres Caños and the hackberry of Lugar Nuevo.

At the end of the 18th century, the road between the cities of Plasencia and Trujillo was frequented by bandits. In an attempt to solve the problem they posed, King Carlos III created the municipal district of Villarreal de San Carlos, which nowadays is part of the municipality of Serradilla. His aim was to establish a garrison that could watch over the area that stretches from the bridge known as Puente del Cardenal to the Serrana mountain pass. Villarreal de San Carlos was provided with just basic infrastructure and it never had a significant population, which was on average of 30 inhabitants. The number increased to 180 during the period between 1960 and 1970, due to the construction of the Tajo-Tiétar

Reservoirs, but the last census from 2014 records a population of just 13.

Villarreal de San Carlos main asset is without doubt its location. It is easily accessible from the main roads network and is placed at the heart of the Monfragüe National Park. Nowadays it serves as an excellent door to this national park.

For many years now this hamlet has been ready to welcome visitors. Accommodation, catering, electrical 4x4 rental, leisure areas, the Monfragüe National Park Interpretation Centre or the Water Interpretation Centre are part of its wide offer. There are also some picnic areas next to a group of shepherd huts that are usually loaned to workshops and other environmental activities.

Year after year, Villarreal hosts the International Ornithological Tourism Fair (FIO), which enjoys worldwide recognition among bird lovers, and is a very important event in the village life. But it is the spring that brings the most visitors to the national park, coinciding with the moment when the landscape is at its most glorious and it is easiest to see the most emblematic birds.

From the village itself, we can watch with no effort the coming and going of many birds around the areas where they feed. Griffon vultures, black vultures, Egyptian vultures, black storks or short-toed eagles are among them.

In the spring, we shall encounter docile barn swallows in balconies, black redstarts on roofs

and white wagtails and thekla larks in pastures around the village.

Villarreal de San Carlos is also the starting point of several routes that will take us to significant spots in the park. Some of the most interesting routes are the ones that go to the castle, the Serrana mountain pass and the Gimio hill.

The great deal of care taken over its facilities and services, as well as its location make of Villarreal de San Carlos a strategic point when it comes to scheduling any visit to the national park. On the other hand, the physical space it occupies is such that practically none of the Monfragüe species are denied the visitor, who is likely to surprise even the imperial eagle in flight.

SITES

15 to 19

40 SITES
for practising **ECO**
TOURISM
in the province of
Cáceres

RED ZONE



Site 15
Page 44
Garganta de los Infiernos



Site 18
Page 50
Dehesas de Toril



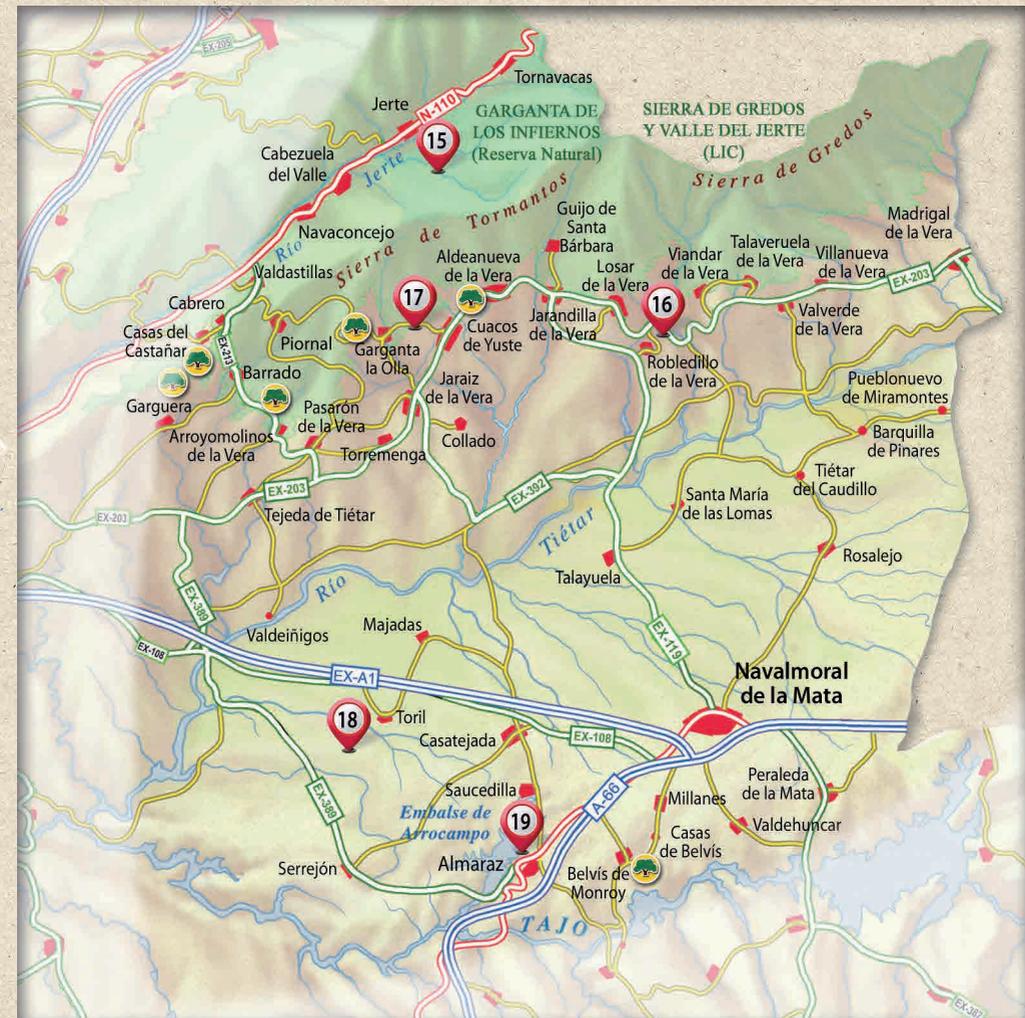
Site 16
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Garganta de Cuartos



Site 19
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Arrocampo Reservoir



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Cuacos de Yuste



Garganta de los Infiernos

Garganta de los Infiernos Nature Park
LIC Sierra de Gredos y Valle del Jerte
La Sierra Regional Game Park

15

Water parks were no doubt inspired by the “marmitas de gigante”, the rock formations we find in the Garganta de los Infiernos. The only Nature Park in our region and a unique space.



In the north of the Cáceres province, serving as a door to the Ávila province, the Garganta de los Infiernos descends between the north slope of the Sierra de Tormantos, the southwest slope of the Sierra de Gredos and the River Jerte.

Here we find three protected areas. It is the only space in Extremadura that has been declared a Nature Park while being also part of a larger protected area, the LIC Sierra de Gredos. Furthermore, it has been included in the Reserva Regional de Caza La Sierra, which manages the Spanish ibex hunting.

In order to get to the gorge, coming from Cabezuela del Valle in the direction of the village of Jerte by the N-110 road, after 3 km we make

a detour into a well-signposted road that will take us to the valley camping site. There we can leave our car and take any of the routes being offered. The path going to the area known as Los Pilones is an excellent choice. It is a hike of approximately 3 km that ends in a spectacular bathing area consisting of a series of waterfalls and “marmitas de gigante” (literally “giant’s cooking pots”). These are the rock formations known in English as “kettles” that result from fluvial erosion. Here they present us with leisure and bathing space whose beauty makes it enjoyable at any time of the year.

The change in altitude, from 300 to 2000 m, in such a very short space allows for striking



Goshawk

Desman

Wildcat

Trout

THE ESSENTIALS

Los Pilones.

The gorge bridges.

The route of Carlos V.

variations in vegetation. The key to this diversity is as follows. In lower areas that are closer to the River Jerte, the mixed oak wood predominates, with a mixture of oak trees, holm oaks and cork oaks. As we ascend, the mixed wood gives way to dense oak tree woods. From 1000 m onwards, where the soil is poorer and more acid and is covered in snow for long periods, there is a predominance of bush. The most characteristic bush is the Pyrenean broom combined with common broom, genista, heather and juniper. In higher areas there is only pasture land. We encounter there the *Nardus stricta*, a hardy and unpalatable plant (and therefore less attractive for the livestock) that belongs to the *Graminiae* family. In the summits, rocks are carpeted by the

even harder lichen and moss.

River banks are populated by alder trees, ash trees and willows that form gallery forests in the lower stretches, while in the gullies headwaters it is still possible to find isolated specimens of yew tree, birch, service tree and holly tree.

In the river waters, the brown trout is king, but the Bosca’s newt, the salamander or the Iberian frog are also present. The following birds can be seen: white-throated dipper, golden oriole and jay, as well as birds of prey, such as golden eagle, European honey buzzard, peregrine falcon, goshawk or Eurasian eagle owl. The wildcat, the otter, the genet, the wild boar and the scarce and elusive Pyrenean desman live also in the area.

Garganta de Cuartos

LIC Sierra de Gredos y Valle del Jerte

16

Clear and deep waters that offer several bathing areas, an oasis where to take refuge from the rigours of the Cáceres' summers.

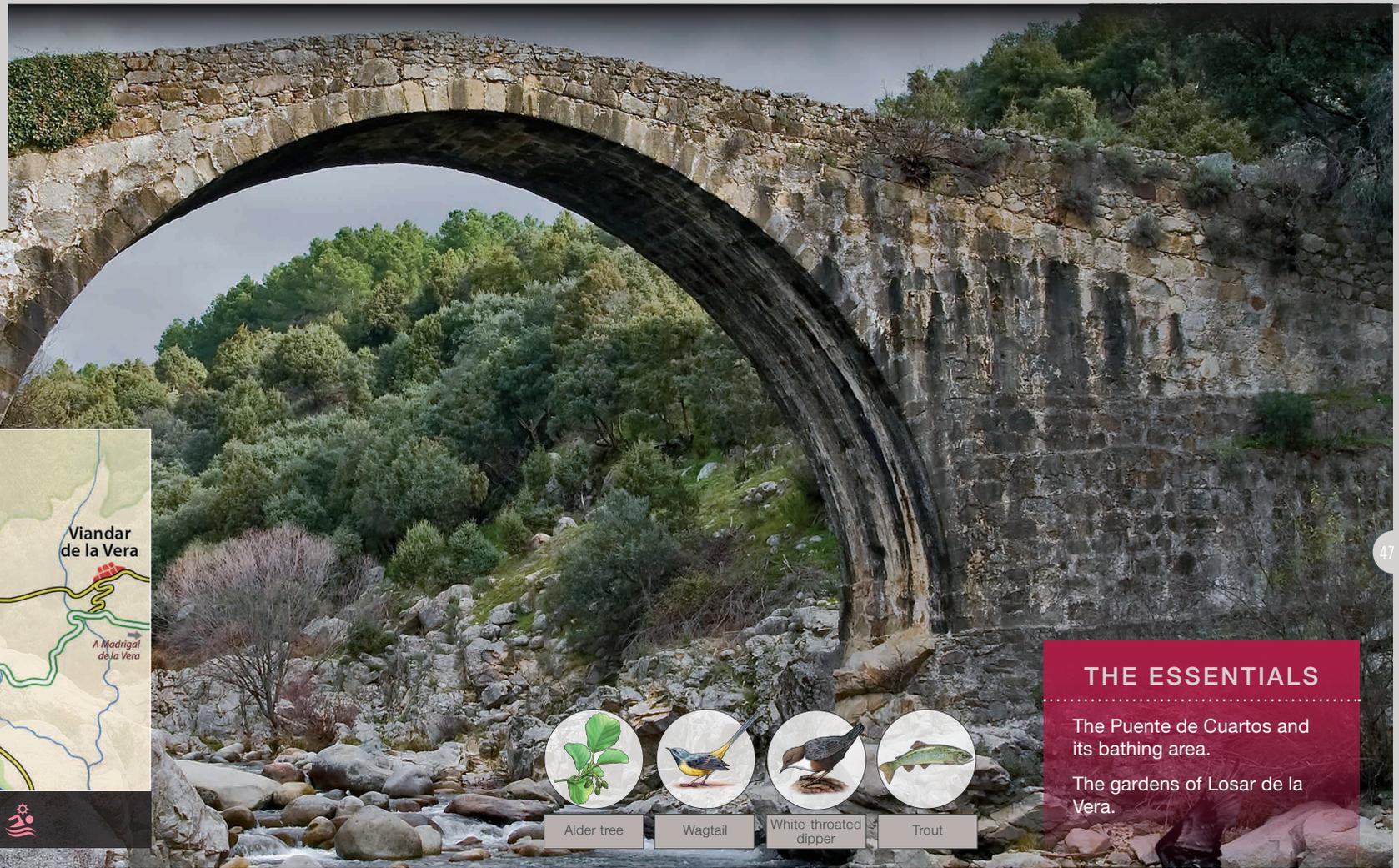


In the northeast of the province of Cáceres, the valley of La Vera runs along 65 km between the towns of Plasencia and Candeleda, which belongs in the neighbouring province of Ávila. The first thing that strikes us as we enter the valley is its luxuriant and diverse vegetation. It tells us, among other things, that water has an important presence in the area: 1423 identified streams and 47 gorges to be precise.

It is common to observe gorges with a distinctive U-shape, which tells us that in the Quaternary Period there was permafrost in a large part of the area.

If we visit the valley in the summer, we will be able to enjoy numerous and excellent bathing

spaces. One of the most popular is the gorge known as the Garganta de Cuartos. Leaving from Losar de la Vera in the direction of Madrigal de la Vera, after 3 km we come to the medieval Puente de Cuartos. Underneath this bridge there is a natural pool of great depth and clear waters. Its current is one of the most fast-flowing in the valley, and it gets its waters from brooks and waterfalls with names such as El Matamoros, La de Caballerías, Largarejo, La Hoz or the Arroyo Vadillo. Ample parking space and a rest area, where it is also possible to drink and eat something, can greatly contribute to our well-being in the hottest months. The Garganta de Cuartos belongs to the LIC Sierra de Gredos and



Alder tree

Wagtail

White-throated dipper

Trout

THE ESSENTIALS

The Puente de Cuartos and its bathing area.

The gardens of Losar de la Vera.

is part of the Natura 2000 network. Among its main assets are the riversides where alder trees predominate, occasionally joined by large ash trees or willows. The most representative species of fish is the coveted trout, and in the gorge those interested can find Catch and Release stretches.

The steep slopes of the valley through which the river flows are populated by oak trees. Sometimes they form very dense patches where we can also encounter heather and broom. In the source of the Río de los Cuartos, at the foot of the Pico de la Covacha, there is the Barrerón de Escobarejo, name given to the area where one of the most important groups of yew trees in Extremadura takes refuge. The Tejos del

Escobarejo, as these trees are known, have been declared a Singular Tree. There are 20 specimens, and one of them is, remarkably, more than 900 years old.

The white-throated dipper diving into the cold waters of the gorge to get its food is not an uncommon sight. The white wagtail, the grey wagtail, the cirl bunting and the nightingale are some of the species frequently seen in many of the river stretches. The delicate elegance of dragonflies and damselflies, always found very close to the water, cannot be overlooked. Cuartos is also one of the strongholds of the Pyrenean desman, a small, semiaquatic mammal that is an endangered species.

Cuacos de Yuste

LIC Monasterio de Yuste
LIC Sierra de Gredos y Valle del Jerte
Cuacos de Yuste: Historic and Artistic Site
Garganta la Olla: Historic and Artistic Site

17

An imperial route that offers us the same peace and privileges that Carlos V enjoyed in his last days.



The La Vera region's most distinctive features are no doubt the variety and richness of its vegetation and its numerous water streams and bathing areas.

Notwithstanding, the village of Cuacos de Yuste offers also an important cultural heritage, the reason why it has been declared a Historic and Artistic Site.

Many of these assets were behind the decision of Emperor Carlos V to spend here his last days. He had an empire and nevertheless chose this place as the most appropriate for his retirement, leaving us many clues for what we can expect to find.

Linking the villages of Cuacos de Yuste and Garganta la Olla, there is a small mountain road

that runs along extraordinary landscape. After 2 km, we arrive in the Real Monasterio de Yuste that is part of the Spanish National Heritage. This monastery dates from the 15th century and its original purpose was that of accommodating, first, a group of hermits and, later, the monks of the order of St Jerome. The emperor chose it as his residence and had special rooms built. Nowadays the two well differentiated sections can still be seen. It is worth mentioning that the monastery has been declared an LIC (Site of Community Importance) due to the fact that it harbours important populations of bats - being exceptional within the Natura 2000 network for a building to be so declared. More than eleven species of



Goshawk

Wildcat

Pyrenean oak

Trout

bats are represented, the most important being the greater horseshoe bat, whose wingspan can reach up to 40 cm. The road continues to Garganta la Olla, a village that has also been declared a Historic and Artistic Site and welcomes us with very fine bathing areas. Even there the emperor's presence is felt in some of the buildings. The Serrana de la Vera viewpoint is a must. It owes its name to an Amazon-like mythological character that inspires many of the legends of La Vera folklore. The road runs mainly at an altitude of 650 m. Alternatively, we can take a path that runs at a higher altitude and goes through a hillock known as the Loma de la Atalaya. The predominant vegetation is that of Pyrenean oak woods,

sometimes replaced by broom and heather, and occasionally by crops. The forest birds will keep our company all the way. The most frequent species are common chaffinch, Eurasian nuthatch, short-toed treecreeper, great spotted woodpecker or common blackbird. If we are attentive we can see a goshawk or a sparrowhawk, or even discover a long-eared owl on its roost. The panoramic views offered by this route are spectacular: the River Tietar valley is in the foreground, the *dehesas* of the Campo Arañuelo region expand over the River Tajo valley, and, in the background, we see the distinctive outlines of the Sierra de Villuercas and the Sierra de Altamira.

THE ESSENTIALS

Monasterio de Yuste.
The German Cemetery, next to the monastery.
Bathing areas in the vicinity of Garganta la Olla.
Paprika from La Vera, Protected DO (Guarantee of Origin).

Dehesas de Toril

Monfragüe National Park
Monfragüe Biosphere Reserve
ZEPA Dehesas de Monfragüe and its surroundings
LIC Monfragüe

18

The *dehesa* is an ecosystem chiselled by human intervention. In Toril, man and nature have joined forces to beautifully accomplish the task.



Toril is a small village that belongs to the Campo Arañuelo district. It is located near the town of Navalmoral de la Mata, in the northern area of the Monfragüe Biosphere Reserve. The former parish church of San Blas houses now the Interpretation Centre of the Reserva de la Biosfera Pórtico de Monfragüe. This is one of the most innovative interpretative centres in Extremadura, and it guides us through a beautiful and interesting review of the Monfragüe National Park's history and environment, giving special importance to the *dehesa*. In what concerns Toril and its surroundings, the *dehesa* has next to sacred attributes. Very few towns in Extremadura can boast almost uninterrupted *dehesa* in their municipal area.

Here a sound agro-economic model has translated into some of the most beautiful and best looked after *dehesas* in our country. The *dehesa* is an ecosystem derived from the Mediterranean woodland. It consists of spacious clearings punctuated by holm and cork oaks, with a substratum of pasture land and scrubland. It plays an important role in livestock and game grazing, while offering other forest resources, such as the cork whose extraction so important is for the Toril area economy. One of the most outstanding *dehesas* in the area is the Dehesa Herguijuela, famous for its very old cork trees. Among them it is worthy of mention El Abuelo, a magnificent specimen classed as a Singular Tree of Extremadura that is more than



Cork oak Black vulture Deer Imperial eagle

500 years old. In December 2011, unable to bear any longer its own weight, it collapsed onto the ground where it was rooted. This *dehesa* is also very valuable from the point of view of game. In these terrains, deer and wild boars graze at their whim. The proximity of griffon and black vulture colonies at the heart of the Monfragüe National Park ensures the natural balance and cleanliness of the ecosystem. Other species, like the Spanish imperial eagle, the booted eagle, the black kite, the red kite or the common buzzard have here their hunting and nesting areas. Given the prominent role that the livestock plays in the *dehesa*, there are numerous pools and little reservoirs used by the cattle that favour

the presence of many other species. On these humid areas feed black storks, grey herons, little egrets and several species of the *Anatidae* family, such as mallard, shoveler or Eurasian teal. Little grebes and great crested grebes tend to nest close to pools of shallow shores, where they take advantage of the common water-crowfoot covering their waters. These wetlands also feed important populations of amphibians and reptiles: Spanish pond turtle, Iberian ribbed newt, natterjack toad, Iberian spadefoot or Iberian waterfrog. Mushroom foraging is another activity typical of the area, and, among the holm and cork oaks, we can find, for example, species of *Amanita*, *Boletus*, *Russula* or *Lepiota*.

THE ESSENTIALS

Pórtico de Monfragüe Interpretation Centre.

Horse races in the Fiestas de San Blas.

Dehesa wetlands.

Presence of the imperial eagle.

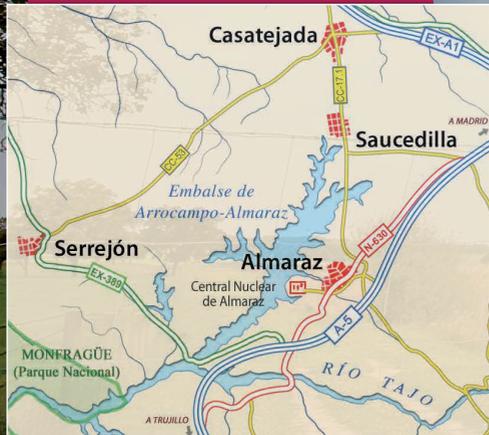
Breeding of fighting bulls.

Arrocampo Reservoir

ZEPA Embalse de Arrocampo
ZEPA Colonias de Cernícalo Primilla
(Lesser Kestrel) de Saucedilla
Peri-urban Park for Leisure and Preservation
Dehesa Camadilla de Almaraz

19

The Arrocampo Reservoir is unusual in that it offers us the possibility to see more than 170 bird species in a small area.



The Arrocampo Reservoir is located in the northeast of the Cáceres province, and it spreads over the municipal areas of Saucedilla, Almaraz, Romangordo and Serrejón. It is part of the Monfragüe Biosphere Reserve, and is atypical and not large when compared with other nearby reservoirs, like the Valdecañas or Alcántara Reservoirs.

It has an elongated form and is placed alongside the Autovía de Extremadura, between Almaraz and Saucedilla, being accessible by the road that links those two villages.

Its purpose was never that of generating electricity or supplying water to irrigated areas,

but rather that of cooling the Almaraz Nuclear Power Station turbines. This fact has important ecological repercussions that make it different from any other wetland in the region. First of all, the cooling rises the water temperature by an average of 2-5 degrees above what is habitual in the area. Furthermore, the uninterrupted oxygenation of the water increases the concentration of nutrients, which in its turn stimulates reproduction at all levels. Lastly, the reservoir filling level is not subject to fluctuations across the year and remains practically stable, not registering a low water period in the summer.



Little bittern



Bearded reedling



Purple swamphen



Night heron

THE ESSENTIALS

Church of Saucedilla.

Do not forget to bring your binoculars along.

Ornithological Park of Saucedilla.

Peri-urban Park of Almaraz.

Castle of Belvís de Monroy.

These circumstances favour the development of a dense vegetation of bulrush (*Thypha sp.*) on some of its shores, which are the nesting habitat of some of the most emblematic species in the area: purple swamphen, Eurasian bittern, purple heron or western marsh harrier. Other important colonies are those of the *Ardeidae* family, with large populations of cattle egret, little egret, squacco heron, grey heron and night heron, that are joined by several pairs of spoonbills.

Across the year more than 170 bird species can be seen around the Arrocampo Reservoir. That is the reason why it has been declared a Special Protection Area for Birds (ZEPA).

Furthermore, in Almaraz, the *dehesa* around the reservoir has been declared a Peri-urban Park for Leisure and Preservation (Parque Periurbano de Conservación y Ocio); while in Saucedilla an Ornithological Park has been created. These two adjoining parks offer high-quality services and infrastructure to those visitors to the reservoir interested in birdwatching. There are watchtowers, signposted routes, information points, etc.

Between the months of March and June, a visit to the church of Saucedilla is a must. It is one of the Extremaduran urban ZEPAs for the preservation of colonies of lesser kestrel, and it houses around 20 pairs of this bird species.

SITES

20 to 27

40 SITES
for practising **ECO**
TOURISM
in the province of
Cáceres

GREEN ZONE



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Romangordo



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Sierra de
La Madrida



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Estrecho de
la Peña Amarilla



Site 25
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Risco de
La Villuerca



Site 22
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Castañar
de Ibor



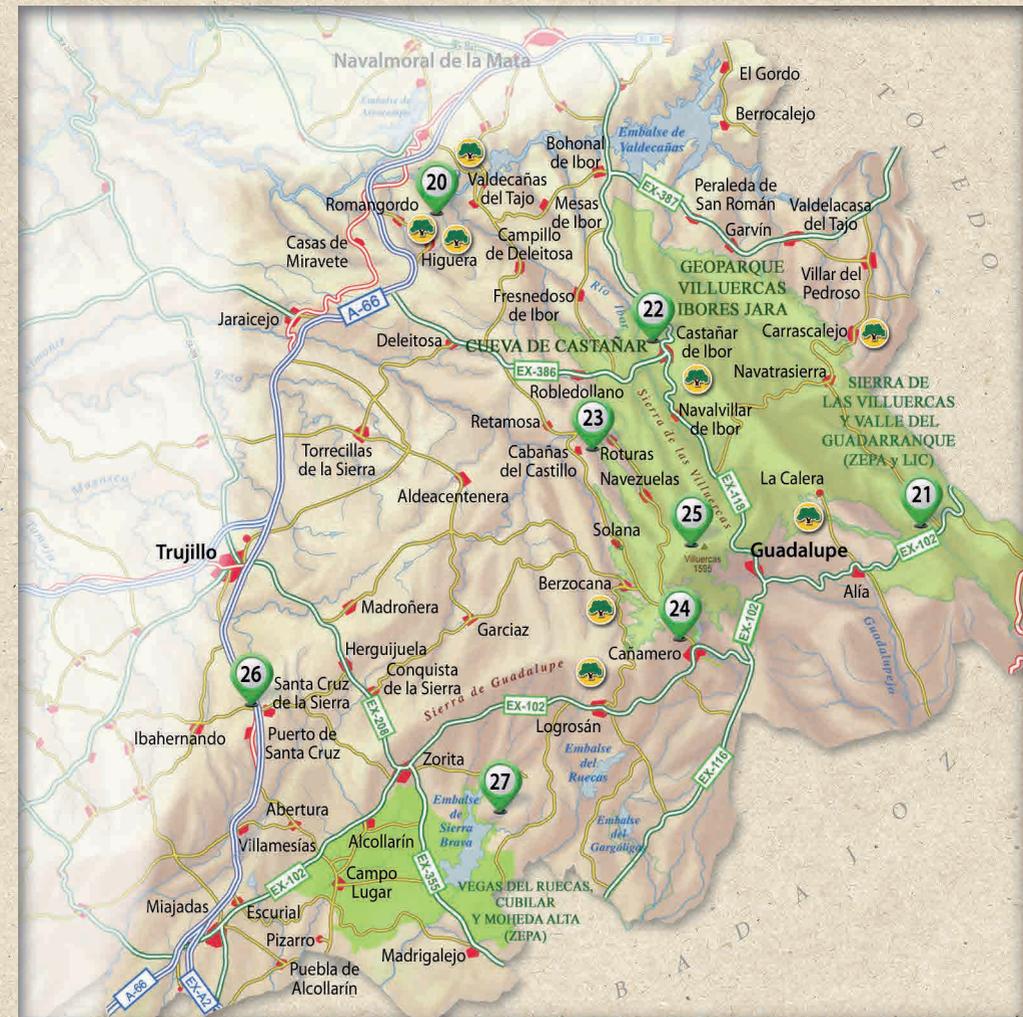
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Sierra de
Santa Cruz



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Cabañas
del Castillo



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Sierra Brava
Reservoir



Romangordo

Monfragüe Biosphere Reserve
ZEPA Dehesas de Monfragüe and its surroundings
LIC Monfragüe

20

The Romangordo's surroundings reflect its role as a bridge between Las Villuercas and the Monfragüe National Park.



Romangordo is one of the 16 villages included in the Monfragüe Biosphere Reserve. The village has a little over 200 residents who have succeeded in preserving the assets and charm of its traditional architecture, which manifests itself in houses made of slate, stone and adobe. Romangordo is easy to access from the Autovía de Extremadura as it goes from Jaraicejo to Almaraz. In the village itself we can visit the ecomuseum known as La Casa del Tío Cáscoles and La Casa de los Aromas, that pays homage to the floral variety found in the Romangordo surroundings. A visit to the absorbing Albalat archaeological site will help us to understand the importance of the Islamic period in the history of this land.

The privileged location of this small village, halfway between the more northern foothills of Villuercas, the River Tajo and the Monfragüe Biosphere Reserve, accounts for the beauty of its surroundings and the great profusion of flora and fauna.

To the south of the villages of Romangordo and Higuera, we find a complex succession of valleys and mountains (Sierras de la Caldilla, de las Navas and de la Novilla) whose slopes are lavishly covered in vegetation. This is not the case in the large quartzite crags that crown their tops or in other rocky areas known as “pedrizas”, especially striking on the sunny hillsides of the Sierra de las Navas. Some slopes were reforested



Black vulture



Holm oak



Sawfly orchid



Imperial eagle

with eucalyptus and pines several decades ago, but in many areas we can still find the original vegetation, characterised by large patches of Mediterranean woodland. The holm and cork oak woods are more open on the hillsides lower parts, where they share the space with rock rose and yellow broom. But as the altitude and the gradient increase, the vegetation becomes more dense and complex, presenting us with strawberry trees, *Viburnum tinus*, *Phillyrea angustifolia*, terebinth, tree heath and some gall oaks. These mountains harbour an important colony of black vulture that complements the one living in the National Park. Golden eagle, Bonelli's eagle, Egyptian vulture and griffon vulture nest on the crags.

Towards the north, in the direction of the Tajo fertile lands and the Valdecañas Reservoir, there is an immense *dehesa* area, where bushes (mainly rock rose patches) alternate with pasture land. There, it is not rare to see birds of prey like the black kite, the booted eagle or the common buzzard. Another site of interest in the area is the Garganta de Descuernacabras, a gorge whose patches of luxuriant vegetation (alder trees, ash trees and willows) are in strong contrast with the surrounding *dehesa*. The natural pool built on the river bed is one of the most visited places during the summer months, by tourists and locals alike. We can also walk along its banks, which offer us a fascinating ornithological route.

THE ESSENTIALS

Mudejar coffering in the church of Santa Catalina.

The only collective burial from the Bronze Age is still preserved in the caves of the Garganta Canalejas.

La Casa de los Aromas.
Its traditional architecture.

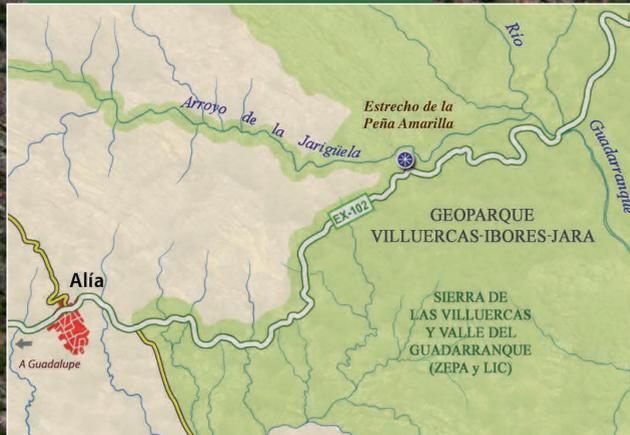
Natural pool.

Estrecho de la Peña Amarilla

Geosite of the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark
ZEPA-LIC Sierra de las Villuercas
y Valle de Guadarranque

21

A geological tapestry that decorates one of the most beautiful places in the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark.



Egyptian vulture



Alder tree



Portugal laurel



Griffon vulture

THE ESSENTIALS

Enjoy the sharp contrasts in vegetation between suntraps and shady areas.

Find a trilobite.

Birdwatching in the defile.

To the east of the village of Alía, at the heart of the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark, there is the Estrecho de Peña Amarilla. We go along the EX-102 road, a narrow and meandering mountain road that urges careful driving and leads us to a viewpoint and a parking area, at kilometre 92.500, especially designed to enjoy the view of the defile.

On its way to the River Guadarranque, the Jalihuela stream has created this narrow gorge by penetrating through the strata of the Armorican quartzites that characterise this landscape. From a geological point of view, the Estrecho is situated in the Sierra Palomera between the Guadarranque syncline and the Ibor-Guadalupe anticline.

The quartzite outcrops are the result of different episodes of fracture and erosion. It was the disappearance of the layers of slate what exposed the layers of quartzite, which, because of their higher hardness, have been able to resist the impact of subsequent geological processes.

The Estrecho de la Peña Amarilla owes its name to the singular yellow lichen (*Acarospora oxytona*) that covers its walls. The presence of *cruziana* invests the space with a distinctive paleontological value.

From the viewpoint on the road we can watch at leisure, ideally through binoculars, the most representative species living on the crags. All the big birds of prey are present and nest in the

quartzite cracks, the star being the griffon vulture. It shares the scene with the Egyptian vulture, the golden eagle and the Bonelli's eagle, although they are more difficult to see. We need to be patient in order to discover them flying over the area or on the rocks where their roosts are. The peregrine falcon and the common kestrel can be also seen. Other species present in this privileged enclave are the blue rock thrush and the crag martin, whose names give us an intimation of which their favourite habitat might be, as well as the Alpine swift. Black wheatears or red-billed choughs give themselves away by their song, although they are scarcer. The winter brings also the Alpine accentor.

The Sierra Palomera, where the deep fracture of the defile opens, presents dense patches of Mediterranean woodland in shady areas, with a predominance of strawberry trees. Junipers are also frequent and among them there are magnificent specimens.

After visiting the Estrecho de la Peña, we can continue along the same road in the direction of Puerto de San Vicente and, after 3 km, follow the track that will take us into the valley of the River Guadarranque. The banks along the river entire course are covered by a spectacular gallery forest consisting of alder and ash trees that leads us to other interesting spots and geosites of the Geopark.

Castañar de Ibor

Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark
Cave of Castañar de Ibor, Natural Monument
ZEPA Sierra de las Villuercas
y Valle de Guadarranque
Singular Tree Castaños de Calabazas

22

The cave of Castañar de Ibor is not always open to the public, but, if at all possible, do not miss the opportunity to visit this Natural Monument.



THE ESSENTIALS

Visit to the cave of Castañar de Ibor.

The *pedreras*.

The Castaños de Calabazas (chestnut trees).



Jay



Chestnut tree



Sparrowhawk



Gall oak

Castañar de Ibor is a village of south-eastern Cáceres with a privileged location, being very close to the geographic centre of the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark. It is the biggest village in the region of Los Ibores and it can be reached by the EX-118 road that links the towns of Guadalupe and Navalmoral de la Mata.

Its origins are unclear but there are some megalithic remains, as well as buildings dating from the Arab domination, such as the Torre de los Moros near the River Ibor.

As its name suggests, chestnut trees abound in the area, but the holm tree and the olive tree carry a lot of weight in the village economy as well.

Notwithstanding, the main asset of Castañar de Ibor is its natural environment. Some of the Geopark's most emblematic points are also linked to this village given their proximity to it. Such is the case with the following sites, that are a must in any visit to the area: the waterfall known as the Chorrera de Calabazas; the Camorro, a plateau that is close to the village and has an altitude of approximately 1100 m; the Raña de las Mesillas ("rañas" being extensive plains of sedimentary origin that take the form of a plateau); and, of course, the Cueva de Castañar. This cave, carved out of limestone dating from the Ediacaran (more than 540 million years ago), offers us a

landscape of stalactites, stalagmites, columns, ribs, flags and fibrous formations, among them the famous fibrous-radial aggregates known as "aragonite flowers".

Leaving Castañar de Ibor in the direction of Guadalupe, we see the signposted route that leads to the Castaños de Calabazas, a group of 15 chestnut trees of considerable size and age that have been declared a Singular Tree and are placed along the gorge. Some of them are well-known, like the Castaño del Postuero (with spectacular roots as a result of its distance from the water), the Castaño de la Piedra (whose roots encircle the rocks) or the Castaño Hueco (with a hollow that

gives shelter to shepherds). The same route will take us to the Chorrera de Calabazas, but before getting there, we come across the Quejigo de la Fuente, a very fine gall oak with an impressive trunk perimeter of more than 3 m.

In the gorge we can also see one of the botanical jewels of Las Villuercas: the Portugal laurel (*Prunus lusitanica*). It is a small tree with bright, green leaves, similar to bay leaves, that grows only in a very specific microclimate. This route is particularly enjoyable for botany lovers, since they can encounter here many different species of orchids, peonies, cowslips or fern.

Cabañas del Castillo

Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark
ZEPA Sierra de las Villuercas
y Valle de Guadarranque

23

Geology and flora are both responsible for the allure of one of the most beautiful spots in the Sierra de Las Villuercas.



The municipality of Cabañas del Castillo, situated in the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark, is made up of four small villages, among them the one that gives it its name. It is an area with a predominance of quartzite parallel sierras, going from the northwest to the southeast. We can reach this municipal district by the Autovía A5, taking the Exit 219 in the direction of Deleitosa, halfway between the towns of Trujillo and Navalmoral de la Mata.

One of the village's most representative features is the Castillo de Cabañas, a castle of Moslem origin that was later renovated to house the military religious order of the Caballeros de Trujillo y de Calatrava.

The views from Cabañas del Castillo are spectacular. On the western slope, the landscape expands over *dehesas* that on the horizon seem to fade into the pasture land of the Trujillo plains. Then, if we go round the village following the path to the castle, we are taken by surprise by the view of the deep valley that opens between the Sierra de la Ortijuela and the Sierra del Alcornocal, along which runs the Garganta de Santa Lucía, one of the most beautiful tributaries of the River Almonte. This valley possesses all the typical features of Las Villuercas region: the large rocky areas known as "pedrizas" or "casqueras", the quartzite crags crowning the sierras, the dense patches of Mediterranean woodland and



Alder tree



Eurasian eagle owl



Short-toed eagle



Golden eagle

THE ESSENTIALS

A walk along the River Almonte banks under quartzite masses.

Go up to the Castillo de Cabañas, take a seat and look around you.

From the Mirador near the bridge, enjoy the views of the River Almonte's narrow ravine.

bush that cover the hillsides, the small plots of olive and chestnut trees, or the alder trees that cover the gorge.

In these valley's landscapes the cork tree plays a significant role. It forms an almost uninterrupted wood that spreads over the mountains, and is one of the most valuable natural resources of the region.

The River Almonte has its source in a big stone quarry on the hillsides of the Risco de La Villuerca, and before leaving these sierras is joined by the Garganta de Santa Lucía, the River Garciaz and the River Berzocana. One of the most impressive spots is the Apretura or Portilla del Almonte, a narrow ravine where the

river passes among two big rocky outcrops of Armorican quartzites. All of which invests this enclave with great geological and natural value. If we take a few minutes to observe the view from any of the many natural viewpoints that this sierra offers us, we are likely to discover some of the ornithological jewels that nest in the area: black stork, Bonelli's eagle, Egyptian vulture, peregrine falcon or griffon vulture. The quartzites are the habitat of the blue rock thrush, the black wheatear and the rock bunting, joined in the winter by the Alpine accentor. In the cork tree woods abound hawfinches, common chaffinches, mistle thrushes and Iberian magpies, as well as other smaller birds of prey such as the booted eagle or the sparrowhawk.

Sierra de La Madrila

Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark
ZEPA Sierra de las Villuercas
y Valle de Guadarranque

24

A very beautiful walk along the narrow fluvial valley sculpted by the River Ruecas awaits us.



The Desfiladero del Ruecas, a defile north of Cañamero, belongs to the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark. It is a narrow valley that resulted from the encasement of the River Ruecas into a tectonic fault forming a beautiful syncline that stretches to the Aperturas del Almonte and crosses, among other spaces, the Sierra de La Madrila. This sierra is easily accessible by the road that goes from Cañamero to Berzocana. One of its main points of interest is the Risco Viejo: a crag from which we can enjoy very attractive views of the River Ruecas syncline. The Interpretation Centre of the ZEPA Sierra de las Villuercas y Valle del Guadarranque is located at the southern end of the Sierra de La Madrila, and is a must for those interested in a

detailed account of the region's natural values, as well as a starting point of very beautiful routes.

In our ascent toward the mountain pass known as the Puerto de Berzocana, the Pyrenean oaks that cover the highest slopes dominate the landscape. We can come across roe deer and wild boars, two of the most important game species in the region. Salamanders, Bosca's newts and Iberian ribbed newts are also a common sight, especially in rainy days. These woods have great ornithological richness, and the Eurasian blue tit, great tit, robin, Eurasian nuthatch, short-toed treecreeper, woodchat shrike or jay are among the most frequently seen species. It is more difficult, but by no means



Iberian emerald lizard

Kingfisher

Otter

Great spotted woodpecker

impossible, to observe the Western Bonelli's warbler, the Eurasian blackcap, the lesser spotted woodpecker, the European crested tit, the long-eared owl or the red-necked nightjar.

The River Ruecas results from the confluence of several tributaries that have their source in the valleys of the Risco de la Villuerca southern slope. On its headwaters the Cancho del Fresno Reservoir was built, and it is now surrounded by big red heath and rock rose patches. Further down though nature is once more reinstated, and the Desfiladero del Ruecas presents us with the alder trees that form a dense gallery forest over its bed. Walking along its banks, we can see and listen to several species: nightingale, long-tailed tit or golden oriole. If we are patient,

the kingfisher and the white-throated dipper will show themselves in their busy comings and goings around the river. In an amazingly beautiful stretch of the River Ruecas, we find the Charco de la Nutria, that has been transformed into a natural pool and is very popular in the summer due to its cool and crystal-clear waters. Its picnic areas offer the possibility of a very enjoyable day by the river.

Notwithstanding, one of the main attractions of the Desfiladero del Ruecas is the Cueva Chiquita, where numerous schematic cave paintings can be seen scattered over a huge wall. There is a convenient walkway and several interpretative panels that will help us to identify the paintings and understand their meaning.

THE ESSENTIALS

The Visitor reception centre for the Cañamero Geopark.

Be sure not to leave the area without tasting the Cañamero wine.

Risco de La Villuerca

Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark
ZEPA Sierra de las Villuercas
y Valle de Guadarranque

25

No point in the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark offers so many visual treats as this vantage point, just a few kilometres away from Guadalupe.



The Risco de la Villuerca could well be described as the viewpoint of the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark. It is situated at the centre of the Sierra de las Villuercas, among Navezuelas, Cañamero, Villar del Pedroso and Guadalupe.

We can reach its summit by a Tarmac® track that starts at the chapel known as Ermita del Humilladero, on the EX-118 road, or by a cement road that starts in the vicinity of Navezuela, on the CC-121 road.

With an altitude of 1601 m, it perfectly fulfils its role as the Geopark viewpoint. From its top we can observe the distinctive relief of the land, the River Guadalupejo valley, the

Viejas-Torneros syncline, the Ibor-Guadalupe anticline, the Rañas de Cañamero (“rañas” being extensive plains of sedimentary origin that take the form of a plateau) or the Sierra de la Madrila, among many other points of geological interest.

But not only its summit, also its slopes present us with sites of interest: the chapel known as Ermita del Humilladero, the Arca del Agua, a system for gathering and conducting water dating from the 14th century, or the Pozo de la Nieve, a well built in the 17th century by the monks of the order of St Jerome, who used it to store ice and keep food and medicines at a low temperature during the hottest months.



Roe deer



Portugal laurel



Otter



Pyrenean oak

THE ESSENTIALS

View of the Appalachian relief from the summit.

Visit to the Arca del Agua.

Follow any of the pilgrimage routes to Guadalupe.

Being the highest point in Las Villuercas, it offers us a view of most valleys, and, therefore, of the territories where the life of the following species nesting on the crags unfolds: black stork, griffon vulture, Egyptian vulture, Bonelli's eagle, golden eagle or peregrine falcon. Nevertheless, due to its extreme conditions, the summit itself is reserved to just a few species. In the springtime, it is difficult to miss the common rock thrush, whose striking feathers will catch our attention. It shares this habitat with the blue rock thrush, the wheatear and the black redstart. In the wintertime, even when the summit is covered in snow, there are Alpine accentors and Alpine citril finches.

Both for those in search of beautiful landscapes as for those interested in birds, invertebrates or botany, the route that ascends from El Humilladero to the Risco de la Villuerca will always be a pleasurable experience. It is 11 km long and has a gradient of almost 950 m, which means that we can observe the changes and transitions in the vegetation as the altitude increases, as well as the changes in the associated fauna. Furthermore, the path goes across both sunny and shady areas, displaying the entire biodiversity of these valleys. The groves of cork oak, strawberry tree, pine tree, chestnut tree and oak tree give way to heather, rock rose and, finally, in the summit, to bushes of *Genista cinerascens* and *Adenocarpus argyrophyllus*.

Sierra de Santa Cruz

ZEPA Llanos de Trujillo

26

This sierra is an oasis in the middle of the Trujillo plains. Lavish vegetation, springs and birds in a vantage point that is worth visiting.



Going from Trujillo to Miajadas by the Autovía de Extremadura, we come across the Sierra de Santa Cruz, located between the Villuercas-Ibores-Jara Geopark and the Sierra de Montánchez. From this elevation, we see several small villages that appear to be embedded in the landscape, among which Santa Cruz de la Sierra stands out. It is a historical place, where we can see numerous stone crosses, a Visigothic marble pilaster preserved in the parish temple, the church of the Convento de los Agustinos or the Templo de la Vera Cruz.

This sierra presents us with outstanding patrimonial, cultural and natural treasures. There is a signposted route that sets out from

the Augustinian convent and runs along narrow cobbled streets and paths up a gentle slope. On our way we encounter several springs where we can freshen up. The irrigation canals, that are carved into granite, and the cobbled roads will surprise us. At the summit there are the remains of an interesting stone sanctuary from the Iron Age. It is worthwhile to continue to La Silla del Moro, a chair-shaped hollow carved on the crag known as the Risco Chico.

Along the route that ascends to the summit of the Sierra de San Gregorio, the vegetation that predominates is that of small holm oaks. They share the space with hawthorn and Iberian pear, and we see also some very fine gall oaks



Griffon vulture



Eurasian eagle owl



Black wheatear



Blue rock thrush

THE ESSENTIALS

Do not miss the walk to the Cancho de la Misa.

The springs that flow down its slopes are a gift to the traveller.

and some isolated cork trees. On the slope lower parts, the common broom, the yellow broom and the rock rose predominate, but, as altitude increases, they are mostly replaced by white broom. In the sunniest areas, there are wild olive trees and terebinth. Before arriving in the summit, we catch sight of the spectacular Cancho de la Misa, a crag easily recognised because its crevices harbour a strawberry tree and a juniper.

The Bonelli's eagle and the Egyptian vulture nest on the crags, and, in the appropriate season, it is possible to see them from the summit. Nonetheless, we are more likely to see the black kite or the booted eagle. The bush is home to the

Sardinian warbler, joined in the winter by robins, Eurasian blackcaps, blackbirds, song thrushes and hawfinches. Around the two springs we encounter on the route, it is common to see little birds that come to drink from them. These springs are also a good place for the traveller to rest and freshen up.

The pasture land and the unirrigated crops that expand from Santa Cruz de la Sierra towards the triangle formed by Ibahernando, Ruanes and Trujillo are part of the ZEPA Llanos de Trujillo, and among the best areas to see steppe birds. The following species are very common: great bustard, little bustard, Montagu's harrier, European roller, thekla lark or calandra lark.

Sierra Brava Reservoir

ZEPA Llanos de Zorita y embalse de Sierra Brava

27

An ornithological paradise by international standards that harbours populations of aquatic birds that comprise more than 50,000 specimens in the wintertime.



The Sierra Brava Reservoir is in the southeast of the province of Cáceres, within the limits of the municipal district of Zorita. It is easily reached from Zorita by the EX-355 road.

We find ourselves in a flat area, only interrupted by the Monte de la Peña or the Monte de la Cabeza del Águila. A pseudo-steppe landscape and a humid area coexist side by side investing this space with its distinctive character. It belongs to the Trujillo-Cáceres plateau, and was designated ZEPA Llanos de Zorita y Embalse de Sierra Brava in 2003. The reservoir is fed by the Pizarroso stream, and we can cross it by the road that goes above the dam. Built in 1996

with a capacity of 223 hm³, it is home to very important populations of black bass, carp and pike, being highly valued by anglers.

The presence of plains, wetlands and *dehesa* ensures biodiversity of significant ornithological value. Several viewpoints at the level of the reservoir facilitate the sighting of aquatic birds. Although the Sierra Brava Reservoir is said to be one of the major humid areas in the region, its populations of aquatic birds reach numbers that are relevant also at national and international levels. After Doñana and the Delta del Ebro, it is the most important wetland in our country. In the winter the populations of aquatic



Eurasian coot



Crane



Collared pratincole



Gull-billed tern

THE ESSENTIALS

With just your binoculars, a warm coat and coffee, you can rest assured to enjoy hours of entertainment.

Daybreak and dusk by the reservoir in the days when cranes are around is something not to be missed.



birds average more than 55 000 specimens, mainly due to the gatherings of shoveler, Eurasian teal, mallard, greylag goose, gadwall, Eurasian wigeon, pintail, common pochard or Eurasian coot.

On its shores there is an important roost of common crane. Nevertheless, during the breeding season, other species stand out, the presence of islands where they can establish their colonies being crucial. Among them it is worth mentioning the gull-billed tern, the black-winged stilt, the little tern or the collared pratincole.

The significance of the Sierra Brava from

an ornithological point of view can only be accounted for in terms of its strategic location, since it is placed on the dividing line of to radically different habitats: the irrigated areas of the Vegas Altas del Guadiana and the pasture land and crops of the Zorita plains. In the steppe areas, we see the most representative species: great bustard, little bustard, lesser kestrel, European roller or Montagu's harrier. It is also worth visiting other humid areas of birdwatching interest, like the irrigated lands of Madrigalejo and Logrosán or the reservoirs known as Embalse de Cubilar, Embalse del Rucas and Embalse de La Copa.

SITES

28 to 33

40 SITES
for practising **ECO**
TOURISM
in the province of
Cáceres

YELLOW ZONE



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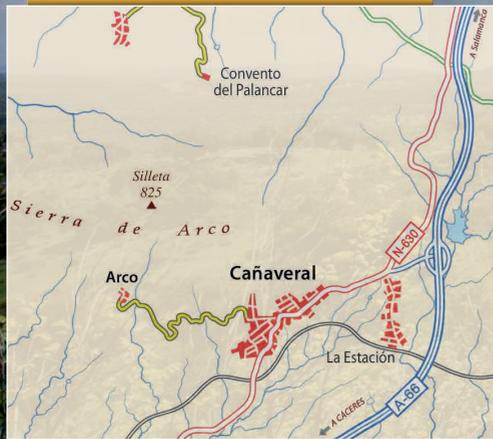


Cancho de La Silleta

ZEPA Canchos de Ramiro y Ladronera
LIC Canchos de Ramiro

28

Between two important ZEPAs, this rocky summit in the Sierra del Arco offers us a splendid view of our province.



At a distance of 5 km from the village of Cañaveral, Cancho de La Silleta is the highest point in the Sierra del Arco, which together with the Sierra Chica and the Sierra Grande form the orographic system known as the Sierras de Cañaveral.

There are several paths leading to its summit, which has an altitude of 826 m, and all of them offer enticements that make the ascent worthwhile. Our first suggestion entails setting out from Cañaveral. This village is crossed by the Carretera Nacional 630 (an A-road) and located at a very short distance from the Autovía A-66 (a carriageway). A visit to Villa de Arco, also known as "Arquillo", a small, semi-abandoned village, is a must. It welcomes us with its spectacular, ancient elm tree. We leave the village behind

and, facing southwards, have a panoramic view of the outstanding Alcántara Reservoir. Once at the summit, we enjoy the exceptional views that this enclave offers us. Both the fact of it being a vantage point and the supply of water guaranteed by the Valdecoco stream account for the presence of an interesting archaeological site dating from Roman times.

On the other side of La Silleta, we see the Portaje or Torrejoncillo Reservoir, as well as the Sierra de Gata, the villages of Hervás and Béjar and a section of the Alagón valley. Upon descending the mountain northern slope, we reach the convent of El Palancar, a religious monument representative of the Modern Age that was founded by Fray Pedro de Alcántara in 1557. The convent is still of service to the Franciscan Order,



Cork oak

Black vulture

Short-toed eagle

Strawberry tree

THE ESSENTIALS

A walk along the Villa de Arco streets always has a calming effect.

The cloister of the convent of El Palancar and its quiet beauty, something to be experienced first-hand.

being a place of pilgrimage and contemplation. These mountains, located at the eastern end of the ZEPA Canchos de Ramiro y Ladronera (ZEPA being a Special Protection Area for Birds) form a natural corridor that goes all the way to Portugal known as the ZEPA Dehesas de Monfragüe, giving continuity to the mountain chain that configures the Cáceres province. On their slopes, we can see the wonderful *dehesas*, meadows populated by holm and cork oaks, among which abound magnificent specimens. In some areas, patches of Mediterranean woodland have been preserved, and they surprise us with their floral variety, their strawberry trees and heath thickets. It is not uncommon to encounter some of the most threatened species among the Extremaduran birds of prey, such as the Iberian imperial eagle, the

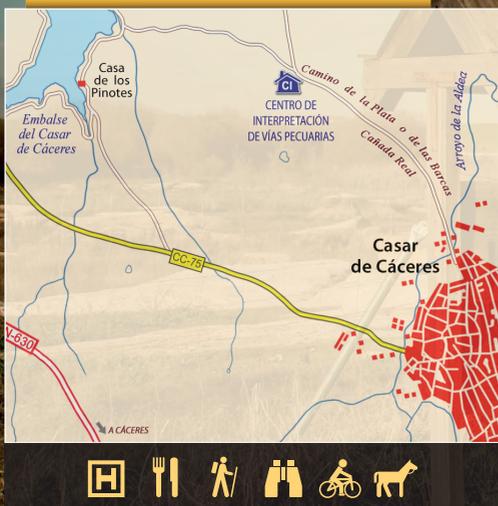
Bonelli's eagle or the black vulture, a small colony of which has established itself in the area. On the big cork oaks nests the black stork, and we are likely to see it feeding from the streams and pools of the surrounding pastures. In these mountains, where woods predominate, the presence of trees, among them chestnuts and pine trees, works as a magnet for birds of prey, such as the short-toed eagle or the goshawk, which are frequently seen. The Portaje Reservoir that can be observed from La Silleta is, due to its remarkable ornithological values, one of the Extremaduran humid areas of greatest interest. It is home to several colonies of heron (grey heron, little egret, cattle egret) and white stork, as well as big populations of *Anatidae* and waders (especially during the winter) and flocks of migratory spoonbills.

Casar de Cáceres

ZEPA Llanos de Cáceres y Sierra de Fuentes

29

The transhumance route is recreated every year in Casar de Cáceres, an event we should keep in mind when planning our own route.

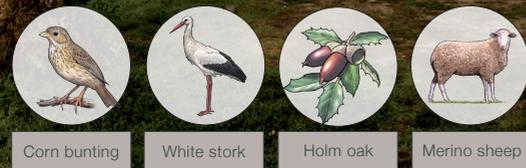


CENTRO DE INTERPRETACIÓN DE VÍAS PECUARIAS CASA PINOTE

The town of Casar de Cáceres brings to mind, first of all, its famous cheese, the Torta del Casar, one of the jewels of our national gastronomy. Casar is a town located at a very short distance from Cáceres, the capital of the province, and it can be reached by the Autovía A-66. It is a natural space where tradition is valued, and whose ornithological offer is notably generous. Pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela along the Vía de la Plata cross this village, which is on the Cañada Real Soriana Occidental, “cañadas reales” being the cattle tracks that were part of the transhumance route.

Over the years the residents of Casar de Cáceres have become more aware of the historic role played by the transhumance, which is now an

important part of their lives and culture. Every autumn, during the by now traditional week of the Torta del Casar, a tribute is paid to the transhumance route. Since 2006 the Casar residents gather for a walk that recreates the old transhumance journey and has the town as its starting and finishing point. It is an easy hike of less than 4 km. Year after year, they are joined by an increasing number of tourists. The walkers set out from Plaza de las Palmeras, and take the path going to the Casa de los Pinotes. This old country house, renovated and reopened as an Interpretation Centre for Livestock Routes (Centro de Interpretación de Vías Pecuarias), is located alongside the El Cordel Reservoir, and is the ideal place to take a break from the walk while



Corn bunting White stork Holm oak Merino sheep

eating some *migas* (a dish of breadcrumbs fried in garlic), before setting back. At the end of the walk, a tasting of lamb stew, local wine and, of course, the Torta del Casar will be awaiting them. The route to the Casa de los Pinotes goes primarily through pasture land, where it is easy to see species common in these habitats: corn bunting, zitting cisticola, calandra lark, thekla lark or lesser kestrel. There are also close to Casar de Cáceres two wetland areas of similar characteristics: the Cojuge and Casar pools. Since they are the biggest water reserves in those plains, they both attract many bird species. In springtime, mallards, Eurasian coots, great crested grebes, little grebes, common sandpipers and little ringed plovers can be seen on the

islands and shores. While the winter brings along cormorants, black-headed gulls, lesser black-backed gulls and various species of *Anatidae*, like the Eurasian teal, the common pochard or the shoveler. During the spring, their shores and shallow waters are also covered in the little flowers of the white water-crowfoot. It is a good opportunity to pay homage to a tradition that helped not only to create a sustainable environment but also to spread our folklore and culture. Younger people taking part in the event will become aware of the importance of the transhumance as a means rather than an end, as well as of the prominent role of our sheep, responsible as they are for the Torta del Casar quality.

THE ESSENTIALS

The Torta del Casar, a cheese that has no doubt earned its place among these essentials.

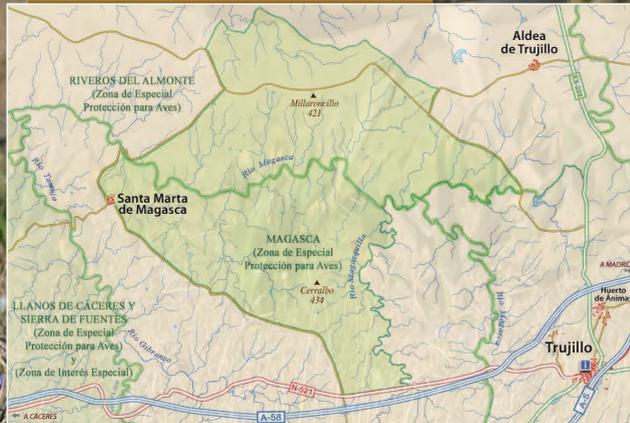
Migas, lamb stew, bread and cheese, all of it sitting by the Cordel Reservoir.

Santa Marta de Magasca

ZEPA Llanos de Cáceres y Sierra de Fuentes
ZEPA Magasca

30

Generous river banks and plains inhabited by a population of steppe birds that attracts ornithologists from all over the world.



Santa Marta de Magasca is at the very centre of the peneplain that also encompasses the towns of Trujillo and Cáceres, at 15 minutes from the Autovía A-58. The village rises over ancient and heavily eroded terrain. It is surrounded by an immense plain, where natural pastures alternate with unirrigated cereal crops and *dehesa*. The *dehesa* becomes thicker when it approaches the banks of the four rivers that cross this land: Tamuja, Tozo, Almonte and Gibranzos. In those banks, because of their higher thermicity, the vegetation is enriched by the presence of wild olive trees, kermes oaks, common hawthorn, terebinth and Mediterranean buckthorn. As we follow the road that links the A-58 carriageway with Santa Marta de Magasca, we

might well see many species that are typical of steppe areas, like great and little bustards, Montagu's harriers, calandra larks, European rollers or lesser kestrels. On the electricity pylons that run parallel to the road, many nest boxes have been installed for the two latter species, although sometimes they are home to little owls and western jackdaws instead. It pays off to stop at places with good visibility and search for more elusive species, such as the stone curlew, the pin-tailed sandgrouse or the black-bellied sandgrouse, that can often only be heard. The abundance of livestock in the pasture land explains the presence of necrophagous species, like the black vulture, the griffon vulture or the Egyptian vulture. It is not uncommon to



Montagu's harrier Great bustard Black-eared wheatear Little bustard

see them flying over the territory in search of food. Likewise, because of the abundance of partridges, hares and rabbits, several big birds of prey, among them golden eagles, imperial eagles and Bonelli's eagles, have made their dominion of these skies. Other well-represented birds of prey are the short-toed eagle and the black kite. When walking along the river banks, we can stop and contemplate these distinctive landscapes, where streams interrupt abruptly the flatness of plains. In their quiet waters the few black storks left can be seen feeding on fish and crabs. Other rare birds, such as the blue rock thrush, the red-rumped swallow or the crag martin, frequent the areas around stone bridges. Due to their exceptional ornithological richness,

these beautiful landscapes have been included in the ZEPA Llanos de Cáceres y Sierra de Fuentes (ZEPA being a Special Protection Area for Birds), which is among the most representative European steppe habitats of the Natura 2000 network, and one of the most valuable destinations for ornithological tourism. Between Santa Marta de Magasca and Cáceres there is the Guadiloba Reservoir, whose shores are shaped like a dragon. This reservoir is the habitat of the following species: little tern, collared pratincole, black-winged stilt or little ringed plover. In its waters lives the Spanish pond turtle, as well as some autochthonous fish like the Iberian barbel.

THE ESSENTIALS

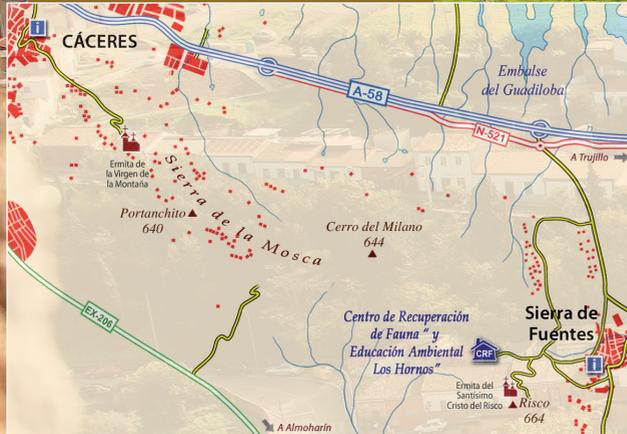
A chance to see birds like the stone curlew or the pin-tailed sandgrouse is a call in itself. Birdwatching in a space that enjoys European recognition for its steppe birds.

Sierra de La Mosca

City of Cáceres: Heritage of Humanity Site
 ZEPA Llanos de Cáceres y Sierra de Fuentes
 ZEPA Colonias de Cernícalo Primilla
 de la Ciudad Monumental de Cáceres

31

A mosaic of different groves that boasts great ornithological value, being the only high point in the Cáceres plains, a city declared a Heritage of Humanity Site.



THE ESSENTIALS

The views from the Santuario de la Montaña.

On the one side the capital of the province, the plains on the other, with Gredos in the background.

A walk around Cáceres' old quarter is a must.



Cork oak



Griffon vulture



Poplar leaved rock rose



Iberian magpie

Southeast of Cáceres, between this city and the village of Sierra de Fuentes, there is a wooded area known as the Sierra de la Mosca that we can easily identify because it is the highest point in the Cáceres plains.

From an ecological point of view, it is a wooded island immersed in a vast plain of pasture land and crops, and its slopes are a stronghold for natural habitats that centuries ago covered also the plain and other hills. The Sierra de la Mosca allows a view of Cáceres from the Santuario de la Virgen de la Montaña, patron of the city. At an altitude of 718 m, this view is the best. We are in an enclave where different paths will take us to the town centre in a matter of minutes. It is of special interest the route along Fuente Fría, San

Marquino or Ribera del Marco, at the foot of the hill over which the Cáceres old quarter spreads. This historical centre was declared a Heritage of Humanity Site by UNESCO in 1986, and, having been recovered for the Cáceres residents in recent years, is the source and origin of the city life. No more than five minutes away, the corridor that goes along the edge of the Sierra de la Mosca towards El Portanchito will take us, just after 2 km, into a landscape of genuine Mediterranean woodland. The predominant vegetation is that which is typical of the holm and cork oak *dehesa*. In some areas, though, it alternates with pasture land and even olive groves, while in others it forms dense patches of Mediterranean woodland. On hillsides of strong sun, there

abundant wild olives, yellow broom, gorse, Spanish lavender, Kermes oaks, terebinth and *Phillyrea angustifolia*, while on shady hillsides strawberry trees, *Viburnum tinus*, poplar leaved rock rose, red heath and tree heath predominate. On mountain tops, crowned by quartzite rocks, magnificent specimens of juniper can be seen. The landscape is a mosaic where different areas are populated by different kinds of trees, and differ in density, in a greater or lesser presence of bushes and pasture land, all of which explains its ornithological richness. It is worth mentioning its bird of prey populations, among them are those of black kites, booted eagles or common buzzards. In the *dehesa*, species such as the Iberian magpie, the hoopoe, the woodchat shrike,

the Eurasian nuthatch, the spotted flycatcher, the Eurasian blue tit or the Sardinian warbler are very common. Areas where quartzite rock abounds are ideal habitats for the blue rock thrush, the black wheatear, the rock bunting or the crag martin. If the Sierra de la Mosca geological variety becomes visible in the Minas de Valdeflores, mines from which years ago lithium and tin were extracted, its tradition is also present in the already mentioned Santuario de la Virgen de la Montaña, its history in the old tuberculosis hospital, and its invaluable flora and fauna in the Mediterranean woodland. They are all assets that invite us to enjoy our walk in this natural site where so many possible views are offered to us.

Aldea del Cano Reservoir

ZEPA Embalse de Aldea del Cano

32

A reservoir, at only 20 km from the city of Cáceres, that is the ideal place to see aquatic birds and is on the Vía de la Plata.



From Seville to Astorga, the Vía de la Plata crosses western Spain. Along this route, right at its centre, where it traverses the province of Cáceres, the walker encounters landscapes where history, nature and tradition coexist side by side.

When approaching Aldea del Cano from the south, among milestones and other remains from Roman architecture, we enter wetland that has been declared a Special Protection Area for Birds (ZEPA).

The privileged position of Aldea del Cano and its surroundings (at just 20 km from Cáceres) invites us to enjoy landscapes that contrast with those of the neighbouring Sierra de Montánchez

and the nearby *dehesas* of the Cornalvo Nature Park. Both the Carretera Nacional 630 and the Autovía A-66 will take us to that village and its important historical heritage. The parish church of San Martín and the chapel of la Virgen de los Remedios are among its best assets. In its outskirts, we will be able to see the remains of Roman villas forts.

The Aldea del Cano Reservoir, also known as the Nogales Reservoir, is located just over 1 km south of the village. It dates from the year 1988, when it was conceived and built to support the irrigation system of the area. The water comes from the streams of Santiago, la Zafra, la Zafrilla, Nogales y la Cuesta, that run across large



Spanish pond turtle

Crane

Black kite

Great crested grebe

THE ESSENTIALS

A visit to Cáceres is also a safe bet.

On its shores there is a roosting place for cranes.

Milestones and a long way to go.



extensions of holm oak wooded *dehesa*. Big, rounded granite outcrops give its character to the landscape, and emerge above the reservoir waters to form islands.

We find ourselves in a space of ornithological interest. In the wintertime, its quiet shores serve as a roost for an important crane population of more than 1200 specimens. During the day they feed in the *dehesa* surrounding the reservoir. Some species of *Anatidae* are also common, among them are worthy of mention the populations of common pochard, tufted duck, gadwall, mallard and greylag goose.

In the springtime, a small colony of little tern

settles in the reservoir islands. It is not rare to see these birds taking a nosedive into the water to catch small fish. Other common species are the white stork, the great crested grebe, the little grebe and the Eurasian coot.

The reservoir is known for its low water, and during the summer its water table is very shallow, but even so it attracts many bird species, such as spoonbills, egrets or lapwings.

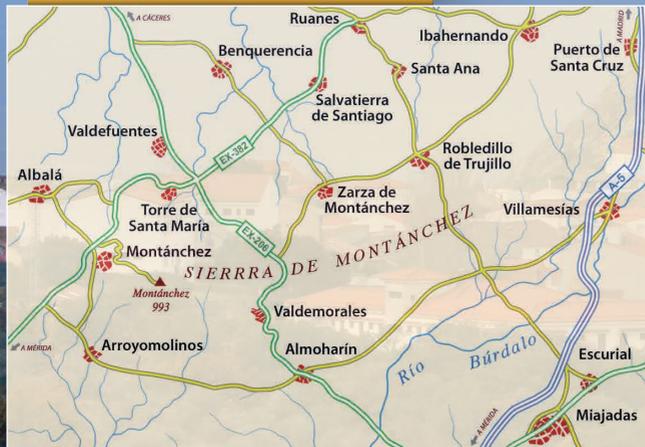
Fishermen frequent the reservoir attracted by the carp and tench. The flatness of the land and its richness, the neighbouring wetland and *dehesa* are all convincing reasons for a walk in and around Aldea del Cano.

Sierra de Montánchez

LIC Río Almonte
ZEPA Riberos del Almonte

33

This sierra offers us a wide range of natural, patrimonial and gastronomic options that will more than justify a visit.



THE ESSENTIALS

Visit to the Basílica de Santa Lucía del Trampal and its surroundings.

Encina la Terrona, a holm oak that has been declared a Singular Tree, a natural monument more than 800 years old.

That this is a land of marvellous ham and very fine wines is something not to be forgotten.



Griffon vulture



Chestnut tree



Holm oak



Great spotted woodpecker

In the south of the province of Cáceres, on a hill overlooking the land crossed by the Rivers Tajo and Guadiana, we encounter the town of Montánchez. It gives its name to the mountain where it stands, which is crowned by a castle of Roman origin and subsequent Almohade influence. We find ourselves in an environment of great patrimonial richness, exemplified by the Basílica de Santa Lucía del Trampal, the only Visigothic temple still standing in the southern Iberian Peninsula.

Montánchez serves as a bridge between the mountain formations of Las Villuercas and the Sierra de San Pedro, making up an ecological corridor of exceptional value. It rises abruptly from rolling plains, and its steep slopes ascend vertiginously up to an altitude of 994 m.

Its remarkable altitude grants the presence of different kinds of vegetation, with the peculiarity that in higher and colder parts oak tree and chestnut tree groves replace the cork oak and holm oak groves.

Its peculiar orientation emphasises the difference between its slopes. The vegetation in areas exposed to the sun (those overlooking the basin of the Guadiana) offer more species typical of a moderate thermal environment, such as wild olive, kermes oak, *Cistus albidus*, rock rose, *Genista anglica* or yellow broom. Most of the olive groves of the sierra can be found on these sunny slopes, and their oil is of exceptional quality. Whereas on shady slopes abound heather, *Viburnum tinus* and strawberry trees. The areas around the rivers and streams that

flow through its hillsides often display thickets of spurge, enriched by the presence of ash trees, willows and oleander there where the terrain is flatter.

Given the excellent state of preservation of its arboreous areas, the forest birds are the best represented in this sierra. In the springtime it is a pleasure to hear the song of blackbirds, robins, Eurasian nuthatches, short-toed treecreepers, hawfinches, Sardinian warblers, chaffinches and nightingales. Here we can see the four woodpeckers of Extremadura: great spotted, lesser spotted and European green woodpeckers, as well as Eurasian wryneck. Even the Montánchez castle itself is an excellent enclave for the observation of birds, and as we walk along its battlements we can see interesting

species, such as Alpine accentor, blue rock thrush or crag martin.

Among the birds of prey, the Bonelli's eagle, the Egyptian vulture and the Eurasian eagle owl have their territories in the most inaccessible crags, while in oak groves and woods it is easier to encounter the booted eagle, the common buzzard, the black kite or the sparrowhawk.

In the many fountains and pools present in the sierra, we can admire amphibians of exceptional beauty, as are the common salamander, the Bosca's newt or the pygmy marbled newt.

Furthermore, we can get our strength back by testing the local ham quality. While the Sierra de Montánchez has many different scents, it is its renowned ham that gives it its flavour.

34 to 40

40 SITES
for practising **ECO**
TOURISM
in the province of
Cáceres

PURPLE
ZONE



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Alcántara



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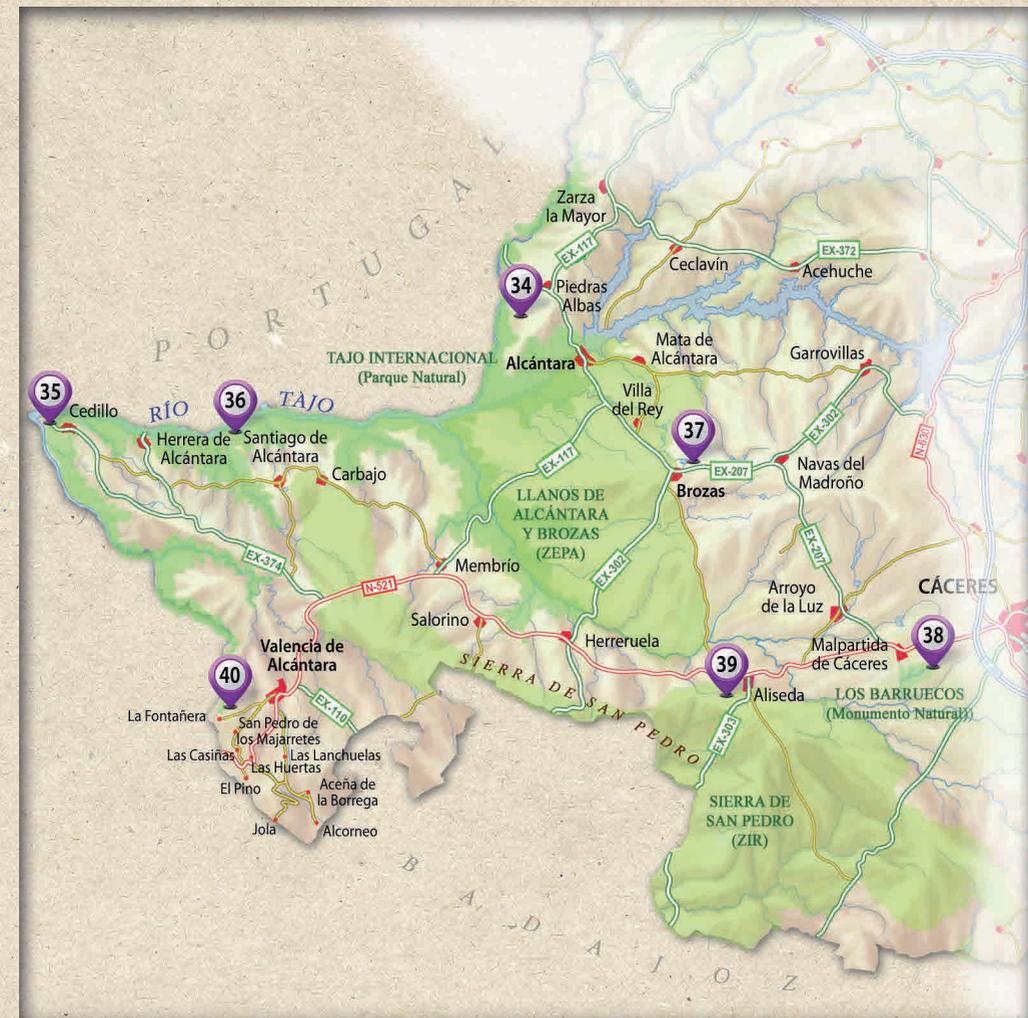
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Herrera and
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Charca de Brozas
y Ejido



Alcántara

LIC Río Erjas
Tajo Internacional Nature Park
ZEPA Río Tajo Internacional y Riberos
LIC Cedillo y Río Tajo Internacional

34

In the vicinity of Alcántara, the Roman bridge competes in value and singularity with the landscape and its natural assets.



Alcántara, a word of Arabic origin, means “the bridge”, and close to this town, located near the Portuguese border, there is the famous Puente de Alcántara, a Roman bridge over the River Tajo. Being more than 70 m high, this bridge was declared a National Monument in 1924. It dates from the 2nd century AD, and its magnificence and excellent state of preservation recommend it as a place the visitor should not miss.

We can reach Alcántara taking the EX-207 in the vicinity of Malpartida de Cáceres. Not only is it a town of historic and patrimonial value, but it also situated at the heart of the Tajo Internacional Nature Park, whose reception centre it houses. Very close to Alcántara there is the village of Piedras Albas. Formerly a border and customs post, it probably takes its name from the white

quartzite outcrops that can be found in its surroundings. Piedras Albas, too, is an enclave of significant patrimonial value. The remarkable Roman road that linked Córdoba with Oporto crosses the pasture land *dehesa* towards the nearby Puente de Segura, a Roman bridge over the River Erjas.

The Puente de Alcántara is also a good location to observe the birds that find shelter in its ancient stones. There nests the common house martin, that has established its bustling colony under the arches of the bridge, while the common swift and the Alpine swift take advantage of the cracks and hollows that the passing of time has carved on its stones. On its pillars or in the nearby crags, it is also possible to see the following species: black wheatear, black redstart, jackdaw and rock



Griffon vulture Black wheatear Broom Bonelli's eagle

pigeon. In the river waters the populations of barbel and Iberian nase deserve special mention, though lately catches of non-autochthonous species, such as catfish and zander, are stirring up interest among anglers. Going from the Roman bridge in the direction of Piedras Albas, we can stop by the Cantera de Alcántara, a deep ditch excavated with the aim of obtaining stones for the construction of the dam, while creating in the process an artificial humid area surrounded by steep cliffs on which the black stork and the Egyptian vulture nest. It is also a very popular bathing area, one of whose main attractions is no doubt the distinctive landscape in which it is embedded. The Cañada Real de Gata is a transhumance route that links the villages of Estorninos, Piedras Albas and Zarza la Mayor,

and runs parallel to the River Erjas, among granite outcrops, holm oak *dehesa* and little brooks. Having been declared an LIC (Site of Community Importance), the River Erjas course flows through narrow valleys and has hardly been subjected to human intervention. In some stretches it presents the curious “*marmitas de gigante*” (literally “giant’s cooking pots”). These are the landforms known in English as “kettles” that result from fluvial erosion. It is possible to walk along this river banks from the Portuguese town of Segura, or from Salvaterra do Extremo, that faces the River Erjas canyon. From there we can admire, on the Spanish bank, the castle known as the Castillo de Peñafiel. It sits on a picturesque landscape in whose impregnable cliffs griffon vultures, black storks or Bonelli’s eagles take refuge.

THE ESSENTIALS

The Puente Romano de Alcántara.

The convent of San Benito.

In August, do not miss the Alcántara Classic Theatre Festival.

The Tench Day, at the end of the summer.

Cedillo Tajo Internacional

Tajo Internacional Nature Park
 ZEPA Río Tajo Internacional y Riberos
 LIC Cedillo y Río Tajo Internacional

35

Strongly marked by its bordering location, the village of Cedillo offers us the assets of the Tajo Internacional Nature Park wherever we approach it from.



Tajo Internacional is a Natural Park that encompasses the natural spaces of the Portuguese district of Castelo Branco and the Spanish bordering area of the province of Cáceres. Rather than serving as the dividing line between both countries, the River Tajo course is the line where the two natural spaces converge, being the axis and reason d'être of the Natural Park. The Tajo and its tributaries the Rivers Erjas, Aravil and Ponsul coming from the north, and the Rivers Salor and Sever coming from the south, provide for the natural richness of these spaces, where family, gastronomic, historical and adventure tourism carry a lot of weight.

This park occupies more than 50 000 ha and includes more than 11 municipalities in Cáceres and 12 in Portugal. Cedillo is the most western

village in Cáceres. It was founded in the 18th century by the Portuguese, although evidence of previous settlements, in the form of dolmens and anthropomorphic tombs, has been found in its surroundings. Cedillo is now one of the starting points of the Crucero en Barco del Tajo Internacional, an interpreted river cruise that takes us to the Spanish village of Herrera or to the Portuguese village of Lentiscais before returning to Cedillo.

In the confluence between the Rivers Sever and Tajo there is the Cedillo Reservoir, this stretch being dammed up to the vicinity of the Puente de Alcántara. The Extremaduran slopes, on its left bank, face north and their vegetation is that typical of shady areas, with predominance of cork oak, holm oak, gall oak,



Egyptian vulture

Griffon vulture

Blue rock thrush

Imperial eagle

strawberry tree, *Viburnum tinus*, tree heath, terebint or Iberian pear, which on occasion form impenetrable patches. On the sunny slopes of the Portuguese side, there grow more thermophilic species as the following: wild olive tree, Kermes oak, Mediterranean buckthorn, rock rose or *Asparagus albus*. Criss-crossing the vegetation we find the paths walked by deer and wild boars.

Occasionally these animals surprise us when they break into a run through the vegetation patches. The far more stealthy otters travel along the banks looking for fish, and if we are attentive, we can observe them swimming in the river dammed waters.

Those willing to discover the essence of the park will be astonished by the navigable

stretch between Cedillo and Herrera de Alcántara. Along it, and depending on the time of the year, we can be lucky enough to see the following birds: black stork, griffon vulture, black vulture, Egyptian vulture, goshawk, sparrowhawk or Bonelli's Eagle. It is therefore important to bring our field-glasses with us. If we have time to walk, the paths that go around the banks (to the Mirador de Negrals, Mari Loza, La Geregosa or the Mirador de las Viñas) invite us to get in touch with the landscape and discover other many interesting flora species, such as *Iris lusitanica* or hackberry. Among the little birds, it is possible to observe the hawfinch, the Orpean warbler, the blue rock thrush or the black wheatear.

THE ESSENTIALS

The river cruise in a boat with the suggestive name of "El Balcón del Tajo" ("The Tajo's Balcony") is a memorable experience.

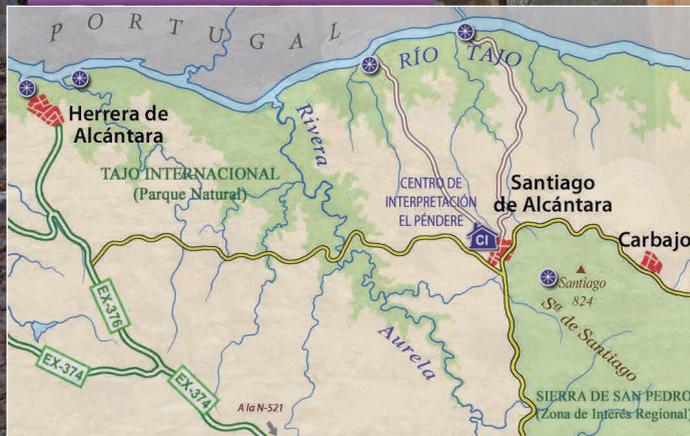
Visit to the Casón de Cedillo Interpretation Centre.

Herrera and Santiago de Alcántara

Tajo Internacional Nature Park
 ZEPA Río Tajo Internacional y Riberos
 LIC Cedillo y Río Tajo Internacional
 LIC Rivera de Aurela
 LIC Rivera de Carbajo
 ZEPA-LIC Sierra de San Pedro

36

In the river banks of the Tajo Internacional Nature Park we encounter the generous vegetation that is home to a very diverse and rich fauna.



Herrera de Alcántara is placed over a hill surrounded by four fluvial courses: the Aurela stream and the Rivers Tajo, Sever and Aburrel. We must not forget that it was an important river port connected with Lisbon through the Tajo, and therefore the door to a commerce route with England. Due to the fact that it is on the Spanish-Portuguese border, we can still hear some of its residents speaking in “ferrereño”, an archaic Portuguese dialect.

If we go east, we arrive in Santiago de Alcántara, a village of possibly Roman origin that is an excellent starting point from which to get to know the area. The Centre of Interpretation of the Megalithic Period and the Nature Interpretation Centre of El Péndere are among

its assets. It is easy to access these two villages from the city of Cáceres. We take the N-521 road in the direction of Valencia de Alcántara, and then take a turn-off to Cedillo. Before arriving in this village, we encounter other forks that offer us the option to go to Santiago and Herrera de Alcántara.

Santiago de Alcántara is at the northwest end of the ZEPA-LIC Sierra de San Pedro, where the Sierra de Santiago is the last mountain formation before the narrow valley of the River Tajo. From the Centre of Interpretation of the Megalithic Period, a path ascends taking us across a landscape where the vegetation of shady areas is clearly differentiated from that of sunny areas. The viewpoint at the summit will offer us the



Egyptian vulture Eurasian eagle owl Black stork Iris lusitanica

THE ESSENTIALS

Did you ever hear anybody speaking in *ferrereño*? When in Herrera de Alcántara, you should prick-up your ears.

Centre of Interpretation of the Megalithic Period.

Nature Interpretation Centre of El Péndere.

Try the *carpa en caldo corto* (carp), the *coles con buche* (cabbage) and the “Bella María” pears.

opportunity to observe some of the birds of prey that inhabit these sierras, such as the Bonelli’s eagle or the griffon vulture. El Buraco, a deep cave where some extraordinary paintings have been preserved is a must.

This ZEPA-LIC is connected to the River Tajo by two important ecological corridors: the Rivera de Aurela and the Rivera de Carbajo. Both rivers flow across narrow valleys of dense vegetation that not long ago were the refuge of the Iberian wolf. Among them runs the Fuente Geregosa route, the best option to go from Santiago de Alcántara to the River Tajo banks through *dehesa* and pasture land. It takes us to the Fuente Geregosa, a fountain of excellent sulphurous waters that is not only situated in one of the most picturesque

river stretches but is also a viewpoint for the observation of the numerous birds.

The slopes of the River Tajo banks present very similar ecological features: a dense vegetation of holm oaks, cork oaks and strawberry trees enriched by species typical of a warmer climate in the sunny areas, like wild olive tree or Mediterranean buckthorn. The steep and inaccessible cliffs that fall into the river bed are the spaces chosen by the Egyptian vulture, the griffon vulture, the Bonelli’s eagle, the golden eagle and the black stork. Because of the beauty of its landscapes and the possibility it offers to observe some of the most emblematic species in the park, this navigable stretch of the river has an important touristic value.

Charca de Brozas y Ejido

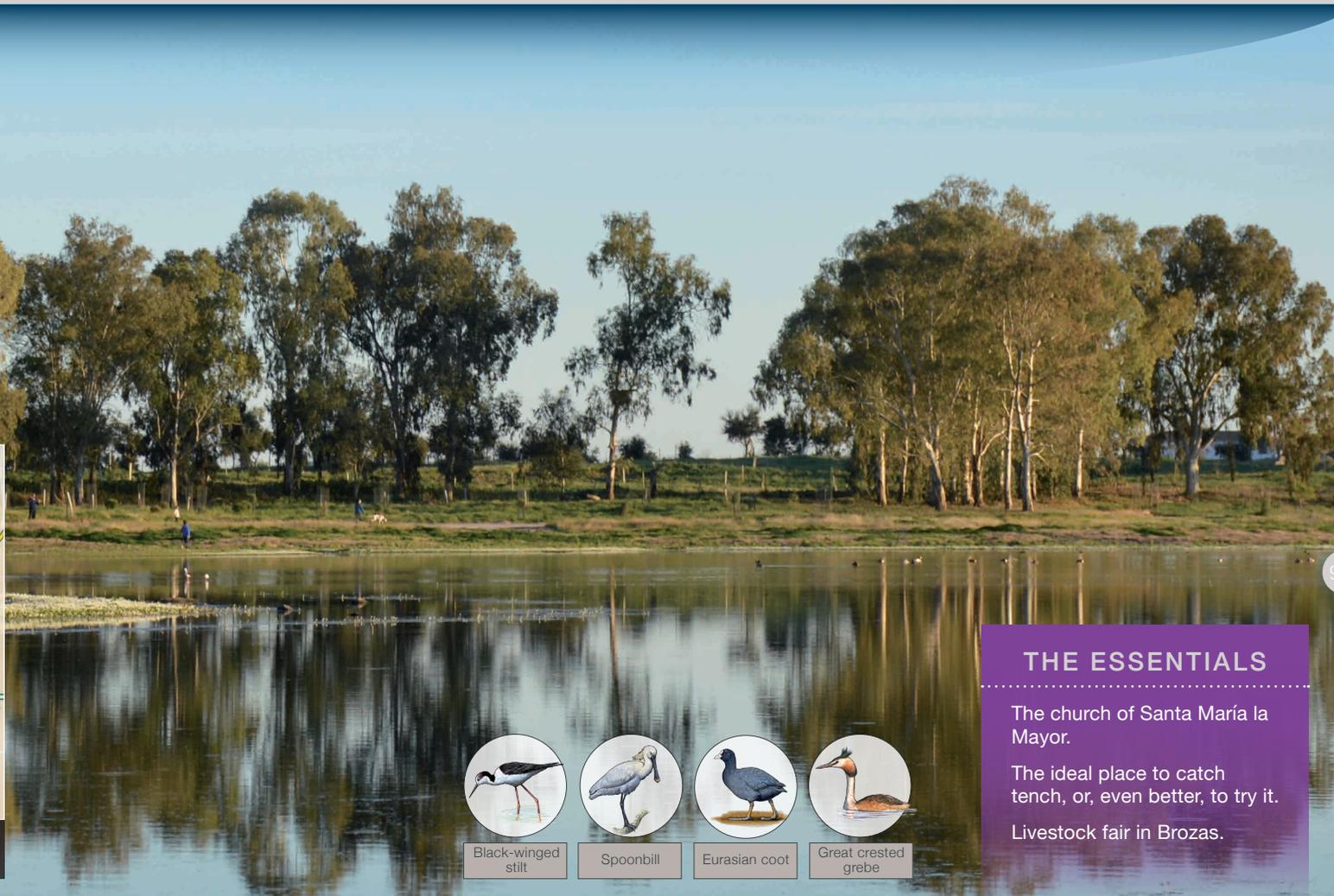
Charca de Brozas y Ejido- Peri-urban Park for Leisure and Preservation

ZEPA Colonias de Cernícalo Primilla (Lesser Kestrel) de Brozas

ZEPA-LIC Llanos de Alcántara y Brozas

37

A town whose aristocratic, medieval past has left a visible mark and whose surroundings offer us a walk around wetland conceived as a leisure area.



THE ESSENTIALS

The church of Santa María la Mayor.

The ideal place to catch tench, or, even better, to try it.

Livestock fair in Brozas.



Black-winged stilt



Spoonbill



Eurasian coot



Great crested grebe

Setting out from Cáceres by the N-521 road in the direction of Valencia de Alcántara, we leave behind Malpartida de Cáceres and turn right into the EX-207 road that takes us to Brozas, 50 km away from Cáceres.

This town possesses a long and complex history, and presents us with remains dating from different periods of prehistory, the Roman Empire, and notably the Middle Ages. Its location, the spaciousness of its municipal area, so apt for agriculture and transhumance livestock farming, and the fact of it being an important connection with the west, all favoured Brozas' development and the settling in it of a powerful nobility. It was a time of splendour for the town that left its mark in

the form of monuments like the Iglesia de Santa María la Mayor (a church that has been declared a National Monument), the Iglesia de los Santos Mártires or the Convento de Nuestra Señora de la Luz.

Another of Brozas' assets is its location, surrounded as it is by some of the most important natural spaces in the province of Cáceres. Closest to the town, is the Parque Periurbano de Conservación y Ocio Charca de Brozas y Ejido (which, as its name suggests, it is a space for leisure and preservation). When visiting it, we leave our car at the entrance to the village in order to enjoy a very pleasurable walk along the paths that skirt it. It is an artificial humid area that resulted from the

construction of a dam on the headwaters of the Noque stream. The terrain on which it sits is granitic, some of the rocks becoming visible during the low water period.

On its shores, vegetation is scarce, with just some scattered trees, mainly eucalyptuses. In areas closer to the water, there is a predominance of grasslands, where reeds abound. Nevertheless, the most representative vegetation is that of common water-crowfoots. They cover large areas of the sheet of water, providing a colourful spectacle in the spring. This habitat is ideal for species such as great crested grebe, little grebe, black-winged stilt or Eurasian coot, which nest taking advantage of

the dense web of floating stalks. On its sandy shores nests also the little ringed plover.

The magnificent populations of tench found in its waters attract many birds' species, among them the black stork, the grey heron or the little egret. The populations of overwintering *Anatidae*, like tufted duck, mallard and shoveler, are also worthy of mention.

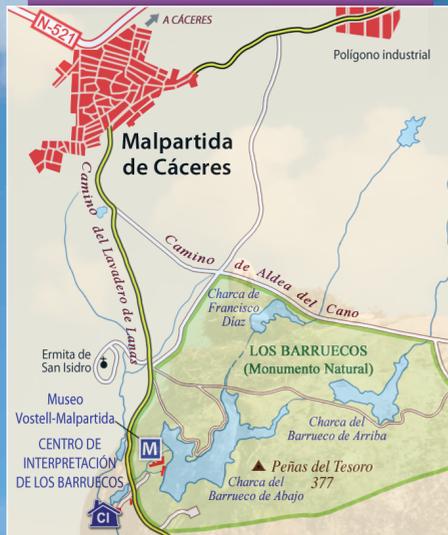
But our visit to Brozas will be incomplete without a walk along the streets of this urban ZEPA that gives shelter to an important colony of lesser kestrels, as does the Convento de la Luz, a convent located in Brozas' vicinity, right in the limit with the ZEPA Llanos de Alcántara y Brozas.

Los Barruecos

Los Barruecos - Natural Monument
ZEPA Llanos de Cáceres y Sierra de Fuentes

38

The wind and the water have sculpted one of the most beautiful natural monuments in the province of Cáceres. The artist Wolf Vostell has added value to it.



THE ESSENTIALS

The Vostell Museum.

Tench, pickled, in *mojo*, in tomato sauce or fried, is the local specialty.

The Semana de la Cigüeña (the Week of the Stork).

Pedida de la Patatera (festival).

Los Barruecos Interpretation Centre.



White stork



Spanish pond turtle



Otter



Tench



Los Barruecos is a natural area located within the municipality of Malpartida de Cáceres, at a distance of just 14 km from the capital of the province. It sits on a granite batholith that is the reason behind the capricious shapes of the *bolos*, the monolithic globular figures punctuating its landscape. These rocks great exposure has made it easy for the wind to sculpt them with the help of the waters of the River Salor.

The remains from the Palaeolithic Period, the paintings and engravings from the Copper Age, as well as the anthropomorphic tombs found around Malpartida speak of man's presence in the area from time immemorial. The Modern Age has also left its mark with the construction of the four main reservoirs that bestow this

landscape its special light. The reservoirs, built between the 16th and 19th centuries, cannot be dissociated from the presence of mills, vegetable gardens and orchards, providing a good example of a sensible and rational use of water.

Los Barruecos is a protected natural space that has been declared a Natural Monument. In spite of its reduced dimensions, with an area of less than 320 hectares, it encompasses three valuable types of habitats: pools, granite rocky areas and pasture land with bush. No doubt, its singularity is the result of a perfect combination of geology and the presence of birds: the spectacular granite globular rocks are crowned by dozens of white stork nests that make of Los Barruecos a unique place. On the rocks, it is also possible to see the ocellated

lizard or the common wall gecko basking in the sun. The space has two artificial pools (Barrueco de Arriba and Barrueco de Abajo) that have been nevertheless successfully integrated into nature with the passage of time. Their shores and islands present a vegetation of reed and common water-crowfoot abundant enough to be home to a large community of birds, among which we find the following: great crested grebe, little grebe, Eurasian coot, black-winged stilt, grey heron or common spoonbill. On the granite rocks that rise above the water surface it is common to see the Spanish pond turtle, and with a little luck even otters searching for fish. The most abundant bush species are bridal veil broom, laburnum, hawthorn and Iberian pear. Some other species are adapted to living in the granite

cracks, like foxglove or Dianthus. Here we can also find small birds, such as the thekla lark, the Sardinian warbler or the common stonechat. Malpartida de Cáceres is the only Spanish village that is part of the European Stork Villages Network due to its proven ability to coexist with this species and work actively for its preservation. More than 180 pairs of white storks live in its municipal area. Another appeal of the region is the artist Wolff Vostell's spiritual presence. Being one of the greatest exponents of the Fluxus movement, in Los Barruecos, he left us not only his memory and museum but also his contribution to the landscape, which we can discover in our walks along some of the many paths that traverse the terrain.

Aliseda

ZEPA - LIC Sierra de San Pedro

39

In a space of spectacular ornithological richness, history and heritage raise also to the status of a treasure.



At a distance of 28 km from Cáceres, in the direction of Portugal, we come across the village of Aliseda. It has just 2000 residents and belongs to the Tajo-Salor region, being strategically situated in the dividing line between the plains that stretch from Brozas to Cáceres and the mountains of the Sierra de San Pedro. It was in Aliseda that in 1920 an archaeological treasure was found. It consists of gold, silver, bronze and glass pieces that date from the 7th century BC and are of Tartessian origin. They are believed to be burial offerings, and at present are kept in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional de Madrid, although we can find replicas of them in the Aliseda's Treasure Interpretation Centre (Centro de Interpretación del Tesoro).

If we take the road that goes from Aliseda to Badajoz (EX-303), before arriving to the Aliseda Reservoir, we encounter the Interpretation Centre of Mining and Man (Centro de Interpretación de la Minería y el Hombre), where the visit to the Mina Pastora and its surroundings starts. This old mine, located in the Sierra del Aljibe, shows clear indications of having been first used in Roman times. Although it was reopened in 1920, its exploitation reached its peak in the fifties, when the iron and sulphur extracted from it were sent to the Bilbao's steelworks. The Mina Pastora was closed down in 1958. These days it is possible to visit the mine and make a tour of its three levels of extraction. The third level, which is in the open, takes the form of a cave

known as the Cueva de la Gitana, offering us a good sample of the flora in the area. It is also an important refuge for bats, where they can breed and take shelter in the winter. In its labyrinthian tunnels at least ten different species have been found, among them the following: common bent-wing bat, greater horseshoe bat, Mehely's horseshoe bat, Mediterranean horseshoe bat and greater mouse-eared bat. Aliseda is part of a space included in the Natura 2000 network, both as a ZEPA, because of its bird populations, and as an LIC, because of the excellent state of preservation of its habitats and associated fauna and flora. Its municipal area includes several mountain ranges (Sierra del Aljibe, Canchos del Muelle, Sierra de

Valdelasmanos, Sierra de la Umbría and Sierra de las Turras) that present large uninterrupted patches of cork tree woods and *dehesas*. These sierras hold more than 50 nesting territories of protected species, such as black vulture, griffon vulture, Egyptian vulture, Bonelli's eagle or black stork; something that very few Extremaduran municipal districts can boast. There are several routes we can take around these sierras. One of them starts from the mountain pass known as the Puerto de los Terreros and leads us to the sunny slopes of the Sierra del Aljibe, while another sets out from Aliseda and follows the Valdelasmanos stream, between the Canchos del Muelle and the Sierra de Valdelasmanos.

THE ESSENTIALS

The Treasure Interpretation Centre.

The pre-Roman fort of Sansueña.

The Tumba de los Moros (burial site).

It is a wild-game paradise.



Maidenhair fern



Black vulture



Greater horseshoe bat



Imperial eagle

Valencia de Alcántara

Site of Cultural Interest under the category
Archaeological Sites
ZEPA Nacimiento de Río Gévora
ZEPA-LIC Sierra de San Pedro
ZEPA Colonias de Cernícalo Primilla
(Lesser Kestrel) de San Vicente de Alcántara

40

Prehistory is the star. Natural and historic richness around the town with the highest population in the Tajo Internacional Nature Park.

THE ESSENTIALS

La Boda Regia (festival), in August.

At the end of summer, the deer rutting season.

The church of Nuestra Señora de Rocamador.

The *cocido rayano* and the *tiborna* (traditional dishes).

The Molino de la Negra route.



Cork oak



Griffon vulture



Black stork



Short-toed eagle

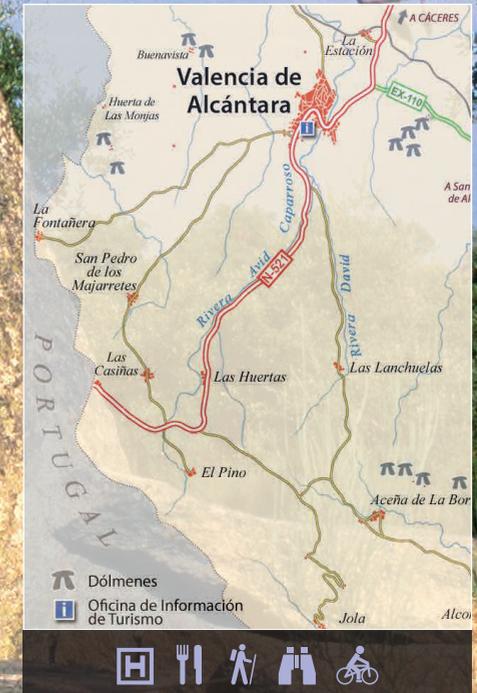
Valencia de Alcántara is inside the Tajo Internacional Nature Park, at a distance of 91 km from Cáceres and 14 km from Portugal. In fact, between 1644 and 1668, it belonged to the Kingdom of Portugal.

This town boasts many natural, patrimonial and gastronomic assets. In its surroundings we find 41 dolmens that form one of the most important Megalithic groups in Europe. For this reason, it has been declared a Site of Cultural Interest, being classed under the category of Archaeological Sites. In the municipality of Valencia de Alcántara, 8 sites of the Natura 2000 network converge, which gives us an idea of the natural assets it offers. They extend over the area of the River Gévora, the Sierra de San Pedro and the Tajo Internacional. Being under marked Atlantic influence, this is one

of the Extremaduran spaces of highest rainfall, which propitiates the growth of exceptional vegetation. The predominant granitic terrain facilitates the drainage of water and accounts for the dense network of fluvial courses, usually accompanied by alder and ash tree groves. The presence of species such as the salamander and the Iberian emerald lizard are indicative of the area's exceptional ecological conditions. These sierras offer some of the best hunting spaces in Extremadura, with important populations of deer, mouflon and wild boar. While fish is abundant in rivers like the Gévora and its tributaries, that even today preserve large populations of barbel, *Rutilus lemmingii*, *Anaocypris hispanica* or *Cobitis paludica*. To the north there are the Sierras de Talliscones,

Matalobos and Torrico de San Pedro. The mountain pass known as the Puerto Élice deserves special mention. It offers us a view of endless Mediterranean woodland spreading over the mountain slopes, in sharp contrast with the *dehesa*. Here we find important colonies of black vulture and several pairs of Spanish imperial eagle. In the south, the picturesque villages of El Pino, Alcorneo, Jola and La Aceña de la Borrega are a must. From La Aceña there are signposted routes to some of the most famous and best preserved dolmens, such as Los Mellizos, Data and Carijón. Another site of interest is the Puerto Roque, a mountain pass that presents us with spectacular crags. It is located just before the Portuguese border, as a threshold to the Sierra de San Mamede, being the end of a succession of

quartzite crests that go almost uninterrupted for more than 15 km. This mountainous relief contrasts greatly with the granite rocky spaces of flatter terrains, known as "berrocales", where there is a predominance of small holm oaks, pasture land and bush of white and common broom. Walking across those fields in the springtime we can enjoy an unforgettable spectacle. Along the paths that traverse them, we encounter species like the calandra lark, the little bustard, the great bustard, the stone curlew or even the lesser kestrel, that has established an important colony on the roofs of the Cortijo de Las Costeras. We find this country house on the road that goes from San Vicente de Alcántara to Salorino (CC-91), once we have passed the railway station.





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