

Birds OF Aragón

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EXCEPT FOR THE SEA, all landscapes of the Iberian Peninsula are represented in Aragón, resulting in great ornithic wealth. Different species of birds adapt to the variety of environments found there, from the sub-desert steppes of the centre of the Ebro Depression to the beech woods of the Moncayo and Pyrenees or the juniper forests of Javalambre, the result being more than 200 species of nesting birds, between the summer visitors and residents, to which a considerable number of birds that winter there can be added. Moreover, its privileged geographical location makes it an obligatory thoroughfare for species of migratory birds that are not present in Aragón which move from their European breeding places to their winter quarters in Africa.

In this brief study, the most characteristic mountain landscapes of the Aragonese community have been chosen, beginning with the alpine environments, where the snow maintains sparse vegetation, continuing through different types of woods: beech woods in the Pyrenees and Moncayo, pine woods of Scots pine and maritime pine at medium heights and holm oak and aleppo pine woods in the lower zones. Some of the birds of these spaces are specific, but there are also more ubiquitous ones, which reside in or frequent ravines and steep cliffs, river environments and even dry and treeless zones of the Ebro depression and the Iberian mountain range, according to their degree of specialization. For all of the environments discussed, a representative place is recommended, where observation of the birds dealt with is possible.

1. Eurasian vulture. A. Martínez Andía

Egyptian vulture. A. Martínez Andía. 2
Dartford warbler. A. Portero. 4



High Mountain

THE PYRENEES IN HUESCA, the Moncayo in Zaragoza and the Gudar and Javalambre mountain ranges in Teruel, with elevations of above 2,000 metres, have high mountain landscapes characterized by the absence of dense woodland and the presence of alpine pastures which are free of snow from May through October. Only two Pyrenean species reside all year in these environments: The rock ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*), which never leaves high elevations, and the white-winged snow finch (*Montefringilla nivalis*), which in winter forms groups which descend to lower heights.

In spring and summer, when the snow disappears, the grassland is occupied by species which have wintered in the foothills of the mountain massifs or in the Ebro depression, such as the alpine accentor (*Prunella collaris*) the water pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*) or the northern wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*), a species which is widely distributed, present in practically all the treeless zones of Aragón. The yellow-billed chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*) is likewise a species representative of the Pyrenean mountain tops, where it forms noisy winter groups. The golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) also ascends to high elevations preying on the introduced marmot (*Marmota marmota*).

The summer grass of the mountain passes is utilized by sheep herds, cattle and horses in semi-free range regime, which causes losses which attract carrion eaters such as the common raven (*Corvus corax*), the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) and, in the Pyrenees, the bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), a species with a recovery programme in Aragón.

Golden eagle. J. Díaz



National Park of Ordesa and Monte Perdido

Description: The Ordesa Canyon lies at the foot of Monte Perdido (altitude 3348 m.), providing the possibility of visiting the mountain forests, rocky cliffs and well-conserved mountain pastures.

Main species: All alpine species, to which the forest and rock species.

Access: By the regional road C-140 to Torla (27 km from Biescas and 40 km from Sabiñánigo). From Torla a bus service provides access to the park.

Observations: As it is a national park, there are very strict visiting rules.

Deciduous Forest. Beech woods

MAINLY in the Pyrenees, but also in relic and isolated form in the Zaragoza Moncayo, the deciduous forests typical of central Europe appear in Aragón, their presence being favoured by the cool, humid climate provided by the mountains. Mainly beech trees (*Fagus sylvatica*), along with ash (*Fraxinus*), birch (*Betula*); maples (*Acer*) and linden (*Tilia*) trees lose their leaves in autumn, enriching the soil with humus.

Earthworms and other soil invertebrates are utilized by the Eurasian woodcock (*Scolopax rusticola*) an occasional nester with significant addition of wintering European birds. The black woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*) needs thick trunks to build its nest; thus, it is only found in old beech woods in the Pyrenees. The invertebrate fauna which hides in trunks keeps the common tree creeper (*Certhia Familiaris*), of European distribution, in the Pyrenees, while in the beech woods of the Moncayo the short-toed tree creeper (*Certhia brachydactyla*), more southern, is found. The marsh tit (*Parus palustris*) is also a typical birch woods species, as well as, on the edges of the forest, the tree pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) and the red-backed shrike (*Lanius collurio*). This community of birds can be completed with a granivorous species such as the bullfinch (*Pyrrhula Pyrrhula*).

Short-toed tree creeper. J. Díaz



Moncayo National Park

Description: The Moncayo, with an elevation of 2314 m., is set in the Iberian mountain range. Its altitude makes possible the presence of central European fauna and flora in Mediterranean environment, going in just a few kilometres from aulaga at the foot on the south face to the shady area of the beech-oak woods.

Main species: Blue tit, common chiffchaff, short-toed tree creeper, song thrush, Eurasian nuthatch, tawny owl, honey buzzard, Eurasian woodcock.

Access: From Vera de Moncayo, Agramonte can be accessed through Tarazona-Trasmoz-San Martín de Moncayo, or in direction Añón-Monasterio de Veruela.

Observations: At Agramonte there is a car park and a reception centre for visitors.



Mountain pine woods

THE CONIFER FORESTS associated with mountain ranges appear in Aragon in the Pyrenees and its outer mountains, on the sides of the Moncayo and in the Teruel ranges of Gúdar, Albarracín and Javalambre. These are tree formations which do not demand much from the soil, which vary from mountain pine (*Pinus uncinata*), consistently occupying the heights, to the Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and European Silver Fir (*Abies alba*), which form mixed woods with the beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) or the maritime pine (*Pinus pinaster*) woods of Teruel.

Common crossbill. E. Santos



Typical of the Pyrenean mountain pine are the boreal owl (*Aegolius funereus*), a small bird of prey which here reaches the southern part of its distribution, and the Western capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*), a species in clear decline today. The Northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) and the sparrow hawk (*Accipiter nisus*) are two forest birds of prey which are anatomically adapted for hunting in the forest. The insectivores of these pine woods are represented by species such as the coal tit (*Parus ater*), the firecrest (*Regulus ignicapillus*) and the spotted flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*). The common crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*), with its specialized beak for extracting pine nuts, and the citril finch (*Serinus citrinella*) are granivores typical of these surroundings. Finally, a forest crow, the Eurasia jay (*Garrulus glandarius*), shares the pine forests with other tree formations.

Protected Landscape Of Maritime Pine Woods

Description: This is a maritime pine forest in an environment of red sandstone and conglomerates, forming a spectacular, rugged landscape of great beauty.

Main species: Crow, red-billed chough, alpine swift, vulture, Egyptian vulture, golden eagle, common crossbill, dunnoek, wood lark, mistle thrush, firecrest, golden-crested kinglet, short-toed tree creeper, Eurasian nuthatch, tawny owl, short-toed snake eagle, booted eagle, northern goshawk, sparrow hawk, citril finch, coal tit, and crested tit.

Access: From Albarracín, take the road in direction Belzas. Access is also possible from Gea de Albarracín.

Observations: In Dornaque there is an interpretation centre. There are important examples of Levantine rock art.

Mediterranean forest

CONDITIONED BY THE MEDITERRANEAN CLIMATE (very hot and dry summers, cold winters, mild and generally rainy springs and autumns), the flat areas of Aragon are the domain of Mediterranean forest, which in this region is made up predominantly of holm oak (*Quercus ballota*) in the coolest parts, and aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*) in the more arid zones of the Ebro depression. These are formations which have been greatly reduced from their original extension due to anthropic influence.

Made up of tree formations which are not very dense, the understory, when well developed, makes possible the presence of the orphean warbler (*Sylvia hortensis*), subalpine warbler (*Sylvia cantillans*) and Dartford warbler (*Sylvia undata*), as well as the Bonelli's warbler (*Phylloscopus bonelli*) and the melodious warbler (*Hippolais polyglotta*), more typical of the oak forest. The common wood-pigeon (*Columba palumbus*) and the European turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) occupy the dense forest for nesting and the clearings for feeding. Found on the edge of the woods are the woodchat shrike (*Lanius senator*) and the wood lark (*Lullula arborea*). True islands in a "sea" of crops, these forests are utilized by birds of prey such as the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), the booted eagle (*Hieraetus pennatus*) or the short-toed snake eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*), which use the nearby treeless zones as hunting grounds. In winter they are places that receive birds fleeing from the harsher environment of the nearby mountains, such as the song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), the common chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), the dunnoek (*Prunella modularis*) or the robin (*Erithacus rubecula*).

Robin. A. Martínez Andía



Alcubierre mountain range

Description: It is a hill located in the centre of the Ebro depression, with a maximum elevation of 811 m, surrounded by the treeless lands of Los Monegros. It is covered by aleppo pine with kermes oak underforest (*Quercus coccifera*) and mastic tree (*Pistacia lentiscus*).

Main species: red kite, Northern goshawk, sparrow hawk, golden eagle, Eurasian eagle owl and long-eared owl, the Sardinian, Dartford, subalpine and orphean warblers, red-billed chough, common raven, common crossbill, short-toed snake eagle, booted eagle, Eurasian hobby, and red-necked nightjar.

Access: A forest path ascends from Alcubierre to San Caprasio, the highest point of the mountain range; from the Monegrillo-La Almolda road, an asphalted turn-off to Castejón de Monegros crosses the woods.

Observations: The only figure of protection for the zone is that of the ZEPA; there is no infrastructure for receiving visitors.



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Bearded vulture. R. Polo

