

Lord of the Water

Flora and fauna trails through the province of Segovia



Start

From the car park, walk towards the Navahornos lagoon along a wooden walkway, which is wheelchair accessible. Another option is to first visit the Muña lagoon, 350m in the opposite direction.

1 Navahornos lagoon

After walking 300m we reach the Navahornos lagoon with an observatory located at the end of the walkway. We can observe the "lord of the water" the western marsh-harrier, flying above the aquatic vegetation, notable among which is the European white water lily.

2 La Cerrada lagoon

We border the lagoon until we come to a wide track which we follow for one kilometre. After passing a fork in the track, a meadow stretches to the right which we enter until reaching the la Cerrada lagoon. Here we can find the Iberian painted frog.

3 Navalayegua lagoon

Now we follow the ditch leading to the Navalayegua lagoon, in which a variety of bird life can be observed. We border the lagoon until reaching the forestry track which runs from Lastras de Cuéllar to Cantalejo.

4 Sotillo Bajero lagoon

After walking 450m, turn right onto a path and continue until reaching the Navacornales and del Sotillo Bajero lagoons. A variety of fauna may be observed in each such as coots, moorhens and European tree frogs.

5 Colony of white storks

Go back along the same path, turning right after passing the Navacornales lagoon to reach the Navalayegua car park. Opposite runs a firebreak which we follow to the Planta de Transferencia de R.S.U (municipal solid waste transfer station). A little before, to our left, a colony of white storks can be seen in the pines.

6 Navaelsoto lagoon

Turn left at the plant to reach the Matisalvador lagoon, which we border along a path which leads onto a wider track near the Navaelsoto lagoon, surrounded by aquatic vegetation. Go left until reaching the track which will take us back to the start.

Features of the route

Route: Circular around the lagoons of Cantalejo
 Starting and finishing point: Navahornos lagoon
 Distance: 9 km - 3 h
 Difficulty: low
 Incline: none
 Recommended season: from October to June
 Level of conservation: Red Natura 2000

Good practice

- Leaving the trail marked on the map or climbing over the fences which delimit the lagoons can cause birds to abandon their nests.
- It is essential to remain silent to observe the fauna.
- The vegetation along the route is of **great ecological importance**; picking or gathering it causes the **loss of biodiversity** as well as shelter and food for animals.
- It is best to **keep all rubbish** and dispose of it at home in the appropriate bins.
- Dogs which are not held on a lead can **disturb the fauna**.

Recommendations

- Take binoculars to observe fauna.
- There are no water fountains along the route, we recommend you **carry water**.

How to get there

By car take the SG-205, which runs from Cerezo de Abajo to Cuéllar. Exit at kilometre 36,250 where a lane runs to the La Muña – Navahornos car park.



Cartography: National Topographical Map of Spain scale 1:25.000 Leaf 430-II y 430-IV. Centro Nacional de Información Geográfica

- Cws Colony of white storks
- Cs Poorly visible crossroads
- D Dunes
- i Information panel
- Bo Bird observatory
- Cp Car park
- V Views
- Meadow
- Pine forest
- MAIN ROUTE
- ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

Recommended reading

- SAN MELITÓN SANZ, J.C. 1999. **Estudio de desarrollo sostenible de los humedales de Cantalejo**. Ed. Caja Segovia Obra Social y Cultural.
- DE JUANA, E. y VALERA, J. 2005. **Aves de España**. Linx edicions.



The western marsh-harrier

The **western marsh-harrier** (*Circus aeruginosus*), flies over the lagoons of Cantalejo, the king of these waters, with its powerful claws and low-level flight.

What does it look like?

The western marsh-harrier is a diurnal bird of prey, with long, narrow wings. It has a long tail, the end of which is straight. It is common to see it flying low over the lagoons with its wings in a V-formation.

There are differences between males and females. The underside of the male's wings are grey in colour in contrast to the black remiges. The upper sides are brown-coloured and the head yellowish. The female is larger than the male and sports darker tones, highlighting its yellow head.

Where can they be found?

This marsh-harrier, as its name implies, is greatly associated with aquatic areas. On occasion, in is possible to see them among the cereal crops, close to the lagoons, in search of prey. Normally, they surprise us by appearing among the vegetation on the banks of the lagoon, or gliding from a nearby place to perch among the reeds, typical of the lagoons.

If we are patient we can watch from inside the observatory at the Navahornos lagoon. Perhaps if it rests in a pine tree it will be possible to calmly observe with binoculars.



Male



Female

How does it live?

The nuptial flights, at the end of winter, acrobatic flights and lagoon pirouettes, ending with a sharp descent until touching the ground, are performed in order to impress the female. They build their nests among the vegetation, at the beginning of spring. The female incubates the eggs while the male hunts for prey to feed her.

They defend their territory and do not allow anyone near the nest. Sometimes they can be seen to attack other marsh-harriers if they get too close.

They can be confused with...

There are other types of marsh-harrier in the area, which can be seen at the lagoons: the hen harrier and the Montagu's-harrier. Both have a white upper tail coverts. Furthermore, the females are light brown in colour with white bands.



Western marsh-harrier

The lagoons

The continental dunes

The lagoons of Cantalejo form a highly singular ecosystem. They are the only wetlands on the Iberian peninsula, with the exception of Doñana, which are located upon dunes. The sands are the product of the fluvial erosion of the Sistema Central mountain range approximately 1.5 million years ago. Once deposited, they were displaced by strong winds which dispersed them all around the area forming low dunes. Some interesting dunes can be seen along the route to the west of the Cerrada, Navalayegua and del Sotillo Bajero lagoons.



Reeds

Vegetation

The only plant life capable of survival in this arid setting is the **resinous pine** (*Pinus pinaster*), which surrounds the lagoons. In flat areas, where the sand is thinner and impermeable loam can be found in the subsoil, the lagoons were formed. These areas are known locally as "navas". The typical aquatic vegetation is composed of **reeds** (*Phragmites communis*) and **bulrushes** (*Scirpus lacustris*). In shallower areas it is easy to see **knotweed** (*Polygonum amphibium*) in spring, **the yellow iris** (*Iris pseudacorus*) and the **flowering rush** (*Butomus umbelatus*).



Bulrush



Knotweed



Yellow iris



Flowering rush

The marsh-harrier's prey



Eurasian coot

In the lagoons of Cantalejo, the western marsh-harrier feeds on a variety of prey.

Young **Eurasian coots** (*Fulica atra*) and the **common moorhen** (*Gallinula chloropus*) form their staple diet in spring. These two aquatic birds build their nests among the vegetation of the lagoons. The chicks usually follow their parents after hatching. The coots tend to be seen swimming on the surface of the lagoons. The moorhens prefer to walk among the vegetation bordering the lagoons.



Common moorhen

Amphibians are also prey to the western marsh-harrier. Notable among those in Cantalejo are the **European tree frog** (*Hyla arborea*) and the **Iberian painted frog** (*Discoglossus galganoi*). The European tree frog is small and bright green in colour. They tend to cling to the vegetation and can easily be heard croaking in the surroundings of the lagoons. The Iberian painted frog, brown in colour with stripes and spots all over its body, is native to the Iberian peninsula: it is only found in Spain and Portugal. It favours meadowland a little further away from the water.



European tree frog

Iberian painted frog



The marsh-harrier does not tend to eat fish, even though it may hunt them when the water level is low. For example in the summer. In the lagoon, fish species such as the **Iberian rase** (*Chondrostoma polyplepis*), the **bermejuela** (*Rutilus arcasii*) or the **"pardilla"** (*Rutilus lemmingii*), a species of ray-finned fish, can be found. These are small fish and hence difficult to see. It is possible to spot them on occasion from the banks of the lagoons if you remain quiet for a period of time.



Iberian rase



Bermejuela



Ray-finned fish

Interesting species

From the end of May until the end of July, it is possible observe the odd specimen of the curious **Eleonora's falcon** (*Falco eleonora*). Prior to breeding they settle at the lagoons for a few weeks before moving on to the Balearic Islands. They reproduce late, the eggs don't hatch until September, the time of the greatest migration of birds to Africa; when the falcons can therefore have more prey at their disposal.

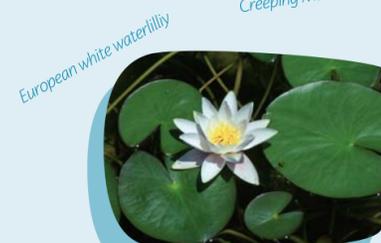
Another particularly important bird in the region is the **black stork** (*Ciconia nigra*). It is a bird in danger of extinction which mates in the pine groves neighbouring the lagoons. These lagoons are a resting point for the colonies. A project is in place in Castilla and León to recover this species.



Creeping Marshwort

Another fundamental element in the lagoons are the floodable pastures or **"navas"**. Used in the past as grazing for cattle, they comprise a rich ecosystem of plant species.

One of these is the small creeping marshwort (***Apium repens***), which goes unnoticed among the dense vegetation surrounding the lagoons. It is included in the Catalogue of Protected Fauna of Castilla and León.



European white waterlily

One species not very common in Segovia-found along the route in the Navahornos lagoon-is the beautiful **European white water lily** (*Nymphaea alba*). It is an aquatic plant with floating leaves, on which sits a large white flower, of up to 12cm. It flowers between June and September.

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Cantalejo
Nature Watching

Segovia

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