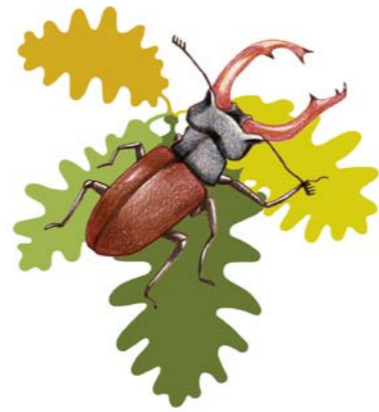


The Little Giant of the Mountains

Flora and fauna trails through the province of Segovia



Start

The route starts at the roundabout of the CL-601 road where it passes through the village of La Granja de San Ildefonso. Follow the path which runs parallel to the road on the left-hand side, going towards Madrid. At the beginning, there is an information board about the "Sendero de los Reales Sitios" (The Royal Sites Trail), which we follow for the most part of our route.

1 The oak wood

After walking for 900m, turn left onto the path signposted "Peñalara". A little further on, we encounter the walls of the gardens of the Palace of La Granja and one of its gates. Turn right at this point to pass through a gate. The tarmacked path leads us into the oak wood, where our main protagonist, the stag beetle, can be observed

2 The pine forest of Valsain

The oak wood gradually becomes a pine forest as we ascend the tarmacked path. In the clearings and along the sides of the path, a multitude of butterflies can be observed. We pass through an area in which felled pines are stored. Once reaching the top of the ascent, turn to the right to descend in the direction of the meadow.

3 The Navalhorno meadow

The path leads us to the Valsain sawmill, where it veers to the right and descends to the road. Follow the path for some 600m, in order to cross the road and take the calle de R (R road). Turn left onto the calle de H (H road), leaving the school to your right. If we follow this path to the end, we will exit the village along a dirt track.

4 The canales bridge

This path runs parallel to a stone wall until reaching the los Canales bridge. Here we can read about its history on an information panel. Before the bridge, on the right, passing through a gate, we follow the river Eresma through the meadows along its right-hand bank. It's a good idea to make the most of the open spaces here to try to spot the imperial eagle.

5 Valsain meadows

Once the bridge which crosses the river has come into view, it is necessary to walk uphill to the right to exit the meadows through another gate. Once on the road, cross the bridge and turn to the right to follow the "Sendero de las Pesquerías Reales" (Royal Fishing Grounds Trail). Several paths lead away from this point so be careful to take the one which runs closest to the river.

6 Royal fishing grounds

From this point it is impossible to lose sight of the path as it follows the river Eresma and is clearly signposted. Take the opportunity to observe the butterflies which cross our path or the interesting vegetation growing in the rock face.

7 Return to La Granja de San Ildefonso

As the river broadens, oak and ash trees appear which mark a change in the vegetation. At this point, we cross a bridge which leads to a wider path onto which we turn left. We pass an area of oak wood where we can observe the stag beetle. Past the oak wood, the path passes through some allotments and continues on to return to La Granja de San Ildefonso.

Features of the route

Route: circular trail along the Senderos Reales (Royal Sites Trail)

Starting and finishing point: La Granja de San Ildefonso

Distance: 9 km - 3 h 30 min

Level of difficulty: medium

Incline: 110 m

Best time to visit: all year round

Level of conservation: Espacio Natural de la Sierra de Guadarrama y Red Natura 2000

Good practice

- After passing through gates it is essential to close them to ensure that the cows and horses do not escape.
- If you stray from the path indicated on the map or climb over the fences, the animals may be disturbed.
- It is important to remain silent in order 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

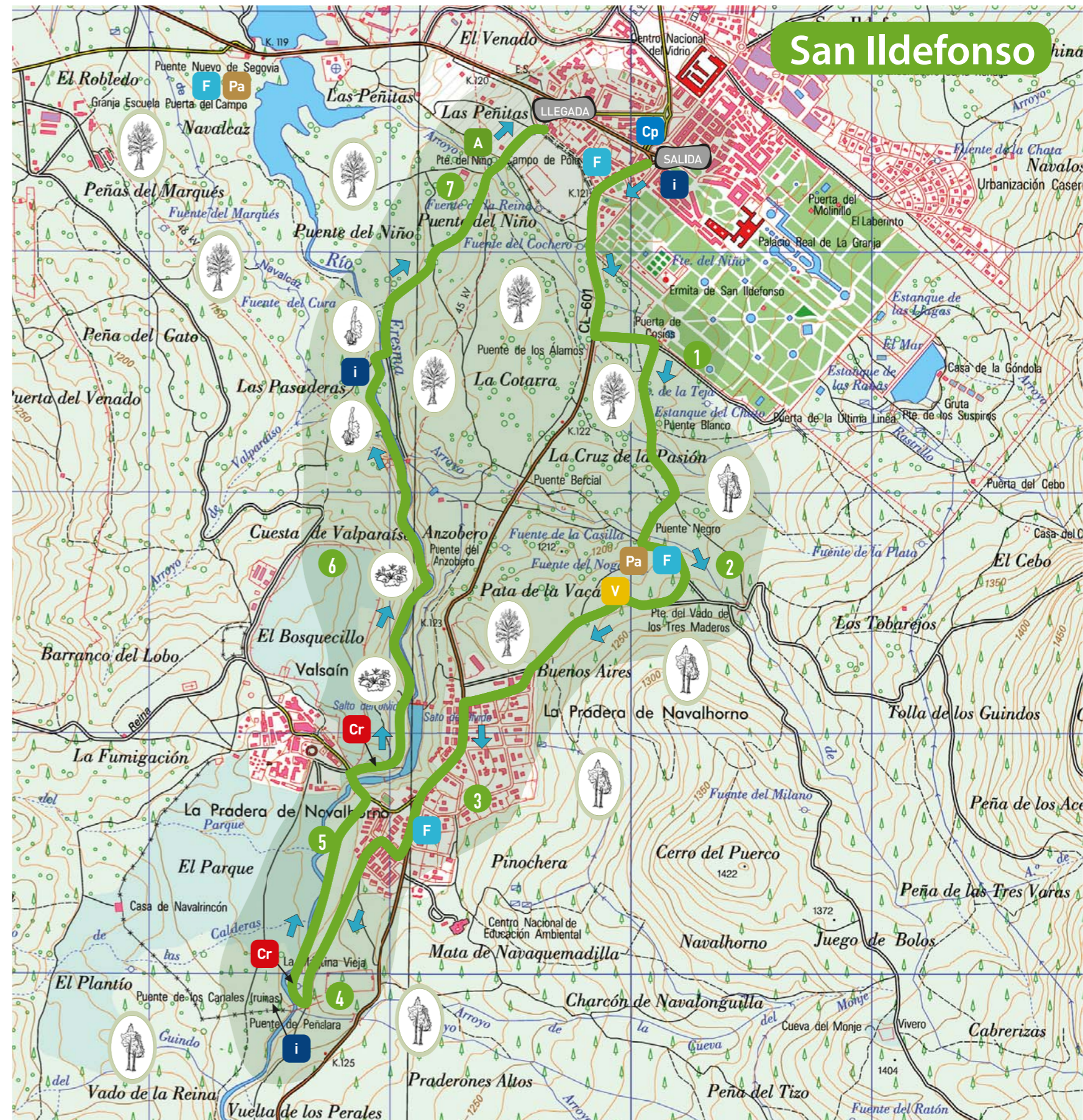
- The best time to observe insects is between April and August.
- Take binoculars for bird watching.
- Carry water with you.

How to get there

By bicycle, follow the cycle path which connects Segovia with La Granja de San Ildefonso.

A bus service runs from the bus station in Segovia every 45 minutes.

By car, take the CL-601 which runs from Segovia to the Navacerrada mountain pass. It can also be reached from the SG-V-6124.



Cartography: National Topographical Map of Spain scale 1:25.000 Leaf 483-III y 483-IV. Centro Nacional de Información Geográfica

Cr Poorly visible crossroads **F** Fountains **A** Allotments **i** Information panels **Pa** Picnic area **Cp** Car park **V** Views

— Route

Riverside woodland Pine forest Oak wood Rock plants

Recommended reading

- PEREIRA SIESO, P. 2009. *Catálogo y atlas de los Ropalóceros (mariposas diurnas) de los montes Matas y Pinar de Valsain*. Organismo Autónomo de Parques Nacionales.
- RODRÍGUEZ LLANO, J.A. 2006. *Sierra de Guadarrama, Fauna y flora*. Editorial Rueda S.L.



The stag beetle

Passing through the oak wood, a large winged insect suddenly appears, surprising us with the sound of its wings and its size. It is the little giant of the mountains.

What does it look like?



Female



Male

The **stag beetle** (*Lucanus cervus*) is a beetle as large as the palm of a hand (between 50 and 80mm long) and black in colour. These beetles, like all insects, have 6 legs and two sets of wings. One of these has become hardened and is no longer used to fly, while the second set can be found hidden beneath these and their ochre tones can be observed when flying against the light. They are sexually dimorphic i.e. there are differences between the male and the female. The male has a larger jaw at the end of its head which they use to fight to secure a mate, while that of the female is more discrete.

Where can they be found?

This beetle is typical in deciduous forests, particularly the oak. Therefore, we can spot them along our route through the "matas", areas of oak wood. It's advisable to remain alert in zone 1 from the start of the trail to the pine forest and, in zone 7, after crossing the Eresma river until the end of the trail. Usually, from dawn until dusk, we can be taken by surprise by their buzzing as they appear flying among the branches, distinguished by their straight flight and upward-pointing jaw.

How do they live?

This large specimen of stag beetle are the adult form which live for some two months. Beforehand, it will have spent at least two years in its larval state. The larvae feed on dead wood and are more difficult to spot, while adults feed on oak sap, hence they can be seen flying among the leaves of this tree.

The objective of the adults is to reproduce. To this end, the males participate in spectacular duels using their jaws, in order to knock down their adversary and turn him over to immobilise him. The winner will mate with the most females.

They can be confused with...

The male with its large jaw is unmistakable. However, the female can be confused with other similar beetles, even those of the same family (*Lucanidae*).



Two male stag beetles wrestling



Stag beetle larva

The oak grove and riverside woodland



Oak



Laurel-leaved rock rose



Leaves and fruit of the alder buckthorn



Aspen leaves



Orchis coriophora



Navelwort



Foxglove

Our route passes through one of the best conserved **oak** woods in Segovia. Its genuine oaks belong to the *Quercus pyrenaica* species. They can be distinguished by their attractive leaves which sprout in a crimson colour and grow to up to 16cm, forming large lateral lobes which almost reach the central nerve. In young oaks, the leaves wither without falling during the winter. The mountain oak wood has a rich and varied undergrowth. Here species such as **the laurel-leaved rock rose** (*Cistus laurifolius*) can be found, with leaves similar to those of the bay tree and eye-catching white flowers, as well as a range of herbaceous plants with attractive flowers. The orchids are noteworthy, among them **Orchis coriophora**, with pink or maroon flowers, with purple stains in the centre.

The Royal Fishing Grounds Trail passes through a well-conserved riverside wood, in the upper course of the river. As well as typical species such as **willow** (*Salix* sp.) and ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*), other less common species may be found such as **the alder buckthorn** (*Frangula alnus*) and **the aspen** (*Populus tremula*) whose Latin name is derived from the way in which the wind causes its leaves to tremble. The rock plants growing in the walls of the river canyon are also interesting, among which are **Navelwort** (*Umbilicus rupestris*) and **the foxglove** (*Digitalis purpurea*), with its thimble-shaped flowers.

The Little Giant of the Mountains



La Granja

Nature Watching

Segovia

Mountain butterflies

The Valsaín mountains are an ideal enclave for observing butterflies. These small, brightly-coloured insects are extremely diverse with at least 103 species in the area.



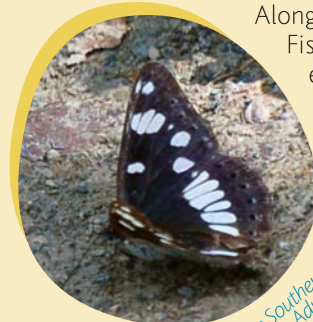
The Meadow Brown

One of the most common, which can be observed all along the route, especially between June and August, is **the meadow brown** (*Maniola jurtina*). It has a black circular mark on each wing which can be seen both when the wings are spread or closed. The purpose of these is to trick predators into thinking they are eyes and hence avoid attack.

Along the route we will probably encounter many butterflies of a bright blue colour, of the *Lycaenidae* family. Noteworthy among them is **the Adonis blue** (*Polyommatus bellargus*), whose name is derived from the turquoise colouring on the underside of its wings.



The Adonis Blue



The Southern White Admiral

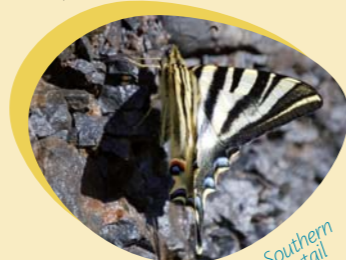
Along the Route of the Royal Fishing Grounds we may encounter a large black butterfly with touches of blue and white spots. It is **the southern white admiral** (*Limenitis reducta*), a territorial butterfly which impedes other males from entering its domain.



The Common Brimstone

At some point we may be dazzled by a yellow reflection in a clearing, indicating we have come across the **common brimstone** (*Gonepteryx rhamni*), which is fairly common in the area.

Other less common butterflies, although delightful to watch should we come across them, are **the peacock butterfly** (*Inachis io*), whose caterpillar feeds on stinging nettles; **the Spanish festoon** (*Zerynthia rumina*), with its multi-coloured mosaic; and **the southern swallowtail** (*Iphiclides feisthamelii*), with tails on its rear wings.



The Southern Swallowtail



The Peacock Butterfly



The Spanish Festoon

Interesting species



Imperial eagle

In the Valsaín mountains one of the most endangered birds in Spain breeds, the **imperial eagle** (*Aquila adalberti*). This eagle is endemic on the Iberian Peninsula though there are only 2,500 remaining, hence it is considered to be in danger of extinction. As it nests in the area, it is sometimes possible to spot two adults flying with their young.

Another endemic species of fauna is the **Iberian emerald lizard** (*Lacerta schreiberi*). The male can be distinguished during mating season for its bright green colour and turquoise head. The females tend to be green or brown in colour with spots on their sides. They can usually be seen close to the water.



Iberian emerald lizard

The forests in this area are notable for their botanical importance and the great diversity of species they sustain. Among them are native species and a group of species from the north of the peninsula which have grown in the Valsaín mountains since the Ice Age.



Along our route, several of these may be observed, such as the native **Hispidella hispanica of the daisy family**. *Hispidella hispanica*. It flowers between May and July. These can be encountered along the sides of the path, in clearings in the oak wood or in rocky areas.

The **wild daffodil** (*Narcissus pseudo-narcissus* subsp. *confusus*) is a species belonging to the northern mountains. They grow in moist meadows, in the undergrowth or among rocks. They can be distinguished by their attractive yellow flowers, of up to 5cm, which usually bloom in March or April.



Wild daffodil

Published by
Patronato Provincial de Turismo de Segovia

Text
Jorge Fernanz y Marta García

Translation
Caroline Cheshire

Illustrations
José María Clémen

Design
Dándolevueltas Estudio de Diseño

Reformatting
Carpasara

Photography
CENEAM
Javier González

(*Lucanus cervus*, *Limenitis reducta* y *Iphiclides feisthamelii*)

José Luis Rodríguez

(*Lucanus cervus* y *Lacerta schreiberi*)

Juan Matute de Toro

(*Polyommatus bellargus* y *Umbilicus rupestris*)

Jorge Fernanz y Marta García

Printing
xxxxxxx

DEPÓSITO LEGAL: 158-2010



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