



Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

Excursion to the Aqueduct and the **Jackdaws** rock at Spília / Prefecture Iraklion



Just 1.3 miles south of *Knossós* [Κνωσός] (the probably most famous archaeological site of Crete from Minoan time), at the road towards *Archánes* [Αχαρνές] (the Centre of Cretan viticulture) is a conspicuous certificate of Turkish architecture. Shortly before the village of *Spília* [Σπήλια], where the road crosses a small valley, in 1840 the Turkish occupying forces built an aqueduct, to provide *Iraklio* [Ηράκλειο] with water from the sources of *Archánes*.

An aqueduct (Lat. *aquae ductus*) is a water pipe which partially forwarding water in natural slope from mountain springs to cities over arch bridges. The first aqueducts were built by the Roman CLAUDIUS (312 BC) to service Rome. Remains of aqueducts can be found in almost all countries of the former Roman Empire.

The aqueduct at *Spília* is worth seeing, especially because a Jackdaw colony has set up on a nearby rock. In addition to the karst niches in the rock they use many niches in the aqueduct (together with pigeons) as breeding caves.

Follow the path through the aqueduct, after approx. 300 meters cross the stream of the Valley and then come to a shady rest area with a small chapel; an "oasis of peace"; also ideal for current-independent camper.



The aqueduct spans the valley and the stream in two superimposed arcs, here seen from the road towards Spília (Picture left). The picture right shows the "backside" from the way through the aqueduct. The lower wall strength is approximately 4 meter, the upper approx. 2 meter, where the upper part of both sides (with appropriate caution) is accessible. The countless niches serve as refuge and breeding cave for the neighbouring Jackdaw colony and pigeons.

Photos: H. Eikamp (17.07.2004)



The picture right is showing the “Jackdaw rock” left of the aqueduct; margin the valley from the east. The "black spots" distributed over the rock are jackdaws of the colony settled here. The figure above left shows a heading for jackdaw with the nesting material. The figure below left shows a dove in a niche in the aqueduct.
Photos: U. Kluge (2004)

Jackdaws (*Corvus monedula*)

The Jackdaw is an omnivore, like all Corvidae. Their main food are insects, snails and worms, sometimes they catch mice and get eggs. In autumn and winter, they live by everything what appears eatable. About the size of a dove but smaller than a carrion crow identifies the jackdaw a short beak; Head parts are grey at old birds; the feathers is black with bluish metal gloss.

The sexual maturity occurs after one year, a brood is mostly only in the second year. The nest system takes place in breeding caves (tree caves, niches, bays). End of March is breeding start; the clutch is usually 4 - 7 blue eggs. The breeding period is 16-19 days. The broody female is fed by the male. Jackdaws can be up to 20 years old (oldest ring found was 18); the Jackdaw became known by the behaviourist K. LORENZ who documented important findings of animal behaviour from breeding and rearing.

Translated by Michael Bloechinger-Daeumling

[Art.-Nr. 2.833, Zitat-Nr. 6.634] – impr. eik.amp 2004

