

Birding Málaga



Where to go birding in April:
Campillos – Sierra de Yeguas

Natural values



The farmlands between Campillos and Sierra de Yeguas, at the north end of Guadalteba District, are mostly devoted to grow olive trees, cereals and legumes. They can be considered as a sub-steppe environment where we can find such interesting species as Little Bustard and Stone Curlew.

But the reason we are coming here in April is the arrival from Africa and display of the Montagu's Harrier, a very elegant and slender bird of prey whose survival is more and more difficult every year.

Some other birds that we can find here are: Mallard, Red-legged Partridge, Quail, Greater Flamingo, Common Buzzard, Kestrel, Lesser Kestrel, Moorhen, Black-headed Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Collared Dove, Cuckoo, Little Owl, Swift, Alpine Swift, Hoopoe, Crested Lark, Calandra Lark, Barn Swallow, Red-rumped Swallow, House Martin, Yellow Wagtail, Stonechat, Sardinian Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Cetti's Warbler, Iberian Grey Shrike, Woodchat Shrike, Raven, Spotless Starling, House Sparrow, Linnet, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin and Corn Bunting.



The Montagu's Harrier

The Montagu's Harriers arrive from Africa during March to breed in our cereal fields. They are very beneficial for farmers as they feed from grain consumers like insects, mice and songbirds.

They face two serious threats here. On one hand, the dramatic reduction of surface devoted to cereals in favour of the olive grove; on the other, the use of cereal varieties that ripen earlier and earlier not leaving enough time for the harriers to raise their chicks before the combine harvester destroys the nest place.



This is why a campaign is carried out by volunteers and rangers every year to locate the nests and negotiate with farmers the best possible way to save the broods.

The Little Bustard

The Little Bustard is also affected by the reduced grain-producing sub-steppe environment. Nevertheless, they are resident in our fields and lay the eggs on their ground nests earlier than harriers which, together with the fact that their chicks are nidifugous, save them by now from the combined harvester blades.

They are very difficult to spot when lying down in the grass or furrows, but males stand up calling defending their territories during the breeding season, providing us with an opportunity to notice them in the fields.



The Stone Curlew

Despite we do not see much of it in wet environments, the Stone Curlew is actually a wader.

They are birds of twilight habits, so they spend most of the day resting on stony grounds, among the furrows of arable land or near the trunk of the olive trees in search for shade when the temperature goes up. This, together with their camouflage skills, makes it very difficult to spot them in the field. It is usually their big yellow eyes what betrays them in a dull background.

If you are not familiar with their crepuscular calls, you might find them a bit scary!



How to get there

Type “Bar Stop, Campillos” on Google Maps and set the counter to cero here. Go along road A-384 and turn off into A-365 following the signs to Sierra de Yeguas.

Campillos

A dirt track starts to the left at km. 0.9. It can be in very bad conditions after rainy days.



Once in the track, Montagu’s Harriers, Little Bustards and Stone Curlews can show up anywhere. We just have to stop and look around from different places like a pig farm on the right at km. 1.5, a young olive grove on the left and wide wheat field on the right at



km. 1.7 and the top of a hill at km. 3.0.

At km. 5.3 we will get into the track to the wind farm that will take us back to the road.

Sierra de Yeguas

We turn left into the road again towards Sierra de Yeguas.



We will follow the signs to “Camino de Servicio” at the first roundabout (km. 10.0), turn right into the track just out of the roundabout and left before we go under the tunnel below the road. Some wetland birds like Mallard, Black-headed Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Moorhen and Black-winged Stilt might join the steppe birds here as the ground can be swampy after the winter rains and the valley is crossed by several irrigation ditches.



The track gets back to the road at km. 11.8 into a roundabout where we take “Roda de Andalucía” direction. There is the entrance to a track 300 metre away from the roundabout where we can stop and look around for



Montagu’s Harriers and Zitting Cisticolas flying over the fields, and Moorhens and Cetti’s Warblers in the ditch.



Back on the road, we will get into another track to the right at km. 14 just after a small sign for “Realenga de la Sierra y Peñuelas” and opposite to an old electrical transformer building. The entrance to the track is another good place to watch harriers quartering the fields.





We go along the track and go left just beyond the solar farm. We will follow this track till the end and come back. It is not very busy so we can stop and watch Mallards, Black-headed Gulls, Black-winged Stilts, Linnets and Yellow Wagtails apart from the harriers.



PHOTOGRAPHS:

1. Farmlands (Campillos)
2. Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)
3. Red-rumped Swallows (*Cecropis daurica*)
4. Male Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*)
5. Male Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*)
6. Stone Curlews (*Burhinus oedicephalus*)
7. Farmlands (Campillos)
8. Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*)
9. Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)
10. Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
11. Male Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*)
12. Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)
13. Female Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*)
14. Navahermosa and Sierra de los Caballos (Sierra de Yeguas)
15. La Peñuela farmhouse (Sierra de Yeguas)
16. Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) in flight towards Doñana