



Natural values



The Sierra de la Utrera is the European southernmost karst in Europe. It is located between Manilva and Casares, east of road A-377 to Gaucin, in the Western Costa del Sol District. Despite the sierra is not very extensive (around 2.3 kms. in length from north to south, excluding a big quarry that has devoured the south end of the mountain range, and 1.4 kms. in width), the limestone pavement and scrub on this plateau is impenetrable so the only place to have a look at is the so called “Canuto de la Utrera”, a narrow gorge across beautiful cliffs, east-west oriented, linking road A-377 and the Baños de la Hedionda.

This is a very good place to watch birds’ autumn migration near the coast in September as it is located in the flyway to The Straits, only 30 kms. away from Gibraltar.



These are some of the birds we can spot here in September (R = resident; MB = migrant breeding; P = on passage): Red-legged

Partridge, Black Stork (P), Griffon Vulture, Egyptian Vulture (MB/P), Osprey (P), Short-toed Snake Eagle (MB/P), Booted Eagle (MB/P), Bonelli’s Eagle, Black Kite (P), Honey Buzzard (P), Sparrowhawk (R/P), Peregrine Falcon, Wood Pigeon, Swift (MB/P), Pallid Swift (MB/P), Alpine Swift (P), Bee-eater (P), Thekla Lark, Crag Martin, Grey Wagtail, Robin, Nightingale (MB/P), Black Redstart, Stonechat, Blackbird, Blue Rock Thrush, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Cetti’s Warbler, Wren, Spotted Flycatcher (MB/P), Great Tit, Blue Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Raven, Spotless Starling, House Sparrow, Goldfinch and Greenfinch.



Birds marked with “P” are some of the migrant species that can be found on passage during September. Birds do not migrate at the same time: Black Kites will pass on a decreasing pace during September, like swifts and Bee-eaters, while other raptors like Egyptian Vulture, Osprey, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Honey Buzzard, Booted Eagle and Sparrowhawk will keep quite a constant flow in September, as well as will Black Storks. There will also be lots of different warblers, wheatears and flycatchers on passage that have not been included on the list for the sake of simplicity though... keep your eyes peeled!

How to get there

Type “Aparcamiento Sendero de la Utrera” in Google Maps. We will park the car at the entrance of the windmills service trail (west of the road) and walk across the road (please, pay close attention to the traffic!) into the trail to the gorge.

We will soon find a board on the right with information about the path in Spanish. There is some more information both in English and Spanish about the Sierra de la Utrera a bit further on.



We will follow the track, leave another trail to a farm on the left and turn left at some houses. The path goes between the houses down towards the gorge.

The little river forest

This area is called Los Llanos (the plains) and we can find Thekla Larks around the stock, Stonechats on the fences, House Sparrows around the buildings and Greenfinches and Goldfinches feeding in the farmlands.

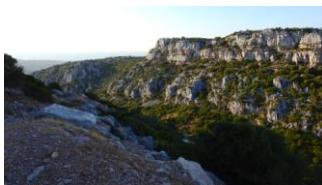


Just before crossing a very rickety gate, we can see the entrance to a little shady stand of carob trees and oaks with a memorial plaque in a monolith on the right. We will hear the calls of Cetti's Warblers, Short-toed Treecreepers and Wrens coming out the trees. At this time of the year, we can also perceive the rough call of the Nightingales once they have left their bel canto for the next breeding season. Some other inhabitants of the stand are Great and Blue Tits, Blackcap and Robin.



This will be a nice place to sit down again in the shade on our way back from the gorge.

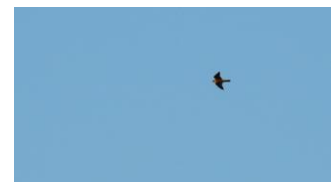
Villavieja Path



Back on the main trail, we leave another track on the left behind and turn left into a winding small path some 50 m. ahead. After going past a small ruined building, the path takes us to the edge of the north cliff of the gorge, from where we have nice views of the "canuto" and the sea in the distance.

The scrubland around is very appropriate for Blackbirds, Robins and Sardinian Warblers. Wood Pigeons use to fly up and down across the gorge and the Spotless Starlings call from the cliffs.

If we get here early enough in the morning, we may witness the hunting flights of the Peregrine Falcons, and even their chasing to the Ravens that dare to enter their territory.



The “canuto”



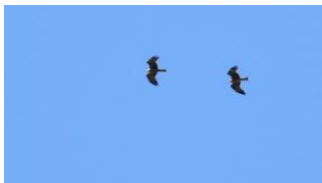
After descending from Villavieja back to the main trail, we walk into the gorge. You will find the board we mention at the beginning of the route description with information about the Sierra de la Utrera in English and Spanish.



The gorge is still wide here so we have a broad field of view to watch the Peregrine Falcons, Griffon Vultures and the intense passage of raptors to the south over the gorge. Black Kites form the biggest flocks at the beginning of September while Honey Buzzards will increase in numbers as the month goes on. Booted Eagles can also travel in little flocks and Short-toed Snake Eagles can be often found amongst the other species.



We can keep walking down in search for birds until we reach two big concrete pools used for oil exploration in the 70's.



We have two more regular resident birds here. The Blue Rock Thrush can easily be spotted in the cliffs of the gorge. Finding the silhouette of the Bonelli's Eagle will be more difficult at this time of year when they do not display, mark

their territories or quarter the hills in search of preys to feed the chicks. But having a little chance to admire these extraordinary birds is a good reason to visit this beautiful corner of Malaga province.



PHOTOS:

1. Karstic formations at Sierra de la Utrera
2. Views of the east end of the “canuto”
3. Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)
4. The trail goes ahead between the houses
5. Thekla Lark (*Galerida theklae*)
6. Entrance to the little river forest
7. Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)
8. The “canuto” from the Villavieja path
9. Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)
10. Access to the “canuto”
11. Griffon Bulture (*Gyps fulvus*)
12. Raptors on passage
13. Concrete pools
14. Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*)
15. Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*)