



Natural values



The Hoz (deep valley) de Marin hosts one of the best preserved river forests in Malaga province, at the heart of its Northeast District. The forest grows alongside Marin stream (a tributary to the Guadalhorce river not far downstream the gorge) and it is composed of Black and White Poplars, Narrow-leaved Ash, Field Elm, Common Hawthorn, Dog Rose and Elmleave Blackberry.

The steep hillsides along the valley are covered with some typical Mediterranean bushes in the mint (phlomis, rosemary, thyme), rock rose, greenweed and broom families and topped with small rock outcrops. The central and final stretches of the gorge home a fantastic natural Aleppo Pine forest though part of it is recovering from a terrible fire in September 2016.



All this botanical diversity leads to the presence of a very wide array of birds including mountain and forest species like Red-legged Partridge, Bonelli's Eagle, Sparrowhawk, Wood Pigeon, Eagle Owl, Hoopoe, Bee-eater, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Wryneck, Grey Wagtail, Robin, Nightingale, Black Wheatear, Stonechat, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Blue Rock Thrush, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Dartford Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler, Wren, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Crested Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Azure-winged Magpie, Jay, Raven, Spotless Starling, Golden Oriole, Chaffinch, Linnet, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin, Hawfinch, Common Crossbill, Cirl Bunting and Rock Bunting.



In May, this marvelous valley acts as a natural soundvox for the display songs of hundreds of birds.

How to get there

Type "Area de Deportes Archidona – Polideportivo Municipal". You can park near the sports hall. We will take the track that goes to the south on the other side of the road, following the signs of the Gran Senda de Malaga (this is the end of its 12th stage between Villanueva del Rosario and Archidona). Birds like House Sparrows, Spotless Starlings and Collared Doves will soon show up as we leave the town towards the valley.



The right bank of the valley

Once we go past the last storehouses near the town, the track descends abruptly. On the first bend to the right, the valley opens up before us and the hum of the stream comes to us with the sound of Nightingales, Hoopoes, Wood Pigeons, Cetti's Warblers and the drumming of the woodpeckers.

The slopes to the right of the track are covered with scrub and broom. Here, Rock Buntings, Stonechats, Sardinian Warblers, Blackcaps, Blackbirds, Linnets and even Wrynecks may show up around us, and we can spot Blue Rock Thrushes and Black Wheatears on the rocks next to the ridge.



Ravens usually fly and croak over the hillsides of the valley and Azure-winged Magpies can show up anywhere from now on.



The river forest



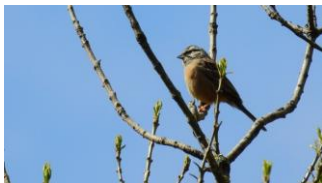
As we come down the hill and walk the little path alongside the river, forest birds will dominate the scene. We can try and spot the birds that sing from deep inside the foliage like the Nightingale, Robin, Blackcap, Short-toed Treecreeper and Golden Oriole, or try to find the elusive Green Woodpeckers when they deliver their noisy calls.



Other birds will be much more obliging and will say hello while showing up like the Great, Blue and Long-tailed Tits and Chaffinches, or will lose their shyness and sing from the top of a bare perch only for a few weeks during the spring like the small Wren. Hawfinches can be found perched or flying over the top of the trees, sometimes moving away from the threatening Sparrowhawk.



Some Aleppo Pines, Holm and Portuguese Oaks grow away from the right bank of the river and they are home for Rock Buntings, Azure-winged Magpies, finches, Coal and Crested Tits, Jays and the very Mediterranean Western Bonelli's Warbler.



The left bank of the river



Our small path reaches a big dirt track near a bridge over the stream that we will find on our left. We can follow the track to the right until we get to a ruined farmhouse. Great Spotted Woodpeckers are usually very active around here and we are closer to the Bonelli's Eagles territory so let's keep an eye on the ridges around the valley.

We can see the devastating effects of the fire from the ruined farmhouse. We can turn around here and follow the track along the left bank of the river once we go across the bridge.



Again, the hillside is covered with Mediterranean scrub, oaks and Aleppo Pines, and an olive grove extends between the track and the river forest. Light conditions are better from this side of the river to search for birds in the river forest, pine woods and olive trees.



We will find another ruined farmhouse as we go along the track. There is a bridge just in front of it that we can reach by taking a path to the left some 50 m. past the farmhouse. The bridge takes us to the path that leads back to Archidona. Let's walk this uphill slowly, savouring the memories that this magic place will have indeed impressed in our mind.



PICTURES:

1. Hoz de Marín: river forest
2. Hillsides covered with Mediterranean scrub
3. Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)
4. Path down to the valley from Archidona
5. Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*)
6. Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*)
7. Path alongside the right bank of Arroyo Marín
8. Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*)
9. Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)
10. Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)
11. Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*)
12. Arroyo Marín
13. The effects of the fire in 2016
14. Hoz de Marín from the left bank
15. Last bridge on the way back to Archidona