



Natural values

The Refugio (hunting lodge) de Juanar is nowadays a mountain hotel located at the heart of the Sierra Blanca, the south end of the Sierra de las Nieves District. We will walk at around 880 metres above sea level on average across a very lush wooded area surrounded by hills and peaks well over 1,100m asl.



The vegetation is very diverse up here, with sweet chestnuts and olive trees as a sample of the traditional mountain agriculture, Aleppo and maritime pines as some of the most common species used in reforestation, and some exotic nonnative species like Monterey pine and eucalyptus, all surrounded, except the ploughed olive groves, by abundant Mediterranean scrub.

These are some of the birds that we might be able to find here in October: Red-legged Partridge, Golden Eagle, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Wood Pigeon, Tawny Owl, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Crag Martin, Robin, Black Redstart, Song Thrush, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Ring Ouzel, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Dartford Warbler, Chiffchaff, Firecrest, Wren, Pied Flycatcher, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Crested Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Jay, Raven, Chiffchaff, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Siskin, Hawfinch, Common Crossbill and Rock Bunting.



How to get there



Type "El Juanar, Malaga" in Google Maps. A big trail starts on the left just in the last bend to the right before reaching the hotel. Google Maps labels it as the extension of road MA-5300 but it is not and there is a gate some 400 m ahead from where access by motor vehicles is forbidden. Furthermore, there is an order issued by the Environment Department of the Andalusian Government forbidding the light of fire and the off-road use of motor vehicles in forest areas from June 1st to October 15th due to the extreme risk of fire at the country side during the summer season, so we should park the car in the trail as close as possible to the road.

There is a map of the Juanar – Puerto de Marbella path next to the gate. We will walk this path to the Puerto de Marbella and come back by following another lane across the Monterey pine wood, the olive grove and the aleppo pine and eucalyptus forests.



The Mirador del Corzo

An early arrival to Juanar will surely give us the sweet hooting of the Tawny Owls from the trees around the hotel. On the way up to the fence, once daylight pushes the owls into their hideouts, some of the birds that will be common along the day, like Wrens, tits, Robins,



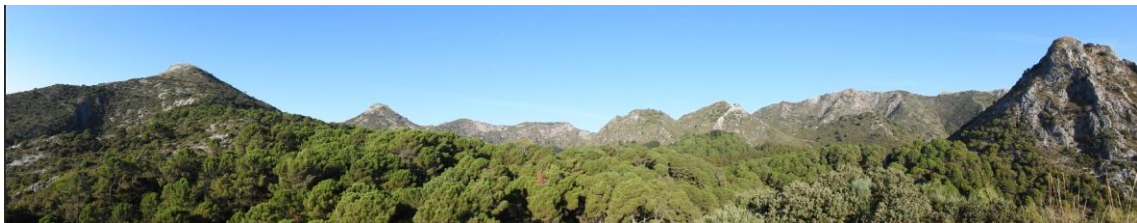
Blackbirds, Nuthatches and woodpeckers, will start to make their names either by calling or by showing up fluttering about in the canopy.

The loop showed in the map takes us to the Mirador (viewpoint) del Corzo (Roe Deer) across a beautiful maritime pine forest marked out by prickly junipers where Firecrests like to flit. The sign to the viewpoint from the main track is lost but you will see an uphill path to the left delimited by stones next to some other signs. Do not confuse it with another downhill path to the left starting at the same place that takes us to Ojen village.

The views of Ojen and the coast from the “mirador” are fantastic. Chances are that the Sparrowhawk be found wheeling over the valley with the Crag Martins, and the Red-legged Partridges sing from the Cerro Nicolas to the north. Try to spot the Roe Deer!



As we walk down the path to complete the Mirador del Corzo loop, the best place to find the elusive Ring Ouzels, we can see a long crest to the west just in front of us. It is frequented by Kestrels and the best place to spot the couple of Golden Eagles living in this area.



The Mirador del Macho Montes



Back to the main track, it goes up across the Olivar (olive grove) de Juanar, the most appropriate place for thrushes like Mistle and Song ones, Redwind and Blackbird, as well as other smaller birds like Robin, Black Redstart, Blackcaps, Sardinian Warblers and the last Pied Flycatchers on their way to Africa.

The track forks next to a house, the Centre for the Study of the Spanish Ibex. We will take left, Marbella direction, not without scanning the trees around the house for Hawfinches, Goldfinches, Greenfinches and Siskins. Short after that, we reach the Puerto (mountain pass) de Marbella and the Mirador del Macho Montes (male Spanish Ibex).





The viewpoint is dominated by a beautiful statue of a big male Spanish Ibex and it is surrounded by Mediterranean scrub. Dartford Warblers, Rock Buntings and real ibex are not uncommon visitors of this extraordinary vantage point.

The woods



Back to the Centre for the Study of the Spanish Ibex, this time we will take “La Concha” (the impressive peak that rises over the town of Marbella) direction into the Monterey pine forest. Once in the wood, we can sit down for a while to enjoy the tall trees and the luxuriant shrub layer made of brambles and fern, and wait for the “waves” of forest birds like tits, Firecrests, Short-toed Treecreepers, Nuthatches and Chaffinches.



After this break, we will retrace our steps out of the wood again and take a path into the olive grove down to the left. There will be another chance for thrushes, warblers and finches, and we will be closer to the ridge where the Golden Eagles may show up.



Then, the path goes into a stand of Aleppo pines where Jays use to be very active, producing all kinds of scary sounds. The Great Spotted Woodpeckers can be heard working on the trunks while their Green relatives’ piercing songs emerge always from behind the trees... There’s no way to see them!



We will leave the pine wood behind as the path goes down towards the hotel to

enter a big stand of eucalyptus and finally a river forest along the Arroyo (stream) de Juanar composed of sweet chestnuts, poplars and ashes whose leaves will turn into gorgeous golden colours as October drives us into the autumn.

PHOTOS:

1. Sweet chestnut
2. Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)
3. Access to Juanar – Puerto de Marbella Path
4. Map of Juanar – Puerto de Marbella Path
5. Start of the path to the Mirador del Corzo
6. Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)
7. Sierra Blanca
8. Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)
9. Fork at the Centre for the Study of the Spanish Ibex
10. Statue of the Male Spanish Ibex

11. Monterey pines
12. Great Tit (*Parus major*)
13. Aleppo pines
14. Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*)