

STAGE 35



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Alhaurín de la Torre - Malaga

LOCATION

Stage 35, the last stage of the Great Malaga Path, begins at the Peñón de Zapata, a district of Alhaurín de la Torre. The flat **12,9 km** walk gets you through a complex metropolitan area and reaches the beach promenade Paseo Marítimo Antonio Banderas, where you will find kilometre zero of the Great Malaga Path at the entrance of the Diputación Provincial de Málaga building.



White-headed Ducks. PHOTO: JAS

DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

The area around Peñón de Zapata is strongly marked by agriculture, by the proximity to the Río Guadalhorce and to the airport.

DID YOU KNOW?

Vicente Martínez y Montes (1812-1876), a Granada-born doctor who resided in Malaga, in his work "*Topografía Médica de la Ciudad de Málaga*" from 1852 commented on Malaga city's ornithology: «we follow the banks of Río Guadalhorce, the fertile plains and adjacent vegetable plots; we encounter non-web footed riverside birds, the Grey Heron, White Stork, Cormorant, Avocet, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Turnstone, etc». He includes the web-footed birds: Moorhen, Coot, Black-headed Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Greylag Goose, Mallard, Northern Shoveler and Eurasian Teal. He also records the presence of the White-headed Duck, (*Oxyura leucocephala*) for the first time for the Iberian Peninsula at the Desembocadura del Río Guadalhorce, which he names *Sarceta de cola espinosa* (Spiny-tailed Teal). Francis Carter (1741-1783), referring to the Río Guadalhorce, comments in his "*Journey from Gibraltar to Malaga*" that: «The river of Malaga is large and not fordable; its banks are inhabited by numerous tribes of the beautiful Aveluco (*Abejaruco*, the Bee-eater), whose brilliant plumage shines with yellow, blue and green tints, are not to be equalled by any of the feathered tribe in Europe: these birds are of the size of a large thrush, and are only to be met with in this province». TEXT: SMB



Flock of Black-winged Stilts. PHOTO: ARM

From the very beginning of Stage 35 you will be walking past orchards, vegetable plots and farmland with



Glossy Ibis. PHOTO: JAS

crops that become an oasis for birds during migration periods. Here, the irrigation canals and ditches play an important role for wildlife during dry periods. Soon, you will encounter the Guadalhorce river, where in addition to numerous water birds you will have a chance to see other birds that frequent the area in search of water and food. Shortly after crossing the Guadalhorce river, the walk takes you to Malaga city where typical urban species are predominant.

HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

This stage crosses the area of the province of Malaga with the most number of bird records, the lower stretch of the river Guadalhorce. In the beginning you can see species linked to populated areas, Eurasian Collared Dove, Pallid Swift, Barn Swallow, House Martin, Common and Spotless Starling and House Sparrow, and as soon you enter cultivated areas with irrigation channels and trees, you can observe various species of herons



Osprey. PHOTO: JLM

and egrets (Grey Heron, Little Egret and Cattle Egret), Turtle Dove, Bee-eater, Hoopoe, and passerines typical of this type of environment (Crested Lark, White and Grey Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Common Stonechat, European Robin Common Nightingale, Bluethroat, Common Blackbird, Song Thrush, Cetti's Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher, Great Tit, Woodchat

Shrike, Golden Oriole, Jackdaw, Common Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin, Eurasian Siskin and Corn Bunting). This is an environment where the birds gather during migration, although crops have been encroaching on their territory in a gradual but unstoppable manner. In the fields of alfalfa some of the rare species have been recorded such as Aquatic Warbler and Savi's Warbler. If you make this trip late in the evening or very early



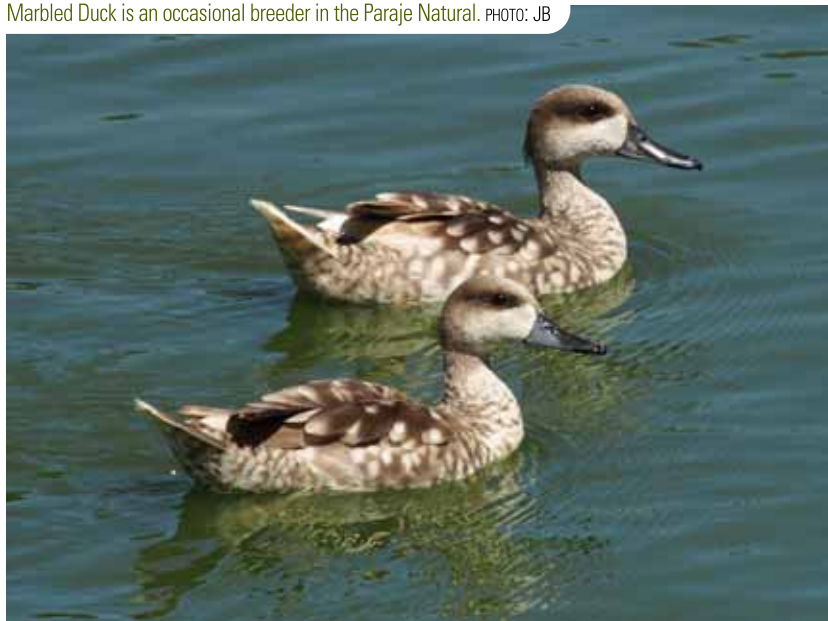
Booted Eagle. PHOTO: JLM

Bluethroat. PHOTO: JLM





Marbled Duck is an occasional breeder in the Paraje Natural. PHOTO: JB



Coot. PHOTO: JLM



in the morning, preferably in summer, you will have a chance to find Little Owl, Barn Owl and Red-necked Nightjar. As soon as you start walking along the Río Guadalhorce you may be able to spot Great Cormorant, Night Heron, Grey Heron, Cattle Egret, Little Egret, Mallard, Common Pochard, Common Buzzard, Osprey, Common Kestrel, Red-legged Partridge, Quail, Coot, Moorhen, Stone-curlew, Little Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Yellow-legged, Lesser-black Backed and Black-headed Gulls, Collared Dove, Monk Parakeet, Kingfisher and Red-rumped Swallow, besides other species. At the site called Paraje Natural de la Desembocadura del río Guadalhorce, the mouth of the river, you can view up close the Great Cormorant, Grey Heron, the previously named gulls, the Booted



Eagle, Common Kestrel and Jackdaw. As you cross the bridge over the Río Guadalhorce, the bird diversity decreases, since now you are entering the city itself. However, the bird species which are present here can reach very good numbers. Crested lark, Zitting Cisticola, finches (Goldfinch, Greenfinch y Serin), can be seen around here mostly thanks to the existence of open fallow land. Most common species however include Yellow-legged, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gull, Eurasian Collared Dove, Rock Dove, Common and Pallid Swift, Monk Parakeet, Spotless and Common Starling plus House Sparrow. It is a good idea to have a look at the tops of the tall chimneys which mark the end of Stage 35, and the end of The Great Malaga Path, since they serve as habitual perches for the Peregrine Falcon.

TIMING

Although Stage 35 can be done throughout the year given its short route, migration time and winter season are most appropriate for bird-watching. In summer, the number of species is significantly lower.

NATURAL VALUES

Irrigation canals host populations of two vulnerable species of Unionidae family, the *Potomida pictorum* and the *Unio littoralis*. These large freshwater molluscs are very sensitive to the introduction of exotic species. Passing through the channels you will be able to see shells of molluscs eaten by Otters.



Purple Heron. PHOTO: MG



Knot. PHOTO: MMA

The first part of the stage, up to the Guadalhorce river crossing, holds different species of mammals. Worth a mention are the Otter, Badger, Genet, Weasel and Water Vole. A well-conducted search for prints along the muddy paths will allow you to detect the presence of these animals.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Stage 35 passes through the northern edge of Paraje Natural del Río Guadalhorce. This site has viewpoints/hides for birdwatching, and a very large diversity of species which makes visiting the site highly recommended. There is a network of footpaths connecting the different viewpoints

which show you the site's different natural environments (beach, tamarisk formations, salt marshes and lagoons). Although the site is an area of great



Kingfisher on the beach. PHOTO: MMA



importance for wintering birds, the migration periods are highly recommended since the mouth of Río Guadalhorce is a rest area for a lot of



Monk Parakeet at the entrance of the nest. PHOTO: ARM

species. Over seventy species can be easily seen during this time of year in a single day's outing. During the months of June, July, August diversity is lower but the species which are present are quite interesting. The most prominent species include Little Bittern, White-headed Duck, Common Scoter, Marsh Harrier, Audouin's Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Sandwich Tern, Black-winged Stilt, Avocet, Purple Swamp Hen, Short-eared Owl, and Barn Owl. This is also a well-known site for species which are considered rarities and they can be spotted in the area fairly frequently; for example White-winged Tern, Richard's Pipit, or Isabelline Shrike. ○

Water pipit. PHOTO: JLM

