



## Natural values

El Alcazar is a recreational facility 6 km. northeast the village of Alcaucin, within the Sierra Tejeda, Almirajara y Alhama Nature Reserve. It is one of the best places to watch forest birds in the Axarquía District and one of the ways to the highest summit in the reserve, La Maroma, at 2,065 metres above sea level.

We can enjoy two very emblematic species on the way to La Maroma from El Alcazar in December: the Alpine Accentor, a very friendly bird that loves wintering in the highest reaches of our limestone mountains, and the Golden Eagles, which will show their amazing display flights at this time of year over their territory around El Alcazar.



These are some more species we can find at El Alcazar and the way up to La Maroma in December: Red-legged Partridge, Sparrowhawk, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Woodlark, Crag Martin, Meadow Pipit, Dunnock, Robin, Black Redstart, Black



Wheatear, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Ring Ouzel, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Dartford Warbler, Chiffchaff, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Crested Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Jay, Chough, Raven, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Common Crossbill and Rock Bunting.

## How to get there

Type “Venta La Parra, Alcaucin” in Google Maps. We are on the road MA-128 at the entrance of Alcaucin. Set the counter to cero here, go on the road and turn left at the sign to “Area Recreativa Cortijo del Alcázar – 6 km.” (km. 0.7). Go straight ahead at the next crossroads (at 100 metres from the sign to El Alcazar).

Take right to El Alcazar at the junction (km. 2.1). The road becomes a track at km. 2.7 though we will still find some more paved stretches before reaching El Alcazar. There is a viewpoint at km. 3.7 with extraordinary views over the Zalia Plateau and the Boquete de Zafarraya.

Another nice viewpoint featuring a nice statue of a male Spanish Ibex is found on the left at km. 4.2. It is called Mirador Miguel Alvarez and 400 metres ahead we have El Rio (the river) recreational facility next to a restaurant. Past this area, at km. 5.8, we reach El Alcazar recreational facility where we can park the car.

## El Alcazar

This facility, located at the heart of a beautiful pine tree forest mixed with poplars, some eucalyptus and cedars, is equipped with tables, barbecues, toilets and drinking fountains. A little ditch comes down across the area with pure water coming from a spring north of the site.



The views over the Alcazar Gorge and ridges are stunning. That is the place where we can spot our Golden Eagles, so keep looking up!

Despite we will suggest a mountain “birdwalk” below, El Alcazar is a very good option for less “walk lovers”. There is even another chance for forest birds and walk enthusiasts consisting on doing the Botanical Route of Sierra Tejada depicted on the board in front of El Rio recreational facility.



Around us, we will be able to spot most of the typical Southern Spain forest birds like tits, including the funny Crested one, woodpeckers (we can spot the Great Spotted on the trunks and hear the crazy calls of the very shy Green ones), finches like Chaffinch, Siskin and Common Crossbill, Chiffchaffs, Nuthatches and Short-toed Treecreepers.

## The way to La Maroma



Following the ditch upstream, we will find the north way out of the facility into a track that goes uphill towards La Maroma peak. Our goal is not the summit but finding the Alpine Accentors which are usually at around 1,700 metres above sea level after a 7.5 km. walk with 900 metres of elevation gain. This means it is a winter hard walk and we have to take two main precautions. One is to look at the weather forecast and choose a sunny day (clouds can become very thick fog here); windy days should also be avoided.

Second. Daylight range goes from 8:00 to 18:30 (it can be significantly shorter in cloudy days!). It takes around 4 hours to come down from the 1,700 m. level at a “birdwatching” pace, so start coming down well before 14:30. The conditions in the mountains can be extremely hard after dusk, with strong winds and temperatures well below 0°C.

The first part of the track goes across a shady pine forest. As sun goes up and reaches our position, the temperature will rise and



birds will show up happier too. There will still be Sardinian Warblers, Long-tailed (in big winter families!), Crested, Great, Blue and Coal Tits, Short-toed Treecreepers and Chaffinches around us.



As we go up, and after an almost 180° bend to the right, the track goes across a firewall and a little cliff to the left in a more open area. Mistle Thrushes are very common here. They, as some scarce Ring Ouzels and Blackbirds



do as well, feed on the fruits of the prickly and Phoenician junipers. Other birds we can find here are Black Redstarts, which will become our walking companions from now on, Woodlarks and Black Wheatears.



There is an old rain gauge at the end of the track, where a twisting narrower path starts its way up to the summit across an open scrubby pine tree forest where some Coal Tits and Nuthatches are still present, we can spot the Sparrowhawk in flight between the trees, Jays and Dartford Warblers call and show up frequently and Red-legged



Partridges sing from the stony slopes. Chances to find the Golden Eagles increase as we are coming closer to the ridges around El Alcazar Gorge, which appear to our right as we go up.

As the path goes on, pine trees are replaced by Holm and some Alpine Oaks, and these vanish in favour of hedgehog scrub. We must now be approaching the 1,700 m. asl level and Alpine Accentors must be about to show up peacefully feeding on the rocky ground. These lovely birds are very friendly and will let us get as close to them as to be able to look at them at naked eye. Could they be more obliging!





While sitting there enchanted by the accentors, we could also enjoy some big flocks of Choughs, and Rock Buntings and Meadow Pipits keeping the accentors company...



What time is it? Is it time to come back to reality from the doors of Heaven?



## PHOTOS:

1. Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) in display flight.
2. Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*).
3. El Alcazar Gorge and ridges from the track to La Maroma.
4. Information about the Sierra Tejada Botanical Route.
5. Way out from El Alcazar recreational facility to La Maroma.
6. Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*).
7. Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*).
8. Black Wheatear (*Oenanthe leucura*).
9. The signs will help us when the path vanishes.
10. Dartford Warbler (*Sylvia undata*).
11. Alpine Accentor (*Prunella collaris*).
12. Alpine Accentor's habitat at 1,700 metres above sea level.
13. Choughs (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*).
14. Snow on the slopes of La Maroma.