



STAGE **29**



STAGE 29

Casares - Estepona

LOCATION

Stage 29 begins in Calle Carrera in Casares, at the birthplace of Blas Infante. You need to leave the village direction southwards, although the main direction of Stage 29 leads primarily eastwards. After **32.8 km** of walking along the southern foothills of the Sierra Bermeja you will arrive in Estepona at Río de la Cala, and reach the promenade Paseo Marítimo.



Waymark on the path, at Arroyo de la Cala, just before arriving in Estepona.

PHOTO: ARM

DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

Casares is a star site for birdwatching, both the sierra and the village centre, since they hold a breeding population

DID YOU KNOW?

Charles Edmond Boissier (1810-1885), a botanist from Geneva, comments in his *"Botanical Journey around the South of Spain in the year 1837"*: «I have planned a climb to the Sierra Bermeja for the following day. I was curious to see and examine the pine tree, whose branch with no fruit I have seen in the herbarium of Mr Haenseler in Malaga, and which seemed to me to be a new species. In Estepona everybody knew it as a *pinsapo* ...» he mentions further: «Mr Haenseler, who had lived for almost nine years in Estepona, discovered in these hills a new four-legged creature in Europe, *Viverro Ichneumon* which had only been known in Egypt and a few places in Barbary: it lives in burrows and in the country it is known as *Meloncillo* (Mongoose)». This is the first record of Egyptian Mongoose for Spain. British travellers, hunters and naturalists Abel Chapman (1851-1929) and Walter J. Buck (1843-1917) published *"Unexplored Spain"* in 1910. They tell us: «from the peaks of Bermeja we enjoyed a spectacle possibly unequalled in Europe. Soaring down below was a magnificent pair of Lammergeyers, with their backs and outstretched pinions gleaming almost white in the sunshine. Here we saw Golden, Booted and Bonelli's Eagles, a solitary Griffon Vulture, Peregrine Falcon and Goshawk, a pair of Sparrowhawks, very busy carrying twigs, Ravens, Eurasian Jays, Woodpecker, Wrens, Crag Martins, the usual Wheatears and a few Wood Pigeons». TEXT: SMB



At the foot of Sierra Bermeja. PHOTO: ARM



View of the coast from one of the streams. PHOTO: ARM

of Lesser Kestrel and various pairs of Griffon Vulture in the rock faces visible from the viewpoints. Around the Arroyo de los Molinos you will be able to see river birds and species typical of cultivated areas. You will be walking along this characteristic environment of the Strait of Gibraltar region having flanked the southern corner of Sierra Bermeja. Here, the substrate changes to metamorphic rock. The great attraction of this stage

Section along Río Padrón and farmland. PHOTO: ARM





PHOTO: ARM



is the Sierra, composed of plutonic rock, which offers beautiful views that include the African continent. The final section leads to Arroyo of La Cala, which takes you to the Paseo Marítimo of Estepona. This beach promenade provides an opportunity to see coastal birds.

HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

The very start of Stage 29 produces a great number of birds which, depending





Adult Griffon Vulture. PHOTO: JLM

on the season, can be highly diverse and abundant.

In spring and summer they are the swifts, swallows and the most frequent House Martins, accompanied by Griffon Vultures (often in the village itself), Common Kestrels, Collared Dove, Spotless and Common Starlings, Jackdaw and House Sparrow.

Next, as you enter the flysch of Aljibe, the wild olive and mastic bushes support Turtle Dove, Robin, Stonechat, Mistle Thrush and Song Thrush, Blackbird, Blackcap, Sardinian Warblers, Spotted Flycatcher, Great Tit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Eurasian Siskin, Greenfinch, Serin and Rock Bunting. Around the Arroyo de los Molinos the following birds may turn up: Great Spotted Woodpecker, White and Grey Wagtail Wren and, on occasion, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (which also occurs in the vineyards in Cortijo del Robledal). It is a peculiar fact that during the breeding season Spectacled Warbler and Tawny Pipit can be seen here, species linked to higher altitudes in the rest of the province.

From this area until you pass through the settlement called Acedía, dotted with houses, and cork oaks mixed with scrubland constituting the main vegetation; again the already mentioned forest species occur, alongside those typical of open spaces: Spotted Woodpecker, Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Eurasian Jay, Blackcap, Great Tit and Chaffinch along with Crested Lark, Sardinian Warbler and Stonechat. Upon reaching the viewpoint of Peñas Blancas you can enjoy a broad view of Sierra Bermeja, and this is a good moment to scan the sky for raptors. Here you can see Griffon Vulture, Booted and Short-toed Eagle, Common Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Common Kestrel, and with a little luck, Golden Eagle. During times of migration passage you can also observe Black Kite and Honey Buzzard. Next, you will come to Arroyo Vaquero and enter the sierra.



Mistle Thrush. PHOTO: JLM



Migrating White Storks. PHOTO: ARM

Following the stream along the slightly uphill section among pines and cork oaks, you can find European Turtle Dove, Wryneck, Robin, Blackbird, Mistle Thrush, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Golden Oriole, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Greenfinch, Serin, Goldfinch and Common Linnet, plus Starlings and House Sparrows around the buildings. The climb leads to an esplanade where you will be able to see the section of mountains ahead and the town landfill, which sometimes attracts concentrations of thousands of birds. The majority are gulls (Yellow-legged, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed), although there are also Cattle Egrets, Griffon Vultures and, during migration

periods, large numbers of Black Kites and White Storks.

The sierra Bermeja slopes are covered with loose rocks which can be hard on your ankles and you must tread carefully. The history of forest fires of the Sierra is clearly visible here, looking at the scarcity and dispersion of maritime pines. However, there is a single stand of pine before Barranco del Infierno. This area is dominated by larks, Stonechat, Black Redstart and Sardinian Warbler, together with finches, such as Goldfinch, Common Linnet and Greenfinch. You do need to keep looking at the sky as you may see some of the previously named raptors and gulls coming and going to the landfill. You could also spot the Black



A pool at Arroyo La Cala. PHOTO: ARM



Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrush here. With luck, you may hear and see the Eagle Owl.

Near Guadalobón river the abundance of birds increases, as they flock to the water, something that frequently happens during the summer months. As you leave behind the area of loose rocks and reach the road which connects Estepona with Los Reales de Sierra Bermeja, you are still 10 kilometres away from your destination. You are now at the basin of the stream of La Cala, where young cork oaks and cistus scrub plus inhabited areas with vegetable plots appear. Here, again, there is a community of forest bird species accompanied by the birds accustomed to human presence, named above. Grey Wagtails and Reed Warblers, which nest in reed beds, remind you that you are walking close

to a watercourse. It is not uncommon to observe the Booted Eagle, Common Buzzard, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Kestrel before approaching the centre of Estepona. As before, you will notice Collared Doves, Starlings and House Sparrows approaching the town centre. Along the beach promenade of Estepona you will have a chance to see marine and coastal species, which are listed in Stage 30 (Estepona - Marbella).

TIMING

Similarly to other stages that run through the western Costa del Sol, Stage 29 is especially rewarding for birdwatchers during periods of pre-breeding and post-breeding migration, due to the diversity of species found and the large concentrations of birds which may occur.

Stage 29 passes by a waste treatment station where birds congregate: gulls, vultures, egrets, kites, among others. PHOTO: ARM





View of the Strait of Gibraltar from the path. PHOTO: ARM

Stage 29 is not recommended for birding during the hottest month of the year. The location of the southern slopes of Sierra Bermeja within Stage 29 puts you in the mountains around midday and this is why hot months are best avoided.

NATURAL VALUES

Peridotite is an ultramafic igneous rock of great hardness and high density which consists of ferromagnesian minerals and, when transformed, receives the generic name of serpentinite. The uniqueness of this particular substrate and its outstanding strategic location halfway between Europe and Africa are behind the great interest shown in Sierra Bermeja plants of serpentinite habitat, starting from the first work dedicated to the vegetation of this type of habitat published in the late sixties of the last century (Goday Rivas 1969). Botanically speaking, this area is considered a separate bio-geographical zone denominated *Bermejense* because of its special importance in Spain according to its level of speciation. Worth mentioning are the formations of *Pinus pinaster* var. *acutisquama* growing on peridotites, which are then replaced at a higher altitude by ultramafic Spanish Fir wood, the only one in the world (Asensi & Rivas Martinez 1976 Cabezudo *et al.* 1989).



Mating Lesser Kestrels. PHOTO: JLM

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Out of the 22 endemic plants, some are listed as vulnerable, while others are critically endangered species. The most threatened species are *Armeria villosa* subsp. *carratracensis*, *Centaurea lainzii*, *Peucedanum officinale* subsp. *brachyradium*, *Silene fernandezii*, *Allium Rouyi*, *Arenaria* and *Armeria capillipes colorata* (Moreno 2011, Pérez-Latorre *et al.* 2013). ○