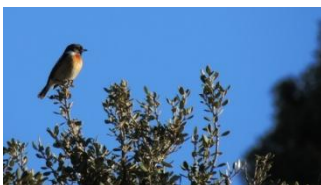




Natural values.

The Sierra del Padrastro is a limestone “island mountain” that stands west of Cañete La Real, in the Guadalteba district, surrounded by farmlands. Its main peak, Padrastro (999 m. above sea level) forms a big cliff facing the village that can be seen from a long distance.

Most of the farmlands around this site are shoots so January, after the regular hunting season is over, is a good time for a visit.



Some birds present in January: Griffon Vulture, Little Owl, Green Woodpecker, Crested Lark, Thekla Lark, Woodlark, Crag Martin, Meadow Pipit, Robin, Black Redstart, Black Wheatear, Stonechat, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Blue Rock Thrush, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Dartford Warbler, Wren, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Jay, Raven, Spotless

Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Linnet, Goldfinch, Serin, Common Crossbill, Corn Bunting and Rock Bunting.

How to get there.

Type “Restaurante La Piedra, Canete La Real, Malaga” in Google Maps to know where to go. We will describe a “birdwalking” trip for those ready for around a 7 km. hike, and also an easier route for drivers.

“Birdwalking” route.

You can find a place to park near the restaurant. The hike starts on a tarmac track between the restaurant and the first houses of the village, just in front of a Telefonica station. The first birds

will soon show up: House Sparrows, Goldfinches, Serins, Greenfinches and Spotless Starlings near the houses, and Crested Larks and Meadow Pipits in the first farmlands we walk across.

Cross the road and go on the track. We are now closer to the north end of the cliff, from which we receive sounds of Spotless Starlings and Linnets, and we will see the first Griffon Vultures resting on the rocks if not flying along the ridge. The telescope will be useful (maybe a first stop before we park the car is worthwhile so that we do not have to carry it for the whole trip) to identify little birds higher up in the cliff like Rock Buntings or even Rock Sparrows. We will start hearing the first songs of the Corn Buntings and the calls of Sardinian Warblers, and we will spot Stonechats and Black Redstarts around. Watch the piles of stones dividing the farmland plots for Little Owls.



Once we move forward around the cliff and walk down after the first pass, we will reach a junction with a stand of old Almond Trees. At this time of year some of them may be already covered in flowers, depending on the weather. If not, some remaining almonds from last year still on the branches may help you identify these leafless trees. We do not have to take the track on the right, but we can search for and listen to Green Woodpeckers in this area and the whole Aleppo Pine forest that extends around.

Crested Larks turn into Thekla ones up here. Pay attention to their beaks. As a rule of thumb, Crested's are longer and slightly curved downwards while Thekla's are more finch-like shaped (shorter and conical). The rest of features are almost identical in both species.



We will soon get to a little farm surrounded by an olive grove on a bend to the left over a small stream. House Sparrows, Goldfinches, Chaffinches and Spotless Starlings (attracted by the last mature olives on the trees) are very common here and the Short-toed Treecreepers call from the trunks of the olive trees on which they become almost invisible!

The track goes into the pinewoods towards the aerals on top of the hill. The forest borders on the olive grove so here is where Mistle and Song Thrushes like to hide. The forest is home for tits, treecreepers, Jays, Common Crossbills and Woodlarks.



We can save the climb to the aerals and turn left at the entrance to the woods into a stretch of gorse between the farmland and the forest. This is a good place for Dartford Warbler. At the end of the path we will find a little sign "Puerta" in the fence to access the limestone plateau of Padrastro. Private owners of plots like this are so kind to place gates in the fences to allow us getting in so, please, let's keep them closed, not disturb the livestock or pick up any crop, nor leave any kind of waste in the field.

The climb to the Padrastro summit is very difficult, not in terms of physical strength required but because the ground is very



rough and there is not a path. If we are not sure about our capability to go on, we should leave it for a better occasion.



If we are determined to climb, a few metres away from the fence, we reach an esplanade from which we can see the triangulation pillar at the summit. It looks close (but it is not!) and we are tempted to cut across the limestone pavement. We suggest following a little path along the fence to the left until we get to a big round rock from which we can turn right uphill. The first metres are very steep but, from then on, we will be able to make it to the top by walking on the grassy stretches on the ground. Once at the trig point, wait for the very close flights of the vultures and search for Black and Rüppell's ones, which are becoming more common in the region.

Once back to the gate, we just have to walk the path down and go through a green door, which we must also keep closed, to finish our turn around the Padraastro massive. Turn left into another path along the fence around the mountain once more. We will find lots of House Sparrows while close to the houses we have just gone past and the Corn Buntings can be heard again. Lots of Crag Martins fly in front of the cliff. Black Redstarts and Stonechats are abundant and you can spot a few couples of Black



Wheatears and some Blue Rock Thrushes on the rocks. In the next junction, turn right back to the village.



Route for drivers.

Drivers can start the same way and reach the aerials, where the track ends, stopping in front of the cliff, the almond tree stand, the olive grove by the farm and the start of the pine tree forest. Once back to the road, turn right and drive around 500 m to turn right again into a dirt track (the last one mentioned for the birdwalking trip) at a house in front of a big board of

Diputacion de Málaga (facing the other direction!). Drive up to the junction to have a look at the cliff and the surroundings from there.





Photographs:

1. Sierra del Padrastro and Cañete La Real from the road to Ronda
2. Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*)
3. Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)
4. Almond Trees (*Prunus dulcis*)
5. Thekla Lark (*Galerida theklae*)
6. Access to the summit of Padrastro
7. Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*)
8. Limestone pavement
9. *Iris planifolia*
10. Cañete La Real from the summit
11. Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*)
12. Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*)
13. South end of the cliff

14. Black Wheatear (*Oenanthe leucura*)

15. Almond Trees in blossom

16. East face of Padraastro