



Natural values



Despite the coast of Marbella and Estepona is a very built-up area, we can still find some places to take our bins, telescope and camera out and go birding once the bulk of the tourism “rush” is over in October.

In this occasion we suggest visiting the mouths of two typical short rivers coming from the nearby mountain ranges along the coast, Guadalmanza and Verde, and some of the last coastal dunes of the European Mediterranean, the “Dunas de Artola”, a Natural Monument included in the Andalusian Network of Protected Natural Sites.



These are some of the birds we can observe around here in October: Mallard, Common Scoter, Little Grebe, Scopoli’s Shearwater, Balearic Shearwater, Gannet, Cormorant, Cattle Egret, Little



Egret, Grey Heron, Kestrel, Moorhen, Coot, Sanderling, Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Audouin’s Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Sandwich Tern, Razorbill, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Kingfisher, Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Robin, Black Redstart, Stonechat, Blackbird, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Cetti’s Warbler, Chiffchaff, Wren, Spotless Starling, House Sparrow and Greenfinch.

Mouth of Guadalmanza River

Type “Heaven Kite School” in Google Maps. If you arrive to Guadalmanza early enough in the morning, you will find a nice roost of Cattle Egrets in the great reeds next to the road bridge. Go on and park the car in the shade of the eucalyptus and walk towards the beach just in front of the river.

Most of the rivers on the coast of Malaga form these characteristic lagoons in summer and during dry periods. It is only after heavy or continuous rains that the rivers flow into the sea. After that, a bank of sand blocks the river bed, giving rise to these coastal brackish lakes where common and great reed and tamarisk develops to shelter a wide set of wetland birds.



We can first have a look at the sea in search for shearwaters, seagulls and Gannets, and to the shore, where Sanderlings carry out their funny runs to avoid the waves. The scope will be very helpful to scan the horizon to detect the water topping flights of the shearwaters: the big pallid long gliding ones are the Scopoli’s and the smaller, homogeneously dark in the distance,

flying with shorter gliding sequences are the Balearic ones. Finding the Razorbill fishing near the shore or a flock of Common Scoters diving all at once for shellfish will be a bonus!

Back to the mouth of the river, we can try and spot one of the dozens of Cetti's Warblers calling from the vegetation and scan the reeds for Mallards, Moorhens, Wrens and Grey Wagtails. Walking upstream towards the bridge, we will find some good view points from which we can have a look to the river.



Mouth of Rio Verde



Type "La Playa Fantastica, Marbella" in Google Maps. We can park the car in Calle del Rio. This will take us to the Mouth of Rio Verde, just in the middle of Marbella, so this is going to be a kind of urban birding!

We can look at the river from the promenade, from the bridge and from the beach for nice views of Mallards, Coots, Moorhens, Little Grebes and seagulls. Let's pay attention to the high pitched calls of the Kingfisher to try and spot it sitting on a great reed or any other perch over the banks.



Dunas de Artola



Type "Parking Cabopino, Marbella" in Google Maps. This is the start of our walk here. If we come in the morning, the light will be better walking westwards so we can take the path down to the beach from the southeast end of the car park and come back along the north path in the shade of the umbrella forest.

A network of wooden footpaths has been set across this area in order to protect the dunes and the vegetation. There are maps showing the paths and where you are. We will find the Torre Ladrones on the right as we approach the beach; look for Kestrels on top or flying around.

Once we start walking the boardwalks, the calls of the Sardinian Warblers will come to us. Stonechats and Black Redstarts will be





easier to spot while perched on top of the junipers and mastic trees to which Greenfinches will feel attracted by their tempting red berries. As soon as Meadow Pipits reach the coast from their breeding quarters in the north during October, they can be found feeding on the ground in the gaps of the vegetation.

As in the two previous spots, different kind of seabirds like Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Gannets will show up in the sea and the beach. Again, let's pay attention to other less common birds like Mediterranean and Audouin's Gulls and Razorbills.



PHOTOS:

1. Mouth of Rio Verde
2. Dunas de Artola
3. Yellow-legged Gulls (*Larus michahellis*)
4. Mouth of Guadalmanza River
5. Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)
6. Moorhen (*Gallinula ochropus*)
7. Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*)
8. Mouth of Rio Verde
9. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
10. Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)
11. Coot (*Fulica atra*)
12. Torre Ladrones
13. Umbrella forest
14. Network of wooden footpaths at Dunas de Artola
15. Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
16. Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*)
17. Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*)