



Natural values



The Montes de Malaga nature reserve, located north of the city of Malaga, belongs to the Andalusian Network of Protected Natural Sites with Natural Park status. Most of its extension is covered by an Aleppo Pine reforestation though we can still find some stands of native trees like Holm Oak and Strawberry Tree as well as Mediterranean scrub and the remains of olive groves and orchards around old farmhouses.

The shaded trails at Montes de Malaga provide the bird watcher with a great opportunity to go out in search for one of the most diverse set of forest birds in Malaga province when the heat goes up.

These are some of the species we can find during our trip: Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Common Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Goshawk, Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Wood Pigeon, Tawny Owl, Scops Owl, Red-necked Nightjar, Swift, Pallid Swift, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Woodlark, Red-rumped Swallow, Grey Wagtail, Robin, Nightingale, Mistle



Thrush, Blackbird, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Firecrest, Wren, Spotted Flycatcher, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Crested Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Jay, Spotless Starling, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin, Hawfinch, Common Crossbil, Cirl Bunting and Rock Bunting.

How to get there

Type "Bar Fuente de la Reina Camino del Colmenar, Malaga". We will start our trip by visiting the Lagar (winepress) de Torrijos so set the counter to zero here and take the road eastwards, Colmenar direction from the Fuente de la Reina. After 1.2 km., turn left towards the "Ecomuseo Lagar de Torrijos" which we will find at the end of the downhill always following the asphalted road.

There is an order issued by the Environment Department of the Andalusian Government forbidding the light of fire and the off-road use of motor vehicles in forest areas from June 1st to October 15th due to the extreme risk of fire at the country side during the summer season, so we will not be allowed to drive the trails beyond the lagar nor beyond the road to Hotel Humaina as described below.

The origins of the Aleppo Pine forest

A tragic flood devastated the city of Malaga on September 24th 1907. The origin of this tragedy is to be found at the beginning of the XVI century when, after the conquest of Malaga to the Muslims and the share-out of lands by Ferdinand and Isabella, the forests around the city were cut down and the ground ploughed without any care for the steep slopes of the hills. Grapevines replaced wood and scrub land, leaving the soil unprotected from ordinarily scarce, but torrential rains. The first recorded flood occurred in 1544.

This situation turned even worse from 1878 on with the plague of the phylloxera that led to the abandonment of more than 110.000 hectares of vineyards in the Axarquía, Montes de Malaga and the Valley of the Guadalhorce River.

King Alfonso XIII ordered the necessary public works for these floods to never happen again in Malaga. The first project consisted on building the Pantano (reservoir) del Agujero. This work finished in 1924 and, even though it effectively accomplished the purpose it was designed for, the opinion of those who claimed for a tree cover restoration of the river Guadalmedina basin was, happily, considered as well.

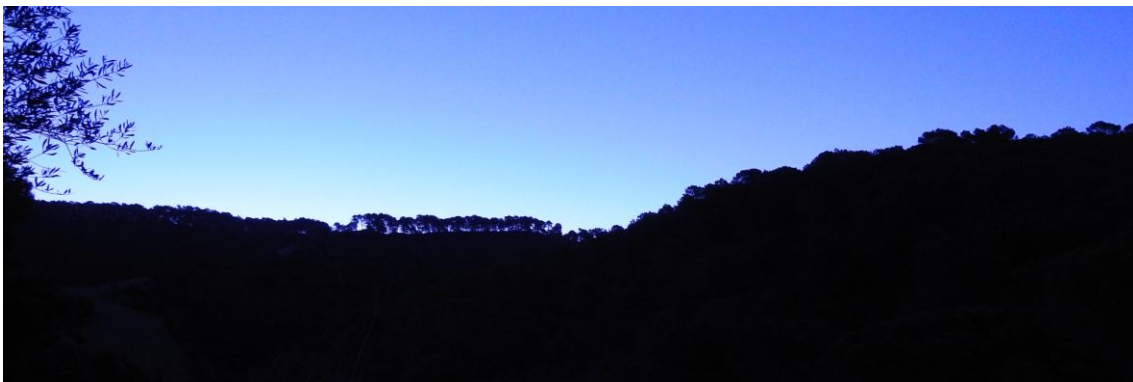


So, the forestry expert Miguel Bermejo Durán designed in 1919 the “Project for the Correction of the River Guadalmedina Basin”, whose execution started in 1930 under the direction of another forestry expert, José Martínez Falero, to which memory, in fair acknowledgement for such a formidable task, is dedicated one of the most beautiful viewpoints of the Montes de Malaga Natural Park. These works went on until the 50s and gave rise to a wonderful pine grove that has successfully achieved its function along the last century.

(See “Andar por el Parque Natural Montes de Málaga”, José Ramón Montes, Acción Divulgativa, S.L., 1993)

The morning chorus

If you decide to arrive to Torrijos before dawn, you might end up listening to the Tawny and Scops Owls, Red-necked Nightjar, Nightingale and Woodlark singing at the same time!



With the break of dawn, once the nocturnal artists go to rest, another heavenly choir stands in for them leading to one of the most beautiful moments of everyday forest birdlife. Step by step, birds join the chorus: Robins, with their messy song; Wood Pigeons and their rough



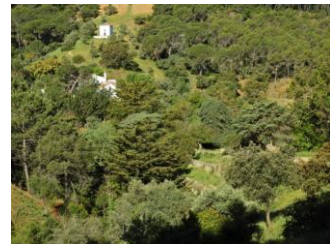
cooing; Blackbirds playing their fluty song; Wrens reciting long strophes; Great Tits with their repetitive song; the drumming of the Great Spotted Woodpecker and the alarming call of the Green one...

When birds stop celebrating the arrival of the light and go back to their ordinary duties, the sounds clear up and songs and calls identification becomes easier. This might be the only way to tick some birds on the list as watching birds in the forest, where visual contact is often impossible, is perhaps one of the most difficult birding exercises.



Once we have enough light to find birds in the leaves, we can have a walk around the recreational facilities where we can find Blackcap, Cirl Bunting (and even the more scarce here Rock one), Firecrest, Blue, Crested and Long-tailed Tits, Nuthatch, Short-toed

Treecreeper, Jay, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin, Common Crossbill and Hawfinch.



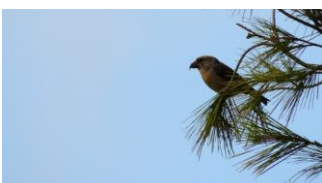
For these later finches, pay attention to the top of the big poplars in the area, where they like perching, and do not forget to look up for Sparrowhawk, Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Common Buzzard, some occasional Peregrine Falcon and... Goshawk for a big bonus!

The Mirador (viewpoint) Francisco Vazquez Sell

Back to the Fuente de la Reina, set the counter to zero again, and follow the signs to Hotel Humaina. Turn left at the fork (Km. 1.5) and we will reach a small car park in front of the viewpoint at km. 1.9.



This strategically located viewpoint provides the visitor with spectacular views of the so-called "Hoya (valley) de Malaga". We can see El Torcal, Sierra de Huma (El Chorro), Sierra de las Nieves, Sierra de Mijas and the city of Malaga from here.



There are a great many Common Crossbills in this area and it will not take long until Booted and Short-toed Eagles come out. We can also walk the "Sendero (path) de la umbría (shady area) de Contadoras" (turning right north as we approach the mirador from

the car park), where Bonelli's Warblers, Firecrests, Short-toed Treecreepers, Mistle Thrushes and tits of all kinds will show up again.



Photos:

1. Aleppo Pine Trees (*Pinus halepensis*)
2. Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*)
3. Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*)
4. Montes de Málaga Natural park
5. It is "morning chorus" time...
6. Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)
7. Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*)
8. Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*)
9. Lagar de Torrijos
10. Short-toed Snake Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*)
11. General view from Vázquez Sell Viewpoint
12. Common Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*)
13. Western Bonelli's Warbler (*Phylloscopus bonelli*)