



Natural Values

The Mouth of the Guadalhorce Nature Reserve is located just between the city of Malaga and Torremolinos. It extends between the two branches of the river, covering 67 ha. of its delta. It is equipped with comfortable hides over the pools that provide shelter from wind and rain in winter and the sun in summer, with very easy tracks to walk about.



The reserve is placed in the flyway to and from the Straits, providing a resting and refueling place for migrant birds which, along with the presence of some very vulnerable resident species like the Kentish Plover or White-headed Duck, makes it a place to deserve the maximum possible protection. The beginning of the spring migration in March is the moment we can enjoy the widest diversity of birds here.



The list of birds we can find here in March is so big including birds on passage. These are some of the most interesting ones: Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard, White-headed Duck, Black-necked Grebe, Balearic Shearwater, Little Bittern, Cattle Egret, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Glossy Ibis, Spoonbill, Greater Flamingo, Osprey, Booted Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Peregrine Falcon, Purple Swamphen, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover, Sanderling, Wood Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Snipe, Mediterranean Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Audouin's Gull, Sandwich Tern, Razorbill, Barn Owl, Pallid Swift, Hoopoe, Crested Lark, Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Yellow Wagtail, Bluethroat, Black Redstart, Stonechat, Sardinian Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Cetti's Warbler, Spotless Starling and Serin.

How to get there

Type "Parroquia Santa Maria Estrella de los Mares, Malaga" in Google Maps. The reserve can only be accessed on foot, so we can park the car just in front of the church and walk Guadalhorce street eastwards. We will turn left into the track that starts on the bend of the street to the right and walk north alongside the river until we reach the bridge to walk into the reserve.

The reserve

Despite the reserve is surrounded by the two branches of Guadalhorce river, it is in the pools inside where birdlife is more diverse and attractive. Every pool is different in size, depth and salinity of the water so they host different sets of species.

Once we go across the bridge, we will find a board with a map of the site showing the paths, the pools and where the hides are placed. We will describe a circular route that goes from the map to the seabirds observatory and across the beach to the Laguna Escondida, but you can also head towards the seabirds observatory, come back the same way with the sun in your back (specially during the early morning visits), and then call on the Laguna Escondida to finish the tour at the Laguna Grande.

Laguna de la Casilla

We will go along eastwards from the map on a track surrounded by Giant Reeds. Finches, Blackcaps and Blackbirds are common here. We will go straight on in the junction (the track to the right is the way to the Laguna Escondida, after coming back from the seabirds observatory for those who do not want to make it through the beach). The grassy sides of the track here are good for Zitting Cisticolas, that will mark their small territories with their wavy "zit-zit" song flights.



The track turns to the right and we will see the east branch of the river to the left and the Laguna de la Casilla, surrounded by Tamarisks, to the right. The hide is a few metres ahead. This pool is deep enough for diving birds like Pochards, White-headed Ducks, Little Grebes and Coots, while the reeds can host Little Bittern, Purple Swamphen, Water Rail, Purple Heron and Bluethroat. Swallows and martins often feed and roost at this pool.



Rio Viejo



There are some shallows on the left as we move on towards the beach where finches come to drink. Little Ringed Plovers also feed there, as do the Bluethroats before they leave to the north. Red-legged Partridges and Cattle Egrets are common around here as well.

We will soon find the Rio Viejo hide on the right. This pool is shallower than La Casilla, so dabbling ducks like Mallards and Teals are present, as well as waders like Black-winged Stilts, Greenshanks, Little Ringed Plovers, Snipes and any of the typical ones on passage like Redshank, Wood Sandpiper or Black-tailed Godwit.



The big eucalyptus beyond the lake are worth a look in search for the Osprey, Booted Eagle, Common Buzzard and even the Peregrine Falcons that often come from the city.



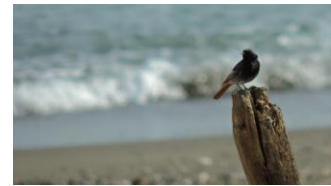


The Rio Viejo meanders from the hide towards the sea. Its last stretch is ideal for waders, including Avocets, Sanderlings, Dunlins, Little Stints, Ruffs and Curlew Sandpipers, and also young Greater Flamingos.



The beach

As we approach the seabirds observatory at the end of the track, we will find a fence delimiting the area where Kentish Plovers nest. It is one of the last places where they can breed in such a built-up area like the Costa del Sol. Other ground nesting birds like Crested Larks can also be found here as well as Stonechats and Black Redstarts before they go breeding to higher places in Malaga province.



In spite of the best time to watch seagulls here is the end of August and September, chances are that we can see some Mediterranean and Audouin's Gulls in March here. Razorbills, Gannets, Sandwich Terns and small flocks of Common Scooters can also be present before they depart to their breeding quarters. With the help of the scope, looking around the fishing boats, we can spot the Balearic Shearwaters grazing the waves in their fast flights.

The walk across the beach can give Sanderlings and Kentish Plovers on the shore, plus some less common migrants like Oystercatchers, Grey Plovers and Whimbrels, and any kind of passerine on passage, like wheatears, shrikes or Short-toed Larks, could show up on the fence and the restricted area.

The Laguna Grande



There is a gap in the fence, close to a big board, well before we reach the end of the beach, giving access to the reserve again. This track takes us to the Laguna Grande, the widest layer of water in the reserve.



It is the place where lots of Cormorants and some Grey Herons and Little Egrets rest during the winter. The Tamarisk to the left of the hide home a very big roost of Cattle Egrets and Jackdaws at night but you will not find a trace of them after the first lights of the day, though there could be some of our wintering Booted Eagles preening at a very short distance from us.



You can find here most of the ducks present in the other pools like Mallards, Gadwalls, Shovelers, Teals, Pochards and White-headed

Ducks, and even some unusual ones like Marbled and Ferruginous Ducks, Wigeons and Garganeys one passage.



Other appealing species we can find here in March are Purple



Heron, Glossy Ibis, Spoonbill and Slender-billed Gull that, unfortunately, will not breed in this area.

Luckily, the shallowest part of this pool is just in front of the hide, what makes it a wonderful place to watch waders and take pictures in the evening with the magical light of the sunset. But we still have the last pool to visit!



The Laguna Escondida



As we move on from the Laguna Grande back to the bridge, we will turn right in the junction and will find the Laguna Escondida hide to the left. Let us sit there in silence as White-headed Ducks, Little Grebes, Coots, Moorhens and any of the other species visiting the pool at that time can be very close to the hide.

This long narrow deeper pool is very good for most of the waterfowl species in the reserve, specially the diving ducks. It is also one of the best places to watch one of our most illustrious



summer visitors: the Little Bittern. They are not particularly shy and can be very close to the hide, but their small size and slow skulking in the reeds, close to the shore in search for little fish and bugs, make them very difficult to spot.



Please, let us contribute to protect this handy bird sanctuary both for local and foreign birders and nature lovers in which you can easily get 60+ species at any time of year!

PHOTOGRAPHS:

1. White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*)
2. Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)
3. Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*)
4. Pochards (*Aythya ferina*)
5. Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)
6. Teals (*Anas crecca*)
7. Snipes (*Gallinago gallinago*)
8. Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)
9. Booted Eagle (*Aquila pennata*)

10. Sanderlings (*Calidris alba*)
11. Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)
12. Laguna Grande Hide
13. Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)
14. Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*)
15. Gadwalls (*Anas strepera*)
16. Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)
17. Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)
18. Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
19. Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*)
20. Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*)