





# STAGE 27

## Benalauría - Genalguacil

### LOCATION

Stage 27 begins in the centre of Benalauría (Plaza del General Viñas) and finishes at the entrance to Genalguacil, at a roadside restaurant (venta) which will help you refuel after a steep climb. The **11,6 km** long walk leads through a markedly wooded environment which continues as you reach Río Genal; the year round availability of water in this river allows for the existence of quite varied riparian plant formations (wil-lows, ash, oleanders, tamarisks and even stands of planted poplars).

### DESCRIPTION

#### ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

This stage gives you the opportunity to train your ear and in this way deepen your relationship with birds. Although you will be able to



View of Algotocin, one of the many Genal Valley villages you can see from Stage 27.

PHOTO: ARIM

observe directly a varied sample of typical forest species, such as raptors, woodpeckers and many passerines, there is a significant number of species typical of woodland environment which are easy to hear and very hard to see. Also, what seems to happen quite often is that there is always a twig blocking the view of your target species. The section following closely the riverbed will provide an opportunity to become familiar with the bird community living in direct contact with the water.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

Specimen of the threatened Splendid Cruiser, *Macromia splendens*. PHOTO: TH

A study conducted by the *Fundación Nueva Cultura del Agua* in 2009 found 18 species of Odonata (Dragonflies and Damselflies) around Río Genal, highlighting the Orange-spotted Emerald (*Oxygastra curtisii*) and the Splendid Cruiser (*Macromia splendens*), both endangered in Andalucía and considered relicts of the ice-age fauna. These species act as bio indicators and prove the extraordinary ecological value of Río Genal. TEXT: JSM



Chestnut in flower and Benadalid in the background. PHOTO: ARM

### HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

Forest species are the stars of this stage. There are also birds characteristic to urban environments at the beginning and the end of Stage 27, and species typical of rivers and river banks. As you take the first and last steps of this route, Sparrows, Barn Swallows and House Martins will remind you that you are close to inhabited areas.



Nuthatch in its nest. PHOTO: JLM



Benadalid village is a true open-air museum. PHOTO: ARM

As you set off on the walk and the first trees appear, you are more and more likely to see the Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Common Wood Pigeon, European Turtle Dove, Wren, European Robin, Song Thrush, Stonechat and Redwing, Common Blackbird, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler, Iberian Chiffchaff, Black-eared Wheatear, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Common Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin, Hawfinch and Cirl Bunting.

Once you are at the river you can see and / or hear Common Sandpiper, Wryneck, Kingfisher, White and Grey Wagtail, Nightingale, Cetti's Warbler, Reed Warbler occurring in the few open spaces with reed beds and Golden Oriole in the canopy of large trees. Birds associated with built-up areas along the way may include Common Kestrel, Little Owl, Red-rumped Swallow and Blue Rock Thrush.



Great Spotted Woodpecker. PHOTO: JLM



Wryneck. PHOTO: JLM

The community of birds of prey is highly interesting here since you can see both the typical forest raptors (Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Common Buzzard, Northern Goshawk and Eurasian Sparrowhawk), as well as birds associated with rocky cliffs that tower over the valley, from Sierra Crestellina and Hacho de Gaucín, to the Benadalid cliff (species such as Griffon Vulture, Bonelli's Eagle and Peregrine Falcon are relatively common if you pay attention to the sky).

If you walk any section of Stage 27 at dusk or at dawn, you can enjoy the call of such crepuscular species as the Eagle Owl, Scops Owl, Tawny Owl and Red-necked Nightjar.



### TIMING

There is a great diversity of birds throughout the year and the percentage of resident species is high, although a significant taxa replacement occurs in winter and in breeding season. In winter, Thrushes, Robins, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs appear in very large numbers, whilst in spring the species which have spent the winter south of the Sahara desert arrive and nest here, such as Wryneck, Bonelli's Warbler, Iberian Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher and Golden Oriole.

During migration periods you can also observe species which are just passing through and are present only for short periods of time. The proximity to the Strait Gibraltar and the layout of the valley which opens directly to the Strait, channels large numbers of birds into the area.

### NATURAL VALUES

Stage 27 covers a relatively uniform environment and most of its interesting components are within your reach. It

is a good moment to become familiar with numerous species of trees such as cork oak, holm oak and Portuguese gall oak, among others.

Woodpecker holes in a cork oak stump, a common sight along this stage. PHOTO: ARM



View of Genal landscape, Benarrabá and Algotocín in the background. PHOTO: ARM



You will also be crossing chestnut groves, and the Genal river valley is a perfect environment for these trees. The river supports a healthy population of otters which you can detect by paying attention to their tracks and signs near the riverbed. Other species of mammals inhabiting the area are Badger, Genet, Stone Marten, Weasel, Polecat, Wildcat and Roe Deer. This river system is also highly important for aquatic invertebrates, mainly dragonflies and damselflies.



Little Ringed Plover. PHOTO: JLM

As far as fish is concerned, the Genal river has been declared by experts to be one of the best preserved rivers nationwide, supporting Eel, Andalusian Barbel, Iberian Nase, also species of chub *Squalius pyrenaicus* and the recently described for science *Squalius malacitanus*. ◉



Walkway prepared for Great Malaga Path, crossing narrow section of the Genal river. PHOTO: ARM