



Natural Values

Those who are enjoying summer along the east coast of Malaga province, in the Axarquía District, have the opportunity to visit this great birding place.

The Mouth of Rio Velez is possibly the most important birding place in the Axarquía District. Despite it is a green oasis in the middle of a very dry region, it does not enjoy any kind of special protection though we have recently known about plans to include it in the Andalusian Network of Protected Natural Sites... Good news!

These are some of the birds we can find at the Mouth of Rio Velez in August: Mallard, Little Grebe, Scopoli's Shearwater, Balearic Shearwater, Black-crowned Night Heron, Cattle Egret, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Moorhen, Coot, Purple Swamphen, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Yellow-legged Gull, Audouin's Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Turtle Dove, Little Owl, Red-necked Nightjar, Common Swift, Pallid Swift, Hoopoe, Kingfisher, Bee-eater, Crested Lark, Barn Swallow, Red-rumped Swallow, House Martin, Grey Wagtail, Nightingale, Blackbird, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Cetti's Warbler, Reed Warbler, Isabelline Warbler, Wren, Spotted Flycatcher, Great Tit, Penduline Tit, Spotless Starling, House Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Linnet, Goldfinch, Greenfinch and Serin. Some more birds could be found on passage, like Squacco Heron, Osprey, Spotted Crake, waders, Sand Martin, Whinchat, acrocephalus, locustella and leaf warblers. Even some wintering waterfowl and seabirds might be present here at the end of August.



How to get there

Type "La Parra Diseminado Huertas Bajas" in Google Maps. You get there by following the signs to the Camping Laguna Playa from Avenida Gerald Brenan. Drive past the campsite and park the car on the left 100 metres away just in front of the beach. You can only do this in August if it is very early in the morning!

The beach

The Mouth of Rio Velez, so close to the beach and surrounded by very active farmlands, can be a very busy place. That is why an early morning visit is a must if we want to enjoy its beauty and the birds it hosts.



Walking along the beach to the west we will soon find the mouth of the river. Like most of other Andalusian Mediterranean short rivers, it is only after heavy rains or a long rainy period that there is water flowing into the sea. In summer, the sea is stronger than the river and a natural dike of sand builds up around the mouth forming a little pond surrounded by very thick stands of giant and common reed, sharp rush and bulrush.



Seagulls like resting at the beach nearby the mouth of rivers. As the Costa del Sol is such a built-up place, seagulls, except some Yellow-legged, which can nest on buildings, and Black-headed ones, that move inland to reproduce in lakes, travel to other areas of the Mediterranean to breed. After that, they come back in big flocks, stay around while moulting, and disperse along the coast in autumn.



Therefore, chances are high here for resident Yellow-legged and Black-headed Gulls, Audouin's and Mediterranean Gulls coming back from their breeding quarters, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls returning to winter from the north of Europe.



There can also be waders at the beach like Sanderlings arriving to winter in the area or Dunlins on their way to the south. If we look at the sea, preferably with



the help of the scope, we can spot Balearic and Scopoly's Shearwaters and even Great Skuas among the seagulls.

Moorhens and Purple Swamphens slithering in the reeds at the banks, signaling with their shiny undertail coverts, Grey Herons and Little Egrets fishing from the banks, Kingfishers perched on the sedge waiting for little fish to show up and hirundines, like Barn and Red-rumped Swallows and House and Sand Martins, and swifts, both Common and Pallid, coming down to drink airborne on the water surface.



The farmlands



We can take a path (bear in mind this is an ever changing place!) that takes us close to the farmlands on the right bank (west) of the river. This is a good place for Crested Larks and finches like Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin and Linnet. Pay attention to the sparrows as the surroundings of the Mouth of Rio Velez is one of the very few places where we can find Tree Sparrows in Malaga

province.

The river



Once we have had a close look at the farmlands, we can go back to the left bank across the beach and take one of the narrow corridors through the giant reeds to have a walk along the banks of the river towards the bridge of the old N340 road.

We have to keep our eyes well open here as most of the birds living in the vegetation are very shy and elusive. Despite Cetti's Warblers are much easier to be heard than seen, this is one of the best places

we know for visual contact with them. There will be lots of juvenile Reed Warblers begging from everywhere in the sedge. Zitting Cisticolas are not particularly shy but are so small that we have to pay attention to every little movement in the reeds, which may

also end up giving a Nightingale. The high pitched calls of Penduline Tits will betray their presence in the bulrushes; it is time then to check the spikes of the bulrushes where they get part of their food from.



The Spotted Flycatchers are much more obliging and they show up sitting on top of the bushes, the lower branches of the trees or even the fences around the farmlands, where they start their flights from in search for insects.

The big poplars closer to the road and the bridge host Collared and Turtle Doves, and also Isabelline Warblers which can be easily confused with the Reed ones.



As August goes on, the summer visitors of this fantastic spot will leave, and the chance will be higher to find the Bluethroat, one of our wintering gems here, as well as other birds on passage like Pied Flycatcher, Whinchat or Willow Warbler.

PHOTOS:

1. Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*).
2. Fishing boat returning to La Caleta Harbour at dawn.
3. Mouth of Rio Velez.
4. Foreground: Audouin's Gulls (*Ichthyaetus audouinii*).
5. Mediterranean Gulls (*Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*).
6. Sanderling (*Calidris alba*).
7. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*).
8. Farms.
9. Riverside vegetation.
10. Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*)
11. Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*).
12. Penduline Tit (*Remiz pendulinus*).
13. Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*).
14. Isabelline Warbler (*Iduna opaca*).