



STAGE 32

Ojén - Mijas

LOCATION

Stage 32 is the longest of the Great Malaga Path stages, covering almost **40 km**. It begins in the western part of Ojén, in the Almadán area, where you need to take a forest track. The stage ends in the northern part of Mijas village, in limestone mountain surroundings similar to the starting point. The end of Stage 32 is marked by the chapel called Ermita del Calvario where you walk down to the village centre. Between the mountain chains of the Sierra Blanca and the Sierra de Mijas, which respectively mark the beginning and the end of the stage, you will be crossing the Sierra de Alpujata, composed of noticeably orange-coloured peridotite rock.



Ruined farmhouse at Mirador de Las Águilas. PHOTO: ARM

DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

This text, describing Stage 32, would have been completely different if not for the many forest fires which have happened during the recent years, the 2012 being the most memorable due to its magnitude. The fires in the summer of 2014 have also contributed to the changed look of the area. Along

DID YOU KNOW?

The surroundings of the Strait of Gibraltar are a strategic point for the hundreds of thousands of **soaring birds** every summer. The site's geographical location causes all of the Western Europe's migrants to gather here in order to cross over to the African continent. Soaring birds use thermals to travel, in this way maximizing the energy intended for migration voyages. Thermals do not form over the sea surface since water absorbs the Sun's heat, consequently these birds need to look for narrow channels where they can minimise, as much as possible, the distance they have to fly over water. Stage 32 provides an opportunity to enjoy the migration of many soaring bird species, which include the Black Kite, Osprey, Booted and Short-toed Eagle and Sparrowhawk. The most suitable spot to do that is the Mirador de las Águilas. TEXT: ARM



Canary Island Pines sprouting new shoots after the fire. PHOTO: ARM

the major part of the stage forest bird communities have been, quite simply, ruined, and where there used to be well established populations of Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Nuthatches, Long-tailed Tits and Eurasian Jays, nowadays you can just see, with a bit of luck, Crested Larks, Stonechats, Sardinian and Dartford Warblers, Goldfinches, Linnets, Rock

Buntings and Swifts pursuing insects in flight. In spite of this, good stands of cork oak can be found along the way and you will come across some scrub and isolated trees, mainly Canary Island pines and eucalyptus, which harbour long-established birdlife. Both in Ojén and in Mijas you can enjoy the typical urban birds and in the cultivated areas you may be able to discover species which, possibly, have found here an environment closest to the pre-fire woodland.

"No entry" waymark placed in the section affected by the 2012 fire.

PHOTO: ARM



HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

In Ojén you will have an opportunity to see such urban-dwelling birds as Collared Dove, Pallid and Common Swift, Barn Swallow, House Martin, Spotless and Common Starling, House Sparrow, Black Redstart in winter and White Wagtail and Meadow Pipit on the outskirts of the village close to water. Very soon the first orchards appear, some of them including tropical fruit trees, and you can see the

View of Sierra Alpujata from Mirador de Las Águilas. PHOTO: ARM



Common Blackbird, European Robin, Sardinian Warbler, Great Tit and finches such as Goldfinch, Serin, Greenfinch and Common Chaffinch. The areas of scrub which follow next, the domain of Mediterranean dwarf palm, juniper, gorse and esparto grass, hold such species as Turtle Dove, Red-necked Nightjar, Bee-eater, Crested Lark, Common Stonechat, Song Thrush, Zitting Cisticola, Dartford Warbler, Melodious Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Woodchat Shrike and Rock Bunting. As Stage 32 continues, it crosses a stand of cork where you can also see Blue Tit, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper and Eurasian Jay. Starting from the area called Cordobachina, the first signs of



Booted Eagle. PHOTO: JW

Short-toed Eagle. PHOTO: ARM



the past forest fires mentioned earlier are becoming visible. From this point, along a good stretch of the stage, the prevailing vegetation consists of sprouting Canary Island pines and eucalyptus trees which have survived the flames. In spite of the efforts to reforest the area, it will take years for the Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Nuthatches and Long-tailed Tits to inhabit the place again and to create stable populations. Surprisingly, Booted and Short-toed Eagles as well as Goshawks and Sparrowhawks continue to be seen here, also Green Woodpeckers and Golden Orioles are still heard around the streams. In spring of 2014 it was confirmed that a pair of Short-toed Eagles nested and reproduced atop a burnt tree. Similarly, a pair of Bonelli's



Black Kite. PHOTO: JLM

Eagle breeds along Stage 32, using a cork oak tree which has survived the 2012 fire.

The southern slopes of Sierra Alpujata and Sierra Blanca are good areas to see soaring birds on migration and one of the best viewpoints is located at the Cerro del Pulpito, only a few metres away from The Great Malaga Path, not far from the “centro de tratamiento y rehabilitación contra la drogadicción” (drug addiction rehabilitation and treatment centre).



Egyptian Vulture and Short-toed Eagle. PHOTO: ARM

The *Additional Information* section contains description of the site. The site also provides a chance to see the Eagle Owl, Raven, Peregrine Falcon, Black Wheatear, and, before the fire, the scarce Bullfinch used to be present during winter season. The downhill section leading from the viewpoint has also been burnt; the track is lined with recovering Canary Island pines all the way up to the Entrerríos area. In this area the riverbed forms several pools which contain water year round and you will note how the diversity and abundance of birds is significantly higher compared to the previous part of the stage. Wood Pigeon, Turtle Dove, Cuckoo, Grey Wagtail, Common Nightingale, Cetti’s Warbler, Blackcap and Spotted Flycatcher appear, so does the Cirl Bunting and again Tits and Finches turn up, as they did at the start of Stage 32.



Common Redstart. PHOTO: JLM

From this point to Sierra de Mijas you will come across gorse and broom scrub harbouring Sardinian Warbler and Dartford Warbler and species typical of open spaces. Ermita del Calvario chapel, surrounded by large stone pine trees, marks the arrival in Mijas. Walking down to the village again you can see birds which are typically found in populated areas.

T I M I N G

This is a very long stage but most of it can be done by car. Considering the current status of the area due to the fires in the past, it is recommended to birdwatch around the sites where some trees remain. This can be done year round, and from mid August to the end of September you can visit the Mirador de las Aguilas in order to enjoy the spectacle of migration of raptors and Black Storks.

N A T U R A L V A L U E S

Sierra Alpujata forms another peroditite massif, similar to Sierra Bermeja and it shares some of the endemic species typical of soils rich in

heavy metals. Along the section which crosses Sierra Alpujata you can encounter, among other species, many specimens of *Armeria colorata*, *Staehelina baetica* and *Silene inaperta* subsp. *serpentinicola*.

A D D I T I O N A L I N F O R M A T I O N

The viewpoint "Mirador de las Aguilas", as christened by Paco Ríos and Blas López, is an excellent place to enjoy raptor migration, mainly in autumn. This site provides a highly representative sample of birds which can be seen at the Strait of Gibraltar itself.

For many years, Paco and Blas, with the help of other birdwatchers, have been tracking migration passages in the area, revealing the magnitude of the bird migration phenomenon around the coastal mountain chains of Malaga. Black Storks, Ospreys, Egyptian Vultures, Griffon Vultures, Honey Buzzards, Black Kites, Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Sparrowhawks, Montagu's, Marsh and Hen Harriers, Lesser Kestrels, Hobbies, Eleonora's Falcons and Peregrine Falcons are the species which can be seen merely a few kilometres away from heavily populated areas, set in beautiful landscapes. ○



Honey Buzzard on migration.
PHOTO: JWV