



STAGE 2



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Rincón de la Victoria - Vélez Málaga

LOCATION

The second stage of the walk starts at Arroyo Totalán, where the promenade called Paseo Marítimo de la Cala del Moral begins, and it finishes in Vélez-Málaga.

This **24, 4 km** long section will give you the opportunity to cover part of the western shore of the Axarquía, from the urban coastal core of Rincón de la Victoria, to the fertile land dedicated to cultivating crops and passes through the Río Vélez, the widest river of the eastern coast in the province.

DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

Amongst the representative birdlife of this stage of the walk coastal species play



Arabic watchtower called Torre del Jaral.
PHOTO: JSM

the main role, considering that you will be walking along the shore itself starting from Benajárfé. As well, there are birds typical to human-influenced environments and cultivated areas. The most interesting place for birdwatching along this stage is around the Río Vélez. The varied landscape and the role played by the sea and the mouth of the river increment quite significantly the diversity of species you will be able to observe.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Torre del Jaral was the chosen site in the Iberian Peninsula to track bird migration using radar technique between 1996 and 1997. A group of Swiss researchers led by Dr. Felix Liechti focused on night migration, although they also studied different aspects of daytime migration and, especially, the birds of prey. They found very significant differences in behaviour of different species during the post-breeding migration. Whilst Black Kites followed the coastline towards the Strait of Gibraltar, Ospreys, the three species of Harriers and falcon family in general flew over this part of the Axarquía direction south, directly to Africa from the coast of Málaga. The Honey Buzzards mostly had a tendency to follow the coast, like the kites, however some individuals used the strategy of the direct southwards crossing. TEXT: ARM



Adult Audouin's and Yellow-legged Gulls.

PHOTO: ARM

HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

Most easily observed species at the beginning of Stage 2 are mainly the gulls and urban-dwelling birds. The Yellow-legged Gull is the most frequent one and can be seen all year round, however, from the beginning of autumn, throughout most of winter until spring you will be able to see the Lesser Black-backed Gulls as well (same size but with a darker back) and Black-headed Gulls (visibly smaller than the previous two). At the beaches of Benjarafe you will be able to see Audouin's Gulls from mid May to November and Mediterranean Gulls and Sandwich Terns in winter season and on passage. If you decide to devote some more time to the large flocks of seagulls which gather on the shore along this stage of the walk, with a bit of luck you will have a chance to

discover a couple of species more (for example, some individuals of Common Gull or Great Black-backed Gull after the severe winter storms, or the Little Gull on migration).

As soon as you embark on Stage 2, around the El Cantal tunnels, you will be able to see winter roosts of Crag Martins. They come from the rocky areas of the province and probably from further north down to the coast to look for food and milder temperatures. You can also spot the Blue Rock Thrush around here.

Other typically coastal species you can see during this section would be the Sanderlings on the shore and Albatrosses flying over the sea, keeping a certain distance from the beach; both can be seen in winter.

Amongst the urban-dwellers there is the Rock Dove (domestic variety), Eurasian Collared Dove, Monk Parakeet,



Crag Martin. PHOTO: JLM

Robin, Stonechat, Spanish Sparrow and Woodchat Shrike.

TIMING

Majority of Stage 2 of the walk is influenced by the usual annual variations in bird species; the main bulk of the species is seen year round and some are typical of

Pallid Swift, Barn Swallow, Blackbird, Sardinian Warbler, Spotless Starling, House Sparrow and Serin; they are joined in winter months by White Wagtail, Black Redstart and Common Chiffchaff.

Once you pass by Benajarafe and cross the Ibero stream and leave the first line of the beach behind, you will encounter the first cultivated areas which cause other species of birds to show up. The abandoned olive groves which you will cross as you walk up towards the Jaral tower and the orchards before arriving at Almayate are the sites to observe Cattle Egret, Common Kestrel, Blackcap, Crested Lark, European Turtle Dove, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Great Tit, House Martin, Jackdaw, Little Owl, Red-necked Nightjar,

winter months such as Meadow Pipits and Black Redstarts, then others are typical of the summer, such as the swifts. It is during the migration when the section of the stage which crosses the Río Vélez becomes more interesting, especially if you get close to the mouth of the river. This is a place of great value for the birds, allowing them to rest during their long journeys.



Baillon's Crake has breed in the mouth of the Velez river. PHOTO: JB



NATURAL VALUES

Stage 2 leads through the El Cantal cliffs, where you can see striking rock formations showing the erosion of the shoreline; you can also encounter a species of plant endemic to Malaga, *Limonium malacitanum*. Another compelling place is the Almayate Rock, an element of great natural value in the Bajo Vélez complex; it stands out from other geomorphologic elements because of its colour and steepness. Here you can see the quarries which used to supply building material for the Malaga Cathedral and in the surroundings there are valuable archaeological sites, especially the Phoenician city Los Toscanos. On the vertical walls of the Almayate Rock there are approximately 4-6 breeding pairs of Common Kestrel,

which could be considered a colony, keeping in mind that the Common Kestrel normally tends to nest alone whilst the Lesser Kestrel nests in colonies.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Although The Great Malaga Path does not pass through the mouth of Río Vélez, the place is well worth a detour of about 500 metres to birdwatch. The mouth of the Vélez river is important at the level of the whole Malaga Province as it harbours a high diversity of species throughout the year in quite a limited space. A bird count conducted in the area in late 1990's and at the beginning of the next decade in the year 2000, 193 species have been recorded at the mouth of the river itself and the surrounding crop fields.



Little Bittern, male. PHOTO: JLM



Great Cormorant drying its wings. PHOTO: JLM

On the river bank where Torre del Mar is located, there is a birdwatching viewpoint from which you have a good view of the final section of the river. Here you can mainly watch the aquatic birds whose numbers depend on the time of the year. Migration time can bring some real surprises. You can see various duck species, grebes, shearwaters, cormorants, herons (from the tiny Little Bittern to Purple Heron), flamingos, birds of prey, crakes, coots, rails, skuas, different species of gulls, nightjars, swifts, hoopoes, bee-eaters, rollers, and a large number of passerine birds. Waders deserve a special mention, they are usually associated with wetlands and known

for their long migrations; the mouth of the river Vélez is possibly the best place in the province to watch them. During certain times in autumn or spring about 20 different species of waders have been recorded. As far as passerines, there are small numbers of Sand Martin during the breeding season, Moustached Warbler during some winter seasons and Penduline Tit, which has even started breeding in the area.

As an example of how valuable the area is for those birdwatchers looking for uncommon species, in late June 2014 a sighting of an individual of the Red-knobbed Coot was recorded.