



Sierra de Huma

El Charro

Puñasa de
Bosaso

Bermejo

Caracuet

Sierra de
Añab

Sierra de Baños

STAGE

21

Cuevas de
Ardales

Ardales





STAGE 21

Estación de El Chorro - Ardales

LOCATION

The platform of the El Chorro station is the setting where you begin Stage 21. Once you cross Río Guadalhorce the path leads uphill and you will be able to enjoy the best views of the El Chorro complex. A track takes you from the area of Bobastro ruins to Ardales village through grain fields which clearly used to be woodland; a total of **16, 5 km** before you arrive in the Río Turón valley.



View of Caminito del Rey. PHOTO: ARM

DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

The initial stretch of Stage 21 is characterised by the large rock faces which hold typical rock-dwellers. Then, the defining feature of Stage 21 becomes the reservoir Tajo de la Encantada

which will add water birds to your list. The first uphill section takes through a pine wood with Mediterranean Dwarf Palm, retama bushes and a few savin junipers. Once you reach the viewpoint area the terrain changes to farmland; mainly almond groves and scattered farmhouses adjacent to grazing land. The former woodland character of this area becomes very evident with the mid-sized holm oaks which are still trying to claim their territory. Walking through fields and stretches of re-forested pine wood you will reach your destination which is the Ardales village.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the Tajo de la Encantada, situated to the west of Mesa de Villaverde, you can see rocky crags made of sandstone and limestone conglomerates of various grain size, mixed with chalk and schist. The erosion caused by wind and water has created various tafonis (lacework of round openings in the rocks) shaped like caves, alveoli (sockets) or a honey-comb, which characterise this rocky panorama. The vegetation is mostly composed of scrub with lentiscs, dwarf palm, savin juniper, retama, purple phlomis and Aleppo pines. TEXT: SMB



Spotless Starlings. PHOTO: JLM



HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

Birds of prey, such as Griffon Vulture, Bonelli's Eagle, Peregrine Falcon and Common Kestrel are common in the area at the beginning of Stage 21, as well as Cormorant, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Kingfisher at the section where you cross the river Guadalhorce. Around

the train station Eurasian Collared Dove, Swifts, Barn Swallow House and Crag Martin, Spotless Starling, House Sparrow and finches such as Goldfinch and Greenfinch indicate the presence of human dwellings, however you can also see woodland birds here due to some forested and

Jay. PHOTO: JLM



Black Vulture surrounded by Griffon Vultures. PHOTO: JLM





A group of vultures feeding on a carcass. PHOTO: JLM



scrub areas (e.g.: Sardinian Warbler, Blackcap, Great Tit, Crossbill, Common Chaffinch and Rock Bunting).

On the way up you will be flanking a few rocky outcrops which gives you access to high rock dwellers such as Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear and Red-billed Chough. Higher up, the *mirador* (viewpoint) is an exceptional site to delight in birds of prey in flight, also Swifts and Choughs. Once you embark upon the part of the footpath which leads along hills dotted with houses, fields, patches of replanted pine trees and lone holm oaks, it will be the Eurasian Jay which will be drawing your attention the most, its visible white rump and its loud call. Moreover, good numbers of Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Serins and Common Linnets will be keeping you company



Mistle Thrush. PHOTO: JLM





Raven. PHOTO: JLM

during this stretch of the path, joined by such species as Little Owl, Red-legged Partridge, Sardinian Warbler, Great Tit, Spotless Starling and Common Chaffinch. Along this section there are various watercourses which allow you to see Song Thrushes, Redwings, European Robins, Blackcaps, Golden Orioles and Crossbills. Plus, the Short-toed Eagle is a frequent visitor to the area in spring and summer months. Golden and Bonelli's Eagle use these slopes to search for food. If you walk along here at the break of the dawn or at dusk you may be able to hear Scops Owl and Eagle Owl.

T I M I N G

Stage12 has features which make it recommendable year round except for the hottest months. Winter months, however, produce bigger numbers of birds.



Crossbill. PHOTO: JLM



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Caminito del Rey runs through an area of exceptional beauty characterised by sheer rock faces and great heights. This is a walkway, about a metre wide and three kilometres long, which connects the area of the station with the reservoirs, crossing the Desfiladero de los Gaitanes gorge at height of over 100 metros at times. The walkway was built between 1901 and 1905, and it was not until the year 1921 when King Alfonso XIII, great-grand father of Felipe VI, opened the path. It used to be abandoned for a long time and as it had deteriorated it had to be closed about 25 years ago. In 2014 the walkway had been refurbished and it was re-opened in March 2015. This walk has all the ingredients to become a “must

do” which will doubtlessly promote outdoors tourism in Malaga.

NATURAL VALUES

The sheer rock faces around the Tajo de La Encantada support highly interesting plants of very limited distribution, as is the case of the endemic *Rupicapnos africana*. ◉



Woodchat Shrike. PHOTO: JLM



Desfiladero de los Gaitanes canyon. PHOTO: DPM