



STAGE

22



STAGE 22

Ardales - El Burgo

LOCATION

The Río Turón marks the start and the end of the **22,8 km** long Stage 22 which begins in the centre of Ardales. You need to find the bridge called Puente de la Molina, Roman in origin, from where you need to continue following a track parallel to the river. The end of the stage is in El Burgo; once you reach the tarmac section you must turn right to access the village.



Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*). PHOTO: JLM

DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

The beginning of stage 22 around the Río Turón constitutes a seasonally flooding area which can hold a great number of water birds. Almost as soon as you set off along the path you will

move away from the river bed and pass through grain fields, which then give way to a mature pine wood within a few kilometres. Juniper and a fine scrub prosper underneath the tallest pines. During the whole stage you can make out the shapes of high mountain peaks in the distance, from the summits of Sierra Huma at the beginning to the Sierras de Alcaparaín, Ortegícar and Prieta along the footpath. This section of the Great Malaga Path marks the beginning of the mountainous stages

DID YOU KNOW?

The **Eurasian Jay** belongs to the corvid family and in spite of being a very retiring bird, it can be quite noisy. Its main source of food is acorns and consequently this bird is present around trees belonging to the *Quercus* genus. The bird has a very wholesome habit of hiding acorns by burying them in the ground, which makes this species one of the biggest allies of reforestation because it only consumes a small part of all the acorns it buries. If you have a chance to have a glimpse of the Eurasian Jay up close, you will be able to notice the striking blue wing panel. TEXT: ARM



Alternating fields and pine woods with the Almorchón de Gutiérrez in the background on the right. PHOTO: ARM

where *sierra* bird species again make an appearance.

Once you reach the maximum height of this stage where pine trees are joined by holm oaks, grain fields will be the predominant landscape again, with species of birds favouring open spaces. Getting closer to El Burgo you will mainly see orchards and vegetable plots and with the addition of a few streams the task of birdwatching here is quite entertaining.

Little Owl. PHOTO: JLM



HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

In Ardales, specifically around the river, you will find the typical urban dwellers such as Pallid Swift, Spotless and Common Starling, Barn and Red-rumped Swallow, House and Crag Martin. These species visit the river to feed on insects and to drink water; flying low they stick just their lower mandible in the water with a precision down to a millimetre.

Red-rumped Swallow. PHOTO: JLM





Spectacled Warbler. PHOTO: JLM



Puente la Molina where Stage 22 starts. PHOTO: ARM

Such a big concentration of these birds gives you a good chance to spend some time watching if you are not sure how to identify them. From the bridge itself and underneath it, you will have a chance to see Mallard, a few Cormorants and waders such as Little Ringed Plover and the slender Black-winged Stilt. The presence of a patchwork of grain fields and olive groves, and a small wood of

holm oak at the beginning of stage 22, favours diversity of species which, as you will be able to notice, is very high. Red-necked Nightjar is abundant in the area, Hoopoe, Crested Lark, Common Nightingale, Black Redstart, Common Stonechat, Common Blackbird, Zitting Cisticola, Cetti's Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Blackcap, Common Chiffchaff, Firecrest, Spotted Flycatcher, Great Tit,



Iberian Grey Shrike. PHOTO: JLM



Bee-eaters. PHOTO: JB

Woodchat Shrike, Golden Oriole, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin and Corn Bunting are the most commonly occurring species. Around the castle, Castillo del Turón, you may startle one or two Little Owls perched on a pile of rocks, as well as the Blue Rock Thrush or the Eagle Owl in the castle itself. At the transition point before entering the pine wood, Red-legged Partridges are common and

once you are surrounded by trees, the presence of Coal Tit indicates the type of wood you are walking through. This pine wood also harbours Booted Eagle, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Common Blackbird, Song Thrush, Sardinian Warbler, Blackcap, and Southern Grey Shrike in open areas, Eurasian Jay, Common Chaffinch, Crossbill and Common Linnet, among other species. Having reached about 800 metres above the sea level, Blue Tit and Spectacled Warbler indicate the presence of holm oak and scrub. If your target species are large raptors, Stage 22 provides good sites especially that it runs through borders of different habitats. An occasional look at the sky and scanning the high ridges with your binoculars could produce sightings of Golden Eagle and Bonelli's Eagle as well as individuals of Griffon Vulture.

Cerro de la Escribana, Sierra de Ortegicar, seen from the path. PHOTO: ARM





View of Sierra Prieta and Sierra de las Nieves from the path. PHOTO: ARM

Having left the woody area behind, the path takes you through grain fields lined with large retama bushes. In this area you will pass by on your left a clump of cane with clearly visible and abundant Corn Buntings, together with European Turtle Dove, Zitting Cisticola, Stonechat, and many other previously named species. The rocky peaks on your right are the abode of the Eagle Owl, which, together with Common Kestrel, Western Jackdaw and Red-billed Chough make it clear that you are now close to rocky areas. Once you reach



Corn Bunting singing. PHOTO: ARM

the stream Arroyo de los Niños, Bee-eaters, Melodious Warbler, Shrikes, Starlings and Cirl Buntings will keep you company until you enter the more inhabited area with houses and fields; here the passerine community is visibly richer. If you choose spring-summer to do this route, House Martins will be the first birds to welcome you to El Burgo, at the banks of the same river you had left behind in Ardales.

TIMING

The diversity of species is distinctly higher in spring, given the diversity of habitats the stage takes you to and the presence of summer visitors.

NATURAL VALUES

At the beginning and the end of Stage 22, during migration periods you can see concentrations of soaring birds, especially birds of prey, as well as large numbers of Bee-eaters. The Spanish Ibex occupies the many high mountain areas along the stage and you will be able to find signs and tracks of carnivorous mammals such as Egyptian Mongoose, Stone Marten, Fox and also Otter around Río Turón.



Bird's-eye view of a section of Stage 22 of the Great Malaga Path (Ardales-El Burgo).

On the right Castillo del Turón, on the left the footpath and in the background Ardales, Embalse del Conde de Guadalhorce and the Sierra Huma. ФУТО: JP



