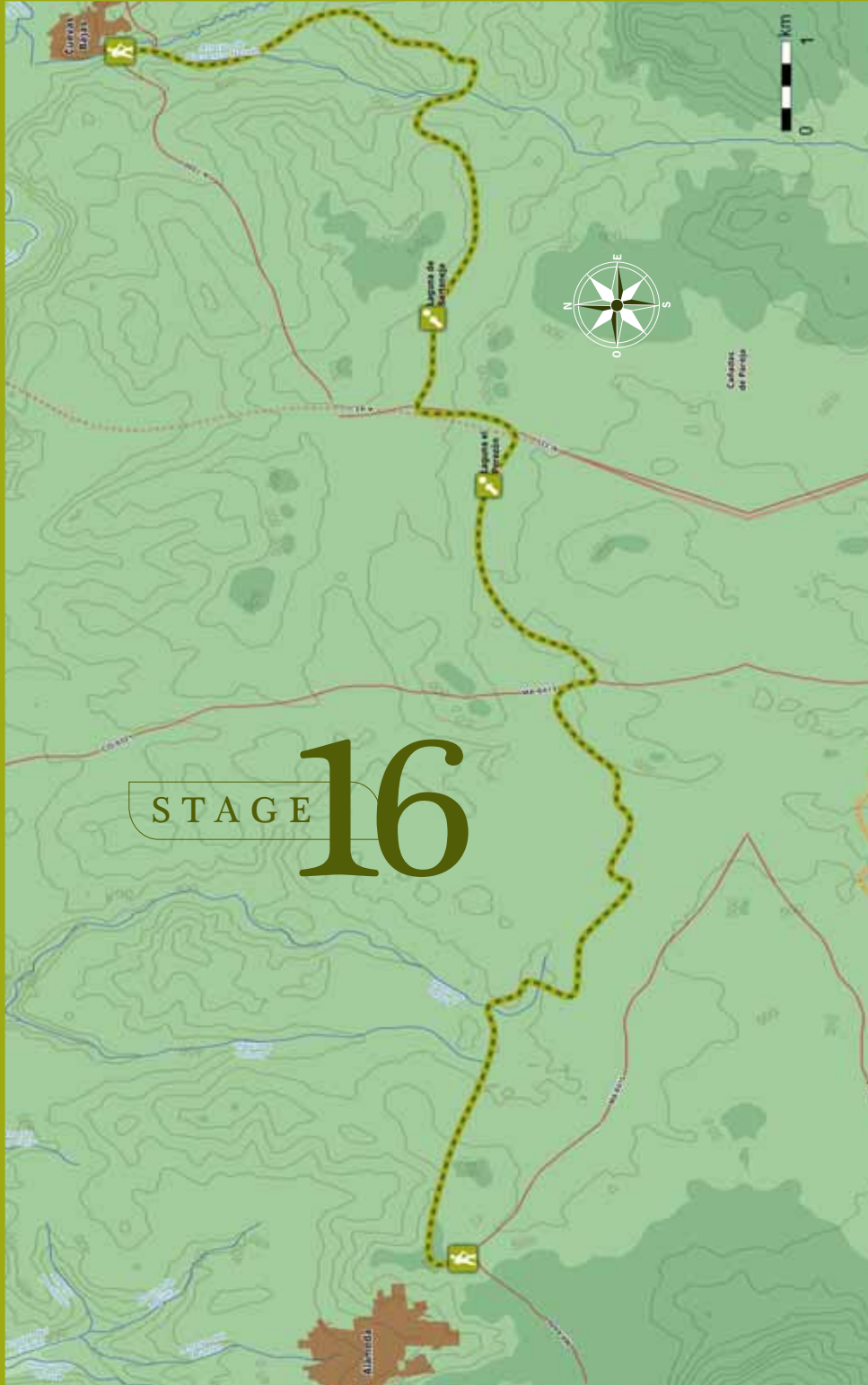


STAGE 16





STAGE 16

Cuevas Bajas - Alameda

LOCATION

Stage 16 starts off by following the stream Arroyo de Barranco Hondo, in the southern tip of Cuevas Bajas. This stage is **21, 2 km** long, it takes you to the northern part of Antequera region and its predominant type of landscape is agricultural. Stage 16 ends at the intersection of El Ventorrillo, in the vicinity of Alameda centre.

DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

The first steps of Stage 16 take you along the stream Arroyo de Barranco Hondo and very soon the path enters an olive grove again, which will keep you company, alternating with a patchwork of dry crop



A patchwork of farmland, chickpeas and olive groves. PHOTO: ARM

farmland, till the end of this stage. Close to the Cortijo de la Sarteneja you will find seasonally flooded areas which, when they contain water, support waterfowl species providing contrast to the type of birdlife seen so far. Once you cross the motorway (A-45) you will enter the mix of olive groves and grain fields again and a small island of a holm oak wood which adds to the diversity of birdlife. The final section leads through an olive grove which is only interrupted by the appearance of the typical farmhouses of the area.

DID YOU KNOW?

Although in the strict sense of the word a steppe is an ecosystem characterised by permanent herbaceous vegetation, in Andalucía and Malaga this type of environment does not exist. It is simulated by hilly treeless landscapes which normally are cultivated. The "Malaga steppe" supports a particular type of fauna which is restricted to its northernmost part and constitutes a unique community at the European level. Currently, most of the fauna requires special conservation measures to ensure its populations are maintained; Little Bustard and Montagu's Harrier are the examples of this type of fauna which can be seen at Stage 16. TEXT: ARM



Olive grove environment. PHOTO: ARM

HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

Swallows and House Martins, together with Starlings, Sparrows and increasingly common Eurasian Collared Dove are probably the first species you will see; however the fact that there is

Bee-eaters. PHOTO: JLM



a stream at the very beginning of the walk will cause your bird list to grow considerably. Close to the river more birds appear, such as Nightingale, Stonechat, Cetti's Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Great Tit, as well as finches typical to this part of Stage 16 (mainly Goldfinch, Greenfinch and Serin). Even though this is a river environment, the domestic variety of Rock Dove breed under the low bridge you will be crossing and they fly out as you walk past. At this point you are entering an olive grove and the most common species become the Red-legged Partridge, European Turtle Dove, Hoopoe, Crested Lark, Song Thrush, Common Blackbird, European Robin, Blackcap, Common Chiffchaff, Great Tit, Azure-winged Magpie and Corn Bunting, together with the previously mentioned birds. In spring you can also find Bee-eaters and the three species of Swifts most frequently seen in the province (Pallid, Common and Alpine), these birds use the areas above watercourses to find food.



You can also see large raptors such as Short-toed, Bonelli's, Booted and Golden Eagle, drawn by the presence of prey, as well as Common Buzzard and Common Kestrel; in spring and summer you can find Montagu's Harrier, a species which breeds in the surroundings of the path. Once you reach Barranco Hondo, you will walk past, on your left, a patch of dry farming land (mostly cereal or chickpeas, depending on the time of the year) which represents a steppe environment in the province; here you can see the Montagu's Harrier, Lesser, Kestrel, Stone-curlew, Little Bustard, Skylark and Calandra Lark. Other species occurring in the area are Common Kestrel, Barn Owl, Little Owl, Eagle Owl, Red-legged Partridge,



Nightingale. PHOTO: JLM

Montagu's Harrier. PHOTO: JLM





Young olive trees planted where other dry crops used to be. PHOTO: ARM



Quail, Zitting Cisticola, Woodchat Shrike, Raven and however it is very uncommon, you might be able to see the scarce Black-bellied Sandgrouse. In spring and in June you will be able to see Gull-billed Terns which spread out from Laguna de Fuente de Piedra looking for food. In the wetland at Cortijo de La Sarteneja flocks of Mallard and Coot gather in winter. You can also see Little Grebe, Grey Heron, Moorhen, Mallard, and Golden Plover in winter, and even Greater Flamingos. Although the rest of Stage 16 leads through an olive grove, it is the area just after the Cortijo de La Capilla which, during breeding season, harbours a population of the scarce Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin. The existence of a holm oak formation favours the occurrence of typical woodland passerines in the area such as Great Tit, Woodchat Shrike and Common Chaffinch. In winter Common Buzzards gather around here, probably coming from the north, and it is not uncommon to see the Northern Harrier, Red Kite and Merlin.

TIMING

Stage 16 is highly recommended during the whole year except for the period between July and October when the temperatures are high around here and the diversity and abundance of birds is lower.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The track which you pass by on your left in Barranco Hondo climbs along the valley and joins the MA-206 road, where



Little Owl. PHOTO: JLM

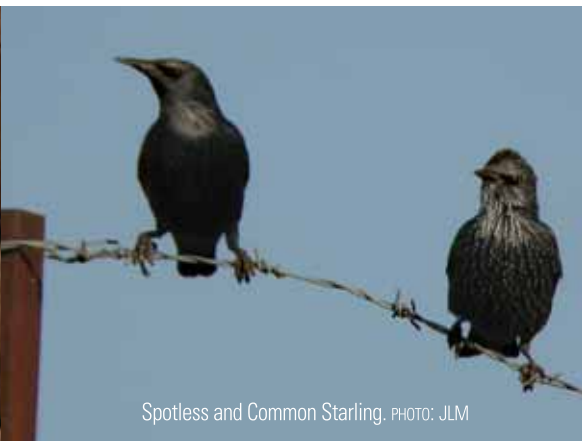


Red-legged Partridges. PHOTO: JLM



it leads to a breeding area of Montagu's Harrier with an established colony of 8-12 pairs. This uphill track is also a good site to see other steppe species. The municipal district of Alameda and the village of Humilladero, where the stage ends, share the Reserva Natural Laguna de la Ratoosa, a brackish seasonal fed by rainwater. It is surrounded by farmland with little vegetation on the shores and it supports a high diversity

of waterfowl species when it contains water. You may be able to see the Little and Black-necked Grebe, Grey Heron, Greater Flamingo, various species of ducks, (Gadwall, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Red-crested Pochard, and Common Pochard), Eurasian Marsh Harrier, Moorhen, Coot, Black-winged Stilt, Lapwing and gulls: Lesser Black-backed, Yellow-legged and Black-headed, among others. ○



Spotless and Common Starling. PHOTO: JLM

These are specimens of Spotless Starling and Common Starling showing the differences in plumage. From further away the Common Starling seems to be grey, whilst the Spotless Starling continues looking black.