



Natural values

We will drive across the Antequera District “campiña” (farmlands) in search for the Little Bustard, a gem of Malaga’s birdlife that strives to survive in the last open fields amongst the expanding olive groves.

Our trip travels around the northeast of the Antequera District, from the heart of a fertile valley to a carpet of olive groves at the border with Cordoba province.

Some of the birds we could find during our trip are Red-legged Partridge, Quail, Marsh Harrier, Montagu’s Harrier, Common Buzzard, Kestrel, Lesser Kestrel, Little Bustard, Little Owl, Swift, Pallid Swift, Hoopoe, Crested Lark, Barn Swallow, Red-rumped Swallow, Blackbird, Zitting Cisticola, Woodchat Shrike, Azure-winged Magpie, Raven, Spotless Starling, House Sparrow, Linnet, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin and Corn Bunting. If La Herrera and La Sarteneja lakes do have some water, we can also spot waterfowl, waders and seagulls.

How to get there

Type “Venta San Isidro, Los Llanos de Antequera” in Google Maps. Follow the signs to Los Llanos de Antequera from A-92 motorway. They will lead us to a small hamlet with big pine trees at the entrance where we can spot the Azure-winged Magpies. The street bends to the right into the village and we will see the Venta San Isidro on the left. The street ends into a dirt track; set the counter to cero here.

The Laguna de la Herrera



The track goes along an aqueduct on the right and a row of cypresses on the left. The cypresses host Spotless Starling, Greenfinch, Serin, Chaffinch and House Sparrow. The arable land will give us the first Crested Larks, while Corn Buntings sing from the bushes



and Zitting Cisticolas mark their territories with their typical zit-zit flights.



We turn left at km. 1.0 into another track that leads through very open fields inhabited by Red-legged Partridges, Crested Larks and Linnets. We can stop and have a look at any time, specially in front of farmhouses where we can spot Kestrels, Lesser Kestrels and Little Owls, and also Common Buzzards and even Sparrowhawks in the trees surrounding the buildings. We can

also find Marsh and Montagu’s Harriers as well as Barn Swallows, Swifts and Pallid Swifts airborne. When we see distant kestrels hovering and hunting in groups, chances are that they are Lesser Kestrels.





We turn right at km. 3.2 junction. The track goes along a ditch on the left where House Sparrows, Goldfinches and Corn Buntings are common in the reeds. There is a little bridge over the ditch at km. 3.7 from which we can look around, specially towards a stand of pine trees in search for raptors.



Some 600 metres ahead, we reach La Herrera Lake. It is an extremely temporary lake that can be dry for years depending on the rainfall. After wet winters, it may host any of the birds you could find in the nearby Fuente de



Piedra Lake, including Greater Flamingo, Black-headed Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Mallard, Black-winged Stilt, White and Yellow Wagtails and, in general, any waterfowl, wader and songbird on passage.



Cartaojal

The track reaches road N-331 at km. 6.4 where we turn right into the road. We turn left at km. 8.5 following the signs to Cartaojal. Once at Cartaojal, we drive across the main road towards a junction with Calle Iglesia where we will turn left. Following this street we will get out of Cartaojal (we go straight ahead at km. 16.3) into road MA-209 to a landscape of olive groves mixed with wheat fields which will be the aim of our attention from now on in search for our Little Bustards.



We drive straight ahead at km. 18.8 junction. There is a wheat field at km. 21.5 where we can park in a track on the left to look around. This is a good place for Little Bustards. At this time of year, winter flocks have already dispersed, males are wearing their black “scarves” and defend their territories by standing and calling from any little bush they use to break their silhouettes down not to be discovered.





Again, we drive straight ahead at km. 21.8 junction until we reach another track where we can park aside at km. 22.6 for more Little Bustards and Montagu's Harriers.

Some more points where we have enough room to park out of the road are km. 24.2 (Common Buzzards territory!), km. 24.7 (where we can walk up to a ruined farmhouse in search for Little Owls and Rock Sparrows in the olive grove) and km. 25.4 by a tool house.

Laguna de la Sarteneja

We turn left at the junction with road A-7300 (km. 29.5), go straight on at the roundabout (km. 32.3) and follow the signs for "Vía de Servicio" at the next roundabout (km. 32.5). We will take a track on the left at km. 33.4 with sign posts of the Gran Senda de Malaga. This track can be in very bad conditions after rain so parking aside and walk on can be a good idea.



La Sarteneja Lake is another temporary pool surrounded by olive trees and wheat fields where we can spot more Little Bustards and Montagu's Harriers, as well as the most common aquatic birds like Mallard, Black-headed Gull, Coot, Little Grebe and farmland birds like Common

Buzzard, Red-legged Partridge, Raven and finches. It extends in front of La Sarteneja farmhouse around one km. from the entrance to the track.



PHOTOGRAPHS:

1. Serin (*serinus serinus*)
2. Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*)
3. Llanos de Antequera
4. Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*)
5. Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
6. Corn Bunting (*Miliaria calandra*)
7. Laguna de la Herrera and Peña de los Enamorados (Lovers' Rock)
8. Black-headed Gulls (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)
- 9 – 11. Olive groves and farmland
12. Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*)
13. Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*)

14. Laguna de La Sarteneja

15. Sierra de Arcas from La Sarteneja farmhouse