

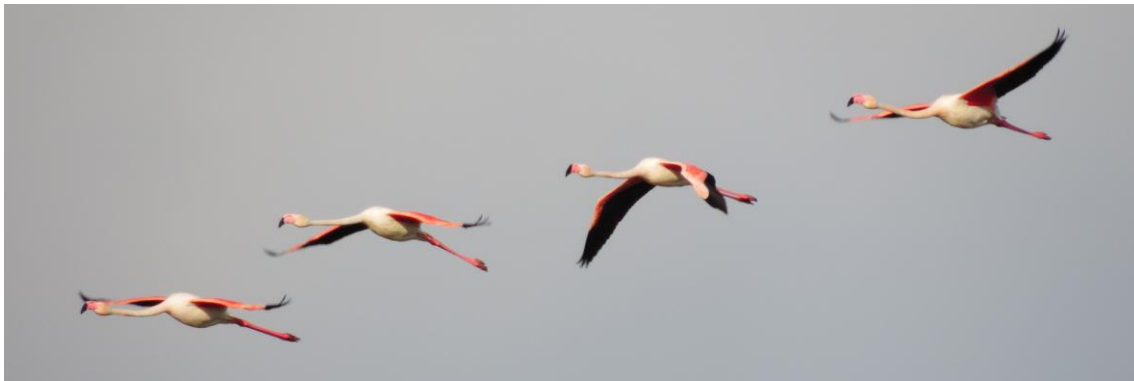


Natural values

The Laguna (lake) de Fuente de Piedra is an endorheic ellipse shaped salty lake of around 6 km. long by 3 km. wide that extends to the southwest of the village of Fuente de Piedra, north of Malaga province. Despite the wide extension of this lake, it is actually a shallow with a very high level of evaporation that usually dries up during the summer months.

The Fuente de Piedra Lake is a nature reserve in the Andalusian Network of Protected Natural Sites, RAMSAR Wetland, as well as Birds Directive Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation of Natura 2000 Network (ES0000033). It hosts the biggest breeding colony of Greater Flamingos in the Iberian Peninsula, and thousands of these stunning birds will come back here in March from other regions of Spain and the north of Africa.

But it is not only Greater Flamingos that we can find here in March. This is a list of some other appealing birds that we can watch in the reserve: Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard, White-headed Duck, Black-necked Grebe, White Stork, Greater Flamingo, Lesser Flamingo, Black Kite, Marsh Harrier, Hen Harrier, Montagu's Harrier, Black-winged Kite, Lesser Kestrel, Purple Swamphen, Crane, Little Bustard, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Stone Curlew, Kentish Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Little Owl, Hoopoe, Wryneck, Crested Lark, Short-toed Lark, Calandra Lark, Red-rumped Swallow, various races of Yellow Wagtail, Bluethroat, Zitting Cisticola, Cetti's Warbler, Iberian Grey Shrike, Spotless Starling, Spanish Sparrow, Serin and Corn Bunting.



How to get there

Type "Centro de Interpretacion de la Laguna, Malaga" in Google Maps. It gives you the location of the Visitors Centre.

The surroundings of the Visitors Centre

As soon as we leave the road MA-454 towards the Visitors Centre, we have to keep our eyes open. If we look to the cultivated plot on the right, we can find Stone Curlews resting on the ground and Lesser Kestrels hovering around the tower, whose holes are





thought for them to nest there. The pool to the left of the access road (*) is the best place for close views of the Greater Flamingos as they otherwise use to be far from our sight in the middle of the lakebed.

(*) The level of water of all the pools and lakes mention in this text is subject to every year particular rainfall. The birds described occur depending on the amount of water at every moment.



Other birds present in this shallow are most of the waders on passage at this time of year (Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff and even Temminck's Stint), the breeding ones like Black-winged Stilts, Avocets and a few Lapwings, Gull-billed Terns and other terns on passage like Whiskered and Black ones. The White Storks that tried to nest in the village in the last years use to feed here too.



After parking the car by the Visitors Centre, we can walk over the wooden bridge (opposite to the pool we have just described) where, if we walk slowly and in silence, we can get very close to the feeding waders, adding Snipes, Little Ringed Plovers and Yellow Wagtails to the list. Trying to identify the different subspecies of Yellow Wagtail present here during the spring passage is a very entertaining birding exercise!



Once we cross the bridge, we can have another look at the plot around the tower where the first Crested Larks will show up. Those willing to do some good "birdwalking", can follow this track towards the Mirador (viewpoint) de la Vicaria. The Tamarisks, fields, ditches and puddles on the way can give us Bluethroat, Marsh Harrier, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Dartford Warbler, Lesser

Kestrel, finches, Spanish Sparrow, Stone Curlews and some Golden Plovers before they depart back to the north.



After crossing back the bridge, we can take the track to the right around the Visitors Centre along the fence of the reserve and the Tamarisks. This is again a place for Bluethroats skulking on the ground between the reeds, Spanish Sparrows and, with a bit of luck, the shy and

extremely mimetic Wryneck. The puddles beyond the line of Tamarisks are worthwhile a close look in search for any “surprise”.



Let’s walk up towards a big Holm Oak in front of the Visitors Centre building. This is the Mirador del Cerro del Palo, built on an old threshing floor, with privileged views over the lake. With the help of the telescope, we will be able to



watch waders, seagulls, terns, ducks and flamingos beyond the fence and the line of Tamarisks. This is the place to try and find the needle in the haystack: the Lesser Flamingo. Unfortunately, they use to be far away from the viewpoint, but you can identify smaller and very pink birds standing among the Greater Flamingos, there they are!



We will now take another path that goes to the Laguneto hide from the viewpoint (to the right as we walked up towards the viewpoint). The Laguneto is a deeper fresh water lake placed between the Visitors Centre and



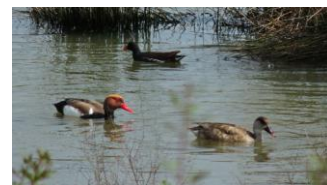
the village. It is the best place to watch all the ducks present in the area, including Red-crested Pochards and White-headed Ducks, Purple Swamphen, Marsh Harrier, grebes, Greater Flamingos, seagulls (specially the Black-headed ones, which will breed in the islands), terns, Black-winged Stilts and Avocets.



The Visitors Centre is worthwhile a visit. The showroom with details

about the Flamingo’s life and breeding is fantastic; there is a

huge window where we can scan the lake from in windy and cold days, lot’s of information about Andalusian wetlands, souvenirs, snacks, soft drinks, coffee and toilets.



The tour around the lake

Driving around the lake will give us the chance to watch some steppe birds and raptors in the farmlands. We will take road MA-454 to the left as we leave the Visitors Centre (VC). Set the counter to cero here. The road is not very busy so we can drive slowly and stop at any of the tracks we will find in case our companions find something.

The first place we can have a look from is the Mirador de la Vicaria, 2.2 km. from the VC. When the lake is full, the flamingos can get very close to the hide. The scrub around is a common resting place for Stone Curlews.

The wheat fields that extend along the road are feeding places for the last Cranes departing to the north at the beginning of March, and the hunting grounds for Hen Harriers that will be replaced by the Montagu's ones coming from Africa during this month.



We will turn left in the junction at km. 5.3, leaving MA-454. The track on the right at km. 6.3 is another good place to stop and search for Crested, Short-toed and Calandra Larks, as well as harriers and Spanish Sparrows.

We will soon get to the Mirador de Cantarranas (km. 7.5), where we can park the car and have a look at the Cantarranas Lake from the view point. This is a good place for waterfowl, Marsh Harrier, Black-winged Kite and Purple Swamphen, though we are far from the water and need the help of the telescope.



The hills opposite the viewpoint used to be the perfect habitat of the Little Bustard before they were planted with olive trees. We will have to wait and see if they will stay in the plots that have not yet been invaded by olive groves.

We will turn left again in the next junction (km. 9.4) into road A-6213. Our next stop will be the Mirador de Las Latas at km. 11.2, which will provide us with wonderful views of the lake from its south west end. Apart from the lake, let's scan the oaks around for Black-winged Kites, Common Buzzards and Iberian Grey Shrikes.

To complete the tour around the lake, we will turn left at km. 12.8, once we drive past a big farmhouse. We can stop again to the left, near a ruined farmhouse at km. 14.2 for another look to the lake and farmlands around.

Following this road, we will be back to the Visitors Centre in 15 minutes by taking a track to the left at km. 19.4, just before the road crosses the railway.



PHOTOGRAPHS:

1. Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)
2. Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*)
3. Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)
4. Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)
5. White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*)
6. Yellow Wagtail, Iberian race (*Motacilla flava iberiae*)
7. Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)
8. Curlew Sandpipers (*Calidris ferruginea*)
9. Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*)
10. Mirador del Cerro del Palo
11. Gull-billed Terns (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)
12. "Wheel" of Shovelers (*Anas clypeata*)
13. Laguneto
14. Red-crested Pocherds (*Netta rufina*)
15. Avocets (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) and Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)
16. Black-headed Gulls (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)
17. Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*)
18. Laguna de Cantarranas
19. Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)
20. Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)