

STAGE

# 11





# STAGE 11

## Alfarnate - Villanueva del Rosario

### LOCATION

Stage 11 starts at the Plaza del Puente en Alfarnate square, and during the **15,4 km** long stretch it takes you to the level of over 1000 metres above the sea and then leads along the Arroyo de la Canaleja valley which gives access to the village of Villanueva del Rosario.

### DESCRIPTION

#### ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

This stage reaches the highest altitude of all the 35 stages of the Great Malaga Path. It starts in a flat farmland area, climbs through scrubland which then turns into a quite dense formation of pine trees and holm oaks with some Portuguese gall oaks. Higher up you will be passing very close to large rocky outcrops. The downhill section leads through the

Hondonero *dehesa* with maple trees and terebinth underneath the towering mountains. As you arrive in Villanueva del Rosario the surroundings abound with natural water springs. Consequently you will be able to see bird species typical of open spaces, mountains, woodland and rivers.

### HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

The beginning of Stage 11 constitutes cultivated areas where the predominant species are the White Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Crested Lark, Skylark, Goldfinch,

Views from the high parts of Stage 11. PHOTO: ARM



### DID YOU KNOW?

**T**he **Hondoneros site** is composed of the varied patch of grain fields, cultivated trees and natural vegetation where there is number of seasonal pools originating in the process of karst being dissolved. These pools are a prime habitat to find amphibians as they support a high number of species including Iberian Ribbed Newt, Penibetic Salamander, Iberian Painted Frog, Parsley Frog, Common and Natterjack Toad, Stripeless Tree Frog and Iberian Water Frog (Perez's Frog). TEXT: JSM



Ring Ouzel. PHOTO: JLM

Common Linnet, Serin and Greenfinch, however once you are on the uphill section leading to the copses of holm oak, species typical of scrub start occurring such as Red-legged Partridge, Common Stonechat, Common Blackbird, European Robin, Black-eared Wheatear, Sardinian Warbler, Black-eared Wheatear, Dartford Warbler, Woodchat Shrike, and forest birds such as Song Thrush, Great Tit, Common Chaffinch and Rock Bunting. Birds in flight include the almost constantly present Common and Pallid Swifts together with Hirundines (mainly Barn and Red-rumped Swallow and House Martin) during the months when these species are present here. In the tree formations composed mainly of pines, then holm oaks and Portuguese gall oaks further on, the Eurasian Sparrowhawk might make an appearance, as well as European Turtle Dove, Common Wood Pigeon, Cuckoo, Scops Owl, Tawny Owl, Hoopoe, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Woodlark, Wren, Song and Mistle Thrush,

Blackcap, Firecrest, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Eurasian Jay, Crossbill, Hawfinch, Cirl Bunting and at times during some winter seasons, Yellowhammer. In the copses of holm oak you have a chance to see the Western Orphean Warbler and Azure-winged Magpie, and Iberian Chiffchaff in the more humid areas with



Eagle Owl. PHOTO: JLM



Western Orphean Warbler. PHOTO: JLM

Portuguese gall oaks. Once you are in the rocky environment approaching the highest parts of the walk, you may be able to see Golden Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Alpine Swift, as well as Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear, Western Jackdaw, Red-billed Chough, Raven and Rock Sparrow. Even though Griffon Vulture does not nest in these mountains, it can be seen relatively often in small groups.

The star species of the highest parts of Stage 11, which can be seen during spring and summer months, is the Common Rock Thrush, a bird belonging to the Thrush family whose males present exceptionally striking plumage. Also in these higher parts of Stage 11 you will be able to find Northern Wheatear and Alpine Accentor. Once in the area of Hondoneros, along the downhill section approaching the end of Stage 11, the previously mentioned species are joined by the Eurasian Woodcock and Common Whitethroat in the shady spots, then Redwing, Ring Ouzel, Subalpine Warbler, Bonelli's Warbler, and, occasionally, Brambling. This is also a good site to watch the majestic flight of the Golden Eagle and listen to the Eagle Owl. As you get closer to the village, and your destination, crop fields start appearing more often, where the most common birds are the Eurasian Collared Dove, Spotless and Common Starling and finches.

Alpine Accentor. PHOTO: JLM





Rock Sparrow. PHOTO: JLM



Rock Thrush. PHOTO: DPM

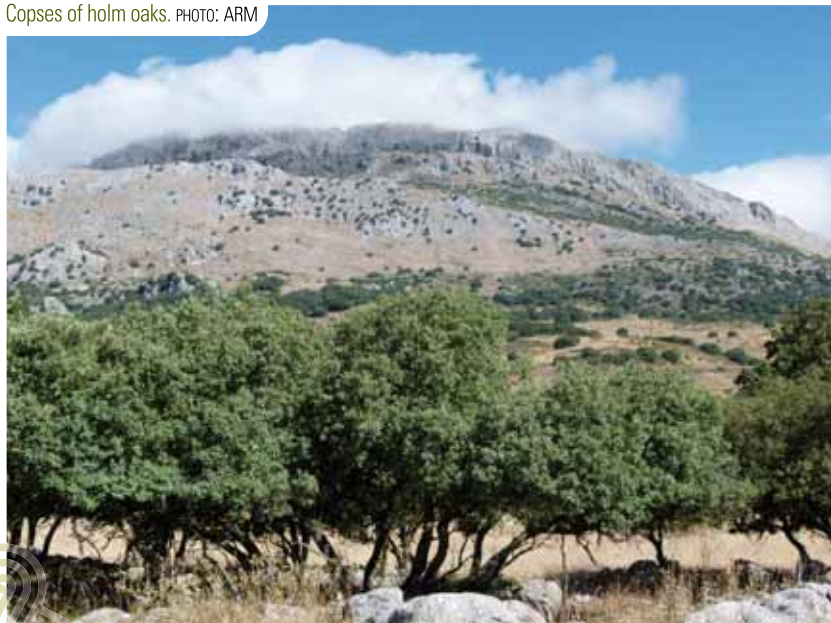
You can also find White Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Nightingale and Cetti's Warbler around the stream Arroyo de Los Cerezos.

### TIMING

This is a very satisfying walk above all in spring and also in winter.

However, even during the height of summer you can enjoy interesting species, especially higher up. Migration passage times allow you to enjoy the birds which settle in the woods and open areas at the high grounds.

Copses of holm oaks. PHOTO: ARM





Golden Eagle with a fox. PHOTO: JLM

## NATURAL VALUES

The area around the Hondoneros site abounds with watercourses and natural streams, also it contains a few permanent ponds and mature riparian vegetation which includes ash trees, elms and well-developed patches of rushes. It is a key spot for the amphibians as it supports a high diversity of their species, including some of great interest. It is worth mentioning the presence of the Iberian Ribbed Newt, the Penibetic Salamander, Iberian Painted Frog, Parsley Frog, Common Toad and Natterjack Toad, Stripeless Tree Frog and Iberian Water Frog (Perez's Frog). An intriguing fact is the presence of the Mediterranean Water Shrew in the area, which was first discovered here in 2004, and this still constitutes the only recent record of the animal in the province. This is a tiny, semi-aquatic insectivorous mammal which normally inhabits damp areas. Little is known about the species

however given the type of habitat it lives in, the animal must be vulnerable to water contamination and the degradation of riparian vegetation. ○



Common Linnets. PHOTO: JLM



Bonelli's Warbler. PHOTO: JLM