



STAGE 3





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Vélez Málaga - Torrox

LOCATION

Stage 3 starts at the Fernando Ruiz Hierro city sports complex in the south-east section of the centre of Vélez-Málaga, and it finishes at the entrance of Torrox. Along the walk you will be passing through abandoned crop fields from the very beginning, which look as if they are just waiting for the city build up to arrive. From La Caleta port continue along the coast up to the tip of Torrox. Once you reach that point, you will start walking up towards the end of Stage 3 through subtropical crops. The **19, 1 km** long stretch supports a diversity of birds which reflects the variety of landscapes of Stage 3 of the walk.



Little Owl. PHOTO: JLM

DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

Along Stage 3 you have a chance to see communities of urban-dwelling birds, birds typical of transformed areas covered in ruderal vegetation and, mainly, sea and coastal species as this stage largely runs along the shoreline.

DID YOU KNOW?

The plumage of various species of seagulls can show differences during the first years of their lives. In some cases, such as with Black-headed Gull and Slender-billed Gull, there are two types of plumage, reaching the adult look at the age of 2. In other cases, the birds acquire the adult plumage at the age of 3, for example the Mediterranean Gull. Meanwhile in bigger species such as Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gull you can distinguish 4 different age groups which correspond with the first 3 years of their lives, the 4th one being the adult plumage maintained during the rest of their lives. This way, in a flock of similarly-sized gulls where there are white individuals with uniformly grey backs, some brown ones and others with a mix of grey and brown on the back and the coverts, you could be watching individuals of different ages but the same species. This example may be seen in July and August along the coastal stages of the walk, with the mixed-age flocks of Yellow-legged Gull. TEXT: ARM. SEE PHOTO AT THE TOP OF PAGE 86.



Common Blackbird. PHOTO: ARM

You will also be crossing streams and riverbeds, which, in spite of being dry a lot of the time during the year, still bring lots of interesting elements. The highlight here is shore birds, mostly waders and gulls, given the seasonal presence of water at the mouths of the rivers.

HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

In the urban environment where Stage 3 takes you, you will see the Collared Dove, Pallid and Common Swift, Barn Swallow, Blackbird, Spotless Starling and House Sparrow, among other species. During winter you can observe Crag Martins in urbanized areas near the beach as they arrive from higher areas to spend the cold months sheltered near the sea; also Wagtails, Common Chiffchaffs and Common Starlings. The area at the beginning of Stage 3 where ruderal vegetation is predominant, you can watch Common Kestrel, Little Owl, Bee-eater, Zitting Cisticola, Crested Lark, Sardinian Warbler and different species of finches (Goldfinch, Greenfinch and Serin). Upon reaching the coast, birds typical of the marine environment take the grandstand, for example the gulls: Yellow-legged, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed, Mediterranean and Audouin's.



Sandwich Terns and waders such as Sanderling and Turnstone are common at the first line of the beach. Cattle Egrets, Little Egrets, Cormorants and Monk Parakeets also show up during Stage 3, together with some specimens of Mallard, Moorhen and Coot in the seasonal pools which tend to appear around the river mouths. Thanks to the closeness of the Vélez river mouth the numbers of species along the coast can elevate greatly during the migration. It is the spring and autumn months when you should pay close attention to anything that flies and you might spot some exceptional species.



Kentish Plovers. PHOTO: JLM

TIMING

The main seasonal changes can be noted in the marine environment, given that the presence of different species of seagulls becomes evidently clear during the winter months, especially at times when the boats arrive at the port and fish remains are thrown in the water becoming food for the seagulls. The inland environment also undergoes a noticeable change when winter arrives, with the massive presence of Common Starlings, Chiffchaffs, Robins and Blackcaps. During spring and summer Swifts, Bee-eaters and Spotted Flycatchers are the highlights; they nest in our area and then go back to Africa to spend their winter.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The La Caleta port is a great place to watch sea birds, especially the gulls. It is an excellent place to practice the identification of gulls, birds which are abundant along our coasts. ○



Ringed-billed Gull next to an Audouin's Gull. PHOTO: JR