



Natural values

We will walk across a very well preserved sample of Mediterranean forest composed of Holm and Portuguese Oaks, Aleppo and Maritime Pines, and even a few Spanish Firs, the gems of the Sierra de las Nieves, a nature reserve with Natural Park status in the Andalusian Network of Protected Natural Sites and Birds Directive Special Protection Area (ES6170006) in the European Natura 2000 Network that will soon become the third National Park in Andalusia.

June is a good time to walk in this shady forest, before it gets too hot in midsummer, to enjoy the songs of Woodlarks, the calls of Bonelli's Warblers and the display dives of the Booted Eagles.

These are some of the birds we could spot during our trip: Red-legged Partridge, Griffon Vulture, Booted Eagle, Wood Pigeon, Cuckoo, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Thekla Lark, Woodlark, Robin, Black Redstart, Black Wheatear, Stonechat, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Blackcap, Western Orphean Warbler, Western Subalpine Warbler, Dartford Warbler, Melodious Warbler, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Firecrest, Wren, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Crested Tit, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Jay, Chough, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Linnet, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin, Cirl Bunting and Rock Bunting.

How to get there

Type "Camping Municipal Conejeras" in Google Maps.

There is an order issued by the Environment Department of the Andalusian Government forbidding the light of fire and the off-road use of motor vehicles in forest areas from June 1st to October 15th due to the extreme risk of fire at the country side during the summer season, so we will have to park next to the entrance to the camping and walk the beautiful way we are describing below.

The Camino (path) de Rajete



Once we park the car, we will follow the trail up towards Los Quejigales recreational facilities. The short trills of the Bonelli's Warblers will soon come to our ears though it might be difficult to spot them up in the canopy of the holm oaks. We can also hear the rough calls of the Western Subalpine Warblers which also flit about in the lower branches. Do not worry if you cannot identify some of the weak calls coming from the trees as all the area will be full of fledglings begging for their parents care.





The views from the track are fantastic and the Torrecilla peak, the highest summit in Malaga province (1919 m.) will show up just in front of us as a grey massive standing out over the Spanish fir and Mediterranean woods.



We will find the entrance to the Sendero (path) de Conejeras on

the right, though we will go on in order to walk the Camino de Rajete first as the sun (if we are doing the trip in the morning, always the best option) will be rising in our face as we walk south east.



The entrance to the Camino de Rajete is well signposted on the left. The holm oak forest is very open over here, the ideal habitat for the Woodlarks. I wish you are lucky to watch them singing their melancholic songs from the top of a tree or feeding unnoticed on the ground. Besides the Woodlarks, this area is good for

tits and we can also hear the song of the Red-legged Partridge coming from the surrounding rocky hills.



It will only take us ten minutes to reach a gate with the sign "Finca privada". We will turn around here back to the main track and the Camino de la Fuenfria.

Camino de la Fuenfria



After returning to the Camino de Quejigales, we will find a fork in the track. The left branch is signed "Sendero Quejigales – Torrecilla". We will take the right branch towards la Fuenfria though this is not showed anywhere.

We are now on a track linking Ronda and Marbella called "Cordel (drover's road) de Ronda" that goes uphill across a leafy forest alongside the Arroyo (stream) de la Fuenfria. Just after we go across the first bridge over the stream, there is a path to the right. It is the end of the Sendero de Conejeras that we will take later on when coming back from Fuenfria.

The forest gets more and more luxuriant as we go up, with ferns below the trees and the first Spanish firs scattered between the oaks. Some typical forest birds like Crested Tit, Firecrest, Wren, Short-toed Treecreeper and the very scarce here Nuthatch, will call or show up around us.





The Tala Hill (1345 m.) stands up in front of us with its round summit topped by a cliff. Griffon Vultures and Choughs are common around this mountain and chances are high that the Booted Eagle circles above over the forest.

It will take us around one hour of slow walk to reach a flat area surrounded by Mediterranean scrub after we go across a rocky pass where we can spot Thekla Lark, Black Redstart and Black Wheatear. This site is going to look great in a few years when all the ashes and elms that have been planted along the stream grow bigger.

Some different birds will show up here like Stonechat, Dartford



Warbler and Rock Bunting in the gorse, Orphean Warbler in the oaks scattered in the scrub, and finches, Green Woodpecker and Cirl Bunting around some big walnut and cherry trees next to the stream.



Sendero de Conejeras

We will take a short cut across the Sendero de Conejeras to return to the car. In this case, we will find the entrance to the path on the left, with the last bridge over the stream before coming back to the Camino de los Quejigales at sight (look at the picture). There are not signs here though the path is clear.



Approximately one kilometer from the start of the path, we will arrive to a pond to provide water to helicopters in case of fire that will serve as a reference we are on the right track. Let's go on leaving the pond to the left until we reach the Camino de los Quejigales again, where we have to turn left towards the camping.



The forest is a bit clearer here which may allow reasonable good views of Jay, Mistle thrush and Booted Eagle.



PHOTOS:

1. Western Subalpine Warbler (*Sylvia inornata*)
2. Fledgling Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)
3. General views from Camino de los Quejigales
4. Torrecilla Peak
5. Sendero de Conejeras board
6. Entrance to Camino de Rajete
7. Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*)
8. Fork towards Camino de la Fuenfría
9. Mediterranean forest

10. Tala Hill
11. Dartford Warbler (*Sylvia undata*)
12. Chesnut and cherry trees with ash and elm plantation
13. Entrance to Sendero de Conejeras
14. Sendero de Conejeras
15. Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)