

STAGE 31





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Marbella - Ojén

LOCATION

Starting point of Stage 31 is at the Paseo Marítimo de Marbella, at the level of the Arroyo de Guadalpín stream. After walking across Marbella and following the steady but gentle climb you will arrive at the Nagüeles pine wood. Here, the footpath which leads along the southern foothills of the Sierra Blanca begins. The path goes up and down continuously, which provides beautiful views, the sharply contrasting

steep peak of La Concha, the natural environment and the tourism-focused coast. After the **17 km** walk you will reach Ojén, via a mirador and walking to the village along the road.

DESCRIPTION

ABOUT THE BIRDLIFE:

At the beginning of Stage 31, at the seaside, you can watch sea birds and coastal birds, together with river species at the stream mouth of the Arroyo Guadalpín.



DID YOU KNOW?

View of Ojén. PHOTO: ARM

Traveller, ornithologist, hunter-naturalist and bird and egg collector, the Londoner Thomas Littleton Powys (1833-1896), who signed his publications as Lord Lilford, comments in his 1865 text *“Notes on the Ornithology of Spain”* for the Ibis magazine: «I believe I found these vultures (he is referring to *Gyps fulvus*) in all of the areas I visited in Spain, and in great abundance, particularly in April of 1864 in the Sierra Palmitera near Marbella, where we set up camp for a few days to hunt the Spanish Ibx», and further: «A handsome pair of Lammergeyers visited our camp near Marbella in April». TEXT: SMB



A group of walkers at Stage 31. PHOTO: ARM

Next, you will be entering the urban sprawl of Marbella, where urban-dwelling birds are predominant. This continues until the tall buildings give way to lower structures surrounded by landscaped areas and an abundance of trees. This encourages the presence of typical forest birds, also because of the proximity of the Nagüeles pine wood. Once you have passed through the pine wood you will encounter stands of trees alternating with areas of scrub and bare rock continuing practically till the end of this stage.

HIGHLIGHTED SPECIES

At the beginning you can see gulls, whose abundance and the type of predominant species depend on the time of the year. In winter, the Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gulls

are most common even though you can also find the Yellow-legged. The last named gull is more common at the end of spring and in the first half of summer.



Siskin. PHOTO: JLM



Iberian Chiffchaff. PHOTO: JLM



Northern Gannet and Sandwich Tern are also common during migration periods and winter season, so are the Sanderling, Common Sandpiper and other waders, such as Turnstone. Mallard, Great Cormorant, Grey Heron, Little Egret and Cattle Egret can also be seen along the first section of Stage 31, as well as the progressively more common Monk Parakeet. As you enter the

built-up area, Common Kestrel, Eurasian Collared Dove, Pallid and Common Swift, Barn Swallow, House Martin, Common Blackbird, Black Redstart, Common Chiffchaff, Spotless and Common Starling, House Sparrow and Serin are the most common. When passing through the area of low houses and extensive landscaped zones, you will notice that both the Blackcap and the Sardinian Warbler turn up, also Great Tit, Coal Tit, Common Chaffinch, and other typical woodland birds. In the "proper" pine wood, where the savin juniper, wild olive and mastic form part of the undergrowth, you will be able see the Common Wood Pigeon, European Turtle Dove, Short-toed Tree Creeper, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin, Eurasian Siskin and Crossbill, besides the already named birds. The Nagüeles pine wood is an excellent place to see the Crested Tit, an easy to identify bird because of the tuft of feathers on

Pine wood in Sierra Blanca. PHOTO: ARM





its head. The bird has a black collar encircling its whole neck and if you are close enough you will notice the striking red eye colour. This species is much easier to hear than to see, however with a bit of patience you will end up spotting the bird, always accompanied by other individuals of the same species. Past the pine wood the many ups and downs lead through a sequence of cols. Dense tree copses alternate with dolomite limestone zones where herbs and esparto grass rule. The European Robin and Bonelli's Warbler nest around the streams where Song Thrushes and Redwings congregate in winter. Open areas are the domain of the Common Stonechat, Sardinian Warbler and Crested Lark, and this is a good moment to start paying attention to the sky for a very likely sighting of a raptor. Besides Common Kestrel, you can see Short-toed Eagle,



Northern Wheatear. PHOTO: JLM

Drinking trough for animals before Ojén. PHOTO: ARM



Common Buzzard, Bonelli's Eagle, Booted Eagle and Golden Eagle, as well as Goshawk and Sparrowhawk. Other well represented species in the area are the Red-necked Nightjar, Little Owl, Bee-eater, Pallid and Common Swifts, which can form great flocks at the foothills of the sierra in search of food, plus the Red-rumped Swallow. At certain points of Stage 31, such as around the open-air pyrite mines, you can find sites which harbour the Eagle Owl as well as wintering and breeding populations of Crag Martin. Before the village of Ojén comes into view, at the outskirt villas, you will be walking through a mature pine wood where the already named forest species turn up again, together with the Tawny Owl and Scops Owl. Along the last section of Stage 31 in the shady areas with trees, such as the surroundings of the Arroyo del Tajo Negro, the scarce Iberian Chiffchaff nests, plus you will be able to spot the Long-tailed Tit. Same environment holds European Robins year round, and one or two Hawfinches might make an appearance.



TIMING

Stage 31 can be walked year round; however July and August would be the least suitable months for birding. Thanks to the stage's proximity to the Strait of Gibraltar, and the fact that the walk lies along a migration flight path of various species of birds, passage periods produce a good number of species, especially soaring birds (mainly raptors but also Black Stork) and sea birds.

NATURAL VALUES

Along Stage 31 you will have an opportunity to observe the Spanish Ibex, as well as tracks and signs of carnivorous mammals along the well-pronounced path which takes you to Ojén; these mammals mainly include Fox and Stone Marten.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Refugio del Juanar site is 10 kilometres away from Ojén. Around the refugio you can familiarise yourself with the Spanish Fir Trees (pinsapos). There is also a breeding station for the

Spanish Ibex where the government environment board, called Consejería de Medio Ambiente de la Junta de Andalucía, keeps about fifty individuals of that species for research. The surroundings of El Juanar support a rich community of forest birds and it is a good site to watch mountain birds. ◉



Intersection at Puerto de Las Pitás.
PHOTO: ARM



Marbella in the background. PHOTO: ARM