

Natural values



Los Quejigales is a recreational facility at the heart of the Sierra de las Nieves Nature Reserve, to the east of the Serranía de Ronda District. It is the start of a path to the Torrecilla, the highest peak in Málaga province (1.919 m. above sea level). The track to Los Quejigales from the road Ronda-San Pedro goes across a wonderful Mediterranean forest. Once at the recreational facilities, the path to the Torrecilla goes through a pine tree forest, a fantastic “pinsapar” (Spanish fir forest) and a hedgehog scrub area at

Puerto (mountain pass) de Los Pilonos.



The trail to Los Quejigales is closed to motor vehicles during the summer season due to the high risk of fire so November is the perfect time to come back here and welcome the arrival of thrushes from northern Europe and Alpine Accentors from Sierra Nevada.



These are some of the birds we can find here at this time of year: Red-legged Partridge, Griffon Vulture, Golden Eagle, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Wood Pigeon, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Woodlark, Meadow Pipit, Alpine Accentor, Robin, Black Redstart, Stonechat, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Ring Ouzel, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Dartford

Warbler, Chiffchaff, Firecrest, Wren, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Crested Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper, Jay, Chough, Raven, Spotless Starling, Chiffchaff, Linnet, Goldfinch, Siskin, Serin, Hawfinch, Common Crossbill, Cirl Bunting and Rock Bunting. There are also regular winter records of Fieldfare, Brambling and Bullfinch in this area.



How to get there

Type “Area Recreativa Conejeras, Parauta” in Google Maps. We are already familiar with this area as we did the Camino de la Fuenfria in June. Set the counter to zero at the recreational facility of Conejeras. This time we will be able to drive past the camp site (km 0.5). At km. 1.9, just after crossing the bridge over the Fuenfria stream, we take left following the signs to “Sendero Quejigales-Torrecilla”. At the end of this trail, we will arrive at Los Quejigales after a 9.2 km. drive.

Los Quejigales

We will suggest three different levels of “birdwalking” according to everyone’s fitness and adventurous spirit.



The first level consists on strolling around Los Quejigales. At first sight, we will be able to spot typically friendly birds, like Blackbirds, Blackcaps or finches, including the Goldfinch, Serin and Siskin, and the most common inhabitants of the pine woods like tits, Robins and Chaffinches.



A deeper look to the trees, either if the walk up to the access of the path to the Torrecilla, or on the track from the road up to the

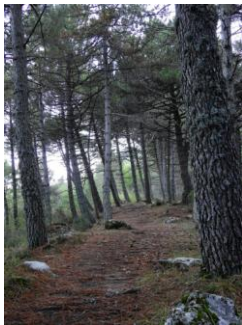


junction with the track to Los Pilonos (where access in motor vehicles is not allowed), can give us Hawfinches, Common Crossbills, Cirl and Rock Buntings, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Short-toed Treecreepers and Firecrests as well as Redwinds and Ring Ouzels in the hawthorns and dog roses along the paths.

Keeping our eyes up will give us Griffon Vultures, the noisy Ravens and even the lonely silhouette of the Golden Eagle.

The pine tree and Spanish fir forest

The second level implies taking the path to the Torrecilla peak by going on the track from the car parks, past the barbecue building. There is a board with a map of the path next to the wooden bridge over the little stream.



The first stretch of the path passes through a pine tree forest. The silence of the woods will allow us to detect the high pitched calls of Firecrests, Short-toed Treecreepers, Coal and Crested Tits while those of the Common Crossbills, Green Woodpeckers and Nuthatches, which can get very close to us, are much louder.

Looking up through the gaps of the forest, we can see Wood Pigeons and even Sparrowhawks in flight over the trees.

Short after we walk past a board with information about the Spanish Ibex, there is an open area where we can stay for a while before coming into the “pinsapar”. The red-legged Partridges sometimes sing from the foothills below.

The pinsapo (Spanish fir) is a relic of the ice ages that in Spain can only be found at Sierra de las Nieves and Sierra Bermeja in Malaga, and Sierra de Grazalema in Cadiz. Walking amongst the Spanish firs is a real privilege. These trees can grow very big and show very irregular shapes. The soft appearance of its branches disappears when we feel their hard rough even prickly touch. After all, they can stand the high summer temperatures of the southernmost region of Europe and



the wind, snow and cold associated to subalpine range mountains.

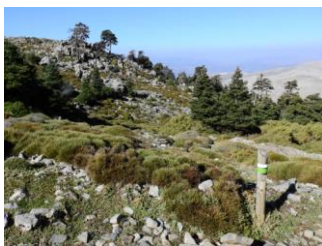


The ubiquitous Spotless Starlings can also be found on top of the first firs and the rough scream of Jays becomes more frequent. Robins, Wrens, Coal Tits and Chiffchaffs flit in the shadiest corners of the forest. The voice of the Nuthatch resounds through the trees at the Cañada (valley) del Cuerno, the name of this valley through which the path goes up. A few enormous firs with big dead branches on top on the opposite side of the valley are often used by Griffon Vultures to perch.



The Puerto de Los Pilones

The board showing information about the Spanish fir by the path may be the turning back point for the second level and the starting point for the third one. There is still quite a long way to the Puerto de Los Pilones: 2 more kilometres on a very uneven path and some 350 m. of altitude to overcome, up to 1,740 m. above sea level. The way down is 4.5 km. on a comfortable track back to Los Quejigales for a total distance of 7.7 km. and 460 m. of elevation gain.



Before reaching the pass, the forest vanishes and we will find ourselves in a hedgehog broom landscape. Some hawthorns grow on the left in a row towards and old radio booster station. This is the place where the first Ring Ouzels may show up.

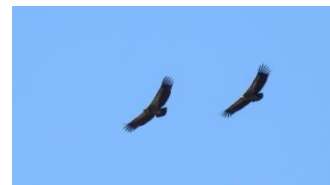


Once we reach the track, we should keep going up until we can enjoy the views over the Torrecilla, the coast and a little stand of



Alpine oak (*Quercus alpestris*). The most common birds up here are the Black Redstart and Meadow Pipit, though we can also find Linnet, Chaffinch (despite the lack of trees!), Dartford Warbler and Woodlarks around the oaks.

Choughs, Griffon Vultures and Ravens are common in flight over the area while the small Kestrel is a bit more difficult to spot when hovering over the broom. This is also Golden Eagle's territory.



But the bonus species up here is the Alpine Accentor. Finding it foraging on the ground around the Puerto de Los Pilones will make the climb here worth it. We just have to pay attention to the ground without leaving the track once we start coming our way down to Quejigales.

The firs will come back as we go down and the forest birds will show up again. There is an area with thick stands of hawthorn and dog rose before the end of the track hosting Ring Ouzels,



Redwings, Mistle Thrushes and sometimes Fieldfares to put the end to a trip in one of the most attractive birding spots of Malaga province.

PHOTOS:

1. Spanish fir (*Abies pinsapo*) at the entrance to the recreational facility Los Quejigales.
2. Way up to the Puerto de Los Pilones through the Cañada del Cuerno.
3. Great Tit (*Parus major*).
4. Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)
5. Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*)
6. Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*)
7. Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*)
8. Access to Quejigales-Torrecilla path.
9. Path across the pine woods.
10. Branches of Spanish fir (*Abies pinsapo*).
11. Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*).
12. Path across the "pinsapar".
13. Path across the hedgehog scrub.
14. Views from the Puerto de Los Pilones.
15. Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*).
16. Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*)
17. Alpine Accentor (*Prunella collaris*)
18. Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*)