



Natural values

The Valley of the Guadalhorce gives name to one of the nine districts of Malaga province. It extends along the river from the Desfiladero de Los Gaitanes (El Chorro) downstream up to its mouth next to the city of Malaga. These fertile low lands are mainly devoted to grow citrus fruits (lemons and oranges) and have gone through major transformations in the last centuries. Even the river forest is mostly dominated by the eucalyptus, a non native tree coming from Australia.



Nevertheless, rivers are always a big source of life and the Valley of the Guadalhorce is not an exception. With the first rains of October, the river recovers a big deal of strength after the dry summer and visiting its banks can provide us with nice views of birds like Mallard, Teal, Red-legged Partridge, Cormorant, Cattle Egret, Little Egret, Great White Egret, Grey Heron, Black Stork, Osprey, Booted Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard,

Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Moorhen, Coot, Black-winged Stilt, Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank, Snipe, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Hoopoe, Kingfisher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Crested Lark, Crag Martin, Water Pipit, Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Robin, Bluethroat, Black Redstart, Stonechat, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Cetti's Warbler, Chiffchaff, Great Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Jay, Raven, Starling, Spotless Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Linnet, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Siskin, Serin and Corn Bunting.



Birds of the Valley

Today, we will suggest a few places to look from in the river. We will more or less be able to spot all the birds mentioned above at any one of them so let's begin by telling about the birds and how to find them before proceeding on how to get there.



The river forest and citrus groves host species that might be found at any other woodland in Malaga. The most frequent species are the Common Buzzard and Sparrowhawk among the raptors; Wood Pigeon and Great Spotted Woodpecker representing non passerine species; Robin, Blackbird, Blackcap, Great Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Jay, Chaffinch and Siskin as the most typical passerines.

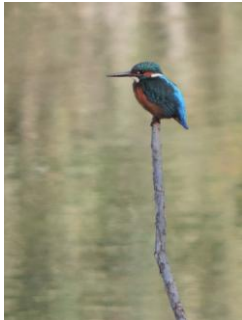
The farmlands around the river can give us Red-legged Partridge, Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Cattle Egret (normally going after livestock), Collared Dove, Hoopoe, Crested Lark, Meadow Pipit, Black Redstart, Stonechat, Song Thrush, Raven, Starling, Spotted Starling, House Sparrow, Linnet, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Serin and Corn Bunting.



The shrub layer at the banks deserves careful attention as some of its inhabitants show a very shy or elusive behaviour. This is the case of the Moorhen, Snipe, Bluethroat, Sardinian Warbler and Cetti's Warbler, whose presence might only be detected by its characteristic and powerful calls. On the other hand, other species like the Black Redstart, Stonechat, Zitting Cisticola and Chiffchaff may be much more obliging.



The river bed can be very wide at some points showing shallows where waders, herons and other river birds feed. This is the spot for the Little and Great White Egrets, Grey Heron, Black-winged Stilt, Green and Common Sandpipers, Greenshank, Water Pipit,



White and Grey Wagtails. Kingfishers can also be found in these shallow waters. In absence of bushes and reeds next to the water, they can perch on rocks and hover over the ponds where they get fish from. It is amazing to see how they dive into the water after a short hovering, fly out of the pool and hovers for another attempt time and again.



This is also the habitat of the gem of the Valley during the winter months: the Black Stork. Black Storks are common on passage in the valley during the autumn migration and some of them stay with us for some time. We are very lucky about that and have to take very good care of them. Black Storks are very shy and do not like to be disturbed. We are all eager to see them close, specially when trying to take photographs. Let's use the telescope to enjoy these lovely birds and be happy with just a record picture. If they are bothered by every one of us, they will, for sure, look for another place to settle as it seems to be happening at the moment. We photographers should try the joy of taking the last picture and turn around before flushing the birds.

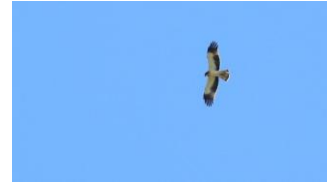


When the river bed narrows, waters become deeper, being the perfect place for Mallard, Teal, Cormorant, Coot and Kingfisher.



Finally, there is a set of birds we can spot in flight up and down the river or sitting on some of the trees next to the banks. This is the case of the Crag Martin, our only resident hirundine, and most of the raptors in the area: Osprey, Booted Eagle and Marsh Harrier, which use to roost near

or at the mouth and fly upstream to feed every morning.



The “Junta de los Rios” (rivers’ junction)



This is the place where Guadalhorce and Grande rivers meet. Type “Restaurante Rio Grande, Cartama” in Google Maps. We will follow the signs to “Ribera de Rio Grande” or “Base BRICA” just past the petrol station and take right into the eucalyptus forest past the restaurant. The track goes along the runway of the BRICA (Andalusian Forest Fire Brigade) base. We can park the car at the

end of the runway and get close to the river banks.

The eucalyptus forest and the poplars on the opposite bank are good for Jays and Great Spotted Woodpeckers. The shrub at the banks is frequented by Cetti’s Warblers which we will soon hear after leaving the car. The muddy banks below the scrub are the best place to find Bluethroats at any of the places we will visit today.

There are some big dead eucalyptuses between the left bank of the Grande and right bank of the Guadalhorce (remember we say right or left when looking downstream!). We can find almost any bird there so pay attention to Great White Egret, Peregrine Falcon and Osprey, though this is Common Buzzards’ territory and they use to fly and “miaow” around.



The views to the bed of the Guadalhorce are made very difficult by the river vegetation. On the other hand, the bed of the Grande from the junction upstream is a very wide shallow we can scan with the telescope.



We will drive back to the restaurant but keep going around the BRICA base, along the river and down the road bridge. This is a good spot to use the car as a hide and try good pictures of birds at the river bed and the farmlands around. Once we reach a horse ranch on the left, the track gets very bad and we can use the telescope to have a look around.

Casapalma

Let’s go back to the petrol station and take the road to the right. There is a track on the left past the bridge over the river though it is much safer to go on a little bit and wait on the track to the right until the road is clear (this is a very busy one!) to go take it.

The track goes across a farm and leaves us just in front of the horse ranch on the right bank of Rio Grande. We can have another look to the river from here though our goal is reaching the bridge we can make out upstream. In order to get there, we will follow the track and take the first junction to the left down towards the river. We can still drive to the left using the car as a hide and go back towards the bridge from which we can scan the banks up and downstream.



Pizarra's Birds Observatory

We will carefully take left when back to the road. 2.4 km. ahead, we will find signs reducing the speed limit of the road and a junction to the right. Let's take right at the junction and right again into a track past the entrance to "Finca Las Fuentes". From now on, we will always take right in the two coming junctions until we reach the birds observatory by the river.



The field of view from the hide is not very wide so we can walk towards a big eucalyptus downstream the hut and wait for the birds to show up.

La Charcucla



Coming the same way back to the road, we will turn right and right again Malaga direction in the junction past the flour factory "Harinera de Pizarra". After 2.8 km. from the junction, past the tunnel and the entrance to the "Museo Municipal de Pizarra", we will take a track to the right and go across a bridge over the railway.

We can take the junctions to the right, following the signs of the Gran Senda de Malaga, until the track ends next to the railway. This is a good point to look at the river. Some of the top branches of the eucalyptuses are dead and serve as perches for Cormorants and raptors like Sparrowhawks, Booted Eagles and Common Buzzards.

On our way back, we can drive as far south as the puddles in the track allow us from the first junction after the railway bridge. Any place is good to park the car and silently get close to the banks.



PHOTOS:

1. Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)
2. Grey Heron (top, *Ardea cinerea*) and Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)
3. Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)
4. Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*)
5. Meadow Pipit (*Anthus pratensis*)
6. Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*)

7. Great White Egret (*Casmerodius albus*)
8. Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)
9. Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*). Remember, do not disturb them!!!
10. Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
11. Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*)
12. Junta de los Rios
13. Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*)
14. Serin (*Serinus serinus*)
15. Rio Grande
16. Pizarra's Birds Observatory
17. Guadalhorce River
18. Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)