



FINCA CORTESIN GOLF CLUB

Golf & Birds Study

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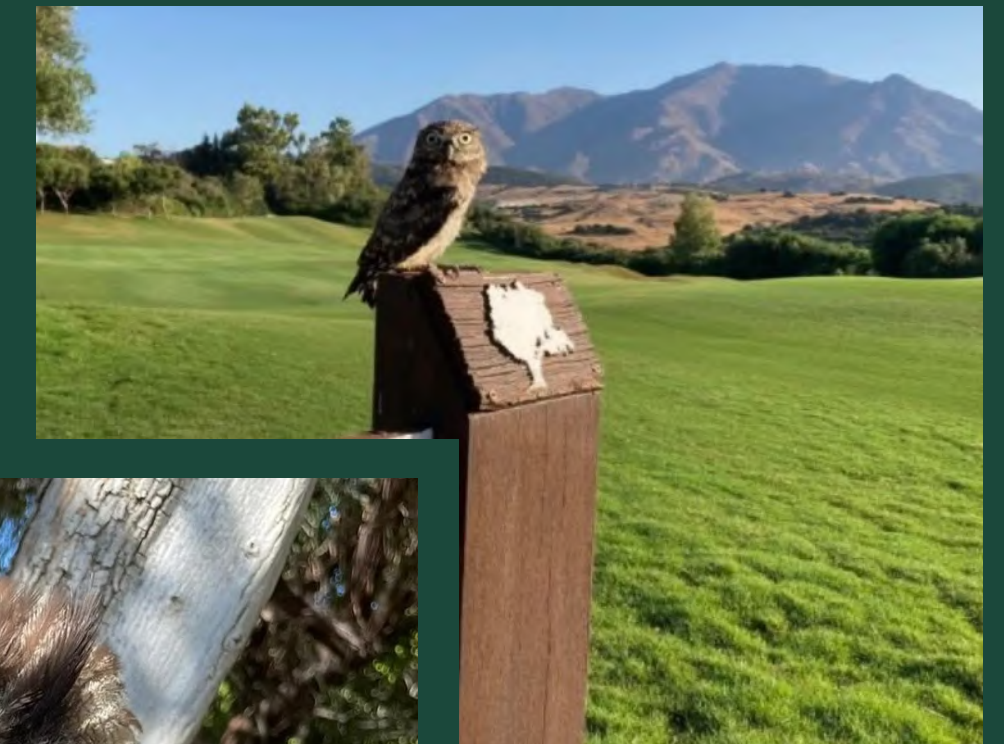
GOLF & BIRDS STUDY

Where Golf and Nature Thrive

Finca Cortesin has long been recognized as a leader in luxury golf, but beneath its championship course lies a deeper commitment — to sustainability and biodiversity. The **Golf & Birds** study is more than a research project; it is a testament to the harmonious coexistence between sport and nature.

Situated near the Strait of Gibraltar, a crucial migratory corridor between Europe and Africa, Finca Cortesin has embraced its responsibility to protect and enhance local biodiversity. This study demonstrates that golf courses, when responsibly managed, can serve as thriving sanctuaries for wildlife, particularly avian species navigating the migratory routes between Europe and Africa.

The goal was clear: to map the seasonal presence, abundance, and diversity of avian species while evaluating the golf course's ecological footprint.



The Story Behind the Study

What began as a simple curiosity—tracking birdlife across Finca Cortesin — evolved into a comprehensive conservation effort. The study, conducted by ornithologists and environmental experts, followed a rigorous methodology over a 12-month period (October 2022 – October 2023). Using 11 designated observation points, researchers carried out monthly bird censuses, ensuring comprehensive coverage across both playing and non-playing areas of the course. This systematic approach mapped the ecological footprint of a golf facility when sustainability is prioritized, solidifying Finca Cortesin’s belief that luxury and nature are deeply intertwined.

The golf course, known for its pristine fairways and commitment to excellence, has now also been recognized for its role in fostering ecological balance. By monitoring bird populations, Finca Cortesin is not only preserving biodiversity but also providing invaluable data that can contribute to global conservation efforts. The findings confirmed what Finca Cortesin had long believed—when managed with sustainability in mind, a golf course can function as an oasis for biodiversity.



Key Findings & Conservation Achievements

The study recorded a total of 73 hours and 33 minutes of observation during daylight hours, conducted between 8:35 AM and 3:40 PM. Observation periods varied in duration, with an average of 30 minutes per day, ensuring comprehensive and consistent data collection.

- 65 bird species identified, reinforcing the course's role as a biodiversity hotspot and a valuable refuge for migratory birds. Another 35 birds could not be identified due to lack of light, birds flying at great distances, backlighting from the sun, or other factors that prevented their characterization.
- 3,807 total sightings recorded, showing sustained avian activity across the grounds, indicating a stable ecosystem. Largest recorded species group: The black kite (544 individuals), followed by Sardinian warblers (442) and rock doves (356).
- 14 species with conservation status, including near-threatened and endangered birds, such as the short-toed snake eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) and the European roller (*Coracias garrulus*).
- Seasonal migration patterns mapped, confirming the course as a strategic rest point for birds traveling between Europe and Africa.



Key Findings & Conservation Achievements

- Presence of 11 raptor species, including black kites (544 individuals), booted eagles, and peregrine falcons, highlighting the area's suitability for birds of prey.
- Significant nocturnal activity, with confirmed sightings of Eurasian eagle owls and little owls, proving that the course plays a role in sustaining wildlife beyond daylight hours.
- Diverse habitats: The course features high vegetation diversity, with native Mediterranean flora providing multiple microhabitats for birds and other wildlife.
- Monthly variations in species abundance, with peaks in February (759 individuals recorded) and July (447 individuals), corresponding to seasonal migrations.
- Water resources: Two lakes, totalling 11,500 m², serve as both irrigation reservoirs and vital bird habitats.



Beyond Golf: A Commitment to Sustainability

Finca Cortesin's environmental ethos extends beyond the fairways and into a holistic approach to sustainability:

- **Water Conservation** – The resort employs advanced irrigation systems that optimize water use, reducing waste while maintaining world-class playing conditions.
- **Chemical-Free Groundskeeping** – A strict policy minimizes pesticides and fertilizers, prioritizing organic and natural treatments to preserve soil and water health.
- **Habitat Protection & Restoration** – Dedicated areas of the course are maintained with native Mediterranean flora, providing essential food and shelter for local and migratory bird species.
- **Ongoing Monitoring & Research** – The Golf & Birds study is not a one-time project but an ongoing effort, with annual assessments to track biodiversity trends and refine sustainability strategies.
- **Collaboration with Conservation Experts** – The study has involved ornithologists and environmental specialists who have provided recommendations to further enhance the golf course's role in conservation.

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This study is just the beginning. By continually monitoring biodiversity, we can adapt our management practices to better support local and migratory species. The golf course is not just a playing field – it's a living ecosystem.

Ignacio Soto - Head Greenkeeper at
Finca Cortesin

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Why This Matters & What Comes Next

The Golf & Birds study challenges the misconception that golf courses are purely man-made landscapes with little ecological value. Instead, the study at Finca Cortesin proves that, with responsible management, a course can function as a dynamic, living ecosystem.

In an era where environmental sustainability is increasingly in the spotlight, golf clubs worldwide are being urged to rethink their environmental impact. The results from Finca Cortesin serve as a blueprint for the industry, showing that courses can:

- Support conservation efforts by acting as safe havens for birds and other wildlife.
- Enhance biodiversity through the protection of native habitats.
- Reduce environmental impact with sustainable water use and pesticide-free groundskeeping.

With World Wildlife Day as a platform, this study not only enhances the resort's prestige but also reinforces a message that luxury tourism must evolve together with nature.

