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Spain Birding Tour

12 DAY/ 11 NIGHT TOUR

OVERVIEW

Spain is the country with the highest birding diversity in Europe. Over 550 species of birds have been recorded in the country; some of them have their last European strongholds here (Purple Gallinule, White-headed Duck and Marbled Teal to name a few). Birds in Spain are diverse and abundant due to a combination of factors: its geographical location, great variation in the local geography and topography, and a wide range of microclimates present in many regions. The proximity of many habitats, especially on migration corridors leads to a rich mixture of species.

Spain is like a birding bridge between Africa and Europe. Birds coming from western and central Europe migrate to Western Africa following either coastal routes (eastern Spain at the Mediterranean Sea) or inland routes (La Mancha, Extremadura). It is thus ideally located to attract many migrating species in these corridors, along with of course hundreds of fascinating resident species.

This birding tour starts in Madrid, the Spanish capital, and visits Extremadura, the arid Ebro valley plains, the high Pyrenees and the Ebro Delta wetlands to get a complete yet concise look at the rich bird life and scenery of this western European country. The tour concludes in Barcelona, the cosmopolitan capital of Catalonia, home of Gaudi and the Ramblas.

DAILY SUMMARY

DAY 1	Madrid to La Mancha Húmeda & Extremadura
DAY 2	The Monfragüe National Park
DAY 3	The Cáceres plains & Arrocampo wetlands
DAY 4	Extremadura to the Ebro Valley
DAY 5	The Ebro valley and transfer to the Pyrenees
DAY 6	The Pyrenees

DAY 7	The Pyrenees
DAY 8	The Pyrenees and transfer to Lleida
DAY 9	Lleida to the Ebro Delta
DAY 10	The Ebro Delta
DAY 11	Morning Mediterranean pelagic cruise. Afternoon in the Ebro Delta
DAY 12	Ebro Delta to Barcelona

DETAILED DAILY ITINERARY

DAY 1: Madrid to La Mancha Húmeda & Extremadura

We start this exciting birding trip in Madrid, the capital city of Spain, and also the political, economic and cultural centre of the country. Madrid lies on the River Manzanares and has almost 3.2 million inhabitants. While Madrid possesses modern infrastructure, it has preserved the look and feel of many of its historic neighbourhoods and streets.

We will meet at the Madrid-Barajas Airport or at your hotel and transfer southeast for about 90 minutes to the wetland lagoon systems known as La Mancha Húmeda. Here we will look for the scarce White-headed Duck. Other interesting species here may include Ferruginous Duck, Greater Flamingo, Ruff and, if we are lucky, the very elusive Moustached Warbler. The lagoons may attract flocks of Spanish Sparrows and Black-bellied Sandgrouse coming to drink water as well as a good variety of migratory birds.

After lunch we will transfer to Extremadura, about 2 hours away. Extremadura is a western Spanish region bordering Portugal, comprising the provinces of Cáceres and Badajoz. It's a remote area of mountains, forests, lakes and reserves, notably the famous Monfragüe National Park. The capital of the area, Mérida, is also known for its well-preserved Roman ruins.

We will do some afternoon birding in a nearby wetland. Here we hope to get our first views on the trip of Western Swamphen, Little Bittern, Savi's Warbler, Black-winged Kite, Zitting Cisticola, Eurasian Black Vulture, Cetti's Warbler and maybe even Greater Bittern.

DAY 2: The Monfragüe National Park

We will spend all day birding the rocky crags and wooded slopes of the National Park of Monfragüe. It is situated in the center of a triangle formed by Plasencia, Trujillo and the city of Cáceres within the province of Cáceres. The park runs from east to west along the

valley of the River Tagus or Tajo. The park occupies an area of 18,118 hectares. In 1988 the European Union designated Monfragüe a Special Protection Area (SPA) for birdlife.

The park is especially rich in raptors, with the endemic Spanish Imperial Eagle, Golden Eagle, Booted Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Egyptian Vulture, Black Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Black-winged Kite, Red Kite, Black Kite, Peregrine Falcon, Hobby, Montagu's Harrier, Western Marsh Harrier, Lesser Kestrel and Common Buzzard all on our list of possibilities!

Other interesting birds that we could see in the park include Blue Rock Thrush, Short-toed Treecreeper, Mistle Thrush, Rock Bunting, Little Owl, Red-rumped Swallow, Eurasian Wren and Great Spotted Woodpecker and many others.

Other regional and Mediterranean specialities in Extremadura include birds such as Pallid Swift, Iberian Magpie, Spanish Sparrow, Black Stork, White Stork, European Bee-eater, Hawfinch, Rock Bunting, Orphean Warbler and more.

DAY 3: The Cáceres plains & Arrocampo wetlands

Today we will be birding the extensive, flowery plains of Cáceres in search of a variety of steppe land and plains birds.

Our main targets will be Great and Little Bustard as well as Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse. Other birds we will look for include Short-toed and Calandra Lark, Great Spotted Cuckoo, European Roller and Little Owl.

This will be complemented with a visit to Trujillo to admire the historic town centre, as well as its colonies of Lesser Kestrel, White Stork and Pallid Swift.

We will also visit the nearby Arrocampo Reservoir, ornithological park and wetland area. The reservoir was originally built to cool the nuclear power station in nearby Almaraz, but today 687 ha of the reservoir and its surrounding banks are designated as a Special Protected Area (SPA). The whole area offers a network of small ponds and wetlands, and here we will look for Purple Swamphen, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron, Bluethroat and many more.

DAY 4: Extremadura to the Ebro Valley

We leave Extremadura today and transfer to our next base at Lécera, in the Ebro Valley, with a travel time of about 6 hours.

We will make an early morning stop at Sierra de Gredos Mountains to look for some key species, including Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Whitethroat, Dunnock, Dartford Warbler, Subalpine Warbler and Bluethroat.

We will incorporate a few strategic rest and birding stops en route and might see Great Tit, Blackcap, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Melodious Warbler, Skylark, Eurasian Hoopoe, Yellow Wagtail and Iberian Grey Shrike.

Nevertheless most of the day we will be driving to our next destination.

We will do some sunset birding looking for the rare and elusive Dupont's Lark before dinner and a good night's rest.

DAY 5: The Ebro valley and transfer to the Pyrenees

After breakfast we'll be birding all day around a mosaic of steppes, gorges, river valleys and farmland to see a surprising range and variety of interesting and possibly quite rare birds. Here we look for bustards, sandgrouse and larks, including Lesser Short-toed Lark, Skylark and Thekla's Lark.

We will also hope for others such as Red-legged Partridge, Blue Rock Thrush, Tawny Pipit, Black-eared Wheatear, Black Wheatear, Dartford Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Spectacled Warbler, Iberian Grey Shrike, and Red-billed Chough.

Riverside and woodland birds along the Ebro Valley often include Iberian Green Woodpecker, Penduline Tit, Cetti's Warbler, Common Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail, Short-toed Treecreeper, Melodious Warbler, Golden Oriole, and Cirl Bunting.

A walk along the Ebro River could produce European Penduline Tit, Common Cuckoo, Blackcap, Common Kingfisher, Sand Martin, Great and Eurasian Blue Tits, Chaffinch and Linnet. The Ebro is the most important river in Spain in terms of length and area of drainage basin. Its source is at Fontibre, Cantabria in the northwest of the country and it discharges into the Mediterranean Sea at Tarragona in Catalonia in the northeast of the country, some 930 kilometres (578 miles) later.

We will have a beautiful picnic stop in a gorge where we could have first look at Lammergeier as well as Subalpine, Sardinian and Western Orphean Warbler, Crested Tit, Blue Rock Thrush, Black-eared and Black Wheatear, European Greenfinch, Rock Bunting, Egyptian Vulture, Firecrest and if we are lucky, even a Wallcreeper.

We will then transfer to our next base in the Pyrenees (about 1 hour) for dinner and our overnight stay.

DAY 6: The Pyrenees

Today we will spend the whole day birding the spectacular high mountain areas in Spain and into France. The Pyrenees mountain range separates the Iberian Peninsula from the rest of Europe, stretching more than 430km between Spain and France and rising higher

than 3,400m in elevation at Aneto. The main crest of the mountain range forms a divide between Spain and France, with the microstate of Andorra sandwiched in between.

We will be looking for some of the key mountain birds of forest, rock faces and slopes. The spectacular mountain scenery is populated with some special birds such as Lammergeier, Black Woodpecker, Wryneck, Scop's Owl, Eurasian Nightjar, Water Pipit, Tree Pipit, Ring Ouzel, White-throated Dipper, Rock Thrush, Marsh Tit, Crested Tit, Bullfinch, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Goldcrest, Firecrest, Red Crossbill, Alpine Chough, Ortolan Bunting and many more.

DAY 7: The Pyrenees

Today we will have another full day in the Pyrenees, and especially the Portalet area. Alpine Accentor is only possible at Portalet depending on the time of the year (with high temperatures they withdraw higher along with Snow Finches).

We will also look for Egyptian Vulture, Short-toed Treecreeper, Citril Finch, Wallcreeper, Red-billed Chough, Barn Owl, Rock Thrush, Coal Tit, White Wagtail, European Blue Tit, Crested Lark, Marsh Tit, Eurasian Siskin, Red Crossbill, Eurasian Jay, Common Chiffchaff, Black Redstart, Spotless Starling, Western Jackdaw, Redwing, Fieldfare, Red Kite, Grey Partridge, Red-backed Shrike and many others.

Furthermore, we will also look out for mammals such as the Red Squirrel, Marmot and Chamois.

We will return to our accommodation for a good night's rest after another fruitful mountain birding day.

DAY 8: The Pyrenees and transfer to Lleida

We will have the morning to bird in the lush green landscapes of the Pyrenees of Navarra. This will allow us to seek out some of the elusive forest birds, including Black and White-backed Woodpeckers, Eurasian Treecreeper, Marsh Tit, and many others.

We will then drive for about 3 hours to Lleida and check into our accommodation. Lleida is an ancient city in Spain's northeastern Catalonia region. La Seu Vella, a Gothic-Romanesque cathedral in a ruined hilltop fortress, towers over the city. Below the hill stretches the long, pedestrianized Eix Comercial de Lleida, with shops set inside many of the old town's striking buildings. Every year since 1980, at the end of May the world's biggest snail-eating festival (L'Aplec del Caragol) is held on the banks of the river Segre and the Champs Elysees in Lleida. Over 200 000 visitors attend and more than 12 tons of snails are consumed annually!

The drylands of Lleida are the remaining non-irrigated lowlands in the Ebro Valley which hold Spain's easternmost populations of a series of characteristic steppeland birds. Largely dormant through the summer and winter the drylands erupt with life in early spring. This area holds the region's last Lesser Grey Shrikes, its most important populations of Great-spotted Cuckoo, Roller and Little Bustard, and a host of other interesting birds. We will do some late afternoon birding and hope for Black Wheatear, Montagu's Harrier, Lesser Kestrel, Eurasian Hobby, Eurasian Scops Owl, Red-rumped Swallow, Turtle Dove, Eagle Owl and even Red-necked Nightjar.

If time allows we might take a short drive after dinner to look for nocturnal species such as Tawny Owl, Red Fox, Pine Martin, Roe Deer and European Badger.

DAY 9: Lleida to the Ebro Delta

We will do some morning birding in a local wetland providing us with good chances for the scarce and elusive Moustached Warbler, Iberian Reed Bunting (potential split) and Bearbed Reedling. We will also look for Calandra, Lesser Short-toed, Thekla's and Short-toed Lark, Rock Sparrow, Red-billed Chough and Sardinian Warbler amongst others.

We will then transfer to Ebro Delta, about two hours' drive away. The Ebro Delta is the delta region of the Ebro River in the Province of Tarragona in Catalonia, in northeastern Spain. It is on the Mediterranean Sea, and is a very important birdwatching area. It is a designated RAMSAR wetland site. In 1983 Spain designated a large part of the delta as a natural park. Ebro Delta Natural Park has protected wetlands, beaches, marshes, salt pans, and estuaries that provide extensive habitats.

The park is of international importance for eight of its plant species and 69 of its vertebrate fauna. It has some 95 breeding species of birds, is also very important for over 300 species of a wide range of transient and overwintering species, and serves as an essential stopover point for large numbers of migratory birds and waterfowl.

We will do some afternoon birding in the area. There may even be a nest of Eagle Owl or Lesser Grey Shrike (depending on the time of year).

We will check into our accommodation for the next three nights and enjoy dinner and a good night's sleep.

DAY 10: The Ebro Delta

This is the day we dedicate almost exclusively to the many wetland birds that can be found among the lagoons, rice fields, bays, reedbeds and marshes of the 320 km² (79,000 acres) Ebro Delta.

We will be looking out for gulls, ducks, waders, seabirds and terns. Some of the bird species we might see include Audouin's, Slender-billed, Yellow-legged, Black-headed

and Mediterranean Gull, Red Crested Pochard, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, Common Shelduck, Black-winged Stilt, Collared Pratincole, Kentish Plover, Northern Lapwing, Common Snipe, Greater Flamingo, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Purple Swamphen, Glossy Ibis, Water Rail, Dunlin, Sanderling, Eurasian Coot, Little Stint, Mallard, Great Cormorant, Red-necked Nightjar, Yellow Wagtail, Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Whiskered Tern and many many more.

DAY 11: Morning pelagic cruise off the Mediterranean coast. Afternoon birding in the Ebro Delta.

This morning we will take a chartered vessel and sail out into the Mediterranean Sea in the hope of encountering a good number of seabirds such as skuas, shearwaters and more. We will be looking out for Balearic, Yelkouan and Cory's Shearwater, Great and Arctic Skua, Storm Petrel, Shag and Northern Gannet amongst others.

In the afternoon we can catch up on some birds in the Ebro Delta or one of the coastal massifs in the vicinity. The Ebro Delta should be very productive and we can enjoy better views of some the birds we saw yesterday, but also look for Little, Common, Sandwich and Gull-billed Tern, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Ruddy Turnstone, Kentish, Grey, Little Ringed and Common Ringed Plover, Common Redshank, Little and Great Crested Grebe, European, Great Reed and Ceti's Warbler and many others.

DAY 12: Ebro Delta to Barcelona

We'll probably do some final morning birding in the Ebro Delta before our transfer to Barcelona, with a total transfer time of about 2 hours.

If convenient we will also look in on the Llobregat Delta reserve on the edge of Barcelona city for some birds.

We plan for an afternoon arrival at the city hotel, where the tour concludes.

It might be a good idea to extend your stay in Barcelona for a few days, as it is safe to say it is one of the greatest cities in the world! It is the city of Gaudi and his Sagrada Familia, FC Barcelona, Carlos Ruiz Zafon, the Palau de la Música Catalana, the Sant Sebastià beach, La Rambla, the Olympic Harbour and so much more!

Thank you for choosing Nature Travel Birding.