

Spain Birding & Nature

with Naturalist Journeys



September 3 – 15, 2022

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Spain enjoys some of the richest and most exciting birding in all of Europe. It sits on a migratory pathway and with a wide variety of habitats, it is a top European birding destination. On this tour, our field days occur in scenic landscapes that include hilltop villages, historic churches, and shady groves.

We carefully crafted this tour with a good pace in mind. This tour focuses on the southernmost autonomous region in Spain, Andalusia. The landscape here is almost tropical, with a mixture of palms, stone pines, and subtropical flowering trees. Birds from further north in Spain and beyond begin to flow southward at this time of year, filling the woodlands, wetlands, and coastline with both absolutely numbers and diversity. In addition to birding and natural history, we make time to experience the many cultural, architectural, and culinary delights that the lovely country of Spain has to offer.

Our autumn Spain birding and nature tour begins in the Sierra de Andújar near Cordoba in search of Iberian Lynx, before heading southwest to the wetlands of Donana (the most extensive wetland area in western Europe). Then, we continue to Tarifa near the Strait of Gibraltar to enjoy the spectacle of bird migration and finish our journey in the limestone karst scenery near Ronda.

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Explore one of the largest and most important wetlands in Europe, Doñana National Park, and experience its rich diversity of water birds, including Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill, Squacco Heron, and Collared Pratincole
- ✓ Immerse in the exquisite Romanesque and Moorish architecture of historic Sevilla and Cordoba
- ✓ Discover the great diversity of raptors (up to 20 are possible!) that Spain has to offer, with highlights including Cinereous and Egyptian Vulture, Spanish and Booted Eagle, and Montagu's and Eurasian Marsh-Harrier
- ✓ Enjoy the rich dance and folkloric music traditions of southern Spain with an evening Flamenco performance
- ✓ Search for the elusive Iberian Lynx, a highly Endangered wild cat that specializes in hunting rabbits
- ✓ Witness the spectacle of fall migration near the Straits of Gibraltar, where shorebirds, raptors, and songbirds stage to cross the last stretch of water before heading into Africa

Tour Summary

13-Day / 12-Night Spain Birding & Nature Tour with expert local guides & Carlos Sanchez
\$4990, from Malaga
Airport is Málaga-Costa del Sol Airport (AGP)



Itinerary

Sat., Sept. 3 Arrival day in Malaga

Please plan to arrive at your leisure during the day. We choose a hotel near the airport. It can be a day to relax after a long journey, but for those who do not want to waste any time, there is a famous birding site close to the hotel. The Guadalhorce Nature Reserve extends between the two branches of the Guadalhorce River. Comfortable hides overlooking pools provide shelter from wind, rain or sun, with very easy, level trails to follow around this small reserve. Birds one may see here include a variety of classic Mediterranean wetland birds such as White-headed Duck, Greater Flamingo, Pied Avocet, Audouin's Gull, Eurasian Spoonbill, and Western Yellow Wagtail.

Also, a visit to the city center of Malaga or one of the nearby beaches might be an option. All are close and within easy reach.

Accommodations in Sol Guadalmar, Hilton Garden Inn, or similar, Malaga (D)

Sun., Sept. 4 Transfer to Cordoba Province

In the morning, we visit the Bailón River Canyon situated in the Sierra Subbética National Park, where we can observe birds such as Red-billed Chough, Eurasian Griffon, Black Wheatear, Blue Rock-Thrush, Crested Lark, Thekla's Lark, Crag Martin, Rock Bunting, Common Stonechat, and many more. Limestone cliffs rise prominently above this trail, home to numerous caves.

Afterwards, we visit the beautiful town of Zuheros, set in an extraordinary location that provides sweeping views of limestone cliffs and olive groves. The village itself preserves the traditional architecture of white houses with ochre roofs. Narrow, secluded streets and a 16th century church sit at the foot of an ancient Moorish castle. Afterwards, we have the option to visit the nearby Cueva de los Murcielagos, a large cave with giant stalactites and even cave paintings from Neolithic times.

After lunch and maybe a short rest, we will go to the Picacho de la Sierra de Cabra, also called the "Balcón de Andalucía," where we expect to have close views of Black Wheatear, Bonelli's Eagle, and several other mountain birds.

Accommodations at Fuente Las Piedras, Cabra (B,L,D)

Mon., Sept. 5 All day birding in Cordoba Province

After breakfast we visit La Laguna del Rincón and La Laguna Amarga. Here, we expect to see White-headed Duck, Red-crested Pochard, Gadwall, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, and others.



Afterwards, we can visit a winery in the wine growing region of Montilla-Moriles in the southern part of Cordoba province in Andalusia. This region produces mainly sweet dessert wines, using similar techniques to those used in the production of sherry. An afternoon snack in the area can include a 'Pincho de Tortilla Española,' a classic small dish made primarily with eggs and potatoes. Finally, we arrive in Córdoba and walk along 'Los Sotos de la Albolafia.' Running down from the San Rafael Bridge, this natural area preserves pockets of riverine forest right along the Guadalquivir River in the urban heart of Córdoba. Groves of trees provide habitat for a variety of birdlife such as Common Kingfisher, Eurasian Moorhen, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Little Egret, Red-rumped Swallow, Eurasian Penduline-Tit, Eurasian Reed Warbler, Gray Wagtail, and European Greenfinch. It is possible to see up to thirty species of songbird here in late summer. The 'Sotos de la Albolafia' run right by the world famous Mosque-Cathedral de Córdoba, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the most accomplished monuments of Moorish architecture in all of Spain.

After a lunch featuring traditional dishes of the region, we continue through the steppes looking for other types of birds such as Calandra Lark, Little Bustard, Common Buzzard, Black-winged Kite, Zitting Cisticola, Spanish Sparrow, Eurasian Hoopoe, and Red-legged Partridge. Raptor migration should be picking up by this time of year, with good movements of Black Kite overhead possible.

At the end of the day, we will try to see or hear various night birds such as Little Owl, Eurasian Scops-Owl, and Eurasian Eagle-Owl.

Accommodations at Fuente Las Piedras in Cabra (B,L,D)

Tues., Sept. 6 All day birding | Searching for Iberian Lynx

Today we go for a full day to the Sierra de Andújar, home to some of the largest areas of Mediterranean forest in Spain. Cork oak is the dominant tree species here, the very same tree responsible for most of the quality corks in wine bottles around the world. In more arid areas of the park, thickets of rosemary, lavender, and marjoram predominate. It is here that we come home to observe the Iberian Lynx, a wild cat endemic to the Iberian Peninsula and listed as Endangered by IUCN. There are only two viable populations left in the world of this species, with Sierra de Andújar being one of them. This area is also very good for observing a variety of bird species, particularly raptors such as Golden Eagle, Eurasian Griffon, Cinereous Vulture, Egyptian Vulture, and (with luck) the regionally endemic Spanish Eagle.

Accommodations at Fuente Las Piedras in Cabra (B,L,D)



Wed., Sept. 7 Transfer to La Doñana

After breakfast, we drive to Villamanrique de la Condesa in La Doñana region to reach our next hotel. Here, we will meet with our next local guide.

After settling into our hotel, we visit the wetlands that flank the Caño del Guadiamar. This productive area is home to hundreds of herons, egrets, spoonbills, storks, grebes, terns, and more! The reeds and tamarisks are full of both singing Eurasian Reed-Warbler and Great Reed-Warbler. By around noon, we reach Dehesa Abajo. This portion of the park features a good example of the primitive original forest that once blanketed large parts of Andalusia, Spain. This woodland attracts numbers of European Bee-eater. Surrounding wetlands attract large numbers of Red-crested and Common Pochard, Greater Flamingo, Great Crested Grebe, and more. We search through these large rafts of waterfowl for less common ones such as Marbled Teal, White-headed Duck, and Red-knobbed Coot.

An optional night walk may produce some exciting nocturnal species: Eurasian Scops-Owl, Little Owl, Tawny Owl, and Red-necked Nightjar.

Accommodations at Hotel Ardea Purpurea in Villamanrique de la Condesa (B,L,D)

Thurs., Sept. 8 Doñana National Park

We dedicate our first morning here to visit a restricted area of Doñana National Park. Here, we find two important ecosystems: the Mediterranean woodland and wetlands. Our goal in the pine and cork oak woods is Iberian Lynx, one of the most endangered wild cat species in the world. The population is in decline due to sharp declines in rabbit populations (it preys exclusively on European Rabbit), as well as fragmentation of habitat. Doñana is one of the two last strongholds for this species.

We then we drive towards the paddy fields of Cantarita. We cross the characteristic rice plantations that dominate this region, before reaching the Brazo de la Torre and the boundary to the natural sanctuary of Doñana National Park. The elegant herons and egrets, the beautiful Collared Pratincole, the colorful Western Swamphen, the abundant Glossy Ibis – this is just a sampling of the extensive variety of birds that use this ecosystem during the different stages of rice cultivation.

We will have lunch in a local restaurant or a picnic lunch.

Accommodations at Hotel Ardea Purpurea in Villamanrique de la Condesa (B,L,D)

Fri., Sept. 9 Doñana National Park

The Brazo del Este Natural Park is 17 kilometres south of Seville, where the main channel of the Guadalquivir forks off. This Special Protection Area is the result of modifications that man has been making to gain



cropland from the Guadalquivir, one of the oldest branches of the river that runs through the marshes. Despite a large amount of human intervention, which started at the beginning of the last century, it has become an exceptionally important wetland for birds. With completely flat land, the channel is accompanied by rich water vegetation and a multitude of wetland species (especially in summer when Doñana itself dries out). Some of the species that we may encounter here include Garganey, Marbled Teal, Greater Flamingo, Northern Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Marsh-Harrier, Woodchat Shrike, Zitting Cisticola, and Spanish Sparrow.

If we have time, we will visit the nearby Salinas de Bonanza. These salt pans host large numbers and diversity of shorebirds and gulls, including Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Kentish Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Red-necked Phalarope, Green Sandpiper, Slender-billed Gull, Audouin's Gull, and Little Tern. *Accommodations at Hotel Ardea Purpurea in Villamanrique de la Condesa (B,L,D)*

Sat., Sept. 10 Transfer to Tarifa | Bird Migration

After breakfast, we drive to Tarifa where we will meet our guide. Every year, Tarifa and its surrounding areas experience one of the greatest natural events that one can witness in nature: the spectacle of bird migration. Only a little over eight miles from the continent of Africa, this strategic location at the southernmost tip of continental Europe lies on the main migratory bottleneck that funnels millions of birds from Western Europe across the Straits of Gibraltar to Africa twice a year.

During our time in this exciting area, we focus our efforts on visiting several sites in search of migratory birds including Black Kite, European Honey Buzzard, Egyptian Vulture, Black Stork, and Lesser Kestrel. Where we go will depend on weather conditions, but we have an expert guide who will find us the best places *Accommodations at La Codorniz or Zahara de los Atunes (B,L,D)*

Sun., Sept. 11 Bird Migration in Tarifa

After breakfast, we enjoy a morning excursion by private boat to observe seabirds of the western Mediterranean (Great Skua, Northern Gannet, Cory's Shearwater, and Balearic Shearwater) and cetaceans. We might see Long-finned Pilot Whale, Common Bottlenose Dolphin, and Short-beaked Common Dolphin. During the first half of September, it is also possible to see Sperm Whale and Orca (Killer Whale). In case of bad weather, we will visit a private island near Tarifa, which is also good for sea watching.



In the afternoon, we visit several areas to look for migrating birds and roosting areas for raptors. Again, where we go will depend on weather conditions, but of course we have an expert guide who will find us the best places.

Accommodations at La Codorniz or Zahara de los Atunes (B,L,D)

Mon., Sept. 12 Visit to La Janda

La Janda represents a mosaic of habitats due to its many historical uses. There are large pastures, an important wild olive grove, rice paddies, and canals with marsh vegetation that together welcome millions of birds through the different seasons to rest and refuel. Why is La Janda so important? It is the last stop for birds before leaving Europe during their annual fall migration, making it a vital site for birds to regain their strength before continuing their journey across the Strait of Gibraltar into North Africa and beyond.

Birds we may see here include European Turtle-Dove, Collared Pratincole, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Montagu's Harrier, Woodchat Shrike, Calandra Lark, Sardinian Warbler, Northern Wheatear, and Common Redstart. Nearby, we have the opportunity to see the Northern Bald Ibis. Here, the population of this Endangered species is part of a reintroduction program and intensively managed to secure their numbers under *Proyecto Eremita*.

Accommodations at La Codorniz or Zahara de los Atunes (B,L,D)

Tues., Sept. 13 Transfer to Ronda

After breakfast, we drive to Benaolan near Ronda where we meet our next local guide.

After settling into our hotel, we go out for birding in the Serrania de Ronda in the afternoon. The nearby Rio Guadiaro is only one of two rivers in the area to flow year-round. This river system acts as a highway for migratory passerines on their southward journey, which attracts an accompanying set of migratory (and non-migratory) raptors. In fact, the geographical location of this river and the surrounding mountains makes this one of Europe's best areas to observe concentrations of predatory birds. With a bit of luck, we should be able to see up to four species of eagle here—Bonelli's, Booted, Short-toed Snake-, and Golden Eagle. Indeed, being so near the famous Straits of Gibraltar, this area features a rich assortment of bird species migrating south in autumn.

Accommodations at Molino del Santo (B,L,D)

Wed., Sept. 14 Birding in the Sierra de Grazalema

Today, we visit the Sierra de Grazalema and adjoining areas. Established in 1977, this natural park offers spectacular, rocky scenery and a large number of limestone caverns. It is also home to an endemic tree, the Spanish Fir *Abies pinsappo*, a tree species that became isolated in these mountains since before the last ice age. Typical mountain birds we may observe in this area include the colorful Blue Rock-Thrush, dapper Black Wheatear, and intelligent Red-billed Chough. Throughout the park, there are large areas of Cork Oak Forests, often known as *dehesas* in Spain, which can hold good numbers of migrant warblers as well as resident passerines such as Crested Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, and Wood Lark.

It will be a relaxing day with your guide, who will be ready to explain not only the wildlife but also the culture and geology of this wonderful area.

Accommodations at Molino del Santo (B,L,D)

Thurs., Sept. 15 Departures

The final day of this trip. Depending on departure time of the flights, we can spend some time birding during our trip from Ronda to the airport in Malaga. (B,L)

Guide Carlos Sanchez



Born in Miami, Florida, Carlos has had a fascination with wildlife since childhood. In college he began to bird in earnest throughout Florida, South America, and even Australia. Currently, Carlos sits on the board of the Tropical Audubon Society, is a regular contributor to the birding blog 10,000 Birds, and leads local tours through his company, EcoAvian Tours. He has also been a resident guide at lodges in both Ecuador and Brazil.

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$4990 DBL / \$5490 SGL** per person from Malaga, Spain, based on double occupancy and includes: accommodations for 12 nights, meals as specified in the itinerary, professional guide services, local guides, local park and reserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

It does not include roundtrip airfare to or from Malaga, airport transfers, or items of a personal nature such as: laundry, telephone, drinks from the bar, or gratuities for portage or personal services.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Málaga-Costa del Sol Airport (AGP) on the morning of September 3, or a day ahead of time (at your own expense). We can recommend a hotel if you plan to come in a day early. Please plan your flights home in the afternoon on September 15. Alternatively, plan to extend your adventure with a trip to Hungary and Bulgaria. Please check your flight times with us before you book and finalize your plans.

Photo Credits

Greater Flamingo, Pieter Verheij Photography | Spanish Nature (PVP); European Bee-eater, Gerard Gorman (GG); Red Deer, PVP; Booted Eagle, PVP; Griffon Vulture, PVP; European Roller, PVP; Great Spotted Woodpecker, PVP; Black Vulture, PVP; Eurasian Spoonbill, PVP; Seafood in Andalusia, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Cordoba, CS; Iberian Ibex, CS; Common Chaffinch, CS; Kingfisher, Tom Dove; Wildflower, CS; Great Reed Warbler, PVP; Spotted Redshank, PVP; Serin, PVP; Spain group, CS; Red Squirrel, PVP; Redwing, PVP; Spanish Imperial Eagle, PVP; Fox, PVP.

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