

Spain Birding & Nature

with Naturalist Journeys



September 3 – 15, 2023

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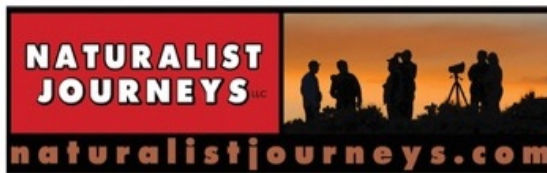
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Spain enjoys some of the richest and most exciting birding in all of Europe. It sits on a migratory pathway and with a wide variety of habitats, it is a top European birding destination. On this tour, our field days occur in scenic landscapes that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

\$5490, from Malaga

Airport is Málaga-Costa del Sol Airport (AGP)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Sun., 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)

Mon., Sept. 4 – Wed., Sept. 6 Transfer to Andújar | All Day Birding | Searching for Iberian Lynx

We transfer to the Sierra de Andújar, home to some of the largest areas of Mediterranean forest in Spain. We then enjoy two and a half days exploring this fascinating forest. 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 or similar (B,L,D)

Thurs., 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)

Fri., 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)

Sat., 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)

Sun., 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)

Mon., 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)

Tues., 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)

Wed., 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)

Thurs., 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)

Fri., 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)

Tour Details

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 **\$5490 DBL / \$6140 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

Arrival and Departure Airport: Malaga-Costa del Sol Airport (AGP)

Arrival: Sunday, September 3, 2023 at leisure. We recommend arrival in the morning if you wish to go birding in the afternoon (or plan to arrive the day before). The tour officially starts with the welcome dinner after this optional outing.

Departure: September 15, 2023 in the afternoon. We have a 1.5-hour drive to the airport, and you should be there 2.5 – 3 hours ahead for international flights so please book flights out after NOON.

Travel Tips and Extra Services: Our operator can book an early night (or nights) hotel for you if you wish to rest up from travel or explore Malaga a bit. It's a great small city with a lot to do, including the famous Picasso Museum. The internet is FULL of best things to do in Malaga, here is one link to spark your curiosity. <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/spain/articles/the-10-best-things-to-do-in-m-laga/>

VISAS: At this time no Visa is required ahead of time for tourist visits of less than 90 days.

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.

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