

Birding & Nature in Spain's Pyrenees

July 8-19, 2026 | Trip Report by Tamara Winkler



With Guide Carl Grillet, Naturalist Journeys' Staff Host Tamara, and participants Christa, Robert, Karen, Chuck and Kit



Our Pyrenees Adventure Begins!

Wed., Jul. 8

Arrival in Barcelona | Leonardo Royal Hotel

The last of our group arrived in the morning with Carl picking them up from the Barcelona El Prat airport. The rest of us had arrived at various times the day before. Kit and Tamara met up to have dinner together at the hotel rooftop restaurant, which has views of the ocean and the city of Barcelona. In the distance you could spot Antoni Gaudi's masterpiece, the distinctive La Sagrada Familia.

We arranged to meet up for lunch at the hotel rooftop restaurant, before heading out into Barcelona for some sightseeing (and maybe a few birds!). Our first stop was to tour the Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau, which was built by Catalan architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner between 1902 and 1930 and housed the hospital from 1916 to 2009. It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997 and is a

wonderful example of Art Nouveau style. The grounds of the Hospital were beautiful, with lovely flower gardens and open areas to attract birds and butterflies.

We continued to walk the short distance to Sagrada Familia, viewing the amazing architectural wonder from all sides. During that afternoon we saw quite a few species, including several species of Pigeon (Rock and Common-Wood), Eurasian Collared-Dove, as well as Rose-ringed and Monk Parakeet. Alpine and Common Swifts could be seen flying all around the Sagrada Familia.

Dinner was at a restaurant nearby, where we could cool off and rest a bit while we got to know each other better. The food was very good and enjoyed by all. Carl was also playfully dubbed “Boss Man” by the waiter, a nickname that stuck around for the entire tour.

Thurs., Jul. 9 Llobregat & Lleida Steppes | Belchite Steppes

We met in the morning for a delicious breakfast at our hotel. The offerings were plentiful and fresh, with plenty of meats, cheeses, and fruit. After breakfast we headed out of the city to the Llobregat Delta Nature Area for some wetland birding. As we climbed a viewing platform at the nature area entrance, Christa spotted a Common Hoopoe and we were able to see its distinctive striped wings as it flew. We were very lucky to see Eurasian Penduline-Tit as well. As we strolled along, we heard but didn’t see the Eurasian Moorhen in the reeds along the road. They are a timid bird, so while it sounded close, it never came out in the open. A short time later there was a large group of about 20 Glossy Ibis that we got very good looks at and we heard the distinctive call of the Zitting Cisticola for the first time. We also heard vocalizations from birds such as the Little Bittern, Common Reed Warbler, and the Citti’s Warbler that were hiding in the reeds. Despite the heat that day, we still managed to see a good number of bird species in this area.

We started our drive towards Belchite where we would spend the night at Hotel Oleum, stopping along the way to do some birding as opportunities presented. Lunch was at the El Moli del Mallol restaurant in the historic town of Montblanc, which is built around a centuries old castle. With a beautifully decorated interior and authentic Catalan dishes, this lunch was a real treat that was enjoyed by all. As a bonus, the dishes were prepared with locally sourced, fresh ingredients.

Fri., Jul. 10 El Planeron Ornithological Reserve | Piraces | Mallos de Riglos

We started our day early with sunrise birding at El Planeron Ornithological Reserve, just south of Zaragoza. On the drive there we saw a gorgeous Iberian Fox who sat and watched us from the roadside. With reddish coloration and a distinctive, white-tipped tail we all got a very good look. When we arrived at the reserve we were treated to a spectacular sunrise. We saw and heard at least 24 bird species including the Calandra Lark, Iberian Gray Shrike, Western Black-eared Wheatear, just to name a few. We got our first look at a Common Buzzard and stopped on the way back to Belchite to get a close-up view of a group of brightly colored European Bee-eater on a tree right by the roadside.

By mid-morning we had returned to our hotel for breakfast and then we were off to tour the ruins of the Old Town of Belchite. Many of these buildings are still standing despite it being a battleground in the Spanish Civil War.

As the day progressed, we drove on to our accommodations for the next 3 nights near the town of Riglos. The Alen D'Aragon hotel is located out of town, situated among an olive grove and has amazing views of the Pyrenees Mountains. After we were greeted at the hotel with complimentary cold drinks, we settled into our rooms, all of which were named after family members of the owners. After a bit of rest, we met to go into town for dinner at a local tapas bar. Dinner was at 8 pm, which is the normal time most restaurants open for dinner in Spain. The locals were watching the World Cup match between Belgium and Spain. Of course we were all rooting for Belgium, as that is Carl's home country!

Sat., Jul. 11 Mallos de Riglos “Kingdon of Cliffs” | Loarre Castle

We started the day with a wonderful homemade breakfast at our hotel with scrambled eggs, fresh fruit, croissants, bread, and coffee, all made by our wonderful hosts at Alen D-Aragon. As we were leaving the grounds, Christa spotted a Short-toed Snake-Eagle perched on a power pole. An impressive bird, as the name suggests, it continued to stay perched and we all got very good looks through the spotting scope. We continued our drive to Mallos de Riglos where we got our first looks at the Eurasian Griffon that were perched on rock spires and soaring around the rock formations in groups. We heard the European Turtle-Dove and Sardinian Warbler and also got a look at the Eurasian Hobby and Mistle Thrush.

After watching the vultures at Mallos de Riglos, we drove towards Loarre Castle, stopping along the way to have lunch at a restaurant nearby. Tapas were shared by all in a leisurely lunch that was delicious. We had a waiter that we all loved and we all shared a lot of laughs. Gazpacho was enjoyed by all and Carl was given another nickname from Robert. For the rest of our time together, he was “Gazpacho Man” after taking a photo of him in front of a tower of empty gazpacho glasses.

After our lunch, which was full of good food and laughter, we drove the short distance to the Castille de Loarre. This is one of the oldest and best-preserved Romanesque fortresses in Spain, dating back to the eleventh century. While exploring the castle we spotted an Egyptian Vulture and Eurasian Griffon soaring overhead. The view from the top of the castle of the surrounding countryside was well worth the climb.

On the way back to our lodgings, we stopped to get groceries in Huesca for our next 2 nights of dinners, since we would be having a few longer days. We gathered in Kit's room where she graciously agreed to host us for a dinner of finger foods and delicious local cheeses selected by Carl.

Sun., Jul. 12 Hecho Valley | San Gabardito

After another refreshing breakfast prepared by our hosts at Alen D'Aragon, we loaded up and traveled to the Hecho Valley and the Refugio de Gabardito in the Pyrenees Mountains, the most western part of our journey. The views were amazing as we climbed in elevation. We stopped at the picturesque town of Hecho for a refreshing drink and a short walk around town. The stone buildings and narrow, cobbled streets provided a feeling of having traveled back in time. While there we saw a Red Kite soaring above town.

We ascended into the Pyrenees Mountains and stopped at a high mountain meadow to look at the Pyrenean Blue Thistle, in which all parts of the plant are a brilliant blue, and to observe and identify the abundant species of butterflies in the area. We continued on to Boca del Infierno, our one chance to find

the elusive Wallcreeper. After a hike to the cliff face, we were able to hear the Wallcreeper but did not get any looks. However, we did see many species of birds that day overall, so the day was very productive. After a lunch of “hamburgers” at the small restaurant there, we started the drive back to our hotel and once again saw an Iberian Fox watching us from the side of the road as we were driving.

We gathered once again in Kit’s room for a light and early (for Spain!) dinner after our long day.

Mon., Jul. 13 The Wild Northern Guara | Salto del Roldan

We started our day with an optional pre-breakfast walk in the olive grove on the grounds of the Alen D’Aragon hotel. A Short-toed Snake-Eagle was sitting once again on a power line and we all got another good look at him. As we strolled among the olive trees we saw European Turtle-Dove, Woodchat Shrike, and a Common Hoopoe flying away. We heard the Eurasian Golden Oriole’s beautiful song and Carl imitated it in an attempt to lure the bird closer so we could all get a look at this brilliantly colored yellow and black bird. The bird would call right back when Carl imitated him and it was almost like they were having a conversation! We never did get a good look but it was really fun to hear them talking to one another.

After yet another wonderful breakfast, we said goodbye to our gracious hosts at our hotel and left to explore the northern Guara. We traveled to Sierra y Canones de Guara National Park and traveled up the mountain to Salto del Roldan where we were fortunate to get incredible close-up views of European Griffon riding the thermal air currents around the stunning rock formations. We observed a large number of European Griffon resting at their breeding colony and saw several Bearded Vulture as well. The views from this high up were absolutely stunning.

We left this beautiful place and drove to the nearby town of Huesca to have a late lunch at a restaurant next to a shopping mall that turned out to be very good, with a very funny waiter who made us all laugh a lot!

After lunch we set out for Lasaosa, a ghost town where we were going to stay the next 2 nights. The town is situated in the forest several miles from any other settlements and felt like a very rural private area, with several buildings having been recently renovated. We chose our rooms in the 2 renovated buildings and settled in for the next couple of days. This felt like a very unique and special place, with ruins all around to explore. After a bit of rest Carl had a special treat for us. We drove a short way to an ancient Neolithic burial site, between 5 and 6 thousand years old, called a Dolmen. The Dolmen of Ibirque was discovered in 1949 and is a simple dolmen with a large chamber. It is a circle of stones with a horizontal stone on them, forming a burial chamber. It was impossible not to have a sense of wonder when looking at this ancient structure and wondering about the life of the person buried here and why they were so important that this monument, that has lasted so many centuries, was built for them. Just before leaving this ancient site Chuck took a photo of the beautiful sunset which he generously shared with the rest of the group.

Tues., Jul. 14

El Portalet | Pyrenees National Park | Panticosa Ski Resort

We started the day with optional pre-breakfast birding on the grounds of Lasaosa and were excited to see a large group of European Bee-eater, who put on quite a show flying overhead. We finally got to see several Eurasian Golden Oriole, who we had heard calling all around the grounds that morning. We were all excited to see an Iberian Green Woodpecker through the scope and were able to take our time viewing this impressive bird. Carl spotted a large butterfly but after pointing it out to us he turned away to look through the scope and a local cat who had been accompanying us that morning, stalked and ate it!

After breakfast we headed for the border of Spain and France where we spent time birding as well as looking at butterflies and the large flocks of sheep grazing. The open landscape and rolling hills with the towering Pyrenees Mountains behind was a spectacular sight to see and spend time enjoying. We drove a short way into France to the town of Laruns, where we had lunch in a small rustic restaurant with wonderful food and décor. After lunch we turned around and headed back to Spain so we could go to the Panticosa Ski Resort and ride the tram to the top for some high elevation birding. It was very windy when we first got up to the top, but it settled down pretty quickly. While hiking further up the road above the restaurant we were thrilled to see an Alpine Marmot! We all agreed that it was bigger than we thought it would be. Several in the group walked further up the mountain and some stayed back to relax in the outdoor area of the restaurant and enjoy a cold drink.

We caught the tram back down the mountain and traveled back to Lasaosa, where we would have dinner and then take a short walk at sunset to look for the Eurasian Nightjar along the nearby road. Unfortunately, we didn't see any nightjars, but we did hear them out in the field next to the road. Again, we were accompanied by the local cat, but no butterflies were harmed this time.

Wed., Jul. 15

Lasaosa | Enrique's Butterfly Museum | Alquezar

Today we started our day with early morning birding at our lodge in Lasaosa, without any cats this time. We walked a short distance to the edge of the open field where we had been the day before hoping to show the rest of the group all the species we had seen there already. We again saw a large group of about 30 European Bee-eater, Great Spotted Woodpecker, and at least 4 Red-backed Shrike. Everyone got very good looks at the Eurasian Golden Oriole and listened to their beautiful songs. We were lucky to see a Western Orphean Warbler and a Red-legged Partridge which was spotted in the rocks on a ridge across the field. It was a great morning with at least 17 species seen or heard before breakfast.

After breakfast we packed up, said goodbye to the cats, and traveled a short distance to a local private butterfly museum in the tiny village of Aneito. Our expert, Enrique, is a soft-spoken man with a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm for butterflies and moths that he was more than happy to share with us. We all enjoyed his beautiful exhibits and the interesting and informative way he shared that knowledge with us.

After we left Enrique and his butterflies we drove to the medieval village of Alquezar, where we would spend the next two nights. Alquezar has narrow cobbled lanes and beautiful stone buildings. A Moorish castle overlooks the village and is lit up at night for a stunning view. Once arrived, we checked into the

quaint Santa Maria Hotel and then went next door for a leisurely lunch. As usual, the food was excellent, beautifully presented and enjoyed by all. After lunch we walked back to our hotel for siesta time and had a plan to explore this beautiful town in addition to some souvenir shopping a bit later.

We met outside the hotel in the evening before dinner and walked along the narrow stone cobbled streets to a magnificent canyon and rock face studded with caves that contained prehistoric drawings. We watched the Alpine Swift and Rock Pigeon flit around the deep canyon below us. We had a late dinner at a bar on an outside patio that overlooked this beautiful canyon and enjoyed the sunset, sharing old photos of ourselves with each other, laughing and enjoying good company.

Thurs., Jul. 16 Alquezar Village | Santa Cilia De Panzano | Torla

We started our day with early birding before breakfast at the canyon in Alquezar Village. We saw or heard at least 15 species, including the elusive Blue Rock-Thrush and European Greenfinch. We all got good looks at the distinctive Egyptian Vulture with the white markings seen during flight and also a number of Eurasian Griffon flying high above the canyon.

After a bountiful breakfast at our hotel, we traveled to the Santa Cilia de Panzano Visitor Center where we were hoping to observe the vultures being fed. While it was not the right day for feeding, we did stay to enjoy the landscape and the lovely village. Fortunately, we did also see a vulture feeding on a carcass in a field near Siben later that day.

We continued on to the town of Torla and Ordesa National Park, where we met up with Pablo who would be driving us up to the top of the Pyrenees, traveling through privately owned land. While traveling up the mountain Pablo explained that private landowners grazed cattle up here in the summer months and historically, some of the land had been cleared and terraced to provide grazing. Once at the top we had amazing views of mountain peaks all around. It was so beautiful we decided that this was an excellent place for a group photo! After enjoying the scenery and cooler temperatures for a while, it was time for Pablo to drive us back down the mountain before sunset. While driving down we were fortunate enough to spot a Bearded Vulture. Just a short while later we also spotted a male and female Red Crossbill with their unique crossed bill which is used to pry seeds out of conifer cones. Carl informed us that getting such a good look at a pair of crossbills was very unusual, as they usually don't perch for very long at a time.

We got back to our hotel later that night, and as we drove into Alquezar we were treated to sight of the 8th century castle which overlooks the village. It was lit up for the evening, a beautiful sight.

Fri., Jul. 17 Lecina Canyon del Vero | Carrasca de Lecina | Pirineos Bird Center

Today we left the medieval village of Alquezar after a hearty breakfast at our hotel and began the drive towards Barcelona, stopping several times along the way. We stopped briefly at Lecina Canon del Vero hoping for a last look at the Eurasian Griffon and the Egyptian Vulture, both of which we did see, as well as Red Kite and Eurasian Blackcap. We also took an interesting side trip to Barcabo, near the town of Lecina, to see a tree that was honored in 2021 as the European Tree of the Year by the Environmental

Society Association. It is considered one of the longest-lived trees in Spain, with an estimated age of 1100 years and is one of the largest holm oaks in Spain.

As we continued our journey towards Barcelona we stopped at the Castillo de Ainsa, or the Pyrenees Bird Center. The Center is located in the heart of the medieval town of Aínsa and we were able to get closeup views of various birds that were being rehabilitated from injuries. There were vendors selling their handmade handicrafts outside which we eagerly visited and we all were happy to purchase items at the gift shop as they contributed to vulture recovery efforts. After all, who doesn't want vulture themed souvenirs from Spain?

We enjoyed a wonderful lunch on the grounds with a chance to cool down, relax, and reflect on how we became fortunate enough to be travelers together on this journey through the Spanish Pyrenees. This meal served as our farewell dinner as we knew we would be getting in late to our hotel in Barcelona and some of us had early departures the next day. We did get to Barcelona somewhat late, but most of the group went out to enjoy one last meal with excellent company.

Sat., Jul. 18 Barcelona | Farewells

It's always a bit sad to say goodbye to new friends, but it was time to go home. We were all tired, but very happy with all the places we were so fortunate to have visited. We saw so many beautiful and interesting bird species and learned a lot about the different vultures that are so abundant in the Pyrenees Mountains. We have many memories to share with friends and family and perhaps we'll meet again sometime on another adventure.

Photo Credits: Group Photo (Tamara Winkler), Torla, Ordesa National Park, Loarre Castle (TW), Montblanc (TW), Tour Participants (TW), Eurasian Hoopoe, Griffon Vulture, European Greenfinch by Carlos Sanchez, Queen of Spain Fritillary by Carlos Sanchez