

Spain: Birding & Nature | Trip Report

Sept. 3 – 15, 2022 | with Naturalist Journeys



With local guides Manuel Morales and Victor Porras, and participants Anindya, David, Vicki, and Vivian.



Sat., Sept. 3

Arrivals

We arrived and met at the hotel Malaga Alameda Centro where we were welcomed by our guide Manuel in the lobby. After settling in, we went out and enjoyed a wonderful Spanish welcome dinner with some local specialties such as fried anchovies, Iberian ham and homemade croquettes.

Sun., Sept. 4

Sierra de Andujar Natural Park | La Caracola

After a very nice breakfast at the hotel Malaga Alameda Centro, we departed towards Sierra de Andujar Natural Park, where we were going to spend the next 3 days. On the way to our hotel La Caracola in Andujar, we saw our first raptors of the tour: Booted Eagle, Common Buzzard and Black Kite. Also, and due to fall bird migration in Southern Spain, we drove through Cordoba, we could enjoy watching the first huge flocks of White Stork heading south, where there were at least 3,000 of them. When we arrived at Sierra de Andujar Natural Park, we stopped at the visitor center to get an idea of where we were and the places that we were going to visit during the next few days. At the visitor center we saw the first groups of Azure-winged Magpie (which now in Spain is named the Iberian Magpie) and many more nice birds such as Long-tailed Tit, Iberian Green Woodpecker and many others. We arrived at our hotel, "La Caracola," where we enjoyed a nice lunch. After a short rest we took



our first chance to see the Iberian Lynx and lovely birds such Spanish (Imperial) Eagle and Black Vulture. On our arrival back to the hotel we had a wonderful homecooked dinner.

Mon., Sept. 5 El Encinarejo Dam

We started the day very early with the idea to visit El Encinarejo Dam because this is an excellent place to see Eurasian Otter and because the Iberian Lynx was recently spotted there. When we arrived, we saw a lone Eurasian Otter fishing and swimming for a long time just in front of us. The rest of the morning we enjoyed watching small passerines such as Willow Warbler, Grey Wagtail, Spotted Flycatcher and we had some amazing views of two Spanish (Imperial) Eagles. After we had picked-up the picnic lunches from our hotel, we headed to Jandula Dam. We enjoyed our picnic lunch there, shortly after this we saw Iberian Ibex and a nice colony of Bats (Pipistrelle sp) in the tunnel towards the Jandula reservoir. We also saw other nice birds such as Red-billed Chough and Spanish (Imperial) Eagle among others. After lunch we gave it another chance to see the elusive Iberian Lynx, but again without success. In the late afternoon, we again could enjoy lovely views of Spanish (Imperial) Eagle and Black Vulture and we also discovered a nice Ocellated Lizard due to the calls of Common Magpies It was also a nice moment watching and hearing the rutting season of Red Deer.

Tues., Sept. 6 Early Birding in Andujar Natural Park

Our last day in Andujar started with an early breakfast just to be ready for the Iberian Lynx at the first light of the day. Apart from the beauty of European Mouflon and Red Deer (which we saw), we saw many Iberian Magpie and very nice warblers such as Orphean Warbler and Common Firecrest, but we did not have the luck to see the Iberian Lynx. It was also our last lunch in La Caracola and there is no better way than to enjoy the most famous Spanish dish, a lovely paella. After a proper paella a good rest is very important and after this, we had a wonderful afternoon watching birds along the river Encinarejo. Birds such as White and Grey Wagtail, European Goldfinch, Hawfinch, Common Kingfisher, Golden Oriole and many others gave us wonderful views and very exciting moments. We stayed in the area until dusk with the idea to watch for some nocturnal birds and mammals and we were lucky with nice views of Rednecked Nightjar and a wonderful Eagle Owl singing on its perch.

Wed., Sept. 7 Seville | Brazo de la Torre | Dehesa Tornero

After an early start from Andujar, and some 3 hours on the road, we reached Seville. Here we had a little comfort stop and we said goodbye to our guide Manuel and hello to Victor who would be our guide for the rest



of the tour. Soon we headed down to Villamanrique de la Condesa, talking about the itinerary ahead and enjoying on our route some nice sightings of Booted Eagle and Common Buzzard. Once checked in at Ardea Purpurea, our accommodation for the coming days, and after having enjoyed a tasty lunch, the group devoted the afternoon and evening to a visit to Brazo de la Torre and Dehesa Tornero, where, despite the very dry conditions in the area, we enjoyed a good number of birds, as Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard, several Woodchat Shrike and White Stork. The constant presence of Yellow-crowned Bishops and some Common Waxbills, plus the dragonflies Northern Banded Groundlings and Red-winged Darters was another bonus. After a very pleasant dinner it was off to bed, it had been a long and interesting day! The Tawny Owls literally perched on our roof creating the perfect ambience!

Thurs., Sept. 8 Huelva | Odiel Marshes | Laguna Grande | Owling!

This day we decided to head towards Huelva and explore the Odiel marshes. Laguna Grande provided magnificent views of Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill, Ruff, Little Ringed Plover, Wood Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Glossy Ibis and plenty of Gadwall and Black-tailed Godwit, to name but a few. Then we decided to stroll into the salt pans, where we had great views of hundreds of Black-bellied Plover, Dunlin, Whimbrel and Eurasian Curlew, Black - and Common Tern and we also saw up to 3 different Ospreys. A hearty lunch in Huelva with the group getting acquainted to the local seafood delicacies, and off again to Doñana, visiting Acebron Palace, where we could take in a very different habitat of amazing Cork Oaks and Ferns, with a huge number of Spotted and Pied Flycatcher, and a very active Eurasian Sparrowhawk, plus the very abundant Iberian Magpies. A Garden Warbler and some Willow Warblers plus several Booted Eagles and a sighting of Iberian Grey Shrike and it was time to drive back to the hotel for dinner. After dinner we took time for a small Owling session! Obtaining no response from any species of Owl but to our sheer surprise, an Iberian Lynx suddenly appeared in front of some of us and quickly vanished into the darkness!!

Fri., Sept. 9 Coria del Río | Ferry Ride to Brazo del Este

Having again magnificent weather, we set off to Coria del Río, where we took the “wee ferry” across the River Guadalquivir to spend the whole day exploring Brazo del Este. Hundreds of Lesser Black-backed Gull and White Stork formed a beautiful backdrop. Night Herons, Marsh Harriers, 3 Ospreys in flight at one time, lead the way toward the meanders, where we came up against the most incredible diversity: Marbled Teal, Whiskered Tern, Black Tern, Common and Red-crested Pochard, Red-knobbed Coot, hundreds of Glossy Ibis, Common Snipe, one White-winged Tern and more than 40 Wood Sandpipers in one single Pool alongside many other species, made a perfect morning. A quick drive into Los Palacios to enjoy a delicious lunch (rice with Partridge) and back again to



explore the northern part, with many Black Stork, Common Snipe, Collared Pratincole, Booted Eagle, Osprey. What a day!

Sat., Sept. 10 Tarifa | Bonanza Salt pans

Today, it is transfer day, and our next destination is Tarifa! As usual the group gathered around the central garden for some pre-breakfast birding and there were 2 obliging Eurasian Wrynecks feeding on the wet lawn setting the day on the right track! A little over 1.5 hour drive South and we had our first stop to check out the Tarelo Lagoon, with nice additions in the form of White-headed Duck and Black-necked Grebe. A short pause to savor the local specialties at Venta Raspa and time to go for the Bonanza Salt pans. Slender-billed Gull, hundreds of Dunlin, Sanderling, Curlew Sandpiper, Red-Knot, a whole clay-wall covered in Eurasian Curlew and Kentish Plover. We even found more Marbled Teal and Tufted Duck at the Colorado Lagoons. Once arrived in Tarifa, we were met by a very active migration, right over La Codorniz, our new accommodation. Short-toed Eagles, Booted Eagles, Egyptian Vultures and our first European Honey Buzzards!

Sun., Sept. 11 Los Lances Beach | Migrating Wonders

Easterly winds and a promising day of migration ahead. We started off with an interesting visit to Los Lances beach and adjacent fields with gave us good views of hundreds of Calandra Larks, Northern and Black-eared Wheatears, Eurasian Sparrowhawks and numerous Black Kites and European Honey Buzzards struggling with the gusts of Easterlies. At the Lagoon, Kentish Plover, Red-Knot, Curlew Sandpiper, and many other shore birds awaited us against a backdrop of Cory's Shearwaters and Gannets offshore and our first Audouin's - and Mediterranean Gulls. We spent the rest of this great migration day at several Viewpoints getting the best sightings of hundreds of Booted Eagles, Short-toed Eagles, European Honey Buzzards, Griffon - and Egyptian Vultures, and dozens of Eurasian Sparrowhawk as they all fought their way into the coastal valleys.

Mon., Sept. 12 Strait of Gibraltar

And finally, the strong Easterly winds gave way to a beautiful calm day that allowed our planned boat trip into the Strait of Gibraltar. After an appetizer of bird migration from Santuario, with good numbers of Black Kite, Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle and European Honey Buzzard, and a showy Ocellated Lizard, we drove into Tarifa town center, getting very good views of the Common Bulbul present at Tarifa's car park. A quick stroll around the castle with some Lesser Kestrels and a little stop-over for a tasty coffee before boarding our boat. A refreshing downpour just as we left the harbor and soon, we were all surrounded by several family pods of Pilot



Whales, some gently swimming by as close to us as it gets, and treating all the audience to a truly unforgettable experience as they momentarily popped out of the water to look at us and interacted with each other. Some

Common Dolphins swam past us as we also got to sight a Pomarine - and an Arctic Skua and had a flitting view of several European Storm-Petrels. To top it all off, the chef at La Codorniz cooked to order the best Seafood Paella for dinner!

Tues., Sept. 13 Sierra de Ronda

Another transfer day ahead of us, with very overcast conditions and a few showers and we head North towards Sierra de Ronda. A brief stop-off on the main road by some imposing limestone cliff near Algodonales gives us plenty of Griffon Vultures flying low overhead and the most impressive gathering of Alpine Swifts and Crag Martins! After checking into our rooms at Meson del Puente, we proceed to have lunch at a nearby local restaurant overlooking a little creek where our group located a truly big Montpellier Snake by the water. At Cueva del Gato we had a glimpse at our first Blue Rock Thrush, and then as requested by the group, we devote the rest of the afternoon to visiting Ronda's old quarter and doing some shopping. Once back at the hotel, we all enjoyed some time with Peter Jones, who came by to share his valuable expert knowledge on how to get the most out of our time around these mountains.

Wed., Sept. 14 Birding the Hotel Grounds | Serranía de Ronda

Very early and before dawn, part of the group got together for a pre-breakfast birding session by the stream at the back of the hotel: With European Robin, Eurasian Blackcap, Grey Wagtail, Eurasian Wren, a Garden Warbler, European Bee-eaters flying over and a Western Olivaceous Warbler! In less than one hour we were slowly driving through the dirt tracks of the Serranía de Ronda, enjoying the most amazing numbers of Common Redstart, big concentrations of Willow Warbler, impressive numbers of Griffon Vulture permanently floating above us alongside Booted Eagles and Short-toed Eagles. Patiently scanning the vegetation, we managed to see several Dartford Warblers, Common Whitethroat, Spectacled Warbler, Iberian Grey Shrike and Black Wheatears around the limestone boulders. Then we were off to spend some time standing near a Cork Oak with real close ups of Firecrest and Coal Tit. Grazalema and its environs proved to be just as good, plenty of Griffon Vulture, a glimpse of a Golden Eagle and then finally the spectacular Puerta de Las Palomas provided our sought-after Bonelli's Eagle and great views of Rock Bunting, European Serin, more Willow Warblers and Iberian Ibex, to name just a few! We finished the day and this tour with a lovely dinner and a bottle of Spanish Cava (sparkling wine of Denominación de Origen (DO) status from Spain) to toast on a truly magnificent week of touring Andalucía with these great people!

Thurs., Sept. 15 Departures

Our magnificent week around Andalucía came to an end and it is time for farewells. After a nice breakfast we drove back to Malaga Airport, sharing memories of the many highlights experienced during the tour.

Photos by Anindya Sen