

Spring Flowers of Western Andalusia

Naturetrek Tour Dossier

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly to Málaga and transfer to hotel
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- Day 2/7** Driving and walking excursions in search of plants and other natural history
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- Day 8** Fly London
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Departs

March

Focus

Plants, and other natural history

Grading

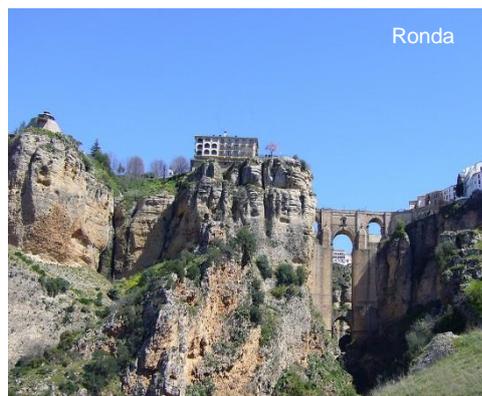
Grade A/B. Easy/moderate day walks only, up to 2,000 metres

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP14) or brochure

Highlights

- A wealth of rare and localised Orchids, Daffodils & Irises
- Magical white-washed mountain villages nestling among the rugged peaks of the sierras
- A host of iconic birds with Griffon Vultures & Golden Eagles soaring overhead
- Butterflies may include the Spanish Festoon and Cleopatra
- Excellent food & a warm welcome assured in this quiet corner of Spain



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly Málaga

We leave from the UK today on a direct flight to Málaga. It is likely that we will be able to offer a selection of departures from regional airports; please state your preference upon booking. The two and a half hour flight gives an exciting view of the mountainous interior of Spain en route. We pick up our minibus and drive north through orange groves and vineyards, before climbing onto the scenic ridge-top route of the Sierra de las Nieves towards Ronda, with its constantly unfolding views of mountains and wooded valleys. Depending on our flight time, we may have lunch en route and expect to arrive at the hotel by late afternoon. This rural hotel will provide a comfortable base for our week-long exploration of the area. All evening meals will be taken there.

Day 2

Grazalema

A short drive west takes us within the boundary of the Sierra de Grazalema Natural Park. We will make several road-side stops for plants, such as *Ophrys tenthredinifera* (Sawfly Orchid), *Ophrys speculum* (Mirror Orchid) and *Ophrys lutea* (Yellow Bee Orchid) and in field margins, we hope to find the locally rare endemic Daffodil, *Narcissus flavus*. Birds of the rocky pasture should include Thekla Lark, Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting. Grazalema, made famous by Hemingway and Polunin, is one of the most beautiful of the scattered white villages. Its limestone cliffs are home to many rare plants, including the large lemon-yellow *Biscutella frutescens*, the grey-leaved *Centaurea clementei* and the endemic toadflax, *Linaria platycalyx*. We will stop for coffee and to walk through its picturesque streets, before exploring the rugged limestone scenery



Fritillaria lusitanica

of the Sierra del Pinar, above the town. Here we can see the largest remaining native stand of the endemic *Abies pinsapo* (Spanish Fir). *Orchis olbiensis* (Early Purple Orchid) should be abundant, in the turf and shaded clefts in the boulders are home to a variety of ferns, saxifrages and dwarf daffodils. After lunch we will drive up to pass of Puerto de las Polomas, at 1327 metres, with magnificent views, if the weather is right. A careful search, among the dwarf shrubby vegetation, should reveal *Fritillaria lusitanica*, whilst overhead we may see Alpine Swift, Golden Eagle and Short-toed Snake Eagle. From here, with time permitting, we will visit the Gargante Verde, home to one of the largest Griffon Vulture colonies in Spain.

Day 3

Garganta del Chorro

An hour's drive to the east, above El Chorro, the Rio Guadalhorce has carved a dramatic defile through the sandstones and forms the basis of a complex of hydro-electric dams. Mixed pine and oak woodland, deep valleys and eroded sandstone rocks form a diverse landscape, rich in plants and with a great diversity of

birds. During our exploration, we hope to find *Anemone palmata* (Yellow Anemone), *Muscari comosum* (Tassel Hyacinth), *Muscari neglectum* (Grape Hyacinth), the strange-flowered Birthwort, *Aristolochia baetica* (a Birthwort) and a variety of orchids, including *Orchis anthropophora* (Man Orchid), *Orchis italica* (Naked Man Orchid) and *Ophrys speculum* (Mirror Orchid), as well as the curious *Rupicapnos africana*. If the season is late, we also have every chance of seeing the diminutive *Narcissus cantabricus* (White Hoop-petticoat Daffodil). After coffee in El Chorro, we will examine the damp roadsides beside the hydro-electric substation, hoping to see some of the more ancient plant groups, including *Adiantum capillus-veneris* (Maidenhair Fern), and Dutch Rush, *Equisetum hyemale*.

Day 4

Sierra de las Nieves and Ronda

South-east of Ronda, the Sierra de las Nieves culminates in Torrecilla, at 1,918 metres, the highest mountain in Western Andalusia. It is an area of rugged limestone and wild grandeur, the high northern slopes of which are clothed with ancient relict forest, including several smaller stands of the endemic Spanish Fir, *Abies pinsapo*. We explore the 'Maquis' of the lower slopes by road and then take to a mountain trail through the trees. Red-berried Mistletoe, *Viscum cruciatum* grows here, on Hawthorn, and damp areas of hillside support colonies of the large-flowered *Narcissus longispathus*. Eventually, we arrive at the Area Recreativa Los Quejigales. In mixed woodland we will seek out *Daphne laureola* (Spurge Laurel), *Pinus pinaster* (Maritime Pine), and *Berberis hispanica* (Spanish Barberry) and, if the sun is shining, *Romulea bulbocodium* (Sand Crocus). Spanish Ibex range freely in these mountains and we may encounter Golden Eagle, Northern Goshawk, Chough, Alpine Accentor and Crossbill, which all breed within the park.

After a picnic, we will make our way into Ronda, where we will take the short cliff-edge walkway, overlooking the gorge of the River Rio Guadalevin. The pink cabbage, *Moricandia moricandioides*, grows here together with the endemic *Ornithogalum reverchonii* (a Star of Bethlehem), and *Sedum Mucizonia* (A Stonecrop). The remainder of the afternoon is free to explore Ronda.

Day 5

El Torcal de Antequera



Giant Orchid

El Torcal de Antequera represents a dramatically eroded area of karst rising to over 1,300 metres. The fluted spires and bastions of gleaming white limestone, rising from bright green turf, form a surreal landscape and are home to some exciting endemic plants, such as the pale-blue Toadflax, *Linaria antequera* and the deep blue bearded-iris, *Iris subbiflora*. During our exploration, we expect to find *Orchis tenthredinifera* (Sawfly Orchid) and *Himantoglossum robertianum* (Giant Orchid), as well as the leaves of the endemic *Saxifraga biternata* (El Torcal Saxifrage).

Following our picnic, we will retrace our steps back towards the town of Campilos, and the Laguna Dulce, lake Reserve, a haven for many aquatic birds including Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo, Western Marsh Harrier, Black-necked Grebe and numerous ducks and gulls.

Our final location of the day will be Rio de la Venta river gorge at Tajo del Molino, near Teba. Here we would hope to see Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Alpine Swift, Rock Dove, Black Wheatear, Red-rumped Swallow and Cetti's Warbler. Exploring the adjacent rock slopes, we will look for the cream flowered *Antirrhinum graniticum* (Snapdragon), *Genista umbellata* (a Greenweed), *Ophrys speculum* (Mirror Orchid) and we may also see here Spanish Festoon and Provence Hairstreak butterflies.

Day 6

Benaolan & Montejaque

Today we begin with a visit to the Cueva de la Pileta (Pileta Caves), discovered in 1905 by José Bullón and managed by the family ever since, where we will see some of the oldest charcoal and red and yellow ochre cave paintings in Europe, mostly Paleolithic.

The limestone ridge above the caves is a highway for migrating birds and we could see Booted and Short-toed

Snake Eagle, Northern and Montagu's Harrier, Alpine Swift and many more. The hillsides have *Aphyllanthes monspeliensis* (Blue Aphyllanthes), *Cytisus villosus* (Hairy Broom), *Linaria platycalyx* (a Toadflax) and *Jasminum fruticans* (Wild Jasmine)

Moving north to Benaolan, we will make our way into the 'Hidden Valley' in the Sierra de Montalata, stopping to look for three local specialties,

Ornithogalum reverchonii (a Star of Bethlehem), *Saxifraga bourgaeana* and *Narcissus cuatrecasasii* (Rock Jonquil) before stopping for our picnic. Here it is possible to see Rock Bunting, Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush and Whinchat, among others. After lunch we take a walk in the 'Hidden Valley', looking for *Paeonia broteroii* (Peony), *Linaria tristis*, (a Toadflax), *Moraea sisyrinchium* (Barbary Nut) and the pea, *Lathyrus clymenum*. We may also see Western Dappled White, Cleopatra and Common Blue butterflies.



Our last stop of the day will be near the failed dam project at Cerro de Tavizna. Exploration of the rocky verge should produce the *Orchis olbiensis* (an Early Purple Orchid), *Vinca difformis* (Intermediate Periwinkle), *Saxifraga granulata* (Meadow Saxifrage), *Linaria aeruginea* (a Toadflax) and *Muscari neglectum* (Grape Hyacinth).

Day 7

Grazalema and Zahara

We will spend today in the reserve area, in the northern part of the Grazalema Park. However, firstly, we will explore the verges and rock-strewn meadows on the southeast side of the village. Here, we will look for *Hesperis laciniatus*, *Chaenorhinum villosum*, *Narcissus papyraceus* (Paper-white Daffodil), and *Ophrys bombyliflora* (Bumblebee Orchid).

In the afternoon we will visit the fortified Moorish hill village of Zahara de la Sierra, where we will enjoy afternoon coffee, whilst seeking out possible nesting Lesser Kestrels. Afterwards, we will explore the banks of the artificial reservoir, Embalse de Zahara-El Gastor. Thekla Lark and European Stonechat can be seen here, as well as *Himantoglossum robertianum* (Giant Orchid) and *Ophrys lutea* (Yellow Bee Orchid).

Day 8

Fly London

We return to Málaga this morning for our lunchtime flight back to London.

Tour grading

The paths we use are generally stony, with some rougher sections. Occasionally there are some optional short scrambles among boulders, to find rarer plants. On some days, lunch will be carried in the minibus in a communal cool box; on others we will need to carry it with us on the walks.

Climate

Mid-March should be fairly settled and the temperature pleasant. Mountain weather can be changeable however so you would do well to come prepared for a range of temperatures and weather conditions.

How to book your place!

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.