

Spain - Birds & Wines of Navarra

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly to Zaragoza and transfer to Navarra
Day 2	Bardenas Reales
Day 3	Pitillas & Olite
Day 4	Foz de Lumbier
Day 5/7	Burgui
Day 8	Transfer Zaragoza and fly London



Departs

May

Focus

Birds, other wildlife and local wines.

Grading

Grade A. Easy day walks only.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP24) or brochure

Highlights

- Find woodpeckers, sandgrouse, larks (including Dupont's), wheatears & raptors
- Enjoy wine-tasting at two contrasting vineyards (artesenal & modern)
- Explore the Roncal & Belagua valleys, looking for White-backed & Black Woodpeckers
- Pyrenean highlights include Lammergeier, Citril Finch & White-winged Snowfinch



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Introduction

Despite its small size, the autonomous region of Navarra offers stark contrasts in scenery, from lushly forested Pyrenean hillsides, broad river valleys and towering limestone canyons in the north, to the plains of the Ebro River valley in the south; the latter enjoying a more Mediterranean influence – a land of scented *maquis*, olive groves and vineyards! A visit to this region gives one the feeling of having stumbled across a well-kept secret, and Navarra offers some fine wildlife habitats, its arid semi-deserts and majestic rock formations, unspoiled wetlands and dense forests all providing a year-round haven for an impressive diversity of birds. This new tour to Navarra offers you an exciting and varied range of little-explored European habitats and their associated wildlife, all washed down with some first-class wines. We're sure you're going to like it as much as we do!



NB. Please note that the itinerary outlined 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. Any such changes will always be done to maximise the best use of time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

London – Zaragoza to Alfaro

We depart London today on a direct flight to Zaragoza in northern Spain. From Zaragoza we drive north-west for one hour or so to our hotel in the village of Alfaro on the edge of the Bardenas Reales Natural Park.

Day 2

Bardenas Reales

Our first full day in Spain will be devoted to exploration of the 42,000-hectare Bardenas Reales Natural Park, an extraordinary semi-desert landscape of gullies, rocky outcrops and plateaux sculpted by erosion. This rather surreal geology provides a splendid backdrop to our excursions within the park, where the steppes and plains are home to many bird species including the shy Dupont's Lark, Stone Curlew, Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, and many



Pin-tailed Sandgrouse

species of lark (Crested, Thekla, Short-toed, Lesser Short-toed, Calandra and Wood) and wheatears (Black, Black-eared and Northern). The park is also home to one of the largest populations of Griffon



Black-eared Wheatear

Vultures on the Iberian Peninsula, as well as the the unique Castildetierra, a geological formation (pictured on Naturetrek's brochure page) which has been the park's emblematic figure for decades. On the eastern edge of the park, a seasonal marsh can produce Pochard, Shoveler, Teal, the odd Bittern, Bearded Tit, Reed, Cetti's, Grasshopper, Fan-tailed, Savi's and Great Reed Warblers.

After a productive morning's birding and a tasty picnic lunch, we will drive to one of the modern, local wineries for our first wine tour. Bordering the world-famous Rioja region, the vineyards to the south and north-west of the River Ebro form the centre of Navarra's wine industry. Vineyards have been present in the province since Roman times and Navarra boasts a fine selection of rosés, whites, both young and barrel-aged red wines, as well as sweet wines.

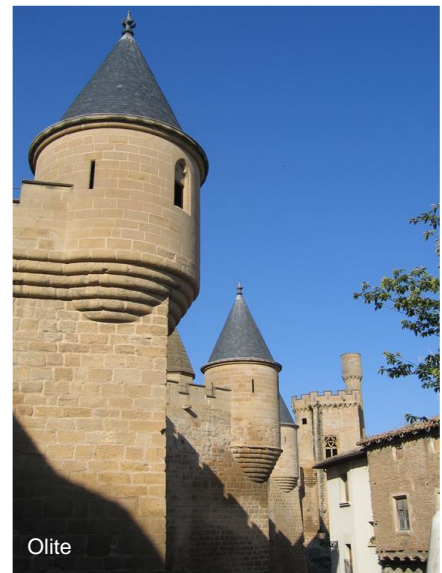
Later, we will return to our hotel for dinner and a run-through of the day's sightings.

Day 3

Having explored the dramatic landscapes of Bardenas we head north towards the Pyrenees today, stopping en route to explore the marshes and grasslands of the serenely beautiful Laguna de Pitillas, a large saline lake where Bearded Tits and Bittern may be found, plus a host of migratory species in both the reedbeds and surrounding steppe. A superb variety of birds is found here throughout the year and by May the air will be full of bird song. We'll listen for such summer visitors as Hoopoe, Turtle Dove, Bee-eater and Nightingale, as well as for resident birds, proclaiming their territories among the reeds and surrounding wheat fields and woodlands. Egrets, Red-crested Pochard and other duck are among the many residents we'll find here, while summer arrivals include Black-necked Grebe, Little Bittern, Purple Heron, the exotic-looking Black-winged Stilt and birds of prey such as Short-toed and Booted Eagle.

After a picnic lunch we will visit Olite, a picturesque medieval town known locally as the cradle of Navarran wine. The town is home to four of the Bodegas of Navarra (Marco Real, Ochoa, Piedemonte and Vega de Castillo) but, in contrast to yesterday's wine experience, we plan to visit one of the smaller,

Laguna de Pitillas



traditional, artesanal wineries in the nearby village of Castejon: Marques de Montecierzo. Later we return for a final night in Alfaro.

Day 4

Foz de Lumbier – Burgui

A pre-breakfast walk around our village base this morning may yield Golden Oriole, Iberian Green Woodpecker and Bonelli's Eagle as well as more common species.

The Mediterranean influence of the plains and wine-growing south gives way to extensive oak and pine forest as we travel northwards towards our next location, the Foz de Lumbier, which we will explore on foot in leisurely fashion for most of the rest of the day. This spectacular limestone gorge, cloaked in Beech and Holm Oak woodland and low Mediterranean scrub, is home to such species as Blue Rock Thrush, Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes, Melodious, Subalpine and Bonelli's Warblers, and Cirl, Ortolan and Rock Buntings, while overhead Alpine Swifts, Crag Martins and abundant birds of prey may be seen. Lower down, in riverside poplar groves, Bee-eaters and Golden Orioles breed, and surrounding fields hold Crested Larks, Thekla Larks and Tawny Pipits.

To round off the day we continue on to our hotel for the latter three nights of the trip, tucked away in the village of Burgui at the base of the Pyrenees.

Day 5 - 7

Roncal & Belagua Valleys

During the final three full days of our tour we'll explore the higher slopes of the north-western Pyrenees. Here we will focus on the magnificent Valley of El Roncal and Belagua. The Belagua Valley is the most important ecosystem within the Roncal Valley, with altitudes ranging between 1,100 metres at the Rincón de Belagua and 2,428 metres at the Mesa de los Tres Reyes, the highest peak in the Navarre Pyrenees. To the north of the Roncal Valley, at the border between Navarre, France and the province of Huesca, lies the Larra Nature Reserve which comprises of the most unique of Pyrenean ecosystems and is one of the most impressive karstic morphologies in Europe. It has one of the best-preserved Beech and Silver Fir forest in western Europe, presenting a vast green mantle of some 13,000 hectares of pristine forest. This is a valuable refuge for a wealth of wildlife – a place where mature trees tower to 40 metres, making this a natural paradise for woodland birds, especially woodpeckers, amongst them both Black, and the rare White-backed Woodpecker, here represented by the race *lifordi* and arguably present in greater numbers than at any other single site in western Europe. Nearby, amongst the rocky summits above the forest, Lammergeiers, Citril Finches, White-winged Snowfinches and Alpine Accentors may all be found, together with Chamois and Alpine Marmots and an abundance of glorious alpine flora.



Day 8

Zaragoza – London

This morning we must reluctantly pack up and leave the tranquility of Burgui and our charming hotel. The drive back to Zaragoza airport will take three hours and, if time allows, some opportunistic birding stops, before catching our flight to London.

Tour Grading

Grade A/B. We will explore all the key birding areas of Navarra as well as ancient villages and two of the most representative of the local wineries and cellars. We will undertake mainly gentle walks which will be easy to moderate in nature, though some tougher optional walks may be offered, especially around the El Roncal Valley. Our pace will generally be slow, as we look for birds, plants and other wildlife, but you need to be reasonably fit and keen to walk as we shall aim to be outdoors as much as possible.

Weather

We have chosen May as being an ideal time for the migratory and resident birdlife, as well as for the flowering plants and butterflies of this region. However, although we expect plenty of fine, hot and sunny weather (especially at lower altitudes), in the hills the weather is never predictable and you must be prepared for such variability and bring a good range of warm and waterproof clothing!

Focus

Mainly birds, especially target species absent from the UK, also other wildlife. We will be also focusing on sampling and enjoying some of the local wines from Navarra whilst visiting the wineries. And of course during the evenings back at base!

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. We'll be based in two small, comfortable and peaceful village hotels.

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.