

Spain – Extremadura at Christmas

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Madrid and transfer to Trujillo

Day 2/6 Birding excursions in Extremadura

Day 7 Drive Madrid and fly London

Departs

December

Focus

Birds

Grading

A. A traditional birding tour with limited amounts of easy walking

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP28) or brochure

Highlights:

- Enjoy winter flocks of both Great & Little Bustards
- Watch roosting Common Cranes in flocks of 10,000+
- Superb raptor-viewing with a day (or more) at Monfragüe
- Magnificent far-reaching winter vistas
- Delightful accommodation & first class hospitality



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Traditionally, most birders visit the magnificent rolling steppes, rugged sierras and Cork Oak woodland of Extremadura in April and May, when the countryside is besieged by migrants, and Great Bustards are in full display. A birding visit in the crystal-clear light and relatively mild temperatures of winter, though, has its own particular, very special, merit.

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

Trujillo

We depart London Heathrow this morning on our scheduled flight to Madrid. On arrival we will drive south for about three hours towards Trujillo, a small town at the very heart of Spain's central plains and one with a beautiful old medieval centre. Depending on the flight times, we may break the journey with a leg stretch and some birding at the Arrocampo Biosphere Reserve where Purple Gallinule, Squacco Heron, Black-shouldered Kite and Bluethroat occur. The area is also home to one of the largest Cattle Egret roosts in Spain, with up to 1,000 birds present.



Bluethroat

For all six nights we will be based in a country house a short distance from Trujillo. The location is perfect with easy access to the steppes and Monfrague, peace all around and an incredibly dark night sky. The welcome is warm and the cooking tasty and rustic Extremaduran fare. After settling in, we may have time before dinner to venture out into the steppes to whet our appetites for tomorrow's activities.

Days 2-6

Trujillo – Steppes

The Spanish Steppes are some of the richest and least disturbed grassland habitats in Europe and they hold one of the world's largest populations of Great and Little Bustards, Black Vulture and other birds threatened throughout their entire global ranges. During our five full days in Spain we will make the best use of daylight hours to explore these habitats thoroughly, endeavoring to find and enjoy as many of the local specialties as possible.



European Otter

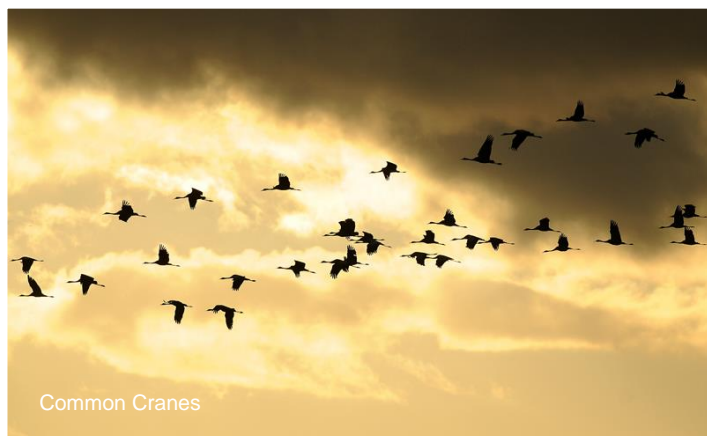
Morning bird walks from our accommodation are a delight, with Azure-winged Magpies, Blackcaps, Sardinian and Dartford Warblers, Firecrests, Short-toed Treecreepers, Crested and Iberian Long-tailed Tits, Serins, Siskins, Hawfinches and Cirl Buntings all present in the surrounding orchards, scrub and patches of woodland.

Out on the steppes, due in part to the shorter grass at this time of year and the absence of any heat haze, Extremadura's many attractive resident birds are much easier to see in winter than at any other season. Stately Great Bustards (the world's heaviest flying bird) congregate in their winter quarters, the males busily exercising their wings in readiness for the annual springtime battle for a mate. Little Bustards, too, congregate in flocks. Although both species of bustards have had a marked decrease in the last 10 years we are still hopeful in encountering these magnificent birds. As we scan the fallow steppes for flocks of bustards, we may find Black-bellied or Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, and flocks of larks. Stone Curlews, Calandra and Thekla Larks, Corn Buntings, Southern Grey Shrikes, Little Owls, Hoopoes, Spotless Starlings, Spanish Sparrows, Woodlarks, White Wagtails and magnificent far-reaching winter vistas complete the picture out on the plains. We'll be spending time both on the nearby Caceres plains, as well as closer to Trujillo, at Belen.



During another day out we'll enjoy watching the unforgettable evening spectacle of Common Cranes, in flocks of 10,000-strong, as they fly in to their night-time roosts at the Sierra Brava Reservoir. Making the most of purpose-built hides in the area, the sight of these Cranes coming in at dusk as the winter light slips beneath the horizon will be a highlight of the tour. Elsewhere, the region's lakes should hold large numbers of wildfowl, Purple Gallinule, Black-necked and other Grebes, plus Cattle, Little and a few Great White Egrets. Water Rails, Cetti's Warblers and exquisite Bluethroats emerge to forage at the fringes of the wetlands and in damp channels, all so much easier to see than ever they are in Britain!

Another full day will be spent exploring Monfragüe National Park, roughly 50 kilometres to the north of Trujillo. Monfragüe is both an incredibly beautiful area and a wonderful place in which to bird. Our first stop will be at the sheer rock face of Peñafalcón, home to numerous pairs of Griffon Vultures. The small car park opposite affords wonderful views of these impressive birds on their nests along with dozens of others soaring above. Black Vultures frequently join these patrolling flocks and it is not uncommon to see the occasional Chough or Peregrine. On the higher ground Alpine Accentors over winter (although



can be difficult to find), while Black Redstart, Raven, Rock Sparrow, Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting and Black Wheatear are all on the cards along with the resident and omnipresent Crag Martins. After lunch we will continue our exploration of Monfragüe by driving to the many vantage points scattered around the park. Here we will watch for the huge numbers of birds of prey that inhabit the area. The onset of winter sees the Black Kite being replaced by the Red, and by January Spanish

Imperial Eagles are displaying over their nest sites — a breathtaking sight. Although the Short-toed and Booted Eagles will not return from Africa until early March, there is still plenty of variety, with Golden Eagles starting to nest and airborne Griffon and Black Vultures drawing our attention to any carrion in the area. Bonelli's Eagles soar in bonding pairs, with Buzzards having arrived for the winter by the thousand from elsewhere in Europe. Other residents include Goshawk, Sparrowhawk and, of course, the stunning and much sought-after Black-shouldered Kite, another species with a tendency to form winter groups. Late in the afternoon we will take a walk to the top of the castle for an eye to eye view of soaring vultures and storks. From this high vantage point you can see over the whole park and are often treated to incredibly close views of a variety of raptor species as they slowly drift past on the wind, a truly breathtaking sight.

On the 24th December, during the Christmas tour, we may have dinner in Trujillo (Spaniards have their main Christmas dinner on Christmas Eve rather than on Christmas Day).

Day 7

Fly London

This morning (depending on the time of our flight) we should have time for a final look around some of the nearby habitats before we have to leave for the drive back to Madrid in time for our direct flight back to London Heathrow.



Black-shouldered Kite



Common Cranes

Tour Grading

Grade A. This is a traditional birding tour with lots of fresh air and lovely winter vistas but with very little walking involved at all. Suitable for all ages and for all degrees of fitness.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

Usually we operate two concurrent tours to Extremadura at Christmas. We have eight rooms at Viña las Torres to the south of Trujillo for one group and Casa Rural Las Canteras to the north-east of Trujillo for the other group. Generally we fill Viña las Torres first and then move on to Las Canteras (where you're

accommodated and which group you're in depends on when you book). The groups are treated as completely separate entities with their own tour leaders and transport.

Optional extensions

For those of you wishing to see the spectacular city of Madrid, we will be happy to arrange a couple of night's accommodation and a change of flight date. Alternatively feel free to find your own accommodation and advise us on what dates you want your flights booked.

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.

