

# Spain's Extremadura in Spring - Birdwatching for Beginners

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	<u>Fly Madrid and transfer to Trujillo</u>
<b>Day 2/6</b>	<u>Monfragüe/Trujillo/Steppes/Arrocampo</u>
<b>Day 7</b>	<u>Fly Madrid to London</u>

### Departs

May

### Focus

Birds

### Grading

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

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP35) or brochure

### Focus

Birds

### Highlights

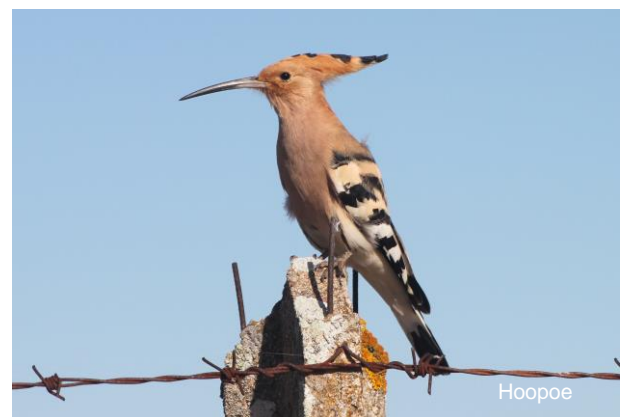
- A perfect introduction to Mediterranean birding with many star species easily accessible.
- Explore one of Europe's premier regions as we explore a great range of habitats.
- A huge range of birds to be seen with time to improve identification skills in the field.
- Quiet, rural guesthouse with warm hospitality and an abundance of birdlife in the hotel grounds.



Great Bustard



European Bee-eaters



Hoopoe



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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.**

## Introduction

On all of our 'Beginners' Birdwatching' holidays, we provide a high level of instruction from our top leaders. These tours are undertaken at a relaxed pace and are suitable for the complete novice, as well as those with some knowledge who would benefit from 'brushing it up' or learning more. And, as is typical with Naturetrek tours, there will be an emphasis on enjoying our surroundings and other wildlife, as well as the birdlife. Questions will be very much encouraged, with emphasis placed on participants being able to see, enjoy and identify every bird well for themselves, whether common or rare..

This tour spends 6 nights at a fabulous base deep in the heart of the Extremaduran countryside, ideally located to enable us to access the many famous birding spots including the Belen plains, Monfragüe and many others. With direct flights to and from Madrid, this tour promises to be a popular addition to our beginners' portfolio.

## Day 1

### Fly Madrid, transfer to Trujillo (Steppes)

We depart London Heathrow this morning on our scheduled flight to Madrid. On arrival we will drive south-west for about three hours to Trujillo, passing first through rolling hills before the vista gradually opens out to one of rolling steppe and farmland, broken by areas of Olive groves and the Cork Oak woodland and extensive sheep-grazed grasslands known locally as *dehasa*, a landscape so typical of the Extremadura region. Southern Grey Shrikes are a common sight perched on roadside wires and in the adjacent woodlands Azure-winged Magpies noisily feed whilst numerous raptors hunt overhead.

On arrival in Trujillo, a small town at the very heart of Spain's central plains, we will check into our delightful hotel, a country house which will be our base for the next six nights. Our base actually lies around 8 miles north of the town in a perfect location for access to superb birds on the doorstep. This ancient town, with a beautiful old medieval centre, retains much of its sixteenth century architecture within the original city walls including spectacular mansions built by the Pizarro brothers, leaders of the Spanish expedition to the Inca empire in South America. The town's most famous sons amassed a considerable fortune from their expeditions and many of the older buildings in this attractive town display the grandeur and opulence of the conquistador period. Trujillo is also an ideal spot from which to explore the adjacent steppes and the magnificent Monfragüe National Park, and it even supports a rich birdlife of its own, including flocks of Lesser Kestrels and the Pallid Swifts that wheel around Trujillo's beautifully preserved ancient churches, whilst White Storks peer down from their roof-top nests or clatter their bills to greet a returning mate.

The Spanish steppes are amongst 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, Red Kite and Lesser Kestrel – all birds that are threatened throughout their entire global ranges.

After settling in we should have time before dinner to enjoy some of the star birds around the grounds and to whet our appetites for tomorrow's activities.



Great Spotted Cuckoo



Scops Owl

## Days 2-6

## Extremadura/steppes

We have five full days to enjoy the Extremaduran steppes from our superb base. We will be moving at a steady pace to appreciate everything we come across covering the steppe habitat, the magnificent Monfragüe national park and also make a visit to an Extremaduran wetland to seek some classic European herons and wetland birds.

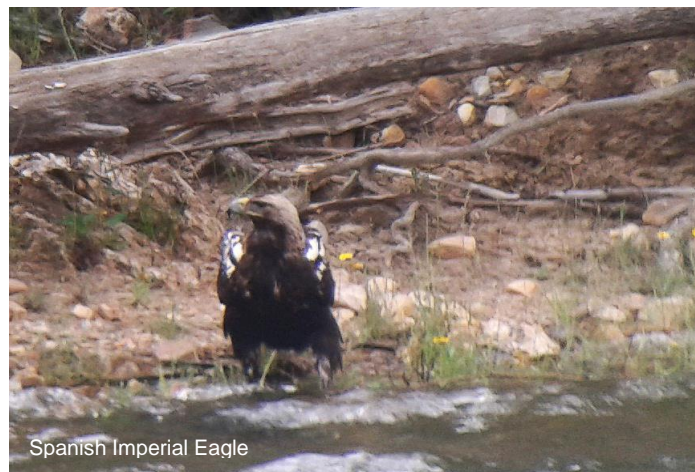
On one morning we will leave the hotel and drive to the gently undulating plains that surround Trujillo in search of the displaying Great and Little Bustards that are present here in good numbers. Rough tracks criss-cross the steppes and by driving slowly along these we should have little difficulty in locating the displaying groups. The sight of a male Great Bustard in full display has to be one of the most spectacular avian sights Europe has to offer....one moment a turkey sized bird then, after an outstanding piece of contortion, a ball of white feathers on legs – the "foam bath" display! There will also be ample opportunities to watch some of the raptors and other species that make this area such an exiting destination, such as Montagu's Harrier, Short-toed Eagle, Calandra Lark, Roller, Stone Curlew, and Great-spotted Cuckoo and, with luck and careful searching, Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse. Griffon Vultures are numerous and Black Vultures are often seen soaring around the nearby hills and Spanish Imperial Eagles are occasionally seen drifting past.

There will be an option on one morning to leave the hotel very early and position ourselves out on the steppes as the sun rises. This is a wonderful experience with the fields teeming with birdlife. It is not uncommon to see flocks of Great Bustard with Little Bustard nearby and both Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse in the same field. Add to that a quartering Montagu's harrier and the noise of displaying Calandra larks all around you and the early alarm soon seems like an excellent decision!





Purple Swampphen



Spanish Imperial Eagle

At some stage we will set aside a couple of hours to wander around the maze of narrow streets in the medieval quarter of town and watch both the Lesser Kestrels and White Storks which breed on the rooftops. The statues of the Pizarro brothers – the Inca Conquerors – are in the central plaza and the town has a wonderful historic feeling about it. The atmosphere is best sampled while sipping a coffee or – better – a *vino tinto* in one of the street-side cafes!

After breakfast on another day, we will drive to Monfragüe National Park, roughly 50 kilometres to the north of Trujillo. Monfragüe is both an incredibly beautiful area and wonderful place in which to bird. Our first stop will be at the sheer rock face of Penafalcón, 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 on the thermals above. Black Vultures frequently join these patrolling flocks and it is not uncommon to see the occasional Chough, Peregrine or Egyptian Vulture drift overhead. With luck we should be able to find



Little Bustard

one or two of the Black Storks which use this area to breed; indeed one very obliging pair has regularly built a nest close to the base of the rockface in recent years and, assuming they return next year, we should have excellent views of this rare bird on its nest. Black Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting all inhabit the rocky slopes around the base of Penafalcón and in the cork oak woodlands Short-toed Treecreeper, Hawfinch, Cirl Bunting and Golden Oriole all breed.

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. In addition to the species already mentioned, there is a good chance of finding Short-toed Eagle, Booted Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Golden Eagle, Red and Black Kites, Hobby and, with luck, maybe a roosting Eagle Owl or one of Monfragüe's most sought after and well known inhabitants, the Spanish Imperial Eagle. Indeed,

we should be able to see an Imperial Eagle's nest which has been used for at least the past six years at least. We will also take a series of short walks off into the scrub and woodland in search of warblers, such as Subalpine, Dartford and Orphean, and spend time at the main bridge over the reservoir watching the flocks of screaming Alpine Swifts.

Late in the afternoon, depending on the weather and what we have seen so far, we may decide to 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.



Not too far from Monfragüe is Extremadura's premier wetland habitat at the Arrocampo reservoir. This area has a constant water level allowing well-established reed beds to grow. Here we can hope to see and learn about many wetland species including a range of herons which are the star attraction. Purple Heron can be obvious here and with luck Little Bittern and Night Heron may be seen. Egrets are often present and we may have the opportunity to compare Little, Great White and Cattle Egrets here. The reed beds will be full of noise at this time of year with Great Reed Warbler croaking away and Gull-billed Terns flying overhead. This small very productive site is an exciting habitat to explore and will bring another dimension to this holiday.

During each day we will be out in the fresh air with a picnic lunch, followed by an early evening return to our hotel, arriving in time to enjoy our evening meal and complete the daily checklist.

## 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 flight back to London.



## Grading

Grade A. This is a traditional birding tour with no strenuous walking involved although it does involve a few early starts. Suitable for all ages and for all degrees of fitness.

## Food & accommodation included in the price

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

## Optional extensions

For those of you wishing to see the spectacular city of Madrid we will be happy to arrange a couple of nights 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. We recommend the Hotel Opera in Madrid.

## 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](http://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.