

Go Slow ... in Andalusia in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Gibraltar, transfer Vejer de la Frontera

Days 2-6 Daily wildlife excursions, The Straits area

Day 7 Fly London

Departs

March

Focus

Spring bird migration, Whales and Dolphins

Grading

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

Dates and Prices

Visit <http://www.naturetrek.co.uk> (tour code ESP51).

Highlights

- Single-centre tour based between the beautiful old towns of Tarifa and Vejer de la Frontera.
- Experience thousands of migrating raptors and storks crossing the Straits of Gibraltar.
- Long-finned Pilot Whales, three species of dolphin and maybe even migrating Sperm Whales possible on a boat trip into the Straits
- Tranquil accommodation at a traditional Spanish *cortijo* surrounded by pastureland and fruit trees.
- Sample superb local *tapas* and enjoy our legendary picnics in the sun!



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Introduction

The Straits of Gibraltar are just 14 km wide and provide migrant birds with an ideal crossing point of the Mediterranean on their way north to breed. Soaring birds make use of the thermals which form over the Rock of Gibraltar and the Moroccan peak of Jebel Musa to gain height to help them on this most treacherous part of their journey. This fortuitous combination of geography and geology means a helping hand for birds, and quite simply spectacular birding for us!

A massive migration event is in progress at this time of the year, as birds journey north to breed. Tens of thousands of migrating Black Kites, Short-toed and Booted Eagles, will be passing through, interspersed with huge flocks of both White and Black Storks.

We will visit the very best places to experience this event and be part of the annual passage of 250,000 raptors over the area, as well as untold thousands of other journeying passerines and seabirds. This incredible natural phenomenon will be happening all around us, meaning you can sit back with a nice cold drink and simply enjoy these unforgettable scenes.

Resident raptors joining the throng include Griffon Vultures, Egyptian Vultures, Bonelli's and Spanish Imperial Eagles. Other local avian specialities include Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper, Hawfinch, Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting and Crested Tit. We will also hope to find the Critically Endangered Northern Bald Ibis – a quirky, charismatic bird that thrives here thanks to a successful reintroduction programme.



A relaxed boat trip into the Straits itself will let you get close and personal with the area's rich sea-life. Common, Bottlenose and Striped Dolphins are all resident, as are Long-finned Pilot Whales. Even Fin and Sperm Whales and Orca are possible here as they pass through on migration.

Visits to wetlands should yield a host of waders including Kentish Plover, Sanderling, Little Stint and Collared Pratincole, as well as eye-catching birds like Purple Swamphen, Eurasian Spoonbill and Greater Flamingo.

And of course it would be remiss to visit the area without enjoying a little urban birding around Tarifa's picturesque Old Town, where we'll also take the opportunity to indulge in some fantastic local *tapas*!

Itinerary

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 Gibraltar, transfer to Tarifa

We begin with a flight to Gibraltar, from where we transfer the short distance to Cortijo el Indiviso, our delightful rural farmhouse accommodation near Vejer de la Frontera.

Set amongst sweeping pasturelands and fruit and olive trees, this traditional *cortijo* is home not only to a menagerie of well-cared-for animals, but also to much local wildlife, including Woodchat Shrikes, Spotted Flycatchers and Common Nightingales.

After a welcoming lunch or afternoon tea, we'll take the afternoon to settle in to our lodgings and explore our local woodland surroundings on a leisurely stroll. We may even be lucky enough to get a visit from some of the local Northern Bald Ibis! This Critically Endangered bird breeds nearby since its successful reintroduction and often drops in to feed on the insect-rich pastures of the *cortijo*.



Cortijo el Indiviso

Day 2

Boat-trip on the Straits

We will take a relaxing boat trip, weather permitting, into the Straits to enjoy the seabird passage and look for cetaceans. We will be on the lookout for Cory's and Balearic Shearwaters and Wilson's Storm Petrel among other species, plus the three species of resident dolphin (Common, Bottlenose and Striped) and the resident pods of Long-finned Pilot Whale. We may even be lucky enough to find larger, migratory whales, such as Fin or Sperm.

Once back on dry land, we will take time to visit the picturesque Old Town of Tarifa, where we can encounter Common Bulbul and breeding Lesser Kestrels among the myriad of quirky local shops and *tapas* bars. We'll enjoy a leisurely *tapas* lunch in the main square where, simply by looking up, we'll be able to see migrating raptors and storks crossing over this historic town.

Day 3

Raptor migration

A massive migration event is in progress at this time of the year, as Booted Eagles, Short-toed Eagles, Black Kites, White Storks, European Bee-eaters, Swifts, Swallows and many more journey north to breed. Migratory movement of birds across The Straits is completely dependent on wind strength and direction. Depending on where – and whether - birds are crossing, today will be spent at one of several local watch points, relaxing in the sun whilst watching this natural phenomenon, as birds of prey and other soaring birds arrive into Europe for the breeding season.

We'll enjoy our picnic lunch right under the flow of migration, so as not to miss a moment!

Day 4

Barbate

Today, alongside more raptor-watching at sites with stunning views across the Straits to North Africa, we'll make a visit to nearby Barbate salt pans. This area is home to Kentish Plover and Pied Avocet and offers a fantastic selection of waders which change every day such as Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Collared Pratincole. There's a decent chance of visiting Western Osprey here too, and seabirds can include Sandwich, Caspian and Little Terns, and the once extremely rare Audouin's



Northern Bald Ibis (image by Tony Mills)

Gull, as well as Eurasian Spoonbills and Greater Flamingoes. The low-intensity farmland that surrounds them is a haven for migrating passerines, and we should start to see returning Woodchat Shrikes, Northern Wheatears, Tawny Pipits, Short-toed Larks and Yellow Wagtails amongst the resident Calandra and Crested Larks.

After picnic in a nearby shady woodland – and who knows, maybe even an icecream stop! – we'll head back to the *cortijo* visiting a special site on the way to visit the Critically Endangered - and totally fabulous - Northern Bald Ibis at their breeding colony!

Day 5

La Janda

Today we'll visit the farmland and wetlands of La Janda. This huge area of low intensity farmland was once a vast wetland on a par with Doñana National Park in terms of its ecological importance. It was drained for agriculture as recently as the 1960s, but amongst the rice fields and managed pools and ditches, some real wetland gems remain, hinting at its former natural glory.

Amongst many hundreds of White Storks and Glossy Ibises, here we should see many wetland birds and raptors, such as Purple Swamphens, Penduline Tits, Spanish Sparrows, Black-winged Stilts, Eurasian Spoonbills and Common Cranes. Marsh Harriers and Black-winged Kites quarter the

farmland, which should also yield Spanish Sparrow and Calandra Lark, as well as a chance of Spanish Imperial and Bonelli's Eagle.

Day 6

Los Alcornocales NP

On our last full day in Spain, we'll visit the high rocky cliffs of Sierra de la Plata. Here, amongst the eerie screeching of the resident Griffon Vulture colony, mountain specialities such as Blue Rock Thrush, Crag Martin, and Rock Bunting can all be encountered.

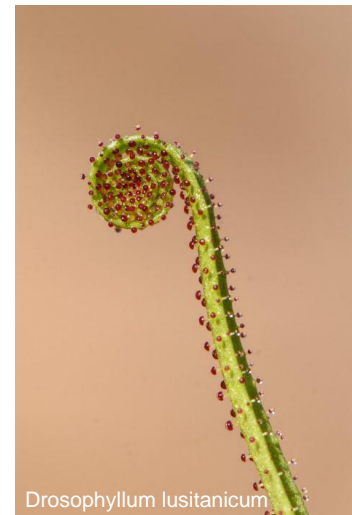
From the top of the mountain we can view across the spectacular bay down over the Roman ruins of Baelo Claudia, once the Roman Empire's most prosperous city.

We may also take time to explore the rich surroundings of Los Alcornocales Natural Park. This is the biggest Cork Oak forest in Europe and is especially unique in the way that it gathers moisture coming in off the ocean to create a warm Mediterranean cloud forest.

As well as some adorable local avian specialities in the form of Western Bonelli's Warbler, Firecrest, Crested Tit, Hawfinch and Short-toed Treecreeper, almost anything can turn up here during Spring migration, as passerines collect amongst the trees to rest after crossing the Straits, and to gather strength for their northwards journey.

There are also a host of interesting rare plants to see here, such as the quasi-endemic carnivorous plant *Drosophyllum lusitanicum*, which occurs only here and in some areas of Portugal and northern Morocco.

We should again find ourselves in the midst of the Spring raptor migration, so we'll take our final chance to sit back and relax with a picnic and a glass of wine as the spectacular birds drift overhead.



Day 7

Fly London

Today sadly our trip comes to an end, and it's time to make our own northwards journey back to the UK from Gibraltar airport - but not before relaxing on the airport terrace and enjoying fabulous views of the famous rock monolith itself!

Tour grading & focus

This single-centre tour will be based at Cortijo el Indiviso for all six nights, a comfortable rural house with a pool situated between Tarifa and Vejer de la Frontera.

The tour focuses on short walks, birdwatching and, weather permitting dolphin/whale-watching boat trips. Although we will not be going out if the sea is rough, it is worth bearing in mind the possibility of sea-sickness, even in calm conditions.

In terms of physical exertion, this is a relaxed tour and we are unlikely to cover more than 1 mile on foot during the course of a day. The main theme is to spend most afternoons lazing in the sun, watching migrating birds of prey!

As with other Naturetrek Go Slow holidays, what we're aiming to offer here is as many of the following as possible:

Single centre

Direct flights

Comfortable hotel with pool

Leisurely paced walks on gentle terrain

Expert leaders, as ever, with more time for interpretation, guidance and explanation

A maximum of 6 hours in the field each day

Morning and afternoon comfort stops

No long drives

Back in time for afternoon tea

All excursions optional

All-inclusive cost

Feel free to relax, read, potter, swim, paint or whatever!

Daily schedule

This will be fairly flexible, with breakfast generally being available from 8am ready for a 9am departure from the accommodation. A picnic lunch will then be taken in the field, with further exploration in the afternoon but returning in time for afternoon tea! Optional excursions can be available for those that wish to do a little more before dinner. Activities depend very much on the weather and wind conditions, the vagaries of migrating birds, and individual wishes.

Our priority is to see as much wildlife as possible without having to work too hard for it!

Regional Flights

For this tour we will be taking a direct lunchtime flight from London Heathrow to Gibraltar, returning in the early evening. Regional flights may be possible – please state your preference at the time of booking.

Weather

March should be fairly settled and the temperature pleasant in the high teens centigrade but there is also the chance of showers and cooler spells so light waterproofs and a warmer layer of clothing are recommended.

The easterly *levante* and westerly *poniente* winds are very much a part of life in The Straits, and what make bird-watching here so exciting! The wind can be strong, but of course your guides know the absolute best and most comfortable places to be whatever the conditions!

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation included in the price.

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 give us a call or request one via our website.