

# Go Slow ... in Southern Spain

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Fly Malaga and transfer to hotel
<b>Day 2/7</b>	Daily wildlife & cultural excursions from Malaga
<b>Day 8</b>	Fly UK

### Departs

May

### Focus

Birds, culture and gastronomy

### Grading

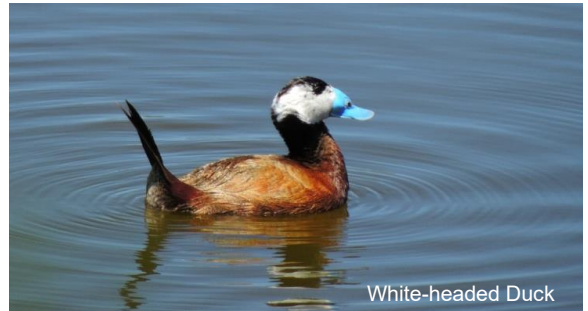
A. A Go Slow tour with gentle wildlife walks

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP52)

### Highlights

- Stunning mountain crags where reside Griffon Vultures, Bonelli's, Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Black Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting and Alpine Swift
- Woodlands full of Western Bonelli's Warbler, Firecrests, Crested Tit, Short-toed Treecreepers and Common Crossbill.
- Wetlands teeming with Red-crested Pochards, White-headed Ducks, Little Bittern, Greater Flamingoes, Black-winged Stilts, Kentish Plovers, Gull-billed Tern.
- Montagu's Harrier, Eurasian Hoopoe, Calandra Lark, Serin, Western Orphean, Subalpine and Melodious Warblers, Woodchat Shrike, European Bee-eater, Red-rumped Swallow, Black-eared Wheatear, and Cirl Bunting abound on local farmland.



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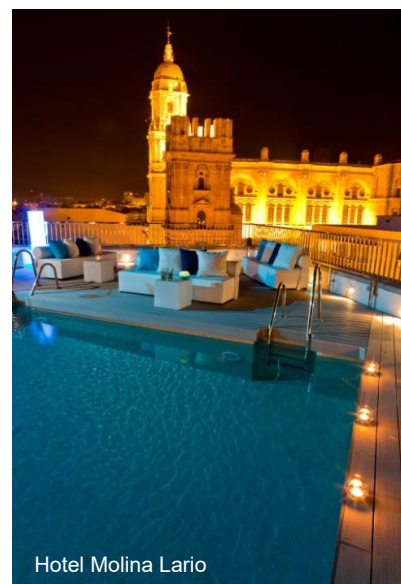
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## Introduction

This Málaga City-based tour will explore the wide diversity of wild habitats packed with breeding birds we can find within surprisingly easy reach of the bustling Costa del Sol. But thanks to the superb location of Hotel Molina Lario, at the very centre of the picturesque old city, we will also be immersed in this area's active thriving cultural and gastronomic life.

Nearby, the Mouth of the Guadalhorce is the last stronghold of a vast marsh that extended over the delta of the Guadalhorce River. This fragment of nature - almost absorbed by the city - is a protected site, thanks to resident species like White-headed Duck and Kentish Plover. Other birds to be found here are Black-winged Stilt and Little Bittern, as well as Audouin's and Slender-billed Gulls.

Located at the very heart of Málaga province, El Torcal is a stunning karst plateau hosting many different migratory breeding species typical of the Mediterranean basin such as Black-eared Wheatear, Orphean, Subalpine and Melodious Warblers, as well as an attractive community of resident mountain birds well-represented by Griffon Vultures, Blue Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting.



"El Chorro" is the popular name given by locals to the Desfiladero de Los Gaitanes (Vultures' Gorge) Nature Reserve. It is the gorge through which three rivers flow into the lower Valley of the Guadalhorce River. The stunning cliffs of the gorge, a paradise for geologists, are the perfect habitat for all sorts of cliff-nesting birds including the spectacular Griffon Vultures for which it is named.

The proximity of these beautiful sites to our hotel will leave us time in the afternoons to enjoy the ancient city of Málaga, with sights like La Alcazaba (Muslim fortress and palace), the Cathedral, popularly known as the "Manquita" (one-handed lady) as one of its towers is incomplete (though the other one is the Peregrine Falcon's realm!), the Picasso museum, and the beautiful Botanical Gardens. Our evenings will be spent sampling a variety of Mediterranean gastronomic specialties at some of the town's best restaurants.

**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and 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

## Arrive Malaga and transfer to our base

We begin with a flight to Malaga (we will do our best to facilitate departures from around the UK). Upon arrival, we will settle into our comfortable base (the excellent Molina Lario) and get our bearings in Malaga, setting the scene for the activities to be enjoyed in the coming week.

## Day 2

## Guadalhorce Estuary and La Alcazaba

Our first birding trip will take place in this small nature reserve, 20 minutes away from the hotel, the place where Phoenicians first settled 3,000 years ago. Surrounded by the two branches of the River Guadalhorce, the reserve is like a little island full of small pools that attract a diverse set of waterfowl, waders, herons, egrets, waders and gulls. Several hides overlooking the pools make our walk around the site a very comfortable and relaxed experience.

Some of the emblematic birds we may spot here are White-headed Duck, Kentish Plover, Black-winged Stilt and the very inconspicuous Little Bittern.

After lunch and relaxing time, we'll make a visit to La Alcazaba, the restored 11<sup>th</sup> Century Muslim citadel.

Dinner this evening will be at "El Pimpi", a very popular old wine cellar.



Alcazaba de Malaga

## Day 3

## El Torcal

A one-hour drive will take us to El Torcal Nature Reserve Visitors Centre, situated at an altitude of 1,100m. A UNESCO World Heritage and included in Natura 2000 Network as a Birds Directive Special Protection Area (SPA), El Torcal is a gem not only for birders but also for geologists and botanists.

Melodious Warblers and Serins will perform their display songs from the top of hawthorns and maples. Other birds will hide to sing, like the Orphean Warbler and Nightingale, while Blackcaps and Subalpine Warblers will alternate shyness and shameless recitals.

We will keep looking up for spectacular views of vultures alongside the ridges and maybe a glimpse of Bonelli's Eagle. Looking down, we will search for Thekla Larks and Rock Buntings on the ground. The rocks are perches for the Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart, Rock Sparrow, Black-eared and Black Wheatears.



El Torcal

After some down-time back in our fantastic hotel – maybe featuring a dip in its rooftop plunge pool - dinner will be at one of Málaga's many excellent restaurants, all within easy walking distance of the hotel.

## Day 4

## Fuente de Piedra and Málaga Cathedral



Fuente de Piedra Lake

Located in the Antequera plains, to the north of Malaga province, about one hour's drive from the hotel, this lake can host more than 20,000 pairs of Greater Flamingoes on occasions when winter and early spring rainfall has been generous.

Other interesting breeding birds at the lake include Marsh Harriers, Gull-billed Terns, waders such as Black-winged Stilts and Avocets, Red-crested Pochards and even some White-headed Ducks, Cetti's and Great Reed Warblers.

The farmlands around the lake, mostly devoted to cereal crops, are very good for larks including Crested, Calandra and Short-toed. Despite the recent expansion of olive groves, Montagu's Harriers still breed in this area, and other steppe birds like Stone Curlews, Little Bustards and Lesser Kestrels are also possible.



Gull-billed Terns



Malaga Cathedral

Returning to our hotel, we will again have chance to indulge in a Spanish-style *siesta* before our late afternoon visit to beautiful Málaga Cathedral. Dinner tonight will be in the hands of our hotel, which itself boasts formidable gastronomic skills!

## Day 5

## La Concepcion Botanical Gardens

Just over halfway through our stay, today will present a chance to go into relaxation overdrive!

For those with energy to spare, we'll make a mid-morning excursion to La Concepción Botanical and Historical Gardens. Conceived and created by a local Spanish nobleman in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, these 23 hectares of expansive and tranquil gardens feature over 3,000 species of plants from five continents. Needless to say, this shady, well-watered haven attracts its fair share of birds, butterflies and mammals in the heat of the Spanish summer!

We'll return to the hotel for lunch today, after which the rest of the day will be free for you to enjoy the city and hotel as you please.

For dinner today we'll drive out to a local institution - Chiringuito El Tintero - and enjoy the best of local seafood on the coast.



## Day 6

## Montes de Málaga &amp; Picasso Museum



The Montes de Malaga Nature Reserve – a Site of Community Importance in the Natura 2000 Network - extends north from the city of Malaga up to an altitude of 1,000.

We will have a walk around an old farmhouse called Lagar de Torrijos. A *lagar* was a place where wine and oil were produced, and there are some olive trees remaining from this building's "golden age". Here, pine trees mix with some native species like Holm and Cork Oaks, poplars and Strawberry Trees.

We will be able to hear lots of woodland birds from the heart of the forest including woodpeckers, thrushes, warblers, tits, treecreepers and finches. With some patience, we will hopefully get views of some interesting birds like Nightingale, Sardinian and Western Bonelli's Warblers, Firecrest, Crested Tit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Serin, Hawfinch, Common Crossbill and Cirl Bunting.

By looking up, we can gaze at the flight of Sparrowhawks, Booted and Short-toed Eagles.



Once we have enjoyed our picnic lunch in these breath-taking surroundings, we will return to our base to rest before the afternoon's excursion to the Picasso Museum. This modern, well-set out museum features 285 works of the twentieth century's most influential artist. Arranged in chronological order, this collection allows great insight into the Málaga-born artist's life and artistic development.

For dinner tonight we will trace back some of the Arabic influences on the area's cuisine, heading for a delightful vegetarian restaurant amongst the purple-flowered Jacaranda trees of the old market square.

## Day 7

## El Chorro

This is an appealing day trip to another of Málaga's Natura 2000 SPAs. The Desfiladero de Los Gaitanes Nature Reserve is a marvellous gorge connecting three big reservoirs to the lower valley of the Guadalhorce River. Here is where the famous "Caminito del Rey" (King's little path) was built at the beginning of the twentieth century.

We will hopefully have the opportunity to watch some more mountain and cliff nesting birds such as Griffon Vulture, Bonelli's Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Alpine Swift, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear and many other small songbirds with the Dartford Warbler as an interesting inhabitant of the Mediterranean scrub.



After time to prepare for tomorrow's journey home, our final experience of the area's much-underrated cuisine will allow us to sample that most well-known of Spanish dishes, the *paella*, in the shadow of the cathedral!

## Day 8

Today sadly our trip comes to an end, and it's time to make our journey back to the UK from Malaga airport. Extra nights in Malaga can be easily arranged in request for those wishing to continue their exploration of the city under their own steam.

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## Tour grading & focus

This single-centre tour will be based in Malaga for all seven nights, in a very comfortable hotel with a pool and all modern amenities.

The tour focuses on short walks, birdwatching and cultural visits as described.

In terms of physical exertion, this is a relaxed tour and we are unlikely to cover more than 1-2 miles on foot during the course of a day.

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 comfort stops (sometimes not possible!)
- No long drives
- All excursions optional
- All-inclusive cost (except drinks)
- Feel free to relax, read, potter, swim, paint or whatever!

## Daily schedule

Our priority is to see as much of the local wildlife and culture as possible without having to work too hard for it!

## Flights

Direct to Malaga from around the UK. Please state your preferred departure airport upon booking.

## Weather

This part of Europe generally has quite reliable weather. We should enjoy daily temperatures between the mid-20s and early-30s degrees Celsius. Rainfall is fairly infrequent. It's a holiday for sunhats and suncream!

## Food and accommodation

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

## 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.

