

Spain – Hidden Extremadura

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly to Madrid and transfer to Cáceres

Day 2/7 Steppes/River valleys/Oak Forests/Crags

Day 8 Fly Madrid to London

Departs

April, May

Focus

Primarily birds but also insects, amphibians, mammals and wildflowers.

Grading

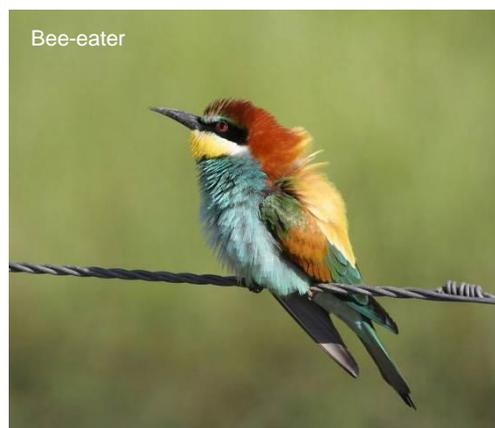
A. A traditional birding tour with some easy walking.

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ESP58)

Highlights:

- Explore some of Extremadura's lesser-known locations.
- Good chance of finding many colourful Mediterranean species like Hoopoe, Bee-eater, Roller and Golden Oriole.
- Explore the world famous Monfrague National Park.
- Visit Cáceres old town – An UNESCO world heritage site.
- Search for steppe species including Bustards, Sandgrouse and larks.
- Great accommodation, hospitality and cuisine, with an abundance of wildlife in and around the hotel grounds.



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

An 8-day birdwatching and wildlife holiday which focuses on exploring some of the lesser-known areas of this wonderful region, in combination with more well-known areas such as Monfrague National Park, making this a great tour for both those new to the region, and those who have been to Extremadura before.

We will visit a number of different locations covering a wide variety of habitats, but will also take time to enjoy the special moments, of which there should be many.

Spending 7 nights at our comfortable and ideally placed base hotel, enjoying Spanish breakfasts and dinners every morning and evening, with picnic lunches served at a different beautiful location each day.

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

London-Madrid-Cáceres

Arriving in Madrid after our morning flight from London, we will make the journey south-west to our base, which is located just outside of Cáceres. The journey will take us a little over three hours but the time will pass quickly. As the traffic thins out, birds will start to appear in the form of White Storks, vultures and possibly even an eagle or two.

Time permitting, we will make a brief stop at Arracampo biosphere reserve to stretch our legs, and try to find species such as Purple Heron, Purple Swamphen, Little Bittern and Savi's Warbler.

Continuing on, we will arrive at our base, Hospes Palacio de Arenales & Spa, a former stately home,



which has been converted into a luxury 5-star hotel with a spa, outdoor swimming pool, and extensive grounds that contain a variety of wildlife.

After settling in and enjoying our first evening meal, we will discuss the plans for the coming week over a glass of wine, and to the soundtrack of beak-clattering White Storks.



Hospes Palacio de Arenales & Spa

Day 2

Sierra De San Pedro & Valdesalor plains

After breakfast, we will take a leisurely drive south, through the eastern part of the Sierra De San Pedro, until we reach the river Zapaton. Here we will explore the riverside in the hope of finding species such as Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Melodious and Sardinian Warblers, Golden Orioles or Wryneck, and in the reeds we will look out for Great Reed Warblers and Little Bitterns. The song of the Nightingale and the Blackcap will provide a constant backdrop.

After a while, the path moves away from the river and into an area of open holm-oak woodland. Species to look out for will include Woodchat Shrike, Bee-eater and Hoopoe, and overhead may fly Black and Red Kites, Griffon or Cinereous Vultures, and who knows, being deep in eagle country we may get lucky and have a Booted, Short-toed or even Golden Eagle pass over. Retracing our footsteps back along the river, we will stop for lunch in a calm, shaded spot by the water, and may be treated to views of a Kingfisher or Purple Heron as we enjoy our picnic.



Lesser-spotted Woodpecker

After lunch, we will head back north along some of the minor roads, stopping for any interesting birds that we find on the way. Arriving at Valdesalor, we will head out onto the plains to familiarise ourselves with some of the more common steppe species such as Crested, Calandra and Short-toed Larks. Both Great and Little Bustard live here, although in small numbers, but if we are lucky, we may encounter one or both of these birds.

After a bird packed first day, we will head back to our hotel to enjoy our evening meal and complete our daily checklists.



Little Bustards



Crested Lark

Day 3

Llanos de Cáceres - Steppes

Today we will head out onto a very rich area of Steppes, only a few kilometres from the city. After parking the vehicles, we will venture on foot firstly through a scrubby area, which can hold Common and Great Spotted Cuckoos along with Sardinian and Orphean Warblers. The scrub will fade away and the habitat will change into that of the classic Steppe. Here we will spend some time searching and hoping to encounter Great and Little Bustards, Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, along with Little Owl, larks and any raptors that could be flying over.

When our stomachs start rumbling, we will travel a short distance to an ancient chapel, which is high on top of a mountain. Here we will have our picnic lunch with incredible views over the surrounding plains and oak woodlands. This is also a favourite spot for the impressive Swallowtail and Scarce Swallowtail butterflies.

After lunch, we will head back down onto the plains and continue exploring. We will pass a road that has purpose-built nest boxes erected on telegraph poles. These nest boxes are home to a



Roller

variety of species, including Little Owls, Rollers and Lesser Kestrels, and we should be able to obtain good views of these from the comfort of our vehicles. We will spend the afternoon completing a circuit that will pass through steppe, oak forest and river valleys and will add a variety of new species to our lists. As evening starts to approach, we will head back to our base in time for dinner and checklists.

Day 4

Embalse De Alcántara & Night walk

This morning, we will head into the old town of Alcántara and spend a short while appreciating the old streets and buildings. White Storks, Pallid Swifts and Lesser Kestrels all nest in the old church in the centre of the town, and we will try to get good views of these species.

For our picnic, we will move onto the Roman bridge of Alcántara. Here we can enjoy our lunch while watching species such as Blue Rock Thrush and Black Redstart, as well as the many House and Crag Martins, which nest under the bridge.



Long-eared Owl



Collared Pratincole

Reluctantly leaving this area behind, we will head back east stopping at a large reservoir on the way. We will spend a bit of time looking for birds on and around the water. Species that nest on islands here include Little Terns and Collared Pratincoles, and it's not unusual to see waders such as Little Ringed Plovers on the shoreline.

Tonight after dinner, we will enjoy an optional night walk, which will start at dusk and continue until around 11pm. Under moon and torch light, we will look for the nocturnal species that this area has to offer and our targets will include bats and Red-necked Nightjars, and if we are lucky, we might hear or even see a Tawny, Scops or Long-eared Owl.

Day 5

Monfrague National Park

After breakfast, we will head north to Monfrague National Park. On the way, we will make a stop at an interesting area of heathland. Here we will search for some of the more difficult warblers including Dartford, Orphean and Spectacled. After spending an hour or two here, we will press on and will aim to enter the park just as things are starting to warm up and raptors are taking to the wing.

Throughout the day, we will explore the park making various stops at different viewpoints. Over 1000 pairs of Griffon Vultures nest in the park, along with around 250 pairs of Cinereous Vultures. Smaller numbers of Egyptian Vultures, Bonelli's Eagles, Black Storks, Spanish Imperial Eagles and Peregrine Falcons also call the park their home, and we will do our best to find as many of them as we can.



Griffon Vulture

In late afternoon, we will make our final stop in the park – the Castle. After a short climb, we will find ourselves at

eye level with the passing vultures, and the views from up here are breathtaking.

After another action packed day, we will head back to our base to enjoy our evening meal and complete our checklists.

Day 6 Cáceres, Los Barruecos lakes & Hinojal steppes

This morning we will head into the city of Cáceres, where we will spend the first part of the morning exploring one of the many urban parks within the city. This park is a real treat; birds such as Iberian Magpies, Hoopoes, Golden Orioles and Hawfinch are present and can often be seen at close quarters, as the birds have lost their fear of humans here.

Dragging ourselves away from this amazing place, we will head into the old town and after enjoying a coffee in the square, will spend some time roaming the old streets of the medieval walled city and will learn about some of the history that this fascinating place holds.

It will soon be time for lunch so we will take a short drive to the small nature reserve of Los Barruecos, where we will have our picnic. There are a number of small lakes here and they hold interesting species such as Black-winged Stilts and Green Sandpipers. There are many White Storks, which are nesting on purpose-built platforms, and obtaining good views of these impressive birds here will not be difficult.

The second part of the afternoon will be spent driving around the local area and making regular stops, where we will hope to encounter species such as Woodchat and Southern Grey Shrike, Black-eared Wheatear, Rock and Cirl Buntings, Bee-eaters and Hoopoes.



Rock Bunting (Pablo Perez)

Our final place for the day will be an area of steppe near the small village of Hinojal, which is a good place for the regular steppe species like bustards and sandgrouse, as well as Short-toed and Booted Eagles, which we will aim to track down before heading back to our base for our evening meal.

Day 7 Merida and surroundings

For our last full day, we will head south. The first stop will be at a huge rock face on the edge of a large reservoir on the outskirts of a small village. Here we will take a slow walk along the edge of the lake, looking out for species such as Gull-billed Tern, Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting, and in particular, Black Wheatear. This is also a regular haunt of Bonelli's Eagle and Raven and the bridge here holds the largest colony of Alpine Swifts in Extremadura.

After spending some time at this fascinating location, we will take a short drive to Extremadura's capital city, Mérida. Here, we will enjoy our picnic lunch by the riverside, before setting out across



Little Bittern (Pablo Perez)

the Roman Bridge of Mérida, which is Spain's longest surviving bridge from Roman times. Although the bridge is impressive, it's the birdlife that we find below and above which will be of the most interest to us. Penduline Tits, Kingfishers, Black-crowned Night Herons, Little Bitterns, Purple Herons, Cattle Egrets, Glossy Ibis and Purple Swamphen, amongst others, all call this place their home, and with careful searching and a bit of patience, we should be rewarded with good views

of many of these species. Three species of swift nest under the bridge, Common, Pallid and Alpine, and we will explore the large park surrounding the river which is a good place for Hoopoes, Golden Orioles and Common Waxbills.

After an eventful final full day in Extremadura, we will take the drive back north to our base, to enjoy our last evening meal and to complete our checklists for the week.

Day 8

Caceres-Madrid-London

This morning (depending on flight times) we should have a chance to have a look around some of the local habitats before making the drive back to Madrid in time for our flight back to London.

Tour grading

A. This is a traditional birding tour which mixes in-vehicle birding with stops at the best viewpoints. We will do some walking each day but the walks will not be strenuous. There will be an optional early morning walk most days as well as some optional night/evening walks. There will be chance to relax at the hotel for an hour or two before dinner most evenings.

Food & Accommodation

All meals and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday.

Weather

Weather during April and May in Extremadura can be unpredictable. Days of around 12 degrees with rain are possible as are days of 25 degrees with bright sunshine. It is advisable to bring a waterproof and wellies, as well as your sun cream and a pair of shorts.

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.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.