

The Birds, Wines and History of Extremadura

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	<u>Fly Madrid and transfer to Extremadura</u>
Day 2	<u>Embalse de Alcollarín / Bodega Habla</u>
Day 3	<u>Monfragüe</u>
Day 4	<u>Campo Lugar/ Madrigalejo / Trujillo</u>
Day 5	<u>Guadalupe / Bodega Ruiz Torres</u>
Day 6	<u>Santa Marta de Magasca / steppes</u>
Day 7	<u>Arrocampo</u>
Day 8	<u>Fly Madrid to London</u>



Departs

March (see website for dates)

Focus

Birds, Wines & History

Grading

A. A traditional birding tour with some easy walking

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP66) or brochure

Highlights

- Fantastic birdwatching with steppe species and raptors to the fore.
- Full day at Monfragüe National Park.
- Enjoy a walking tour of historic Trujillo with an expert local historian.
- Stay in the iconic Parador in Trujillo, a 16th century Franciscan convent.
- Two visits to contrasting local wineries, with tastings.
- Dinner most evenings in the atmospheric plaza of Trujillo.



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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

This Naturetrek Tour is designed to appeal to those who love their birdwatching and the natural environment, but appreciate a focus on other aspects during their holiday too. This tour sits at the more luxury end of nature tourism and promises to be a popular choice for those wishing to get an insight into the history of the area, to sample some local produce (especially wines), and of course to see some fabulous birds. We will be based at the lovely 4 star 'Parador de Trujillo', located in a wonderful position in the centre of the historic town of Trujillo, the birthplace of 'Francisco Pizarro (one of the conquistadors of Peru) whose statue stands in the Plaza Major. The hotel itself is a lovingly-converted 16th century Franciscan convent.

Central Spain is known the world over for its fabulous birdwatching, with Extremadura arguably being the jewel in the crown. The region is dominated by rolling grasslands, rocky hillsides, endless *dehesa* woodlands and overflying raptors, and is intersected by two great rivers, the Tagus and the Guadiana. Although Extremadura experiences long hot summers, this region stores one third of all the fresh water in Spain, in reservoirs such as the Embalses de Valdecañas and the Sierra Brava.

Extremadura has a fabulously rich and complicated history, having been occupied by Celtic tribes, the Romans and the Moors. This mix of cultures has left its legacy in the form of diverse architecture and culture, and wonderful local produce, including the internationally famous Jamon de Bellota, rich cheeses and superb regional wines.

With direct flights to and from Madrid, the tour will encompass all the different aspects of this part of Extremadura, combining culture and good food with wonderful wildlife.

Day 1

Fly to Madrid and on to Extremadura

We will arrive at Madrid Barajas international airport and travel by minibus to Extremadura, a journey of about three hours. As we leave the concrete jungle of the capital, the landscape opens out into farmland which holds many birds that we would not normally see in the UK. As we approach Extremadura, the landscape transitions into steppe and *dehesa*, the latter being the savannah-like landscape of scattered Holm Oaks so typical of the region. Iberian Grey Shrikes are a common sight perched on roadside wires, and in the adjacent woodlands Iberian (Azure-winged) Magpies feed noisily. Numerous raptors soar overhead. We will of course make stops along the way, and depending on the flight times we may have time for a little birdwatching. On arrival at the Parador we will unpack and prepare for the evening meal, and have a quick briefing about



the week ahead in anticipation of our experiences over the coming days.

Day 2

Embalse de Alcollarín / Bodegas Habla

After breakfast we will travel to the Embalse de Alcollarín, a reservoir some thirty minutes from Trujillo, perhaps via a coffee stop in a local bar. There is always something to see at Alcollarín: it comprises wetland/open water habitat surrounded by open grassland and scrub. We will look for waterbirds such as wildfowl, grebes and egrets, raptors such as Bonelli's Eagle and Marsh Harrier, and passerines like warblers and larks. Weather permitting, we will enjoy our first picnic here, before we head back to Trujillo. In the afternoon we will travel ten minutes from Trujillo to visit the Bodega Habla for a guided tour. This is a fabulous winery and promises us a very enjoyable experience. We will then return to base to prepare for the evening meal and our daily run down of events.



Day 3

Monfragüe National Park

After breakfast, we will head north to the National Park of Monfragüe, through Holm Oak *dehesa* and across the pretty valley of the Rio Almonte. Our first proper stop will be at the Castillo de Monfragüe, situated high on a rocky ridge: it is an amazing vantage point from which we will take in the surrounding countryside, and start to see the raptors for which Monfragüe is so famous. All three species of vulture are likely here, along with eagles and more. Next, we will visit the famous Salto de Gitano / Peñafalcon. This mighty rock face, viewed from across the River Tagus, is home to many nesting Griffon Vultures, but also Black Stork, Blue Rock Thrush, Rock and Cirl Buntings and more, and we have a very good chance of seeing the enormous Cinereous Vulture up close. We will take our picnic in the hills at Villareal de San Carlos, a small village with excellent facilities, perfectly positioned for viewing raptors while enjoying a freshly-prepared lunch. We will continue through the park, where we might see Hawfinch, Serin, Dartford and Sardinian Warblers, along with further raptors, and we even a chance of a roosting Eagle Owl! We will return to the hotel following the same route in reverse, and if we have time we will stop off again at the Salto de Gitano.

Day 4

Campo Lugar/ Madrigalejo / Trujillo

After breakfast we will start our first day looking for steppe birds, beginning with a visit to the grasslands of Campo Lugar, where we should see Calandra, Crested & Thekla's Lark. This is a good area for both Pintailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Stone-curlew, and both of the very elusive bustards (Little and Great), both of which are globally threatened. We will take a coffee and sandwiches at Madrigalejo before exploring an area of rice fields which can produce Hoopoe, Common Waxbill, Red Avadavat, Yellow-crowned Bishop and with luck Common Cranes: this area can also be fabulous for waders when the water levels are right. We will then return back to base, and in the late afternoon we will enjoy a guided tour around Trujillo, with a talk from a specialist guide before dinner.

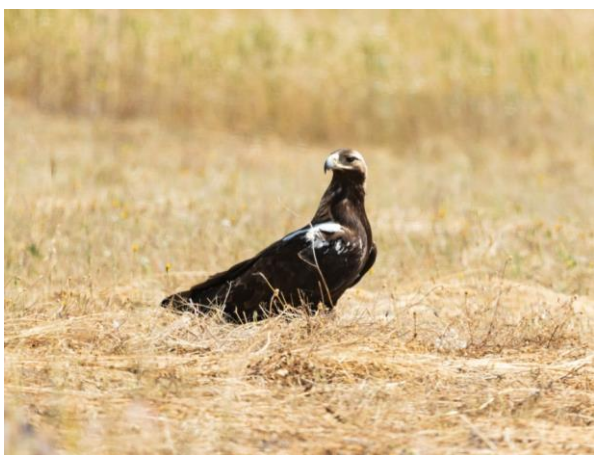
Day 5

Guadalupe / Bodega Ruiz Torres

After breakfast, today's adventure will start with an hour's drive to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Guadalupe where we will have a short visit before the main event of the day. This site, the home of the Basilica and the Monastery of Santa Maria de Guadalupe is a spectacular place of pilgrimage which was, for a short time, home to the Holy Roman Emperor Carlos V. Although we will not be touring the monastery it is still worth a visit, for sure a fabulous piece of architecture with a rich history. The area around Guadalupe and Las Villuercas is also a UNESCO World Geopark, designated in part because of the 'Appalachian relief' type geology. The park covers an area of more than 2500km² and comprises a series of valleys and ridges holding strong populations of both Golden and Bonelli's Eagle (and other raptors), so it will be important to keep our eyes open! We will have lunch before the main event of the day, a visit to the Bodega Ruiz Torres, just ten minutes from Guadalupe. There is a very long history of wine-making in this area (which lies within the DOP region of Ribera del Guadiana), and some truly great wines originate here. It will be fascinating to learn about the process, and fun to try some samples! Following the winery visit, we will head back to Trujillo for a well-earned rest before dinner.

Day 6

Santa Marta de Magasca / Llanos de Cáceres



This will be another day spent in search of steppe-specialist birds. The area of Santa Marta de Magasca and the Llanos de Cáceres is designated as an area of Special Protection Area for birds. Our search will start close to town, where we will choose some areas to park up and scan, again looking for the elusive Great and Little Bustards above all. Moving on through the steppe landscape, we may see Rock and Spanish Sparrows, Cirl Bunting, Pin-tailed or Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Spanish Imperial Eagle or Golden Eagle: the list of bird possibilities here is amazing. It is an area where eagles roam and the awesome Cinereous Vulture is at home,

together with myriad passerines. Around lunchtime we will arrive at a raptor feeding station where we hope for fabulous close-up views, not only of the mighty vultures, but with luck some eagles or other birds of prey too. This is where we will have our lunch, prepared while you watch the spectacle. Later in the afternoon, we will return to the hotel to prepare for the evening meal.

Day 7

Arrocampo Reservoir

After a leisurely breakfast, we will take the motorway north for around thirty minutes to one of the best wetland reserves in central Spain. Arrocampo is the cooling reservoir for a nuclear power plant, and has a stable water temperature all year, something which creates an ideal environment for many birds. More than 220 species have been recorded at this site, and it holds a wide range of species at all seasons. A speciality of the area is Black-winged Kite, along with Squacco Heron, Penduline Tit and (in winter) Bluethroat. There are several hides and observation points and it can easily take most of a day to cover the various 'hotspots'. We will have lunch here, and a well-placed café adjacent to the site will lay on a coffee, or something stronger if you prefer! In the afternoon, we will return to Trujillo, where there will be some final free time to enjoy the sights and ambience of this magnificent medieval city. We will meet up later for the evening meal and the final checklist, before retiring in preparation for the journey home.

Day 8

Travel to Madrid and flight home

Today we will be heading back to Madrid and our onward journeys. Depending on flight times, we may have time for a little birding on the way.

Tour Grading

Grade A. This is a traditional birding tour with no strenuous walking involved. Suitable for all ages and for all reasonable degrees of fitness.

Food & accommodation included in the price

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

Optional extensions

For those of you wishing to see the vibrant 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.

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.