

Wallcreepers & Cranes in Northern Spain

Naturetrek Tour Report

10th – 17th February 2026



Common Cranes



Common Cranes



Spanish Ibex



Griffon Vulture

Tour report by Pablo Pérez Martínez



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

Tour participants: Pablo Pérez Martínez (leader) with six Naturetrek clients

Summary

During this tour, we visited some of the most beautiful places in Aragón, enjoying its remote and authentic landscapes with impressive geology, rugged mountains and vast steppes. We searched for birds in sometimes windy and rainy conditions, but we nevertheless enjoyed good observations of some interesting birds such as Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Black Wheatear, Golden Eagle, and Little Owl. What was really exciting for the group of six visitors was the large number of Common Cranes we saw, not only in Gallocanta, but also in the vicinity of the Sierra de Guara, in La Sotonera. These birds still had to wait a few days for the weather to improve before they crossed the Pyrenees to the north. We hoped they would have a safe journey.

Day 1

Tuesday 10th February

The group of six clients from England and Scotland arrived in Madrid, where they met up with Pablo Pérez, their leader. During the drive out of the city, we saw a dark-phase Booted Eagle, and shortly before arriving at the Hotel Allucant, in the village of Gallocanta, we spotted the first Little Owl of the trip, perched on the remains of an old building, which provided it with good camouflage. The name Gallocanta means “the rooster that crows,” referring to the large number of Common Cranes that come here in winter and gather to spend the night in the safety of its saline waters, which make up the largest endoreic saltwater lagoon in Europe. We enjoyed Javier's friendly welcome at the hotel, and Bipul's exotic cuisine.

Day 2

Wednesday 11th February

Before dawn, we were already prepared on the eastern side of the lagoon to watch nearly three thousand cranes take flight after they had spent the night on the lagoon, and to see them fly to feed in the nearby fields. It was certainly a great spectacle to watch such a river of birds flying in perfect harmony, as the first rays of light illuminated them.

We went to back to Hotel Allucant for breakfast, and then started the morning proper at the Barrueco Castle viewpoint with stunning views over the lagoon. We were delighted by a beautiful pair of Woodlarks performing their courtship flight over the nearby Holm Oaks, and saw the first Iberian Ibex on the rocks. The group also enjoyed seeing so many ‘common’ birds, such as Corn Buntings and friendly Tree Sparrows, which are not so common in the UK.

We then continued our circular tour of the lagoon, where there were large numbers of Greater Flamingoes and ducks, and an elegant group of Ruffs of various plumages and ages. We spent the afternoon looking for some shelter from the wind, and found it in the historic walls of the city of Daroca, which was also home to Iberian Ibex and Red-billed Choughs. We were able to delve into the past of this charismatic city, surrounded by large walls and a very interesting church, which we visited before returning to the hotel in Allucant.

Day 3

Thursday 12th February

We repeated our dawn outing to see the cranes, returning to the hotel for breakfast, and then heading down to the nearby Aguanares observatory, where the strong wind made it difficult to see the birds clearly, although we did manage to spot a Common Snipe. Also noteworthy were the large number of Hen Harriers hunting with their graceful and rapid flight, parallel to those of the small birds trying to avoid them, and the swift action of the Merlins, birds of prey that also spend the winter in these lands.

We then continued to nearby rockier areas, typical of the Blancas moorlands. We searched for endangered steppe birds, saw four Black-bellied Sandgrouse, and were able to spot the first Rock Sparrow.

We visited some historic parts of the village of Blancas, before continuing to Calamocha, where we ate typical Aragónese food and then moved on to the Lechago reservoir, where we enjoyed several aquatic species, such as Great Crested Grebe, and had excellent sightings of a Kingfisher and the near-endemic Iberian Grey Shrike. We saw our first Red Fox of the trip, and continued back to Gallocanta for our last night in the Hotel Allucant before heading north.

Day 4

Friday 13th February

We left Gallocanta in the morning, travelling along secondary roads to the Las Torcas reservoir. On the way, we stopped to rest in a pine forest, where we were able to observe Crested Tit and Coal Tit, before reaching the vertical limestone walls of Torcas. There, we saw a Griffon Vulture incubating an egg, and also enjoyed watching a Dartford Warbler and a distant Golden Eagle.

We stopped for lunch in the charming village of Belchite, where we discovered the delicious Café Bombon, which became very popular with the group for the rest of the trip. We took advantage of the proximity of a nearby reservoir to go birding after lunch, and enjoyed some excellent sightings of one of Europe's smallest birds, the brilliant Firecrest.

We next visited nearby Planerón, a nature reserve on the arid steppes of Belchite. We saw our first Hoopoes, and an impressive Golden Eagle perched near the lagoons was harassed by Yellow-legged Gulls. Although it was a very rainy day, curiously, when we visited Planerón, the atmosphere was calm, allowing us to feel the depth and silence of the immense steppe habitat. We saw Black-bellied Sandgrouse again, this time both in flight and on the ground, with better observations allowing us to differentiate the male from the female by the colour of their heads. Amid showers, we continued in the van driven to Bierge and the Hospedería de Guara hotel, where Ana kindly welcomed us. Unfortunately for us, heavy rains had damaged a nearby road, which meant a longer journey.

Day 5

Saturday 14th February

We took a somewhat quieter morning and visited Alquezar, a historic village nestled high on a limestone cliff, with more than three thousand years of history. For generations it served as a defensive element for the different kingdoms that ruled the Sierra de Guara. We searched first in the sun and then in the shade, unsuccessfully, for Wallcreeper, which did not show itself. However, we did enjoy good sightings of Sardinian Warbler and a Blue Rock Thrush.

On the way back to the van, we explored the historic medieval streets, before continuing on to the iconic viewpoint over the Vero River, which flowed hundreds of metres below us. The feeling of freedom offered by immense Griffon Vultures flying high above the canyon, with the glistening snow on the mountains and the turquoise waters of the Vero River, was incredible.

For lunch, we returned to the hotel to enjoy a hot soup, before driving to the nearby Vadiello reservoir, where the wind swept across its steep conglomerate rock walls. We returned to the hotel in Bierge for a good night's sleep and a tasty dinner.

Day 6

Sunday 15th February

We started the morning by heading north via the Morrano viewpoint in the Sierra de Guara, where we saw vultures taking flight on a sunny morning. We continued to Santa Cilia, where we had to turn back due to a hunt, and then went to the Guara Reservoir where we saw a Peregrine Falcon resting near the vulture nests.

We continued on our way until another sporting event on the nearby road forced us to change course, to the iconic Roldan mountain ridge. At the top of the winding road, we could sense the Pyrenees between the snow-capped mountains and the clouds populated by hundreds of Griffon Vultures. Suddenly, we saw people at the top of a peak, and upon looking closely, we saw the only Bearded Vulture of the trip. Although it was in the distance, we were able to appreciate the peculiarities of its diamond-shaped tail and its thin wings, in comparison to those of the Griffon Vultures, which were wider and V-shaped.

From the top of Roldan, we descended the road to have lunch near Monrepos, and continued our journey under threatening clouds to the famous Mallos de Riglos, a well-known spot among climbers. We walked through the pretty village with the conglomerate stone sentinels towering above us. We got close to Mallo Pisón and looked closely between the rock cavities, but the elusive Wallcreeper was nowhere to be seen. However, we heard a Rock Bunting. We returned to Bierge to enjoy a delicious dinner by the warmth of the fire.

Day 7

Monday 16th February

We began the sunny morning by visiting the fossilised footprints of extinct animals in Abiego, where we heard a Cirl Bunting, and continued on to the famous Montearagón Castle. We were enjoying a sunny morning, as was a beautiful Little Owl under some rocks, and we heard a Thekla's Lark. But as usual on this tour, the clouds were approaching and the pressure was mounting. We were able to observe an elegant pair of Black Wheatears, and it was a joy for the leader to know that this threatened bird continued to thrive for another year yet.

From the top of the parking lot of this recently built road, we walked to reach the castle and took a circular tour, this time in a hurry, as the imminent rain was putting pressure on us. We needed to warm up, so we did so by enjoying a traditional chocolate with *churros*, before continuing on our way to the Sotonera lagoon, where migrating Cranes gather: these birds are not those from Gallocanta, but others from central and southern Spain. They were gathered and lying on the grass, an interesting sight, which was enriched by the presence of a Golden Eagle and a Hen Harrier.

On this occasion we could clearly see the difference between Common Cranes and White Storks, with the cranes having a longer, slenderer silhouette and, above all, flying faster, as if they had a difficult task in migrating, compared to the more relaxed style of the storks. Some of the latter clearly had plans to breed nearby, as we saw from the numerous nests in the nearby trees. We returned to the hotel and ended an interesting day of birding.

Day 8

Tuesday 17th February

We left Bierge, happy after a tour full of beautiful landscapes and experiences typical of authentic Aragón in rural Spain. We saw a total of around ninety bird species, and learned about the vicissitudes and contrasts within a modern and yet traditional country, where nature showed us its ability to adapt to change. We arrived at Barcelona airport and ended the tour.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek email list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers.

naturetrek.co.uk/e-newsletter-signup

Scan to
sign up!



Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Instagram, Facebook, Bluesky and X and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers, exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



[instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays](https://www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays)



[facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays](https://www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays)



[naturetrek.bsky.social](https://www.bsky.social/naturetrek)



x.com/naturetrektours (formerly Twitter)

Species lists

Birds

Common name	Scientific name
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas carolinensis</i>
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Bearded Vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>
Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>