

Spain - Extremadura at Christmas

Naturetrek Tour Report

22nd – 28th December 2025



Iberian Shrike



Spanish Imperial Eagle

Tour report by Mark Wood



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Day 1

Monday 22nd December

We had a reasonably early flight from Heathrow, which arrived in Madrid without fuss at 12.30pm. The group could enjoyed drinks and snacks while the two rental vans were collected. We set off through the Madrid traffic and made our way south-west toward Extremadura. A comfort stop was made about halfway, where we saw our first White Stork, on its nest.

The rest of the drive was fairly quiet, with Red Kite, Marsh Harrier and Eurasian Magpie from the van, before we arrived at our hotel in the beautiful medieval town of Trujillo around 5.00pm. After settling into our rooms, we reconvened for dinner in the restaurant for our first meal together, followed by an early night after a long travel day.

Day 2

Tuesday 23rd December

Our first day proper started with overcast skies and persistent light rain, but we set off into the steppe regardless. Starting in an area near the village of Santa Marta de Magasca, we soon found a small flock of Little Bustards, but it was difficult to get a good view of them through the rain. We decided to detour into the village for a coffee, in the hope that the rain might relent, and it did! Now in drier conditions, we set off to the west, but were soon stopped in our tracks by an adult Spanish Imperial Eagle perched on a post right by the road. We were able to watch this magnificent raptor at around a hundred metres' range for several minutes before it flew off. It made a beautiful sight!

Turning down a dirt track, we found many more raptors, including Red Kite, Marsh Harrier, male and female Hen Harriers, Kestrel and an immature Spanish Imperial Eagle on the ground with some Cinereous Vultures. We stopped at a bird hide, where we found a flock of eighteen Great Bustards, which were a little distant but gave decent views in the scopes.

The rain returned, so we backtracked to Santa Marta for our first picnic lunch. Birdlife was quiet here today, with House Sparrow being the most visible species. Appetites satisfied, we descended into a nearby wooded valley, where we explored for a while. Here, we got good views of Hawfinch, Blackcap, many Chiffchaffs, and Great Cormorant flying over.

We then returned to the Great Bustard area; they were still there, plus a brief Hoopoe, Corn Bunting and Iberian Grey Shrike. We then saw some Pin-tailed Sandgrouse land nearby and drove towards them but, unfortunately, they flushed before most could get a view of them.

Day 3

Wednesday 24th December

Today began with glorious clear skies and bright sunshine. We set off for Moheda Alta, where we could see and hear many Cranes feeding beneath the Holm Oaks. A walk produced excellent views of Thekla's Lark, Black Redstart, Stonechat, Corn Bunting and Zitting Cisticola, as well as brief views of Song Thrush and Sardinian

Warbler. Probably best of all was a Black-winged Kite, which we watched hovering for a while and then perching in a tree top, allowing good scope views.

We moved on to the rice fields around Palazuelo, which were packed with Cranes and White Storks. After a few hours exploring, we had also found many Cattle, Little and Great Egrets and several flocks of beautiful Iberian Magpies, and a few had glimpsed a Booted Eagle.

We stopped for lunch at a small wooded area on the edge of the paddies, and enjoyed the warm afternoon sunshine. Then we returned to the fields, where an Otter was glimpsed crossing the road, several flocks of Common Waxbill were seen, and we found great numbers of Glossy Ibises and wading birds like Green Sandpiper, Greenshank, Little Ringed Plover and Snipe.

Our last stop of the day was to the east of the village, where we managed to see several gorgeous Bluethroats at close range in the afternoon sunlight, along with a dazzling Kingfisher, Water and Meadow Pipits, and many White Wagtails.

For Christmas Eve dinner we went to a restaurant in a small village, where we were treated to three wonderful courses. It made for an entertaining end to a wonderful day.

Day 4

Thursday 25th December

Christmas Day began bright and sunny again, but with the temperature at -2°C, it was noticeably cold. We drove north to the Monfragüe National Park, where an atmospheric inversion was causing cloud to spill down over the hill tops. Our first stop overlooked the Griffon Vulture breeding cliffs, where dozens were perched around looking moody in the mist. Here, we also got excellent views of Blue Rock Thrush, an obliging Sardinian Warbler, and a few Firecrests. We made an ascent of the adjacent fort-topped hill, where we got excellent flight views of the Griffon Vultures collecting and carrying nesting material. We then moved on to the National Park HQ buildings, where we had our picnic lunch. While we ate, we had a Grey Wagtail, and a few Chaffinches and Greenfinches.

Afterwards, we drove to a viewpoint overlooking a valley, from which we observed many Griffon and Cinereous Vultures piling in to some sort of carrion on a hillside nearby, creating quite the spectacle as more and more joined in the frenzy. We then paused in some pine woodland, where we managed to pick up Nuthatch, Crested and Coal Tits, and a singing Mistle Thrush.

Our last stop overlooked another vulture breeding cliff, where many were busy nest building. Another Blue Rock Thrush was here, but best of all was a wonderful Otter which swam in front of us for a while on the opposite side of the river, before swimming directly toward us, then disappearing beneath the bank. As we returned to the vans, a pair of Bonelli's Eagles suddenly made an appearance, and we were able to watch them at length as they drifted about over the valley.

It was time to return to the hotel, but on the way back we had some very close Red Deer on the roadside, some of which sported impressive antlers.

Day 5

Friday 26th December

Boxing Day saw us heading north again, this time to the Saucedilla Reserve, an area of wetlands. Near the park buildings, we quickly spotted a Black-winged Kite on some cables, giving excellent scope views. Then a Black-crowned Night Heron was seen roosting in a nearby tree. We walked the edge of the swamps for a while, getting brief views of Zitting Cisticolas, many Stonechats, a Bluethroat and, at the very end, a pair of Penduline Tits, which showed well for most, but then disappeared over the reeds and out of sight.

We returned to the village, where we had a coffee break while lunch was prepared. Afterwards, we moved to another area of pools, where we saw Little Grebe, Kingfisher and, after a bit of patience, a wonderful Western Swampphen, which gave great views as it fed along the edge of the bulrushes. Our last stop overlooked a lake which held Great and Little Egrets, Teal, Mallard, and a brief pair of Otters. The adjacent field had Curlew and Golden Plover.

We then returned to Trujillo to allow some to explore the historical delights of the town; but the intrepid among us sallied out again for an evening jaunt on the steppe. We found many flocks of Lapwings and Golden Plovers, and Iberian Grey Shrike, but the best of all was another adult Spanish Imperial Eagle, perched on a low hill with two Cinereous Vultures. While we watched them, a Red Fox jogged past; the raptors only gave it a cursory glance.

Day 6

Saturday 27th December

Our final full day in Spain saw us trying to clean up on a few species we had missed so far. We arrived on the Campo Lugar steppe in brilliant sunshine, but with a bitter breeze. We quickly found a flock of around thirty Great Bustards, which gave good scope views. There were huge flocks of passerines fluttering around, mostly Calandra Larks and Meadow Pipits, but also many Corn Buntings, Goldfinches, Thekla's Larks, and some Linnets.

We made a stop for coffee, then continued to a nearby reservoir, where we had a nice sheltered lunch among the trees. Here were many Mallard, Teal, Gadwall, Little Grebes, White Storks, and Common and Green Sandpipers. Several Marsh Harriers, Red Kites and both Griffon and Cinereous Vultures cruised around, and just as we were about to leave, a pair of Bonelli's Eagles appeared.

We returned to the steppe west of Santa Marta de Magasca, where we got great views of three Little Bustards, and after some patience and careful scanning we finally caught up with both Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse. They were a bit distant, but clear enough in the scope. A distant Golden Eagle was also seen, and on the return journey to the hotel we had a fantastic Hoopoe posing on a roadside post. Back in Trujillo we met up with those who had returned early, and had our final dinner together.

Day 7

Sunday 28th December

We had breakfast, departed the hotel promptly at 9.00am, and made our way back towards Madrid. After a comfort stop halfway, we reached the airport around midday. From here, the group split, with some staying on in Spain, and the rest of us returning to Heathrow. The flights went smoothly, and we all said our goodbyes after retrieving our bags.

It had been a very satisfying trip, with memorable encounters with some great bird species. Particularly excellent this year were the multiple Spanish Imperial Eagles which had posed so nicely, and the high density of showy and colourful Bluethroats in the rice paddies. Other notably good encounters were the two pairs of Bonelli's Eagles, two showy Black-winged Kites, and the bold Otter in Monfragüe. Our Trujillo hotel had made a very comfortable base, with tasty food. The good company and sunny weather were the icing on the cake.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	December 2025						
		22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>					✓	✓	
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>						✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓			✓	✓	
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓	H			
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>		✓				✓	
Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>		✓				✓	
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</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>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>					H		
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			H		✓		
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>					✓		
Western Swampen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>					✓		
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		✓	✓			✓	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		✓				✓	
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓			✓	✓	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			✓				
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>					✓		
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓		✓		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓	✓	✓	
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>			✓			✓	
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</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>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>					✓		
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			✓		✓		
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			✓		✓		
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>			✓				
Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		✓			✓		
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>						✓	
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>				✓		✓	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>						✓	
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓			✓	✓	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

Common name	Scientific name	December 2025						
		22	23	24	25	26	27	28
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>						✓	
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Iberian Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓				✓	
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>				✓			
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>				✓			
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>				✓			
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>				✓		✓	
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</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>		✓		✓			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>					✓		
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H		✓		
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</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>				✓			
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓	✓			
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓			
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓	H			
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				H			
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>			✓		✓		
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochrurus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				✓			
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			✓			✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>			✓				
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>			✓				
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓					
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>				✓			
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>						✓	

		December 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	H	✓	✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>				✓			
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	