

Hidden Extremadura

Naturetrek Tour Report

11th – 18th April 2026

Tour report by Luis Fernando Estefano



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Summary

The success of this tour lies not only in the outstanding natural environment we enjoy in this remote inland region of Spain, but also in to the historic old town of Cáceres and to an organic goat farm, where we see how human interaction with nature can be beneficial to both parties. We enjoyed lots of excellent food, including local and organic produce, at our picnics and in the restaurants and cafés we visited. Apart from the first full day in the field, which was difficult for birding due to the strong wind, the weather remained fine for the rest of the tour.

From an ornithological point of view, we had some excellent sightings of species such as Collared Pratincole, Western Black-eared Wheatear, Little and Great Bustards, Little Bittern, Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Stone-curlew, Spanish Imperial Eagle and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. During the tour we recorded 125 species of birds, of which two were endemic to the Iberian Peninsula. We were also able to observe five species of mammals (including a Wildcat!) and four species of reptiles and amphibians, one of them endemic.

As usual, this year's group was great, demonstrating an exceptional willingness to learn and making the work of the guides a real pleasure.

Day 1

Saturday 11th April

Madrid – Cáceres

The tour began at the agreed meeting point at Madrid-Barajas Airport, and we soon boarded two minibuses to take us to our destination near Cáceres. On the way, we saw raptors like a solitary Marsh Harrier, a couple of Short-toed Snake Eagles, quite a lot of Booted Eagles and the usual wandering Black Kites all over the road. Once we arrived at the hotel, the resident White Storks, House Sparrows and Spotless Starlings welcomed us as usual.

Day 2

Sunday 12th April

Santiago del Campo

The day dawned windy, so the conditions to see steppe birds at Santiago del Campo were not the best. We began by crossing the immense plains, and soon the first Hoopoe of the trip showed up. Birding was not easy, but despite the difficulties, the first two elusive Black-bellied Sandgrouses flew off from one side of the road. Pin-tailed Sandgrouse proved to be the hardest species to spot, even though its calls were present during the morning. Finally, we were lucky enough to observe two flocks of them in the distance.

On the way to the hide, we saw a couple of Northern Wheatears, before we saw a Western Orphean Warbler in an area of holm oak *dehesa* woodland. In this area we also had good observations of Woodchat Shrike and Bee-eaters. We had Short-toed Snake Eagle, Spanish Imperial Eagle and Montagu's Harriers patrolling the surrounding area, and once everything was prepared, we sat down in the hide to enjoy the show. Dozens of Black Kites arrived and started picking up pieces of meat. Soon afterwards, Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, the largest raptors in Spain, started to land, and war started. For half an hour, we could take as many pictures as we wanted: we had a

great time. After that, a good salad dressed with organic virgin olive oil and local ham gave us some extra energy to keep birding for the rest of the day.

Interestingly, throughout the day we spotted several Fallow Deer (which seem to have only recently colonised area), and a Red Fox. But the highlight of the day was undoubtedly the discovery of a population of Collared Pratincoles, which we thoroughly enjoyed watching. After enjoying this iconic and rare species, we called it a day and headed back to the hotel.

Day 3

Monday 13th April

Cáceres – Los Barruecos

The day dawned cold but sunny and, as we had planned the day before, we headed towards the city of Cáceres. The first stop was the Parque del Principe, a green and shady oasis in the heart of the city, which is particularly attractive for Iberian Magpies and a number of forest species, including Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

First, we headed towards the tree where the woodpecker had built its nest the previous year, but the unmistakable call of the Wryneck made us change our plans, and we began searching for that bird. Eventually, we spotted two individuals which seemed to be engaged in a musical duel, allowing us to capture some magnificent images of this elusive migratory woodpecker.

Having reaped this unexpected reward, we set off, this time in earnest, in search of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, which reappeared in the same spot as last year. Finally, a Nightingale delighted us with its song among some bushes near a stream. After hearing a Golden Oriole and spotting several Short-toed Treecreepers and a Pied Flycatcher, we left this cool park to head for the old town of Cáceres.

There Lesser Kestrels, Jackdaws and our usual guide, Marco, were waiting for us. Marco told us his anecdotes and shared his wisdom about the history of this World Heritage Site. A meal in the Plaza Mayor allowed us to recharge our batteries for the subsequent visit to the Los Barruecos area.

Los Barruecos is a natural area featuring spectacular rock formations, which are home to an interesting colony of White Storks. It also always treats us to good sightings of Thekla's Larks and Red-rumped Swallows. Apart from those birds, this year we were also able to observe abundant Sardinian Warblers, and Spanish Sparrows breeding under the protection of the storks' nests. In the adjacent lagoons, we spotted the endangered European Pond Terrapin among the numerous Black-winged Stilts.

Once we'd had a rest at the hotel, we went out at night and spotted a Little Owl, which treated us to some flight displays and hunting manoeuvres against a magnificent backdrop dotted with numerous White Stork nests.

Day 4

Tuesday 14th April

Arrocampo reservoir – Monfragüe National Park

The day began with a relatively long drive through the mist to the Arrocampo reservoir, on the edge of Monfragüe National Park. Fortunately, once we reached Saucedilla, the entrance to the wetland, the weather was perfect for spotting species of interest such as Great Egret, Ferruginous Duck and Great Reed Warbler. At the first observation point, we spotted a pair of Little Bitterns making numerous flights back and forth across the reedbed. Furthermore, the incessant song of the Savi's and Sedge Warblers allowed us to locate these elusive birds, which are rarely seen. At the subsequent observation points, we managed to spot a Marsh Harrier, Whimbrels and a Gull-billed Tern. Once out of the wetland, specifically in a pastureland area, we saw a solitary holm oak hosting a breeding colony of Spoonbills, bringing the first part of the day to a close. We headed to the National Park, via its northern entrance.

The first stop in this iconic Mediterranean nature site was the legendary Portilla del Tietar, a set of rocky cliffs which is home to dozens of breeding pairs of Griffon Vultures; we were also able to observe how the endangered Black Stork had built a nest on the other side of the river, on a ledge previously occupied by griffon vultures. Not far from there, an Egyptian Vulture was also incubating its clutch.

The next point of interest was the equally legendary Salto del Gitano, where, in addition to Griffon Vultures, there were three Black Stork nests, alongside Ravens, dozens of Crag Martins, and Red-rumped Swallows. We also spotted Black Redstarts, Blue Rock Thrushes, Rock Buntings and a Western Subalpine Warbler, which allowed itself to be photographed.

Once outside the park, the highlight was seeing some Spanish Sparrows building their nests at a well-known guesthouse, which served as our refuge to regain our strength. We returned to our hotel in Cáceres, though not before we were lucky enough to come across a genuine European Wildcat on the road!

Day 5

Wednesday 15th April

Guadialoba reservoir – Los Cerralbos – Sierra de Fuentes

The day began with an unexpected setback, when we found the gate leading to the steppe area adjacent to the reservoir closed. This did not prevent us from spotting some Little Ringed Plovers flying overhead. Fortunately, we were able to shake off our disappointment and altered our plans: we headed for the nearby steppe area of Los Cerralbos.

Once there, we spotted a group of six Great Bustards walking on a hill, and displaying, a performance known as *La Rueda*. Incredibly, in the very same field where these majestic birds were found, we were also able to spot the always-elusive Little Bustard. We were able to observe a male displaying himself in all his splendour, even going so far as to emerge completely from the vegetation. Finally, the presence of an unexpected Hen Harrier caused it to take flight and disappear to the horizon. At the same time, some Pin-tailed Sandgrouse completed a spectacular scene, calling as they flew by.

Having extracted the best from the area, we headed to the town of Santa Marta for a deserved coffee break. Moving on, we checked countless nest boxes along the road to Sierra de Fuentes, and spotted several Little Owls staring intently at us, which our travellers were able to photograph.

Once we arrived in the village, we went to explore a well-known cork oak forest where we could hear the insistent calls of migrating Wrynecks as well as a multitude of Iberian Magpies. Nearby, we visited the Carrasco Cheese Factory, where we ate traditional shepherds' fare, and were shown how an organic goat farm is run. After a short walk, during which we spotted some Stonechats, and a Woodlark perched on a wire, we headed towards Cáceres, but not before stopping at a spot known for Bonelli's Eagles, though we only managed to see a Common Cuckoo and a Short-toed Snake Eagle.

Day 6

Thursday 16th April

Alange – Mérida

The day began sunny at our headquarters in Cáceres, and we headed south on a comfortable journey of just over an hour. Our first destination in the Vega del Guadiana was the village of Alange. Perched on a hilltop and crowned by a Moorish castle, it is bordered by a reservoir which offers a varied mosaic of landscapes, where both aquatic and rocky habitats can be found.

The first thing we did was look for the star attraction of the area: the Black Wheatear. In fact, we had little trouble finding it, spotting one just a couple of minutes after getting out of our cars. Later on, we took a short walk, where we spotted Thekla's Lark, Blue Rock Thrush, Alpine Swifts and some interesting waterbirds such as Purple Heron and Gull-billed Tern. After observing the reedbeds in the reservoir's spillway, we set off for Mérida, the capital of Extremadura, where the River Guadiana awaited us with its colonies of Spoonbills, Glossy Ibises, Little Bitterns and Cattle Egrets.

After our much-deserved picnic, we searched for birds along the riverbank, where we had the chance to spot Western Orphean, Garden and Western Bonelli's Warblers. Having explored the adjacent park and heard Golden Orioles, we returned to Cáceres after an extraordinary day of birding.

Day 7

Friday 17th April

Santiago del Campo – Ribera Almonte

Our final day was marked by a change to the tour's original itinerary: we decided to get up even earlier due to the heat, and to return to the Santiago del Campo area, which we hadn't been able to explore fully a few days earlier because of the wind. We were thus out at dawn in the heart of the Extremaduran steppe, allowing us to catch the peak activity periods of the species native to the area. Our plan was to find the first of the 'Big Three' that we had yet to spot: the Stone-curlew.

Although we were aware of the difficulty involved, we set about the arduous task of spotting it on the horizon amongst the thistles and broom. Finally, Pablo managed to hear it, giving us a clearer idea of where to point our telescopes. After several tense minutes, he managed to spot a couple of these distant birds, which even stopped to

look in our direction, much to the delight of the clients. Interestingly, the Pin-tail Sandgrouse were also quite active, flying and calling non-stop, but they never actually settled down in plain sight.

Once we had left the plains behind, we headed towards a more rugged area which is ideal for Thekla's Larks and, above all, for Western Black-eared Wheatear. After kicking up a huge cloud of dust behind us, we reached one of the next two hotspots, which offered us a distant glimpse of the long-awaited Bonelli's Eagle. The next spot yielded Thekla's Larks and the anticipated wheatear. This bird is typical of the arid regions of southern Europe, but is never easy to find. We had already ticked off two of our three main targets.

We headed for a picnic on the banks of the Rio Almonte, where numerous Alpine Swifts and House Martins awaited us. It was hot, and a hearty Spanish cold soup (*gazpacho*) accompanied by Serrano ham was the best choice. Once we had regained our strength, we headed to a Roller territory, with positive results. Indeed, several Rollers could be observed in the vicinity of their nest boxes.

Day 8

Saturday 18th April

Cáceres – Madrid – London

The last day of the trip required an early start, so after a leisurely breakfast we left Cáceres at 7.00am. The comfortable journey by motorway allowed us to continue birding on our way to Madrid, along the great *dehesas* of Extremadura and Castile, with the snow-capped peaks of the mountainous Sistema Central as a backdrop. The usual Black Kites were present during practically the whole morning, enlivening the three-hour journey.

We finally arrived at Madrid-Barajas Airport on time, which allowed us to drop off our passengers in good time for them to complete all the new EU travel procedures before boarding their flights home.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

N=Near-endemic, I=Introduced		April 2026							
Common name	Scientific name	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>			✓					
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	1	1						
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	1	5	✓	✓	✓			
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>				✓				
Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>		H	H	H				
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>				✓	1			
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>					✓	✓		
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	1	4	✓	✓	✓			
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>			✓		✓			
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>					✓		✓	
Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>					✓			
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		1	1		✓			
Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>		2			✓			
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>		2			✓			
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>		2	✓	✓		✓		
Western Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>					✓			
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		2	✓	H				
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓		✓			
Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedichnemus</i>							✓	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		4	✓					
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		2	1		✓			
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		1						
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>				✓				
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			4			1		
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		1						
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>		✓						
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>				✓		✓		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>						✓		
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>						✓		
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>				8			✓	
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓			✓	
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>						✓		
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>				✓		✓		
Little Bittern	<i>Botaurus minutus</i>				2				
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>						✓		
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			1	✓				
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				3				
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>	6	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	2	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>				8		✓		
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>				2			✓	
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		1						
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	6	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	1	1		✓	2			

N=Near-endemic, I=Introduced		April 2026							
Common name	Scientific name	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>	6		1	✓				
Spanish Imperial Eagle - N	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>		4						
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>					1			
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		✓	✓		2		✓	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1			✓			✓	✓
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	1	1			✓		✓	✓
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1	1					✓	✓
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>			✓		2		✓	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>							✓	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓		✓		
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>			2		H			
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>			1		H			
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1						
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	1	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Iberian Magpie - N	<i>Cyanopica cooki</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	2							
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		2		2	✓			
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓	✓	✓			
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>			✓	✓	✓			
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>				✓	✓	✓		
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	1	✓			✓		✓	
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	1				✓		✓	
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		✓			✓		✓	
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			✓					
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i>	2		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H	✓	✓		✓	
Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>						✓		
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			H	H	H			
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>				✓				
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>				✓				
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				✓				
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>				✓				
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		2		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			4	✓		✓		
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>						✓		
Western Orphean Warbler	<i>Curruca hortensis</i>		1						
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>			4			✓		
Western Subalpine Warbler	<i>Curruca iberiae</i>				✓				
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>						✓		
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>				✓		✓		
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>			4	✓				
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	

N=Near-endemic, I=Introduced		April 2026							
Common name	Scientific name	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓						
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>			✓	H	H		H	
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>			1					
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			1	✓				
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>				✓		✓		
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		2			✓			
Western Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>							✓	
Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>						✓		
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>		✓	1	✓	✓	✓		
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>			6					
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		1	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		2	✓			✓	✓	
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>	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>				✓		✓		
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>				✓	✓			

Mammals

		April 2026							
Common name	Scientific name	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		1						
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>				2				
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	1							
European Wildcat	<i>Felis silvestris</i>				✓				
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		1						

Reptiles

I=Introduced		April 2026							
Common name	Scientific name	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
European Pond Terrapin	<i>Emys orbicularis</i>						✓		
Red-eared Terrapin - I	<i>Trachemys scripta</i>						✓		
Spanish Pond Turtle	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>		1						

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name
Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>
Western Marbled White	<i>Melanargia occitanica</i>

Damselflies

Common name	Scientific name
Copper Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx haemorrhoidalis</i>