

Serrania de Ronda - A Vegetarian/Vegan tour

Naturetrek Tour Report

9th – 15th February 2026



Common Chiffchaff



Black-winged Stilts



Rock Bunting



Short-toed Treecreeper

Tour report by Niki Williamson
Photos by Simon Tonkin



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: Simon Tonkin and Niki Williamson (leaders) with eight Naturetrek clients

Summary

This seven-day expedition through southern Spain offered a masterclass in Mediterranean biodiversity, traversing the rugged limestone peaks of Sierra de las Nieves, the expansive agricultural plains of Osuna, and the vital wetlands of Fuente de Piedra.

The birding was exceptional, and was characterized by high-altitude specialists and iconic steppe species. In the mountains, the group enjoyed close encounters with Griffon Vultures, Black Wheatears, and Blue Rock Thrushes, while the woodlands yielded Firecrests and Crested Tits. The excursion to the Osuna plains proved a major highlight, providing spectacular scope views of both Great and Little Bustards displaying in the fields. The wetlands were equally productive: they were brimming with White-headed Ducks, Black-necked Grebes and wintering Common Cranes.

The experience was anchored by the hospitality of Hotel Bandolero in the "Blue Village" of Júzcar. Beyond the birding, the trip was a plant-based gastronomic journey led by Chef Ivan. From three-course cordon bleu dinners to a specialized chestnut cookery demonstration (featuring gnocchi and soufflés) the local flavors of the Serranía de Ronda were as memorable as the avian sightings. Despite the rain of Storm Nelson, the combination of expert guiding by Simon and Niki and world-class local cuisine made for an unforgettable Andalusian retreat.

Day 1

Monday 9th February

After meeting up from various flights at Malaga Airport, the group were whisked away in the vans of Simon and Niki, their guides for the week. We drove along the busy coastal strip of the Costa del Sol and up into the mountains, through the pine forests and holm oaks, ascending to 1000m to start our high-altitude birding extravaganza in the Sierra de las Nieves National Park. It was chilly but beautiful, and as Niki prepared a picnic lunch sheltered from the breeze, Simon took the group on a walk around the glen. Here we observed our first Griffon Vultures, Black Redstarts, Woodlark, Rock Buntings, and as we tucked into our picnic, a singing Iberian Grey Shrike finally revealed itself.

We next headed along the road through the limestone crags towards our new home village of Júzcar in the Genal Valley. Here we made a couple of stops and observed several species of mountain birds hopping around the rocks, before arriving at Hotel Bandolero in the famous "blue village" of Júzcar. We were soon relaxing in our rooms, ready for our first three-course meal courtesy of cordon bleu-trained Chef Ivan.

Day 2

Tuesday 10th February

A little light drizzle wasn't stopping the woodland birds from singing around our accommodation. We headed into the sheltered river valley and took a walk through the Holm Oak and Poplar trees, picking up Great Spotted Woodpecker, Crested Tit, Hawfinch, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Short-toed Treecreeper and Firecrest, over the sounds of the river in torrents below us and the gentle pattering of rain on the leaves.

Heading out to further explore our mountain home, we made a stop by a goat enclosure. Here, as well as hundreds of resident House Sparrows, many normally-shy remote mountain birds had dropped in for a snack, including Corn, Rock and Cirl Buntings, and even a flock of Rock Sparrows. As we moved along the track, we glimpsed our first Black Wheatear on a boulder by the road.

We had our picnic, featuring local cheeses from the Natural Park, in the cozy salon of the hotel alongside the log burner. We then stopped at a curve, where Juniper bushes yielded views of Red-legged Partridge and tantalizing glimpses of wintering Ring Ouzels.

With brightness in the sky for the afternoon, we headed to the crags of Los Riscos, just up the road. Here we took a beautiful hike into the boulder-strewn limestone landscape, which gave us excellent views of Blue Rock Thrush and a wondrous singing male Black Wheatear, which drew in an admiring female. Content with a slightly damp but highly enjoyable day, we headed back to the hotel to relax before dinner.

Day 3

Wednesday 11th February

Sun broke through the mist today, and we headed towards the endoreic freshwater complex near the village of Fuente de Piedra. After driving down through the spectacular scenery of the Cordillera Baetica, we made our first stop at Laguna Dulce. This small freshwater lake was full of water for the first time in many years; here we connected immediately with several White-headed Ducks and Black-necked Grebes, some starting to show their golden "carnival mask" summer plumage. Many other waterfowl, including Shovelers, Teals and Mallards, were bobbing on the lake.

The surrounding bushes were chock-full of wintering Common Chiffchaffs, and on the farmland beyond the lake, we could see many Common Cranes feeding, and even the odd Greater Flamingo. We decided to take a closer look and drove around the far side, where we encountered Marsh Harrier, Calandra Larks, Crested Larks and Corn Buntings, and had some great views of Common Cranes. Two distant Bonelli's Eagles were also sighted, and gave us telescope views.

Next, we made a stop at an area of low-intensity arable farmland; as well as assembled larks, we also picked out a pair of Black-winged Kites at their nest: stunning!

We then drove on to Fuente de Piedra itself. The huge saline lagoon was brimful, and looked like a small sea. After a picnic lunch featuring local cheeses, *tortilla de patatas*, salad, and freshly baked bread from Chef Ivan's oven, we did a walking tour around the freshwater pools that surround the lagoon. Here, we were chuffed to get more and closer views of White-headed Ducks and Black-necked Grebes, both much further progressed in attaining their breeding colours, with bright blue bills, bright red eyes, and yellow masks on show!

A pair of Red-crested Pochards bobbed in a corner of the lake, a Great Spotted Cuckoo was heard, and some of the group discovered a wintering Bluethroat in the vegetation edge. There were many Black-winged Stilts as we proceeded with our walk, making their usual racket. After a fabulous sunny day, we headed back to enjoy Ivan's cooking once more in our cozy hotel.

Day 4

Thursday 12th February

Another sunny day awaited the group, and we set off bright and early to the farmland plains of the Osuna area, where we hoped to encounter some very special bird species. We weren't disappointed! Parking up on a disused road bridge over a railway, we were able to scan a large area of fields, and it wasn't long before Simon gave the much-anticipated shout of "Great Bustard!". We could see a male strutting his stuff on the edge of a green crop. It wasn't long before he was joined by a female, and another, and then two more emerging from we knew not where: but we were happy to see them!

Off to the left, we were also lucky enough to spot movement which proved to be a small group of Little Bustards, their shapes clearly visible against the grass. As Ravens, Red Kites, and Common Buzzards began to fill the air, we got back in the buses and drove a short distance to behind where they were standing with the hope of getting a better view.

We did better than that, encountering a further group of five Great Bustards parading on the edge of another field. We stood and enjoyed watching them for a while, our ears caressed by the songs of Crested Lark, Skylark, and literally hundreds of Calandra Larks taking flight from the fields.



Chef Ivan



Ronda Gorge

Continuing, we did indeed get ourselves much closer to the group of Little Bustards, by carefully and quietly manoeuvring the vans down a farm track and using them as a hide. We were able to get great scope views of the male Little Bustard displaying, as well as his harem off to one side: what a fabulous encounter!

At our lunch spot at Laguna de Ballesteros, the water level was very high, but we were still able to pick up Greater Flamingoes, Hoopoe, Spanish Sparrow, Kentish Plover and more besides. In the village of Lantejuela, two White Storks had returned to their clumsy-looking but resilient nest on top of a telegraph pole. We spent the rest of the afternoon further exploring this delightful area of farmland, surrounded by Crested and Calandra Larks, and picking up superb views of two Iberian Grey Shrikes, one of which presented us with a pellet!

Day 5

Friday 13th February

This morning, we braved the rain of Storm Nelson to head out and further explore our local patch. We began in the village of Igualeja, where the Rio Genal itself is born. Between bands of rain, we strolled through this picturesque village and were delighted with views of Grey Wagtail.

After a delicious picnic lunch back in the inviting hotel salon, it was time for the group's cookery demonstration with Chef Ivan. He prepared a chestnut soup, gnocchi made with chestnut flour, artichokes with a chestnut garnish, and an unforgettable chestnut soufflé. The group got a soufflé each, and were left wondering how on earth they would manage their dinner! Thankfully, they received recipes for all of these fantastic creations to try at home.

As the weather cleared substantially, there was free time for the group to explore the village and its surrounding woodlands, some choosing to wander its blue streets with their quirky sculptures and murals, other heading once more out into the forest, picking up Siskin, Serin, Short-toed Treecreeper and more.

Day 6

Saturday 14th February

We enjoyed more mountain birding today, but first we headed to the historic town of Ronda to learn a little more about this fascinating place. Our leaders took us on a walking tour to the centre of the old town, explaining its Roman, Moorish and Spanish heritage as we went, and introducing some of the literary figures who had found inspiration there, such as Orson Welles, Ernest Hemingway and Rainer Maria Rilke.

We took in the view from the Puente Nuevo bridge across the Tajo Gorge, where a torrent of water was flooding past both the Moorish and Roman bridges. After some free time to explore further, we headed to the park for a picnic; Niki prepared our final outdoor feast. The group took a walk in the Holm Oak and Stone Pine forest, picking up great views of Short-toed Treecreeper and the Iberian subspecies of Long-tailed Tit, among other things.

After lunch, we headed out to the limestone cave system of Hundedero where, despite recent flooding and evacuation, we were able to spend some time. We enjoyed our best views yet of Griffon Vultures swooping low overhead, and picked up a single Black Kite, one of the first to return to Europe. On the way back, we spent more time in our local patch around Júzcar and at a layby in the Sierra de Grazalema National Park. Most of the group finally got views of Ring Ouzel and Dartford Warbler, as well as having more superb Griffon Vulture experiences, as Common Ravens and Eurasian Sparrowhawk swooped by.

Then it was back to the hotel for more veggie delights: we finished the trip with an exquisite fennel risotto, a cucumber and sesame salad in a pea flour basket, and a stunning persimmon pavlova. It was crunchy on the outside, gooey in the middle, and perfectly delicious.

Day 7

Sunday 15th February

Time to go. The team said goodbye to our wonderful hosts David and Ivan, and we said farewell to the mountains, plains, and wetlands of the Serranía de Ronda. We headed to Malaga Airport in good time for the group's flights.

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



x.com/naturetrektours (formerly Twitter)

Species lists

Birds

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			40				
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			150				
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			30				
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			20	2			
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			15				
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>			1				
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			40				
White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>			40				
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	2	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>				12			
Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>				6			
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	10	30	✓	4	✓	✓	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓	✓			✓
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			2				
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			6				
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓				
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>			300				
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			10				
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			5				
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			15				
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			600	10			
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			70				
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			20				
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>			20	1			
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			7				
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			2				
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			1				
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			6				
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			1				
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			90				
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓						✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			120				
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>			2	4			
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			4				
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>			1				
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			2				
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	80	20	20	10	20	50	✓
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>			3				
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1	1		1	2	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			10	8			
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			12	20			
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>						1	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1		3	10			
Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>		1	1				

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			1		1		
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>			2	1			
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		1	1				
Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>		1	1	1			
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1	✓	✓	1	2	
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	1		1	4			
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	4	2	1				
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	3	2		2		20	
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓	✓			
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	70	4	10	15	2	6	
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		6	1		2		
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	2	1					
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			2	7			
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		4				8	
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>			✓	✓			
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			120	60			
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		1	✓				
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓	✓			
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>			✓	✓			
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			4				
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		7	6		3	8	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	3	2	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			1	3			
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	2	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>		2				1	
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	3	6			2	3	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	3	1		2	4	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		2			1	1	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	2	2			3	6	
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	2	20	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	2	1				2	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	2	4	✓	✓	✓		
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>		2				2	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	4	6	4	1	2	2	
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>			1				
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	2	6	5	3	2	4	✓
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		1					
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>		3			2	2	
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		43			80	40	
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>				✓			
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		1			2		
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		9	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		2	4	2	✓	✓	

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		2					
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	2	1	10	3	2	2	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>		1	4	5	1	4	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>				1	7		
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		28	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	6	15			4	4	
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	3	8					

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓	✓			

Amphibians & reptiles

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Iberian Water Frog	<i>Pelophylax perezi</i>			✓				
Spanish Terrapin	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>			✓				
Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>				✓			

Butterflies & moths

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>			✓				
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>			✓				
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>				✓			
Tapestry Moth	<i>Trichophaga tapetzella</i>			✓				

Other insects

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Firebug	<i>Pyrrhocoris apterus</i>			✓				
Brio Ladybird	<i>Coccinella septempunctata</i>			✓				
Northern Dune Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela hybrida</i>			✓				
Bloody-nosed Beetle	<i>Timarcha tenebricosa</i>			✓				
European Paper Wasp	<i>Polistes dominula</i>			✓				

Selected plants

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Red Mistletoe	<i>Viscum cruciatum</i>			✓				
Squirting Cucumber	<i>Ecballium elaterium</i>				✓			
Giant Orchid	<i>Himantoglossum robertianum</i>						✓	
Broad-leaved Iris	<i>Iris planifolia</i>			✓				
Three-cornered Leek	<i>Allium triquetrum</i>					✓		