

Serrania de Ronda - A Vegetarian/Vegan tour

Naturetrek Tour Report

17th – 23rd February 2026



Great Bustard



Black Wheatears



Siskin



Great Bustards

Tour report by Simon Tonkin



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Summary

This six-day expedition through the heart of Málaga and Seville provinces offered a spectacular blend of high-altitude birding, steppe specialists, and wetland wonders, all set against a backdrop of dramatic limestone sierras and historic white villages. From the flocks of eleven thousand Greater Flamingoes at Fuente de Piedra to the mesmerising displays of Great Bustard on the plains of Osuna, the trip successfully showcased the immense biodiversity of the region.

Beyond the birds, which included the regionally-endemic Iberian Green Woodpecker and the rare White-headed Duck, the tour was defined by the stunning karst geology of Los Riscos and the exceptional vegan and vegetarian culinary artistry provided by hotel chef Iván in the blue village of Júzcar. It was a journey which perfectly married rugged Spanish wilderness with refined Mediterranean hospitality.

Day 1

Tuesday 17th February

Our journey began in the rugged splendour of the Sierra de las Nieves, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve north of Málaga, famed for its dramatic limestone karsts and ancient Spanish Fir forests. We started at the Puerto de los Quejigales, where the crisp mountain air at over 1200m greeted us. We were immediately rewarded with sightings of the Iberian Grey Shrike. The slopes offered fabulous views of four Rock and three Cirl Buntings, while a kettle of 86 Griffon Vultures, our first for the trip, circled majestically overhead.

Following a legendary picnic lunch under the watchful eyes of the vultures, we watched as eighty Northern Ravens performed a synchronised aerial display, swirling in a "vortex" style. In the distance, the evocative calls of eight Red-billed Chough echoed against the limestone, and a Golden Eagle was spotted surveying its kingdom from a rocky crag.

From here, we took a picturesque mountain route toward the village of Júzcar. Along the winding roads, we encountered more Thekla's Larks and two Short-toed Treecreepers. We enjoyed fleeting glimpses of Black Wheatear, and heard the melodic song of Blue Rock Thrush, while the rhythmic calling of Red-legged Partridges drifted up from the valleys.

Upon arriving at Hotel Bandolero, we were warmly greeted by hosts David and Iván. After settling in, we reconvened in the bar for a briefing. We were treated to Iván's award-winning culinary skills; his ability to specialize in vegan and vegetarian cuisine transformed the tour into a world-class gastronomic experience.

Day 2

Wednesday 18th February

A bright, sunny morning saw us travelling the short distance to Los Riscos de Cartajima, an otherworldly landscape of eroded limestone pillars. As we wandered through the almond orchards, we found twelve Rock Buntings, two Cirl Buntings, and two Blue Rock Thrushes which we managed to pin down in the spotting scope. It wasn't long before we encountered the woodland melodies of the Woodlark.

Among the crags, we found a group of fifteen Rock Sparrows and discussed the taxonomic peculiarities of the species. A true highlight occurred when we found five displaying Black Wheatears! Having both males and females around us, with a male singing just metres away, allowed for incredible views and some stunning photography.

As we journeyed back down the valley, we spotted a large raptor. Disembarking the bus, we identified it as a Short-toed Snake Eagle, a fresh arrival which had likely just crossed the Strait of Gibraltar. We finished the day in the lush Valley of Igualeja, where we enjoyed three Grey Wagtails, two Common Firecrests, and six European Serins feeding among the *huertas*.

Day 3

Thursday 19th February

Today, we journeyed to the Campiña de Osuna, an area of vast, undulating grain steppes and olive groves. This region is a vital stronghold for the "steppe specialists" which thrive in the traditional agricultural mosaic. Our primary targets were the giants of the plains. We were thrilled to locate twenty-one Great Bustards! Witnessing these heavy-bodied birds as they began their "foam-bath" displays was unforgettable. With careful scanning, our joy increased as we also picked out five Little Bustards! Nearby, we added none Black-bellied Sandgrouse, along with a flock of fifty Calandra Larks singing over the fields. Other notable sightings included two White Storks and fifteen5 Corn Buntings.

For lunch, we travelled to Laguna de la Ballestera. While enjoying our picnic, we scanned the muddy margins to find four Black-winged Stilts, eight Eurasian Coot, and four Little Grebes. In the deeper water, sixteen Red-crested Pochards showed off their vibrant orange crests, and Greater Flamingoes provided a splash of pink against the blue water. Rabbits were frequently seen darting between the scrub.

Day 4

Friday 20th February

We dedicated our morning to Ronda, one of Spain's oldest and most dramatic cities. Perched atop the El Tajo gorge, a hundred-and-twenty metre chasm carved by the Guadalevín River, the city offers a unique blend of Roman, Moorish, and Christian history. While admiring the Puente Nuevo, we turned our binoculars to the pine trees and successfully located thirty Siskins feeding busily. The cliffs of the gorge provided perfect thermals for fifty Griffon Vultures, and we noted eight Northern Ravens playing in the updrafts. In the gardens, we spotted Short-toed Treecreepers and Iberian Green Woodpecker, while Song Thrush moved through the understorey.

The afternoon took us back to Júzcar, the famous "blue village." Here, we shifted focus from the skies to the kitchen. Under the expert guidance of Iván, we participated in a vegan and vegetarian cooking school, learning how to elevate local chestnuts and mushrooms into award-winning cuisine.

Day 5

Saturday 21st February

Our first stop was Laguna Dulce near Campillos. We were delighted to find White-headed Duck, a globally endangered species, alongside Black-necked Grebes, Shovelers and Gadwalls. A highlight was the bugling of 301 Common Cranes.

We then moved to the crown jewel wetland site: Laguna de Fuente de Piedra. This massive salt lake is the premier breeding site for Greater Flamingoes in the Iberian Peninsula. The sheer scale was staggering: we estimated over 11,000 stretching across the horizon.

Scanning through the five hundred Lesser Black-backed Gulls and numerous Black-headed Gulls, we successfully teased out a single Mediterranean Gull. Raptors were out in force, with three Western Marsh Harriers and a Red Kite patrolling the reedbeds. On the muddy edges, we found Black-winged Stilts and Lapwings. Near the visitor centre, the Iberian Water Frog could be heard calling.

Day 6

Sunday 22nd February

On our final full day, we explored the rugged valleys surrounding Júzcar. The mountain fields yielded three Rock Buntings, ten European Serins, and three Thekla's Larks. A highlight was seeing two Ring Ouzels foraging in the juniper scrub.

We then visited the Cueva del Gato, a stunning geological monument where an underground river emerges from a massive cave mouth. Here, we enjoyed Crag Martins and Common Chiffchaffs, and found Black Redstart and Blue Rock Thrush on the boulders.

Our final picnic took place at the Parque Periurbano near Ronda. The Holm Oak woods provided ten Short-toed Treecreepers, ten Common Firecrests and four Hawfinches. We were also lucky enough to get views of four Lesser Kestrels hunting over the nearby slopes.

As we made our final journey back to Júzcar, we noted a Red Fox slipping into the brush, and saw several Iberian Pond Tortoises sunning themselves by the water: a perfect conclusion to our exploration of Málaga's wild heart.

Day 7

Monday 23rd February

On our final morning, we enjoyed a relaxed breakfast at Hotel Bandolero, taking a moment to appreciate the quiet beauty of Júzcar one last time. As we loaded the bus, a few final Serins and Black Redstarts flitted amongst the blue-painted houses, providing a charming send-off. The drive back towards the coast offered a final opportunity to admire the dramatic limestone ridges of the Serranía de Ronda, as the mountain air gradually gave way to the warmer breezes of the Mediterranean.

At Málaga Airport, we said our farewells, concluding a week of exceptional birding, breathtaking Andalusian landscapes, and unforgettable culinary experiences.

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Species lists

Birds

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			2		4		
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>					80		
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>					20		
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			3		10		
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>					15		
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>			16		2		
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>					✓		
White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>					30		
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>			21				
Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>			5				
Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>					2		
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>			9				
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>					4		
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			8		200		
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>					301		
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			4		15		
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			2		6		
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			1		20		
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			18		11		
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			4		45		
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>					20		
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					3		
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>					1		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>					✓		
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>					1		
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓						
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>					500		
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>			2				
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>						1	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>					2		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			2			1	
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>					2		
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>			3				
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	86	120	30	50	20	121	
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		1					
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	1						
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1				1	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			6		3		
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			20		1		
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		2	10		3		
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		1	1	1	1		

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>			2				
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				1		2	
Iberian Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus sharpei</i>		1	1	1		1	
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>					4		
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2	2	11	2	2		
Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	1	2					
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	2	6	2	2		4	
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	8	4					
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓		✓		
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	80	✓	40	8	6	8	
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>						8	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	1						
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			4		6		
Thekla's Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>	2	4		3			
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>			✓		✓		
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>			50		40		
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>		2		4	2	2	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			8	2	6	10	
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>					1	2	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		6		6		12	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Sardinian Warbler	<i>Curruca melanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>	2	4				4	
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	2	2				10	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	2		2	1	2	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		1				3	
Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>	2	4	1	2		10	
Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>		10	✓	✓	✓	20	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		15	2	4		4	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	2	4				4	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>		2				2	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	4	10	2	1		3	
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		2				2	
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>		5		1		3	
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	4	15					
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>			✓				
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		3		1		1	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		2	6	4	2	2	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>						4	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

		February 2026						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	1	6	4	8	3	10	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>				30		4	
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		10	15		20		
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	4	12		2		3	
Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>	3	2					

Mammals

		February 2026						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓		✓		
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>					✓		

Amphibians & reptiles

		February 2026						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Iberian Water Frog	<i>Pelophylax perezi</i>					✓		
Vaucher's Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis vaucheri</i>		✓					
Iberian Pond Tortoise	<i>Mauremys leprosa</i>					✓	✓	

Butterflies

		February 2026						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Spanish Festoon	<i>Zerynthia rumina</i>						✓	
Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓				✓	
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>		✓	✓				
Large Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>	✓	✓					
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>						✓	

Other insects

		February 2026						
Common name	Scientific name	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Violet Carpenter Bee	<i>Xylocopa violacea</i>						✓	
Blue-winged Grasshopper	<i>Oedipoda caerulea</i>						✓	

Selected plants

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23
Broad-leaved Iris	<i>Iris planifolia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red Mistletoe	<i>Viscum cruciatum</i>	✓	✓				✓	✓
Squirting Cucumber	<i>Ecballium elaterium</i>			✓				
Spanish Fir	<i>Abies pinsapo</i>	✓	✓				✓	✓
Common Asphodel	<i>Asphodelus aestivus</i>		✓					
Three-cornered Leek	<i>Allium triquetrum</i>				✓			
Giant Orchid	<i>Himantoglossum robertianum</i>						✓	
Sombre Bee Orchid	<i>Ophrys fusca</i>						✓	
African Valerian	<i>Fedia graciliflora</i>						✓	