



## Spain Birding Tour 2022 Trip Report

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### **DAY 1 MALAGA**

We went for a walk along the shore of the Mediterranean Sea and ate a tasty meal typical of the sea before returning to the hotel. The day was very rainy, but luckily for us, the rest of the trip was sunny and with very nice weather.

### **DAY 2 MALAGA-SIERRA DE LAS NIEVES- RONDA**

In the morning, after breakfast, we went to visit the wetland at the mouth of the Guadalorce river in Malaga. There we took a comfortable walk visiting the river bank and the ponds with observatories to see and photograph numerous birds such as our first Night Heron, Flamingos and Pochard. We had the good fortune of already adding the first lifers for the visitors of the tour, such as White-headed duck and Slender billed Gull.



*Greater Flamingo in Guadalorce © Pablo Pérez Martínez*

Afterwards, we returned to the hotel to load the luggage and start the journey to the city of Ronda. After driving along dizzying roads with breathtaking views we stopped for a coffee at the Pension El Navasillo Restaurant, and tasted an exquisite tapa of typical Spanish paella. After coffee, we went to visit the Sierra de Las Nieves and meet its impressive mountains, where we saw our first Eurasian Jay and some excellent observations of the Western Bonelli's Warbler. In the afternoon, we visited the historical monuments of the city of Ronda, with its impressive bridge and bullring among others. Of course, from the impressive balcony we could also observe and differentiate the Common kestrels from the Lesser kestrels and Red Billed Choughs, indeed, just before heading to our hotel on the outskirts of the city.



*Rhonda bridge © Pablo Pérez Martínez*



*view of Rhonda, Spain © Pablo Pérez Martínez*

### **DAY 3 SERRANIA DE RONDA- MONTEJAQUE- ALCORNOCALES- TARIFA**

Before dawn, from the balcony of the Tajo in Ronda, we saw what would be, perhaps the most impressive bird of the trip, an excellent observation of the emblematic and elusive Eagle Owl, the largest nocturnal raptor in Europe, which even gave us a hearing call.



*Eagle Owl in Malaga*

After this fantastic observation we had a satisfying breakfast and started the day towards the Serrania de Ronda, to visit the impressive Llanos de Libar in Montejaque. Shortly before reaching the village, we stopped at a rocky outcrop, to have an excellent observation of a pair of Peregrine Falcons on a branch on top of the mountain. Excited from the observation, we headed to the plains where we walked downhill for a couple of hours watching interesting birds like Melodious Warbler, Stonechat, Rock Sparrow, Blue Rock Thrush, Cirl Bunting and the impressive Black Wheatear, among others. Soon after it also appeared our first observation of the trip of a pair of Short-toed Snake-eagles giving a fantastic show.



*Cirl bunting in Montejaque*

As the day progressed, we drove through the famous white villages where we had a nice snack under a tree sitting on some nice benches in the shade before continuing through the Alcornocales Natural Park and visiting the historic village of Gaucin and then continue to Tarifa, where we would spend the next three nights. We arrived at the Hotel Los Lances in time to update the bird checklist on the top of the terrace, while watching the sunset and in the distance, the traditional Aladraba rafts of local fishermen who used to fish for bluefin tuna since time immemorial.

#### **DAY 4 LOS LANCES- WHALE WATCHING- TARIFA**

In the morning after breakfast, we visited the nearby beach of Los Lances in Tarifa, where we could see our first Greater Short-toed Lark in the nearby fields and already on the seashore to view a good group of waders where they stand out Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit. Curiously, at this point, we coincided with two other groups of birdwatching visitors from the United States with whom we would meet again in future hotels.



*Birding at Los Lances beach in Tarifa, Spain*

At twelve o'clock we boarded the boat from the port of Tarifa to get quite close to nearby Morocco during those 14 km from the narrowest point in the Strait of Gibraltar. The feeling of floating in the sea on a calm and sunny day and being able to perfectly observe the European and African continent is incredible. It could only be improved by the unbeatable observation of a large group of pilot whales that we could practically touch with our hands from the boat. As for the seabirds, they hardly appeared, except for a group of Black Tern in the distance.



*Pilot whale breathing*



*Pilot whales in Tarifa*

Back in the port of Tarifa and quite hungry we went to eat at the nearby Mic Moc restaurant with an excellent international cuisine. As it was quite hot, we decided to integrate into the Spanish culture and after lunch we enjoyed a well-deserved siesta in the comfortable hotel.

## DAY 5 BAELO CLAUDIA- BARBATE- BARCA DE VEJER- LA JANDA- GUADALMESI

In the morning and taking advantage of the fact that it was open as it was a holiday, we were able to visit the impressive Roman ruins of the famous city of Baelo Claudia, located on the beautiful beach of Bolonia. Beside the ruins, we had our first observation of Thekla 's Lark and Woodchat Shrike.



*Baelo Claudio city bridge*



*Baelo Claudio city ruins, Spain*



*Baelo Claudio Roman city in Bolonia, Spain*



*Thekla's Lark*

Continuing with excellent weather, on the way to Barbate, we stopped on a secondary road to observe our first Little Owl of the trip and also several adult specimens of Montagu's Harrier. Very excited after this fantastic observation we approached the nearby marshes and ancient salt marshes

of Barbate, for a good observation of waders where we highlighted excellent sights of Collared Pratincole and a Gull-billed Tern.



*Collared Pratincole*

During these tours, we have generally prioritized the enjoyment of tapas and snacks like the one we enjoyed in La Barca de Vejer on the terrace of the restaurant Venta Pinto. After recovering our energy, we went to visit the nearby nesting colony of the impressive and endangered Northern Bald Ibis where it also nests beside Jackdaw. This is an exclusive sighting in all of Europe and was really exciting to witness.



*Northern Bald Ibis on nest*

Before returning to Tarifa we decided to drive along the tracks that run along the old lagoon of La Janda. It is currently used for irrigation, but hopefully in the future, can be recovered to the important natural wetland that was great importance for birds in southern Europe. Wanting to glimpse the sea and the Strait of Gibraltar again, we approached the Guadalmesi Tower, with the intention of also being able to observe seabirds, which mysteriously once again were not seen. However, we were able to have excellent observations of Green Sandpaper, Nightingale and the precious Black-eared Wheatear.



*Common Sandpiper*

Before arriving at the Hotel, we stopped at the bird observatory of Cazalla and understood the importance of this place during the migration of birds through the strait, which unfortunately we could not see in the days we visited Tarifa as we would had hoped. A few days later, a huge number of Honey Buzzards were crossing the straight soon after we left.

#### **DAY 6 TREBUJENA- CORIA DEL RIO- DEHESA DE ABAJO- EL ROCIO**

Leaving Tarifa after breakfast, we stopped to buy some good sandwiches that would be the important meal during the day and continued our journey to the village of Trebujena, where we tried hard to locate the Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin at the vineyards, but we could not see them despite our efforts. Subsequently, we visited the recovered lagoon of Adventus, where we saw our first Marbled Duck and Red-crested Pochard the trip. After, we went to have a coffee in the village in a very rustic and traditional bar, where we also viewed its beautiful church.



*Trebujena church*

We returned to the road towards Coria del Rio and before reaching the ferry that crosses the river to change to the right bank of the Guadalquivir River in the vicinity of Seville, we could see and photograph a wonderful breeding colony of Bee-Eaters in some abandoned gravel pits.



*Bee eaters*

After crossing the river and navigating arduous traffic, we arrived at the Dehesa de Abajo, a recovered nature reserve, which offers impressive opportunities to see and photograph birds. We ate our snacks while observing the nearby numerous nests of White Storks and flying Black and Red

Kites.



*Stork nest, Dehesa de Abajo, Spain*



*White Stork*

Afterwards we visited the two bird observatories, where there was a large number of waterfowl where it stood out the Red Knobbed Coot and the Ferruginous Duck, where curiously we could also hear a Bittern and watched a Squacco Heron. After a long day, heading towards El Roció, we

stopped and watched the interesting semidiurnal raptor the Blue-winged Kite flying. We then headed towards the Laguna Madre de El Rocío in the heart of the Doñana National Park, where we would spend the next two nights at the Hotel Toruño. There we tasted and got to know their famous flamenco desserts, and watch as the preparations for the next and expected religious celebration of El Rocío were moving at full speed.

### **DAY 7 EL ROCIO- EL ACEBRON- LA ROCINA- EL ROCIO**

Taking advantage of the proximity to the National Park we decided to start the morning very early at dawn and approach the bridge to try to see the elusive and endangered endemic feline, the Iberian Lynx. Despite our efforts we were only able to contrast their presence by observing the interesting tracks in the sand. After breakfast and a brief chat with other groups of naturalists that we met at the hotel, we headed to the Acebrón Palace. There we made a circular tour enjoying an interesting variety of forest and aquatic habitats, to finally fulfill one of Andy's dreams, to be able to observe the Wryneck along with a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and a cuckoo.



*Looking at Wryneck*

We went to La Rocina, to eat our picnic lunch of salad and sandwiches. Here we used the comfortable bird observatories, where in addition to the fantastic flamingos and the Purple Gallinule we could see the extremely interesting and elusive Penduline Tit. Really happy after that observation, we returned by car to the Laguna Madre del Rocío, where we took a slow walk in the vicinity of the hotel, looking for birds and we were fortunate to view really close the Reed Warbler, Eurasian Spoonbill and Glossy Ibis. Following the walk we reached the Bernis visitor center which unfortunately was closed, but after the walk we had a good view of the breeding colony of numerous birds such as the Night heron and Cattle Egret and Little Egret and Glossy Ibis.



*Glossy ibis with nest material*



*Spoonbill*

At dusk we were able to return to dinner watching how the night herons began to fly out of the lagoon at the same time for their nocturnal breeding, while the terns and geese were flying. Later at night we went to locate the song and the presence of the nightjar.

## **DAY 8 EL ROCIO- ACEBUCHE- MATALASCAÑAS- MONFRAGÜE DUNES**

Once again, we enjoyed the sunrise in Doñana National Park looking for the Lynx, but once again we had to be satisfied only with listening to the pleasant singing of the birds, and the tracks of this elusive animal. To avoid leaving Spain without being able to observe the lynx, we went to visit the visitor and breeding center of the Iberian Lynx in El Acebuche, where, thanks to the explanations of the guide José we could understand some of the improvements that have been made to recover the threatened population of Lynx, which thanks to specimens like those we saw at the center, has recovered from just 70 animals in the 1990s to approximately 1,200 at present, with a hopeful situation for the future of this precious animal. After observing the lynx in captivity, we went for a coffee at the center and headed to the beach to see the sea again for the last time. Once again, the seabirds resisted us, but we were able to observe some nearby Black Kites hunting beetles in the dunes of Matalascañas, from the excellent beach bar, El Navegante where we ate. The tray of typical seafood products was very tasty and encouraged us to walk a bit along the beach where we watched the Yellow-legged Gull perched before returning to the car and drive continuously to leave Andalusia and reach our next destination, Monfragüe in Extremadura.

## **DAY 9 LLANOS DE CACERES- MONFRAGÜE**

To avoid the heat, we left the hotel at seven in the morning to drive for an hour to the plains of Caceres in the vicinity of the Guadiloba reservoir. With great satisfaction, our efforts were rewarded with excellent observations of Little Bustard and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, plus not only one, but six Little Owls for about two hours of excellent observation.



*Little Bustard in Caceres*



*Birders watching Little Bustard*



*Little Owl and Little Bustard*

Later we approached the tail of the swamp to take a walk in the beautiful riparian forests and with great luck we could watch the impressive birds, including the Great Spotted Cuckoo, and the Golden Oriole, as well as, the very elusive Cetti's Warbler. Before lunch we went up to the viewpoint at the top of the Sierra de Fuentes to take in the impressive views with Extremadura at our feet. We were already hungry and we approached the Fuentes Cheese Factory, but not before observing a wild

boar napping in the grass, something that we found very curious and interesting. Toni at the Quesería Carrasco cheese factory explained to us how they work with the Andalusian breed of goats adapted to such harsh terrain and how cheese is made now and in ancient times. Of course, we tasted and tasted this tasty cheese, along with some traditional migas de pastor (shepherd's breadcrumbs) that the guide liked so much.



*Cheese making demonstration at Queseria*

On the way back to the hotel we stopped at the Llanos de Cáceres near Santa Marta de Magasca to admire the presence of the sparkling European Roller in its nesting box. Once again at the hotel Hospedería del Parque, we met again with several groups of naturalists from other countries while we enjoyed the tasty dinner at the hotel.

## **DAY 10 MONFRAGÜE- ARROCAMPO**

This day we dedicated completely to the National Park. After breakfast, our first stop was the Salto del Gitano, where we spent a couple of hours enjoying the spectacle of nature, griffon vultures' nest in dizzying cliffs on the river Tagus.



*Griffon vulture nest*

In addition to the nests of the vultures we could see three impressive nests of Black Stork where in one we could even see the chicks.



*Black stork nest*

We also saw the first Rock Bunting of the trip and we saw again the Blue Rock thrush. In the distance we could also see an adult and a grown chick of one of the most endangered eagles in Spain, the Bonelli's eagle. We continued our itinerary stopping at the bridge of the Fuente del Frances to observe a large number of House Martins nesting under the nest. Here we had our first

observation of the Alpine Swift, and could observe their larger size and different coloration. We stopped in the village of Villareal de San Carlos to have a coffee and buy a tasty snack while we watched an interesting specimen of a dark morphed Booted Eagle in flight, that was well worth us to differentiate them from the light one that we had seen previously. As we reached the Tietar dams, we were able to stop in a pine forest and add some important observations of forest birds, highlighting mainly the observation and listening of the Great Spotted Woodpecker and the Nuthatch. Already in the porthole of the Tietar, we could watch the majestic nest of the Egyptian Vulture and enjoy the snacks while watching the vultures sitting on the bench in the shade.



*Egyptian vulture nest*

We also spent a long time waiting to see the Iberian Imperial Eagle nesting in the nearby forest, but unfortunately, we could not see it this time. We guessed that with the heat it was sheltered in the shade of the interior of the great nest that we saw. As we were in good time, we decided to make a circular route to return to the hotel visiting other interesting places nearby, where we tried to see the Black-winged Kite, but we had no luck this time. We stopped at three nearby lagoons at the Arrocampo reservoir, where we had good sight of Purple Heron, Ferruginous Duck and a Common Teal. With a fantastic day of birding behind us, we set a final course for the day at the hotel.

## **DAY 11 EL CERRALBO- GREDOS**

Once again, to avoid the imminent heat, we left the hotel at seven in the morning to reach the famous plains of Caceres in the Cerralbo, to observe steppe birds. We were looking forward to seeing some of the birds we had missed and that Pablo insisted on looking for there. We were really lucky to get our first observation of the Stone Curlew and next to a close and impressive pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles taking flight in front of us. We really felt very lucky with that observation that we did really deserve. Near here, we also saw a male Great Bustard displaying in a field.



*Great Bustard male displaying*

Very happy with that observation, we decided to start our way north towards the Gredos Natural Park, leaving Extremadura to enter Castilla y León, in the province of Ávila. On the road, we could see the castle of Mombeltrán near the Puerto del Pico, and then the old Roman road at the top of the mountain road. That afternoon, we went to eat at the tasty Hotel Almanzor, where we could also take a walk nearby in the forest of the hotel and to view our first specimens of Robin. Our fortune was to be able to use the bird observatories that Luis kindly invited us to visit before and after our exquisite lunch at the hotel, where the observation of our first Crossbill and the Hoopoe stood out.



*Female Red Crossbill*

That afternoon we went to walk through the pine forests near Navarredonda looking for birds, but really, they were very stop their activity and hardly located, where the most interesting was an observation of the Coal Tit. Furthermore, we were able to have a good observation of male black-green lizards, before approaching the Hotel Milano Real, where we slept and also enjoyed a



delicious dinner.

## **DAY 12 PLATAFORMA DE GREDOS- PINARES DE NAVARREDONDA- MADRID**

Early in the morning we left the hotel towards the platform of Gredos, but on the way we met a huge group of the impressive mountain goats, where we were able to get excellent photographs of male Spanish Ibex with their giant horns and their bright yellow eyes in the light of dawn.



*Spanish Ibex*



*Spanish Ibex*

With a fantastic cool morning and shade, we could start climbing the steep granite rock road, where we would make stops to catch our breath and to observe fantastic birds like the Dunnock, and the shiny Common Rock Thrush on top of a rocky face shaped like a molar.



*Birders hiking in Gredos*



*Bird watching in Spain*

Slowly but steadily, we followed the itinerary towards the port of Candeleda and stopped at the old water tank that serves as a place to try to observe the emblematic Bluethroat. We settled on a large rock to wait patiently for the bird to appear while we watched as other nearby birds such as the Skylark and Dunnock perched on top of the bushes. Finally, just when we thought it was impossible, the Bluethroat appeared and we were able to watch it perfectly, with time even for a photograph of this fantastic male with a full blue breast, with no white parts on it like the northern Europeans have.



*Bluethroat in Gredos*

Extremely happy and satisfied, we started to go down the slope with great care to avoid slipping, but this Canadian couple did satisfactorily. At the car, we could see a lot of pairs of Northern Wheatear. On the way back to the village, we could even observe a Short-toed Snake-Eagle flying with a snake in its beak in front of our car, it was impressive. As we reached the pine forests, we first approached the waterfalls of the river where we could watch a fantastic Dipper preening its white chest feathers before flying downstream. Later, we toured through the forest and the countryside near the pine forests of Navarredonda de Gredos, which at that time did not present much activity and only gave us the opportunity for a good observation of the Firecrest. We then approached some rocks near the village where the impressive Golden Eagle was showing off perched in a tree.



*Firecrest*



*Bird watching in Navarredonda*

Now hungry, we returned to the Hostal Almanzor to enjoy the bird observatory and the excellent food. Also, while we were eating, we were able to see a bird that had escaped us so far, the Crested Tit, what a fantastic end to the tour. That afternoon, we drove back to the Hotel Artiem in Madrid, to rest a bit and go for dinner curiously to a Thai restaurant near the hotel. Miraculously, on our way back to the hotel walking in the warm Madrid night we heard a Scops Owl, which was the 165th species for this fantastic 13-day nature tour in Spain.

### **DIA 13 MADRID- CANADA**

The visitors, Andy and Marilyn took an early flight back to Canada.

