



Spain Birding Tour 2023 Trip Report (Apr 17 - 29, 2023)

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This fantastic 12-day trip allows the visitor to see firsthand some of Spain's most representative historical sites, flagged with some of the most representative bird species of the European continent including some exclusive to the Iberian Peninsula. In addition, the local guide will add a great historical and cultural component that will greatly enrich your stay in Spain. Staying in rural, charismatic hotels and tasting typical food, you will get to know the center and south of this country on this entertaining trip. As one of the participants of the tour, said, "this is a trip that no naturalist should miss".

Day 1: Malaga

We had the welcome meeting at the hotel in Malaga to walk to the old part of the city where we could see the first swifts of the trip. There we enjoyed some nice and typical Spanish tapas in a typical restaurant. Pablo the local guide, Michael the co-leader and the other ten visitors coming from Canada and USA.

Day 2: Málaga, Rio Guadalhorce, Laguna Fuente de Piedra, Ronda

After dinner in the picturesque and traditional restaurant in the historic town of Malaga, we started at dawn visiting the mouth of the Guadalhorce River in the vicinity of the city of Malaga. We visited several of the observatories and were able to observe some interesting birds, abundant in this environment, but very rare in the rest of the world, such as the White-headed Duck and the Marbled Duck or the Audouin's Gull, and even other less common as Slender-billed Gull. We were also able to observe the first small birds such as the Greenfinch and good observations of the Zitting Cisticola.

We ate an excellent salad in a nearby restaurant and in the afternoon, we visited the Laguna de Fuente La Piedra. There the large lagoon was very dry, but the nearby ponds were very lively and showed very interesting waders such as Ruffs, Curlew Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper and Spotted Redshank. Already looking forward to visiting the historic city we finally arrived in Ronda and were able to contemplate its impressive mountain top architecture and vertical walls inhabited by the first Red billed Chough and the first Lesser Kestrels.



Ruff © Pablo Perez



Marbled Teal © Pablo Perez



Zitting Cisticola © Pablo Perez



European Greenfinch © Pablo Perez

Day 3: Ronda, Montejaque, Guacin, Casares, El Estrecho

Before dawn we went to look for the Eagle Owl in the vicinity of the Maestranza hotel, but this time we were not as lucky as last year, so we set out to enjoy the excellent breakfast, and then headed to the plains of Libar, near Montejaque. There we could see a nice pair of Black Wheatear, Rock Sparrow, the first Short-toed Snake Eagle and our first Blue Rock Thrush and Melodious Warbler of the long trip. For lunch we enjoyed a nice snack at some tables in a nice picnic area near the road, where we had a good observation of the elegant Cirl Bunting. We then continued along the road to stop and visit the white village of Guacin, where we enjoyed our first Blue Tit. The road then took us to the other white village of Casares, to finish the long day at the nice hotel of Meson de Sancho, near the Strait of Gibraltar itself.



Blue Rock-Thrush © Pablo Perez



Melodious Warbler © Pablo Perez

Day 4: El Estrecho, Playa de los Lances, Tarifa, Whales, Guadalmesi, El Estrecho

Due to the changing wind conditions we decided to start the morning at Tarifa's Los Lances beach, where we walked along the shores to observe numerous waders and gulls, where we saw an impressive Lesser Crested Tern. We could also see a Bar-tailed Godwit and several specimens of Grey (or Black-bellied) Plover. When we were enjoying the waders, we were surprised by a large arrival of birds of prey, mainly young Black Kites that pushed by the east wind arrived after crossing the strait from Africa to Europe. That was real migration happening, indeed! We headed to Tarifa and in the vicinity of the parking lot we looked for the only Common Bulbul in Europe that was not seen initially, but the guides were able to see it later. As we went down to the port, we were able to visit the historical part of the town and even the church itself. We had a nice lunch before boarding the ship, with the day still windy and then it was getting lower, allowing us to see up close, with excellent sightings of Pilot Whale first, and then three fantastic Sperm Whale, which even showed us their tails before diving. Regarding the birds, the migrant groups of Black terns stood out, but even in the distance, shearwaters and a Puffin could be spotted.



Pilot Whale © Pablo Perez



Sperm Whale © Pablo Perez

After a refreshing coffee, the guides arrived with the vehicles to continue the day and we went to visit the historic defensive tower of Guadalmesi, where the views of Africa were spectacular. Nearby we saw a pair of the beautiful Western Black-eared Wheatear and Pablo even spotted a group of Storm Petrels in the distance, with beautiful views in the background. On our way back to the hotel we were able to find our first Little Owl, which we watched for quite a while. Even in the hotel

gardens we could see birds like the first Short-toed Treecreeper.



Common Bulbul © Pablo Perez

Day 5: El Estrecho, Marismas de Barbate, Vejer de la Frontera, Barca de Vejer, Baelo Claudia, Mirador del Estrecho

Just before reaching the marshes, we were able to stop nearby to observe several Montagu's Harriers, another elegant Little Owl and a young Short-toed Snake Eagle. In the marshes we were able to see a Greater Short-toed Lark and a Kentish Plover up close. Most impressive was the large number of Collared Pratincoles of breathtaking beauty. Another amazing bird Michael located was the Stone-curlew (or Eurasian Thick-kee), very difficult to see at times.



Collared Pratincole © Pablo Perez



Kentish Plover © Pablo Perez

It looked like rain was coming, but in the end it didn't and we went to enjoy the impressive breeding colony of Barca de Vejer where the largest colony of Northern Bald Ibis was located, together with the elegant Jackdaw. Before lunch we went to visit briefly the pretty and picturesque village of Bejer de la Frontera, to enjoy a well-deserved lunch in the picturesque restaurant Venta Pinto. After a nice lunch we went to visit the amazing ruin of the Roman city of Baelo Claudia, where in addition to

learning the exciting history, we could see our first Ocellated lizard and Thekla's lark, which was carrying food for her young in the nest.



Thekla Lark © Pablo Perez

On the way to the hotel, we stopped at the Mirador del Estrecho, a nice bar that has stunning views over the strait. There we were thinking there was no migration when suddenly numerous groups of raptors appeared among the mountains. Highlights were a Hobby, Osprey, Egyptian Vulture and of course lots and lots of Black Kites. We enjoyed once again the nice hotel Mesón de Sancho with its tasty dinners.



Baelo Claudia and Bolonia Beach © Pablo Perez



Northern Bald Ibis © Pablo Perez



Egyptian Vulture © Pablo Perez

Day 6: El Estrecho, Chipiona, Trebujena, Dehesa de Abajo, El Roció

In the morning under an imminent rain, we went to the fish market in Chipiona, where we could see an impressive breeding colony of the newcomer to Europe, Little Swift. In addition, there were parallel colonies of Pallid Swift and House Martin. We were also able to taste some tasty churros with coffee and learn about some of the modern and ancient fishing gear, while observing some gulls such as the Yellow-legged Gull and the Lesser Black-backed Gull, in different plumages and ages.



Little Swift nesting © Pablo Perez

We continued north towards Trebujena motivated to look for an elusive bird, the Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin. But despite continued effort we had no luck locating it, although we did see a nice Pied Flycatcher and the first Woodchat Shrike. We also visited the lagoons of the Adventus lagoon and enjoyed a traditional meal on the terraces of the Manegodor. In the lagoons we saw our first Red-crested Pochard. After a good lunch we headed towards the Dehesa de Abajo, where unfortunately it was closed to the public and the lagoon very low water, so we could see little between the vegetation of the road. We continued to some reed beds where we could have a view of the Western Olivaceous Warbler of great quality before arriving at the famous and charismatic village of El Rocio. The nice big marsh and the white houses with sandy roads and horses with wagons, make us transport us to the Andalusian past.

Day 7: El Rocio, La Ajolí, Palacio del Acebrón, La Rocina, El Roció

Before dawn we approached the Ajolí Bridge to look for the elusive Iberian Lynx, which, due to the lack of water in the river, had no specimens nearby. After breakfast, we headed to the nearby Palacio del Acebrón, where we took a pleasant walk through the forest around the lagoon. There we were finally able to see the famous Common Nightingale. We also had excellent views of the Lesser

Spotted Woodpecker and the super interesting Eurasian Wryneck.



Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, female © Pablo Perez

On the way back we stopped at La Rocina to watch waterbirds from their observatories, where we could finally see the famous Red-knobbed Coot, Glossy Ibis and a brilliant Eurasian Spoonbill.



Spoonbill © Pablo Perez

For lunch we went to enjoy the nice Cristina Hotel where we were staying. After lunch we took a break to learn about the Spanish Siesta and then walked again in the surroundings of the large

marsh of El Rocio where we were surprised by the great abundance of waders. Highlights were the close view of the Western Swampphen and of course the excellent and close view of a group with different ages of Temminck's Stint, something that delighted Pablo.



Temminck's Stint © Pablo Perez



Lots of waders in El Rocio © Pablo Perez



Western Swamphen © Pablo Perez

In the evening after dinner, we went to the nearby roads to see nocturnal birds. We were able to hear a nearby Tawny Owl and a Red-necked Nightjar. As we drove along the roadside, we caught a brief glimpse of a Red-necked Nightjar, but despite attempts to get a good look at it, the bird flew away and was never seen again.



Group at Palacio Viejo

Day 8: El Rocio, Almendralejo, Merida, Monfragüe

In the morning we left the beautiful village of El Rocio on our way to Extremadura, where shortly after entering, we stopped again in some vineyards in the surroundings of Almendralejo to try to look again for the Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, which unfortunately we could not see. We continued on to Merida, where we had a snack at the Restaurant El Torero, and then enjoyed a marathon of ornithology, where from the Roman bridge of Merida we observed the Little Bittern and the Kingfisher among others. When we were looking for the sonorous but elusive Golden Oriole in the elm trees near the Guadiana River, we could hear among the reeds the elegant Penduline Tit, which when we looked in more detail we had the incredible surprise of locating a beautiful nest run by a male who was still building it in great detail. After such a surprise we decided to continue our journey to the excellent lodging where we would stay for three nights, the Palacio Viejo de las Corchuelas, where Carmen would treat us with great care and an excellent meal on the terraces of the hotel, in the middle of nature.



Eurasian Penduline Tit © Pablo Perez

Day 9: Guadiloba, Sierra de Fuentes, Los Cerrablos, Monfragüe

We started early in the morning to get to the Guadiloba reservoir, where on the way we had an excellent observation of a pair of Great Spotted Cuckoo. When we arrived at the chosen point, we had a festival of Iberian steppe species starting with the Pin-tailed sandgrouse with Black-bellied sandgrouse frightened by a Montagu's harrier in the vicinity of an Iberian Grey Shrike, and a Common Cuckoo. Later we were able to enjoy a female and a male Little Bustard and, in the distance, we could see a Great Bustard. It was certainly a prolific morning. We climbed to the top of the hill of the Sierra de Fuentes to enjoy its incredible views and we went to see firsthand the Carrasco Cheese handmade Factory, how it is made and also said, how the artisan goat cheese is tasted in Extremadura. In the vicinity of the visit, we were able to see our first Western Western Bonelli's Warbler and finally a quick glimpse of the Golden Oriole, along with an elegant Woodlark.

We continued on to complete the afternoon enjoying some excellent observations of the evening's star bird the Roller.



European Roller © Pablo Perez

The heat was noticeable so we headed to Trujillo to enjoy this historic city, which also held a great surprise, the sighting of a European Scops Owl in the vicinity of the vans. Again, we were happy to visit Carmen and enjoy her nice family dinners.



Birding the steppes © Pablo Perez



Trujillo Plaza © Pablo Perez



Eurasian Scops-Owl © Pablo Perez

Day 10: Monfragüe National Park, Arrocampo wetlands

The first stop inside Monfragüe National Park was at the impressive Salto del Gitano where we could see the impressive black birds, the Cinereous Vulture and the Black Stork, together with the elegant

Rock bunting.



Rock Bunting © Pablo Perez

At a good hour we still went up to the Castle of Monfragüe to see its nice views and to our surprise we found in the distance an otter in the swamp. For lunch we enjoyed some nice tapas typical of Spain and then continued to the Portilla del Tietar, with an obligatory stop moments before, to see the adult Egyptian Vulture nesting, when surprisingly we were visited by an interesting bird, the Western Subalpine Warbler.



Western Subalpine Warbler © Pablo Perez

Back at the porthole we were overjoyed to see the growing chicks of the largest European nocturnal raptor, the Eagle Owl. We decided to continue the circular tour to visit the wetlands of Arrocampo in Saucedilla, where we enjoyed good views of the Purple Heron nesting and several specimens of Great Egret, to return after a great day back to the hotel.



Eurasian Eagle-Owl © Pablo Perez

Day 11: Monfragüe, Talavan, Hotel Almanzor, Navarredonda de Gredos

Before breakfast we tried to see the Eagles in the vicinity of the source of Frances, but we had no luck, so after breakfast we stopped in the surroundings of Talavan to see an adult Spanish Eagle, where there was also a nest with a pair of elegant Great Crested Grebe and an excellent view of the Spanish Sparrow in the nests of White Stork. We continued on the road for several hours until we reached the attractive and cozy hotel of Hostal Almanzor in Gredos. There we were entertained with a good meal to continue the adventure this time, this time without the suitcases in the surroundings of Navarredonda de Gredos, where we first saw the Dipper and quite fleetingly the Citril Finch. Curiously, there we also had an excellent view of the smallest bird in Europe, the Firecrest and the elegant Robin. But we were not finished yet as visitors could enjoy the bird hide that the hotel has and where new species of birds such as the Nuthatch were seen. Dinner at the Almanzor was excellent and a good thing after a long day.



Common Firecrest © Pablo Perez

Day 12: Sierra de Gredos, Madrid

Early in the morning we headed towards some meadows of the Regional Park of Gredos where we would look for the amazing Bluethroat in the brooms, which we could soon see as it perched on the piornos for its courtship song. There were also the Skylark and the Dunnock, along with a brilliant Whitethroat, but unfortunately the relentless wind made us move to another more sheltered place. On the way to the Plataforma de Gredos we could see a couple of Roe Deer grazing before reaching the parking lot. There we struggled hard to find the jewels present, but in the end with care they appeared. From a distance we could see the Water Pipit, Common Rock Thrush, and a large male Spanish Ibex at the top of the mountain.



Male Spanish Ibex © Pablo Perez

Just when we thought we would leave the area, we were surprised to see a female Ortolan Bunting, a bird that is difficult to see, but which allowed us a few seconds of observation before going to eat at the Hostal Almanzor. We were able to enjoy a little more of the fabulous surroundings of the Hostal where a pair of Eurasian Hoopoe and the Iberian European Pied Flycatcher nest. Sad to see this wonderful trip in Spain come to an end, we headed back to Madrid to enjoy our last night at the Artiem Hotel. We headed for dinner on a last warm evening on the nice terrace nearby to say goodbye until next time.



Eurasian Hoopoe © Pablo Perez

Day 13: Madrid

The visitors return to their countries.



Eagle-Eye Tours birding group in Spain

[View the species list from the Spain 2023 birding tour](#)