Eagle-Eye Tours



Spain Birding Tour Trip Report (Apr 21 - May 3, 2025)

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DAY 1 HOTEL MALAGA PICASSO

The group met in the garden of the Hotel Malaga Picasso and then went to sample some local food to experience the varied and rich gastronomy in Spain.

DAY 2 GUADALORCE FUENTE DE PIEDRA LAGUNA DE CAMPILLO RONDA

We began before dawn walking in the nearby mouth of the Gudalorce River making what is undoubtedly the first and longest walk of the trip. We visited three of its bird observatories where we saw the first Marbled Duck along with a good number of waders such as the Kentish Plover, the Great Plover or the Ruff among others. After breakfast, we went to the famous Laguna de Fuente de Piedra that currently hosts the largest breeding population of Greater Flamingo in Europe. There were thousands of birds congregating, showing a unique spectacle, perhaps the largest in the last twenty years thanks to the abundant spring rains. They were accompanied by excellent observations of the elegant Avocets and Black-winged Stilts among other beautiful birds.



Black-winged Stilt © Pablo Perez

In Fuente de Piedra we were also able to observe the White-headed Duck, a bird very similar to its American version, but which has its only European representations in Spain, being very scarce and of great ecological value. On the way to the next place the guides surprised us with the always exciting observation of a Short-eared Owl resting during the day in a dense tree that only allowed us to see it when the wind swayed the leaves to the sides. We arrived at the Campillo Lagoon with the typical Mediterranean landscape surrounded by olive trees and mountains in the background and where we could see the elusive Red-knobbed Coot and some nice red ducks. After lunch we arrived at the fantastic picturesque city of Ronda, where we could visit its impressive balconies and feel the weight of history under our feet, besides seeing the first Red-billed Chough. We also tasted our first varied tapas of the trip, where the famous Spanish 'oxtail' was the highlight, before going to the Hotel Maestranza to rest after an intense day of birding.



Ronda © Pablo Perez

DAY 3 LLANOS DE LIBAR, GAUCIN, CASARES, MESON DE SANCHO

After a tasty breakfast at the hotel, we headed to one of the most appreciated places of the trip, the Llanos de Libar, a mountain environment shared by sheep and goat ranchers that maintains a high population of forest, countryside and birds of prey, generating an ecosystem very rich in variety of birds. Thanks to this mosaic of habitats, we were able to observe the song and nuptial flight of the resident Black Wheatear and the breeding Black Wheatear, the thrilling call of the Short-toed Eagle at the top of the mountain and its dominant flight over its extensive territory, the graceful song of the Rock Bunting or the brilliant flight of the Blue Rock-Thrush while claiming the always imposing Peregrine Falcon.



Rock Bunting © Pablo Perez

We had lunch at a traditional lunch in one of the local bars in Benaojan where Pablo explained a bit of the history of the Spanish flag. We ventured along the mountain road to Gaucin, one of the famous white villages of Andalusia in the province of Malaga. It is winding, but tremendously beautiful, with a green landscape contrasting with the brightly painted villages of the traditional lime. After a coffee in Gaucin, we continued to the next picturesque village of Casares, then to the famous Strait of Gibraltar, which at its narrowest part separates Europe from Africa in the scarce but deep 14 km sea. We also enjoyed the pleasant birding in the beautiful garden of the Hotel Mesón de Sancho with the sudden appearance of a pair of Hawfinches that some lucky visitors were able to observe clearly before enjoying the nice dinner with local food, again each place offers very special food.

DAY 4 MONTIJO BEACH FISHERMEN'S MARKET OF CHIPIONA BOAT OF VEJER

We visited the left bank of the mouth of the Guadalquivir, from Montijo Beach, where we were delighted with the acrobatic flights of the Little Terns, and the magnificent spring plumage of the Sanderling and the difference in size with the Sandwich Tern and the Ruddy Turnstones.



Sandwich and Little Tern © Pablo Perez

Nacho told us about the differences between the different populations of Common Ringed Plovers and the interesting story of the wreck of the rice boat. We continued along the seashore bordering orchards and houses to discover the charismatic fish market and its inn, where we tasted local seafood. For some years the fish market has been used by the Little Swift and Pale Swift for nesting and we had a pleasant time watching them in amazement before returning to the hotel, to rest and enjoy the incredible views of Africa over the forest.



Little Swift © Pablo Perez

DAY 5 BAELO CLAUDIA VIEWPOINT OF THE STRAIT TARIFF EXIT PELAGICAS

We adjusted our breakfast schedule so we could reach the beach of Bolonia where the ruins of the Roman city of Baelo Claudia are located, just before the schools arrived. Here we saw the largest nocturnal butterfly residing in Europe, the Peacock and had a close observation of the Thekla's Lark and a brilliant Black-eared Wheatear. Perhaps the most amazing thing was watching the acrobatic Northern Gannets dive on the horizon near the fisheries.



Belo Claudio bridge © Pablo Perez'



Thekla's Lark © Pablo Perez

We had a fascinating tour to the Roman ruins left by the Romans and the link between the artisanal fishing of bluefin tuna that they did before and now, with the so-called Almadraba. We were eager to taste the famous salty liquid Garum. Suddenly the wind stopped, so we headed to the magical Mirador del Estrecho, a spectacular place to watch the migration. When you can get out of the car, you can see the overwhelming continuous trickle of birds of prey and storks. It was an absolute non-stop bird crossing from the African continent to the European continent. First were the Short-toed Eagles, with literally hundreds of them arriving, of all ages, young and old, as well as Booted Eagles and even a Sparrowhawk and of course Black Kites and Griffon Vultures. Numerous groups of White Storks and Black Storks entertained us with their circular ascents in dense groups of birds. We were able to see how the variation in the black and white patterns of the two species overlap.



Black Kite © Pablo Perez



Griffon vulture © Pablo Perez

The tasty snacks we enjoyed while birding with Africa in the background are unbeatable, but we were all aware that we were missing something to make it even better, an ice cream. So off we went to Tarifa to enjoy the precious sweet treat as we walked through the historic streets of the ancient walled city on the southern tip of Spain and the old continent. Minutes later we went out to sea on the Turmares marine wildlife observation boat, where for three hours we enjoyed a calm afternoon

of the nearby Pilot whales, dolphins and a variety of shearwaters and seagulls.



Pilot whales © Pablo Perez

DAY 6 BARBATE MARSHES EL ROCÍO

The Barbate Marshes are a mixture of former sea salt farms in the estuary with a closed landfill that offers a suitable island area for breeding birds. We had some excellent sightings of the elusive Stone Curlew, which apparently had two representatives on each small island where they breed. In addition, we were treated to the magnificent group pirouettes of the extremely cute Collared Pratincole and fortunately an adult Audouin's Gull, showing off its reddish beak and clean grayish back.



Collared Pratincole © Pablo Perez

We ate traditional food at Venta Pinto where we were again able to see the endangered Northern Bald Ibis under the charismatic white village of Vejer de la Frontera. With plenty of energy we headed to the famous and charismatic historic village of El Roció in the heart of the Doñana National Park. Fortunately for us we were able to briefly visit the large lagoon which had a high-water level and have some free time before dinner to watch the religious event of the Rosary. We were amazed by the perfectly orchestrated parade of the different brotherhoods entering and leaving the Chapple de El Roció carrying the banners that showed the place and the age of the group.



Bald Ibis © Pablo Perez



El Rocio © Pablo Perez

DAY 7 VADO DEL QUEMA VALVERDE EL ROCÍO

Before dawn we drove to the Vado del Quema, where as soon as we parked the van we could enjoy the magnificent soundscape of the sunrise in Doñana, with songs of Red-necked Nightjar, Tawny Owl and Nightingale among others. For more than an hour we waited unsuccessfully for the endemic Iberian Lynx to appear among the flowers of the Andalusian pasture, but although this did not happen, we were able to contemplate in silence the intense activity of the Iberian Magpie. We enjoyed a nice toast with typical butter that the tourists liked very much and gave us the energy we needed for the rest of the long day of birding that lay ahead of us. We were first able to observe a nearby Night Heron and the extremely interesting Western Olivaceous Warbler, and then went on to see a colony of Herons and Spoonbills that impressed us with their hustle and bustle. As we said before, this spring has recorded water and the guides only dreamed of being able to see the marsh completely flooded again. It was near the visitor center of Valverde and Arrozales de Aznalcazar, where surprisingly we saw a Red-Knobbed Coot, in addition to numerous Squacco Herons extremely close, showing that bright green of the corners of the beak, typical of breeding adults. We enjoyed another snack in Valverde, watching hundreds or thousands of birds at a time, where Glossy Ibis, Purple Herons and Flamingos among others stood out, but perhaps the king of the reeds this time was the Great Reed Warbler with its powerful song high up in the reeds.



Glossy Ibis flying © Pablo Perez



Waders and flamingos at Donana © Pablo Perez

We returned by roads visiting first the Escupidera and then Entremuros where we were delighted with a spectacle of waders which highlighted the Purple Sandpiper and again the Collared Pratincole and of course, the comforting feeling of seeing a lot of biomass, in very large numbers of birds that denote a future a little more hopeful for these suffering creatures so fragile.



Waders landing © Pablo Perez

We were still able to return in time to the hotel in El Rocio to take a leisurely stroll through the charismatic white sandy-floored village and even dine at the Toruño Restaurant to watch the sunset as groups of Flamingos returned to roost in the Madre Lagoon.



Greater Flamingo © Pablo Perez

We enjoyed dinner and the typical Flamenquín, then returned to the vans to enjoy the sight and sound from a couple of Red-necked Nightjars - their beating wings giving a shocking sound.

DAY 8 LA ROCINA MONFRAGÜE

After breakfast we went to the visitor center of La Rocina, where in the pine forests we enjoyed the elegant Long-tailed Tit, the striking Crested Tit and the Eurasian Short-toed Treecreeper, and in the observatory the intriguing song of the Savi´s Warbler. We also tried to find the sonorous Nightingale, but without luck, although we were able to observe a Little Grebe feeding its young with crabs and a huge male Gecko reptile resting in a tree.



Crested Tit © Pablo Perez

In the afternoon, Spain had an unprecedented power outage. We got everyone to the hotel in Monfragüe and were able to successfully get dinner. We had an enjoyable dinner with candles, and of course a very starry night. Sometimes we could enjoy the tranquility of the night more often.

DAY 9 LOS CERRALBOS SANTA MARTA DE MAGASCA SIERRA DE FUENTES

On this trip the schedule is key and being at Los Cerralbos at 7am helped, but having good guides also to locate in less than ten minutes a group of Great Bustards showing the wheel display and a Little Bustard in courtship, a unique spectacle in one of the best places in Europe to see it. Afterwards, we continued to the Tamuja River for an excellent observation of the Kingfisher and the Spanish Eagle. We continued the incredible observation of European Roller and a Little European Owl before reaching the Sierra de Fuentes. Over the Dobrijo kilns of the lime creation we observed some Pale Swifts and were surprised by the rare presence of the early migrating Honey Buzzard associated with a Booted Eagle and another Short-toed Eagle. Just as we parked we heard a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker that we watched for a long time, its elegance among the lichens of the oaks. For lunch we had a surprise in store for us at the Carrasco Goat Cheese Factory and we were able to bottle-feed the baby goats and of course taste the different cheeses and the charismatic Extremadura Breadcrumbs with which the locals Oscar and Toni entertained us. Just as we were leaving, we could briefly hear and see a pair of Oropendolas with their fleeting flights and their unmistakable melodic song. We went briefly to Trujillo, and decided to give the afternoon a rest and were grateful to enjoy the sunny evening on the pleasant terrace of the hotel Hospederia del Parque.

DAY 10 ARROCAMPO PORTILLA DEL TIÉTAR SALTO DEL GITANO EN MONFRAGÜE

After breakfast we went to Arrocampo reservoir in the village of Saucedilla, where we visited three of its main observatories. At the first one, we were delighted to see perfectly the Little Bittern, but as there were many more groups of birders, we made transitions between the other points observing the Squacco Heron, and the elegant flight of the Brown Pochard and the graceful legs of the Purple Gallinule. With a sudden sighting of the Aquatic Warbler. We also saw a Black-Winged Kite in the meadow, a spectacle that was the dream of many. It was also close to the lagoon where we compare the Little Plover with the Great Plover. We had lunch at a tasty local restaurant. With renewed energy, we went to visit the Portilla del Tietar. We arrived when no one was there and the sun was still shining, and there was a male Eagle Owl standing sentinel over the river, a spectacle to behold. Suddenly more groups of international visitors arrived and also enjoyed the Grand Lord on the horizon, while an Egyptian Vulture crossed our path. Before leaving we saw a western Orphean Warbler in the bushes. Unfortunately, when we arrived at Villareal de San Carlos, the heavy rain came and limited us during our short visit to the Salto del Gitano, where we humbly watched the vultures nesting on the cliffs in the rain and the lucky Black Stork incubating its eggs protected in the cave. Soon after we returned to rest at the park's Hospedería at six o'clock in the evening, which was the usual time of return most days of the trip.

DAY 11 SANTIAGO DEL CAMPO PEÑAS NEGRAS LA PLATAFORMA PINAR NAVARREDONDA DE GREDOS HOSTAL ALMANZOR

This morning we went to fields of traditional farmers and cattlemen, friends of Pablo, where we usually have the good fortune to see the Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and indeed there they were, only that the fast flight of the Western Marsh Harrier had made them move a little. The other big surprise was seeing a young Spanish Eagle perched for a long time on a big rock on the horizon of that steppe area with that bright green grass and the big clouds in the sky. A little further on in the track we could see a great amount of Stone Curlews camouflaged between the tilled ground and in the vicinity the surprising flight of the young Montagu's Harrier that puzzled the group. Another small stop nearby in some neighboring oaks allowed us to have very good observations of the endemic Iberian Gray Shrike and Woodchat Shrike. But undoubtedly the great observation of that point was briefly that of the Black-winged Warbler. That day we had a quick lunch at the gas station in Santiago del Campo as we had a pure marathon ahead of us since the next day threatened very bad weather. After lunch we left Extremadura to reach Ávila where in Peñas Negras we saw one of the star birds of the trip, the Bluethroat. This bird has its southern limit in its distribution in the environment of the Sierra de Gredos and shows substantial differences in the spotting patterns of the blue bib with absence of white in the Iberian population. Like everything in life, what is desired and difficult to see, when finally observed and photographed, is most appreciated.



Bluethroat © Pablo Perez

We were also surprised by the pleasant observation of a graceful Dartford Warbler and the incredible nuptial display flights of the Eurasian Skylark. Of course, the wind made it difficult, but persistence and tenacity paid off. We continued to the Plataforma de Gredos where we watched the powerful Iberian Mountain Goats with their imposing horns.



Iberian Ibex, female © Pablo Perez



Birding in Spain © Jean L

Here, we were pleased with the beautiful Northern Wheatear. In the distance, a few of us were able to see Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush on top of the rocks. As we descended through the Sierra de Gredos Natural Park in Ávila, we spotted the remarkable White-throated Dipper darting between torrents of snowmelt cascading over granite rocks.



Northern Wheatear © Pablo Perez

Next, we headed to our final destination of the day: the beautiful Pinar de Navarredonda de Gredos. Among the striking Scots Pines, we managed to spot two of Europe's smallest birds—the Goldcrest

and the Firecrest—before catching brief but exciting glimpses of the Iberian Green Woodpecker and the elusive Citril Finch. With our homework done and a large number of birds we arrived at the incredible hotel where Luis Alfonso welcomed us with a big smile and an excellent dinner.



Firecrest © Pablo Perez

DAY 12 SIERRA DE GREDOS MADRID

In the morning, we enjoyed a peaceful visit to the bird observatory before breakfast, where a Fox and a pretty Robin appeared. Later the rain eased, giving us a chance to tour the gardens of the hotel. There we had excellent views of a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers and a Blackcap. We then decided to visit the pine forest again. This time we were able to see an interesting pair of Pied Flycatchers and some nice Coat Tit that remind us so much of their North American cousin, the Chickadee. Luis Alfonso entertained us again with a nice warm soup and we headed to Madrid for the closing dinner of the trip.



European Robin © Pablo Perez



Great Spotted Woodpecker © Pablo Perez

DAY 13 MADRID RETURN HOME

In the morning the group left for the Madrid airport, after an intense, rich and fun tour in central and southern Spain with a total of 190 bird species and fifty ebird lists, and a great memory.



Our group in Ronda

Spain Birding Tour eBird list (Apr 21 - May 3, 2025)