Eagle-Eye Tours



Spain Trip Report (April 2024)

Link: Spain Trip Report (April 2024)

This fantastic 12-day trip with North Americans in Spain has undoubtedly stood out from other years because of how flowery and beautiful the fields and lagoons were, thanks to the copious spring rains prior to the tour, where we enjoyed sunshine every day. We saw a total of 210 species of birds and the group was able to enjoy excellent observations of some very complicated ones such as the Pin-tailed Sandgrouse in brilliant morning light. The closeness with which we saw the great Sperm Whale in Tarifa or the impressive Long-eared Owl were some of the highlights of this incredible tour, where the winning bird was the Bald Ibis and where of course there was superb sights of art and culture in where those Romans in Baelo Claudio and for instance in El Rocío, Ronda and Trujillo, along with its native gastronomic essence in the visit to the cheese factory in Extremadura. An excellent opportunity to see some of the most incredible birds in Europe, with two local guides, Pablo and Javi who really enjoyed outstanding bird observations with this group of ten lucky visitors.

DAY 1: APRIL 15: MALAGA PICASSO

At five o'clock in the afternoon at the Hotel Malaga Picasso we welcomed the group of ten visitors from Canada and the United States, to later start our first group dinner tasting three types of paellas typical of that part of Malaga in Andalusia where we started this twelve-day tour of Spain, to see its interesting birds.

DAY 2: GUADALORCE FUENTE LA PIEDRA CAMPILLOS RONDA

We started the first morning of the tour birding in the nature reserve at the mouth of the Guadalorce River near the hotel. When we were crossing the bridge at the entrance to the reserve, we could see our first Pallid Swift and then in the river the endangered Marbled Teal along with several specimens of Spanish Terrapin in the sun.



Marbled Teal © Javi Elorriaga

When we arrived at the first observatory we had a good observation of the courtship behavior of the formerly endangered White-headed Duck, very restricted to few places like this in Spain, the only place where it is found in Europe.



White-headed Duck © Javi Elorriaga

Already in the second observatory, first of all, we were very excited to observe a nearby pair of Kentish Plovers with their austere nest of a cryptic egg on the pebbles, when suddenly a Gull Bill Tern arrived and attacked the adults and to their misfortune preyed on their only egg, nature is

shocking at times. We could also see great activity of waders such as the Great Plover and the Common Sandpiper, along with a variety of gulls such as the Slender-billed Gull, Black-headed Gull and Mediterranean Gull, which at this time of year overlap the black and white heads typical of summer and winter plumage respectively. We then returned to the hotel to refresh ourselves from that warm morning and set course for lunch in the village of Fuente de Piedra and then visit its surrounding lagoons. It was really a spectacle to see so closely the large number of Flamingos and waders, where large numbers of Wood Sandpipers stood out, and again the mixture of plumage of the Ruff, with some remarkably white and red males, typical plumage of their nuptial period. Those water birds use these valuable lagoons as stopover for resting and feeding during their prenuptial migrations to northern Europe for breeding. Other interesting waders were the striking Pied Avocets and Black-winged Stilts, as well as the also showy Curlew Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank in nuptial plumage or Dunlin among others. After a grateful coffee we headed to the famous city of Ronda, but before arriving we made a mandatory stop in a nearby town to enter an urban park where surprisingly was extremely well camouflaged and still an impressive Long-eared Owl, a bird difficult to observe and that was a lifer and very celebrated observation for Pablo, one of the guides.



Long-eared Owl © Javi Elorriaga

We checked in at the Hotel in Ronda and took a short tour to visit and take a group photo on the impressive balcony of Ronda and its vertiginous bridge. It is certainly a magical city. Also, at dusk we were still encouraged to walk through its viewpoints looking for the presence of more species of owls, but despite not being able to observe, we could hear in the distance an Eagle Owl and a Tawny Owl, as well as a distant Nightingale.



Ronda © Javi Elorriaga

DAY 3: RONDA MONTEJAQUE GAUCIN CAZALLA ESTRECHO

After a good breakfast we leave the beautiful city of Ronda to head to the Llanos de Libar in Montejaque. We started on the gravel track walking slowly to identify the birds, when soon Javi the other local guide, identified a Peregrine Falcon in the distance and later what is the star species of that area, the resident Black Wheatear. We were very fortunate that it crossed our path, giving us some excellent opportunities to photograph it, considering that there were quite a few photographers in this group. Other interesting birds seen there were the Cirl Bunting, the first striking Stonechats and the curious Red-billed Chough, with their vertical swooping flights. We continued on the track in the vehicles to stop to observe our first Little Owl, which curiously had its back to us despite appearing to show false eyes on the back of its neck. The participants were also able to locate on the walls the Spanish Ibex that carry horns of smaller size in this local population and show in both sexes. Once in the forest we could enjoy the observation of beautiful common birds such as the Chaffinch, the Mistle Thrush or the attractive Nuthatch. We had the fleeting glimpse of a Woodpecker and its loud drumming that gave that forest of old oaks a magical character. As we descended, we were able to stop and appreciate the Rock Sparrow on the limestone cliffs and the brilliant and beautiful Blue Rock thrush, a fantastic bird that left no one indifferent.



Birding in Montejaque © Javi Elorriaga

After such an excellent morning we decided to rest with a good coffee in the village of Montejaque while we searched without luck for the emblematic and endangered Bonelli's Eagle on the vertical walls in front, what we did manage to see were the fast Alpine Swifts. Continuing on the road we stopped to eat our picnic at some shady tables near the road, but we could hardly eat peacefully because soon a Short-toed Eagle appeared and just when we were thinking of leaving and to our great joy, we located a specimen of Bonelli's Eagle that was being disturbed by the Common Kestrels, which probably bred in that environment. With the great joy of our guides, we continued to Gaucín, a beautiful white Andalusian village, which would be our farewell to the province of Malaga, before diving into Cadiz. Luckily and due to the difference in temperature between the sea and the land, the whole environment near the Strait of Gibraltar was covered with a dense sea mist, so we could only contemplate the vicinity of that land representative of the end of Europe, Tarifa. We made a stop at the bird observatory of Cazalla to learn firsthand thanks to the local guide, the importance of this observatory during the time of bird migration.



Raptor migration, Strait of Gibraltar © Javi Elorriaga

We had a well-deserved rest at the nice Hotel Mesón de Sancho and took a walk in their garden to meet the local birds, where we saw our first Booted Eagle and started to make the long list of birds and enjoy a nice dinner of local food from the hotel.

DAY 4: LOS LANCES BEACH TARIFA MIGRANT WHALES VIEWPOINT OF THE STRAIT

We started walking along the wide beach of Los Lances in the vicinity of Tarifa, where we could see very well the Northern Stonechat in its resting stop during its migration to the north, a bird that we had seen days before, but very far away. Next to it there was a Northern Wheatear and nearby our first Greater Short-toed Lark. Unfortunately, the large group of waders was far away and we could only see a few close by that we had seen before. What did give us a great spectacle were the vertical bites of the bright Gannets near the beach, not far from the Almadraba, which are the traditional artisanal bluefin tuna fishing boats. We headed then on a sunny day with little wind to visit the historic town of Tarifa, where we could hear the only Bulbul in Europe, but unfortunately the intense light against, did not allow us to see. Following our historical tour through the city, on the walls of the church we could fortunately contemplate and even distinguish the white color of the nails of a male Lesser Kestrel, a birding bird in this part of the southern Spain that nests in the nest boxes successfully installed for this purpose at the Church. We arrived in time to eat a tasty vegetable snack and get ready to take the Turmares boat at noon, which sails the waters of the Strait to approach the center area with the intention of looking for marine mammals. Our fortune was immense, as we were able to see first a group of Bottlenose Dolphins, followed closely by a group of Pilot Whales that came close enough to scratch their heads on purpose with the hull of the boat. Thanks to the extreme proximity we were able to contemplate the difference in size and coloration of the many familiar specimens and even hear them in their calls, something difficult to describe in words. But even more incredible was when we soon discovered the blow of a whale in the distance and as we approached, we could happily check the imminent presence of a huge Sperm Whale, which spent long minutes on the surface before raising its powerful tail in front of us and diving into the depths of the Atlantic Ocean in search of its favorite prey, the large squid.



Sperm Whale © Javi Elorriaga

As we returned to land, we were fortunate to see several interesting seabirds such as some fast Puffins and several Shearwaters such as the Balearic and Cory's Shearwaters with their acrobatic flights at water level, which even offered some photo opportunities for the quick photographers. Although the day was already turning out to be fantastic and although we were looking forward to it, we did not imagine that we would have the immense fortune of witnessing one of the greatest spectacles of nature between the European and African continents, the live migration of hundreds of birds of prey at the same time. That began suddenly, when we arrived at the Mirador del Estrecho and all kinds of birds of prey kept arriving, among which the Black Kites and Short-toed and Booted Eagles stood out by number, but included others less numerous such as Sparrowhawks, the first Honey Buzzard of the season or several immature Egyptian Vultures and even a Hobby and to the great surprise of all a fast Eleonora's Hawk. We were already more than satisfied, but we decided to take advantage of the Hotel´ garden before dinner to be surprised once again by the rare presence of a Whistling Warbler and a Blackburnian Warbler, rare birds at this date and in this place.

DAY 5: CUEVA DEL MORO BAELO CLAUDIA TAHAVILLA BARBATE BARCA & VEJER

Surprisingly the previous day had been a very calm windy day, but today we would see what Tarifa and its extreme winds are really like. Despite the intense wind from the top of the Cueva del Moro we could see a couple of Griffon Vultures nesting and the immensity of the Atlantic Ocean that bathes the beautiful beach of Bolonia, where we would go down to visit the ruins of the ancient Roman city of Baelo Claudia. Luckily, we managed to dodge a brave Terrapin that was crossing the road.



Baelo Claudio Roman Archaeological Site © Javi Elorriaga

Among the ruins of the city we could imagine the old fish salting factories and how its inhabitants entertained themselves in the Roman Theater and baths. It is curious to imagine how the traditional bluefin tuna fishing gear we saw yesterday corresponds to those used since Roman times, something really surprising in this modern world. But these ruins were also happily embellished by our first Thecla's Lark and the Woodchat Shrike. We continued the windy morning braving the wind with much better results than we expected, as we were able to see a hidden Owl in the olive tree and most impressive of all, a female Marsh Harrier together with two female Montagu's Harriers and a brilliant male flying over the cereal. We were able to distinguish the differences in plumage color and the white rump and sharp wings to distinguish these two species of birds. We ate a tasty meal in a picturesque restaurant, very typical of Spain, and continued to wade and defy the strong wind, this time in the marshes of Barbate. There were a lot of waders, from flamingos to sandpipers, sandpipers and of course the big star of the afternoon, the extremely beautiful Collared Pratincole, a really elegant bird that we were able to photograph excellently.



Collared Pratincole © Javi Elorriaga

After a coffee in Barca de Vejer we had the surprise of contemplating one of the three present colonies of Northern Bald Ibis in Spain and one of the few in Europe, of this rare bird, which is progressively recovering from the near extinction it went through a few years ago. Next to them also nest the black and bright-eyed Jackdaws. With its crested and red head, it has been classified as the winning bird for the visitors of this tour.



Northern Bald Ibis © Javi Elorriaga

Before returning to the hotel, we decided to go up to the lofty white village of Vejer de la Frontera,

which is undoubtedly one of the historical jewels of the area with its pretty white and yellow houses. While we thought we were done, surprisingly when we were making the bird list for the day, suddenly appeared a group of about twenty Black Kites that had made a risky migration with this strong easterly wind, something that impresses us very much due to the risky crossing of this 14 km strait with such lateral winds and the risk of drowning that these brave birds suffer, on their migration journey to their breeding areas in Europe after spending the winter in Africa. Of course, their reproductive instinct is tremendously strong enough to defy all dangers in order to reproduce.

DAY 6: CHIPIONA MONTIJO BEACH BONANZA LAGOONS EL ROCIO

Quietly we went to visit the recent colony of an African bird in expansion which is the Moorish Swift, which shares the colony with Common Swift and Avian in the fish market of the village, right next to the sea, where we also recognized the similarities between the Yellow-legged Gull and the Lesser Black-backed Gull. At the café we could taste the tasty churros, typical of Spain. We followed the seashore to the beach of Montijo where a wader festival awaited us where the differences between the Common Tern, Black Tern, Caspian Tern, Little Tern and Sandwich Tern could be appreciated very well, a unique occasion to compare the size and color of the legs and bill among other things. Other attractive waders were the first Curlews, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, and many Ruddy Turnstones. The photo opportunities were excellent with good light and the tide rising as it brought the birds closer to the group. We then went for lunch at a typical Andalusian restaurant and then approached the Bonanza ponds, which, although not very comfortable for birding, did offer some good treasures, with numerous courting pairs of the beautiful White-headed Duck and other cracking birds such as the Black-crowned Night Heron and the Squacco Heron. We took the road towards the Doñana National Park and its great historical and cultural jewel, the beautiful charismatic village of El Rocío that welcomes us late in the day with its bright white walls and streets, more prepared for horses than for cars.



El Rocío, Doñana National Park © Javi Elorriaga

That night we were able to feast on typical Andalusian food, including shrimp pancakes and prawns from Huelva, as well as fried fish, in the hotel restaurant with a very typical and traditional

atmosphere of El Rocío Village. That night we certainly enriched it by taking a late walk with the car looking for the migratory bird and owner of the night, the Red-necked Nightjar, which surprisingly allowed itself to be photographed in an excellent way while it remained perched motionless on the ground.

DAY 7: EL ROCÍO EL ACEBRON LA ROCINA EL ROCÍO EL ACEBUCHE EL ROCÍO

After yesterday's long day we took a quieter day, and started the morning contemplating the pink color of the clouds among the trees surrounding the Madre marsh in El Rocio before breakfast. We were able to see numerous Night herons in flight and there was even one still fishing, taking advantage of its last moments before the sun. This time we did get a good look at the elusive Reed Warbler among the green reeds, its white breast glowing as it called out. We spotted a female Iberian Red Deer among the Tamarinds and a huge group of the fast-moving Sand Martins as well as a group of Flamingos flying over the lagoon in the distance while we listened to the song of the Gull-billed Tern before heading to breakfast at the hotel. We continued making the first circular stop at the Palacio del Acebrón, where we had to deal with the incessant mosquitoes, but that gave us the great joy, which was the bird of the day, a pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker nesting in a dry tree next to the road, yes we could also cross out the endemic Iberian Chiffchaff, and the elusive and sonorous Nightingale, emblematic bird for its attractive song and its presence in the literature, a bird that had resisted so far. The second visitor center we visited was the lagoons of La Rocina, where before entering the observatory, we enthusiastically contemplated a matting pair of Tree Sparrow and we were able to see the first Purple Heron of the trip and enjoy good observations of the Spoonbill and the Grayland Goose, a bird that a few winters ago was the visitor par excellence and that surprisingly no longer visits us, but that has become a breeder. We went back to enjoy the exquisite traditional food of the hotel to do something that, as good visitors in Spain, we had to experience, the siesta. We also tasted the traditional wines of Jerez to the delight of the visitors. In the afternoon we continued the day at the visitor center of El Acebuche, which is also the most important breeding captivity center of the endangered Iberian Lynx, a mammal that we dreamed of seeing the next morning. There we had very good observations and opportunities to photograph in good time a group of Iberian Magpies, and the showy Bee-eaters, as well as the beautiful storks nesting on top of the building and a Woodchat Shrike on some dry branches. We got a good look at the Red-rumped Swallows in a small group, which we imagine nest nearby, as we saw their elongated nest on the porch of the building. The truth is that Doñana this year is very beautiful thanks to the rains with huge meadows of flowers everywhere and it is nice to see huge colonies of planes nesting in the eaves of the buildings. On the way back to El Rocío, we could even stop to contemplate a bee-eater nest on the ground on a small sandy mountain next to the road, another female deer in the distance of the firebreak and a beautiful female grey wheatear contemplating the beautiful landscape from the top of a branch. The photo cameras were burning batteries at full speed. The village of El Rocio is effervescent with so many visitors during the weekend dressed in their traditional costumes making social celebrations, while in parallel many birds are busy with their wedding processions and feeding their flocks, it is pure spring.



Little and Black Terns, Donana National Park © Javi Elorriaga

DAY 8: EL ROCÍO DEHESA DE ABAJO MONFRAGÜE

Before breakfast we headed to the Raya Real in the vicinity of El Rocio to look for the Iberian Lynx at dawn, although we could only find its tracks, we did see an intrepid fox with a rabbit in its mouth, something difficult to see in the countryside. After breakfast we left El Rocío to reach the Dehesa de Abajo, where we found the Western Olivaceous Warbler and the endangered Ferruginous Duck among other beautiful birds, such as the elegant Great Crested Grebe with its windy crest in the wind during its graceful dance. But undoubtedly the most cooperative for the photos were the white storks with nests on the nearby olive trees, where we could even see a chick imitating the typical clucking of the adults. We had a coffee at the Venta del cruce and continued on to Mérida, to visit its immense Roman Bridge over the Guadiana River. From the top we could see the western Swamphen with its long red legs among the reeds, as well as numerous Glossy Ibis flying over the river. We continued after Mérida until we reached the hotel in the vicinity of the Monfragüe National Park. There we were already able to contemplate the famous Spanish Sparrows and listen to their high-pitched song while enjoying the sunny terrace at sunset. The truth is that Extremadura is extremely beautiful with all the meadows full of colorful flowers that seems hard to believe how beautiful it is.

DAY 9: SANTA MARTA DE MAGASCA SIERRA DE FUENTES TRUJILLO MONFRAGÜE

This morning, we had to get up early enough to be looking for steppe birds in the garden of natural colors offered by this rainy spring. It was cold, but it didn't take long to locate the first interesting birds, a female Montagu's Harrier, a European Turtle Dove and an Iberian Shrike. We went a little closer along the Santa Marta de Magasca track to discover that there was a male Great Bustard, wheeling in his nuptial plumage and several females around, near some caws as they grazed peacefully. It was amazing to see his long whiskers and vertical tail standing out on the grasses, as he walked slowly showing up his glamourless on the grassy and shiny hill.



Birding in Monfragüe National Park © Javi Elorriaga

Suddenly we were overjoyed to find a Little Bustard performing the typical nuptial leaps and then, next to it, two other males flying showing the nuptial courtship. This was a sight to behold, especially because they were together with the Great Bustards themselves in the same image. It is gratifying to see these threatened endangered birds in their breeding process surviving the impending agricultural management problems that beset them, including phytosanitary and more recently solar panel factories. Curiously Javi found two cute Red Fox cubs playing on a mound of earth that we sensed was their den, quite close to where we were.



Red Fox © Javi Elorriaga

Behind us a pair of Spanish Eagles perched on some large eucalyptus trees in the distance. Also, in the distance we could hear the Pin-tailed Sandpipers, but we could not see them well. You can't do everything in one morning and even less with the grass so high. We went to the mythical birdwatcher’s bar Kowax to have a coffee and to continue the morning visiting the nest boxes of Rollers with their bright blue, while we watched the attractive Hoopoe on the stone wall and shortly before a group of Red-legged Partridge. We could also see a Short-toed Eagle and a Booted Eagle, this time in its dark phase.



European Roller © Javi Elorriaga

Then we saw some more Great Bustard and even again a Greater Short-toed Lark that we could compare with the large size of the Calandra Lark, while we searched for the cryptic and nocturnal Eurasian Stone curlew unsuccessfully. For lunch we had a special event as we visited the Carrasco cheese factory, in the Sierra de Fuentes and we were even able to milk some native breed goats with which they make the varied and tasty cheeses that we would taste later. Curiously, inside the cheese factory there was a nest of Crack Martin. We also ate the most traditional food of Extremadura, migas de pastor (shepherd's breadcrumbs). On the way back to the van we could see another Spanish Eagle on the way out and on the way back a really interesting bird, the Western Orphean Warbler high up in the cork oaks.



Cork Oak Dehesa Extremadura © Javi Elorriaga

The aviary surprises were not over yet, as in the historic and impressive walled city of Trujillo we were able to see a new bird, and very closely, resting on the branches of a Chestnut tree, an incredible Scops Owl with its gray crypto-plumage that resembled the bark of the tree where it slept during the day. Curiously already returning to the hotel in one of the two vans could see fleetingly on the side of the road a Egyptian Mongoose, a mammal difficult to see sometimes. Back at the hotel, we were again able to observe the colony of Tree Sparrows, with their flamboyant males resting on the eaves of the roof. Once again, we were surprised by the tasty food at the Hospedería de Monfragüe Hotel.

DAY 10: MONFRAGÜE NATIONAL PARK

We decided to take the day easy and dedicate as much time as we needed to quality bird watching and bird photography with time to spare. Before getting into the cars at the hotel we have already located a nearby Hoopoe that we photograph and already in the vans we will make our first stop at the famous Salto del Gitano, where we do not give credit to the amount of birds that are moving non-stop. Hundreds of Griffon Vultures flying and perched on the steep rocks that fall on the river and when we begin to visualize them, we are surprised by numerous nests of Grey Heron and the impressive Black Storks. This is undoubtedly the most recognized place in Spain for bird watching, it is a spectacle without equal that does not give us time to photograph so many birds and when we think we have seen everything, suddenly a Peregrine Falcon cuts the wind and the fast rocky planes overwhelm us with their quick breaks. The Blue Rock Thrush and the Rock Bunting singing on the top of the big rocks while we observe the Black Stork nest with the chick already quite grown, it is wonderful. We continue to the Fuente del Frances where we take a short walk and get a better view of those Alpine Swift cutting the air with their whitish breasts. We succumb to our daily dose of coffee in Villareal de San Carlos to continue the route in the vicinity where, among the flowery rockroses, we discover a courting pair of Western Subalpine Warblers and shortly after another pair of Dartford Warblers, and we can appreciate the differences in their red crown and in the length of their tails, among other characteristic features of their appearance. We ate some tasty tapas typical of Extremadura in Villareal de San Carlos and followed the birding route to the Portilla del Tiétar,

stopping a little earlier to observe the striking sight of a Egyptian Vulture incubating in the nest. One feels a special sensation when you see a bird as threatened as this wise vulture, fighting to maintain the perpetuation of the species, it gives us a lot of respect for its presence. We were surprised to see more nests of Black Storks in the Portilla next to once again a large number of Griffon Vulture nests. After a while contemplating the idyllic picture of large birds in such geological folds and with all the flowers shining to the maximum, we continued until we heard the Golden Oriole, which unfortunately for the group did not show itself clearly.



© Javi Elorriaga

We had a coffee nearby and back to the hotel with plenty of time to rest and enjoy the comforts of the Hospedería and the great photo opportunities offered by the surroundings. It turned out to be a fantastic day in the heart of the Monfragüe National Park with hundreds of birds flying around and leaving us in awe.

DAY 11: SANTIAGO DEL CAMPO PUERTO DE GREDOS HOSTAL ALMANZOR

We were still missing several species of steppe birds and we had to work on seeing them, we had to insist on those native species, only present in Spain in Europe and so endangered and at the same time complex to see. So, we headed to an exclusive place that Pablo knew in the vicinity of Santiago del Campo, a jewel of a place of traditional extensive cattle raising. After a few minutes we could begin to hear the typical songs of these cryptic birds in the vicinity and our hearts, especially those of the guides were racing, to the point that Javi, looking for the Sandgrouses that Pablo had already located in the distance, found the elusive Thick-knee, and we could not believe it. We were fortunate that they were on a relatively close runway and we could get a little closer to photograph them without disturbing them while we could perceive in the same telescope image, the differences between the plumage of the Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and the Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Likewise, the Thick-knee themselves showed a nuptial courtship behavior that to the surprise of the guides was something very difficult to appreciate, especially so close and with such a good light, it was the very magical moment of the trip, indeed.



Pin-tailed Sandgrouse © Javi Elorriaga

We continued our adventure looking for Great Spotted Cuckoo and Black-winged Kite in the vicinity, but unfortunately the former did not want to be seen and the latter flew up from the road and could not be seen again in the morning. Of course, it was a good time to go for a cup of coffee at the nice Cafeteria near by the petrol station. After coffee on the roadside, we could see a group of Griffons and Cinereous Vultures very close, perched near a group of sheep. We were able to take some good pictures of them before they flew away and at the same moment a pair of the beautiful Black-eared Wheatear suddenly appeared, and we enjoyed like crazy taking fantastic pictures, being able to differentiate the plumage of male and female to perfection. Shortly after heading to the Natural Park of Gredos we were able to stop on the roadside to contemplate the bird par excellence of Spain, an Spanish Eagle in the nest. The prominence of the robust beak and its white shoulders stood out against the slender figure of the female guarding the chick in the nest. An incredible sight before continuing our journey to our last destination, Navarredonda de Gredos in Avila. During lunch we were able to taste the Tarta del Casar, perhaps the most typical cheese of Extremadura, and even take a short walk afterwards, where we could see a little better the hitherto elusive Robin. As the weather that afternoon was cold but sunny and the forecast for the next day was of possible rain, we decided to make sure to observe what is undoubtedly the star of Gredos, the Bluethroat. Of course, we were able to enjoy it and photograph it in its fullness on the top of the brume singing, showing us its brilliant blue while raising its tail. Other birds seen were the new Skylark, which Robert recognized very well, and the Northern Wheatear, again a swift young Golden Eagle flying quickly over the horizon. On the way to the Hotel we were able to stop at the roadside to photograph a beautiful Red Fox, which every time it looked at us with its piercing yellow gaze we shuddered as the light illuminated its shiny fur transitioning into summer. In addition, we were fortunate to photograph a common cuckoo that just as we were leaving said goodbye to us making its typical song, cuckoo, something that the North American loves. This village with its robust granite rock churches was full of white stork nests on the roofs, something that fortunately is still very common in Spain. With a good smile on our faces, we arrived at the Hostal de Gredos, where we were awaited by its incredible forest birdwatching hide, where the Great spotted Woodpecker and the Eurasian Jay, among others, stood out, which the visitors were able to photograph to perfection. We then got to know the excellent cuisine of the hostel with a typical beef steak from Avila, from this

mountainous region of Castilla y Leon.



Blind at Hostal Almanzor © Javi Elorriaga

DAY 12: LA PLATAFORMA, NAVARREDONDA DE GREDOS, MADRID

After a tasty breakfast and with a very cloudy and cold day we head to the Plataforma de Gredos, the place where most of the hikes in the park begin. From the parking lot itself, surrounded by powerful granite rocks and even snow in the distance, we could make an intense circular observation where the star birds stood out, the Red Rock Thrush, which even surprised us with a fascinating courtship flight, the Alpine Pipit and the Yellow Wagtail. In addition, in the distance with the telescope, we were able to observe a powerful male. We also saw a female with her small and jumping goat on a cliff. A little further down the road we had the pleasure of being able to observe another of the star birds of Gredos, the Ortolan Bunting, which showed its orange plumage in contrast with the granite rocks of Gredos. We stopped for a coffee halfway and in the parking lot itself we were delighted with the proximity of the Coal Tit and the Goldcrest, which we photographed very well. We arrived at the pine forest of Navarredonda de Gredos and looked first in the stream for the spectacular Deeper, which certainly took a while to come out, but in the end it did and gave us an excellent observation with even two specimens in the vicinity of the ruined water mill at the edge of the waterfall. Another bird that shared the waterfall was the elegant Grey Wagtail.



Birding in Gredos © Javi Elorriaga



Birding with Gredos mountains in background© Javi Elorriaga

Riding in the car we were surprised by a swift Booted Eagle hunting a small bird on the side of the van, which took us to the heart of the Silvestris Pine forest, characteristic for its orange bark that flakes off. There we could see the smallest bird in Europe, and really similar to the previously seen Goldcrest, but in this case, it is the Plain Goldcrest and lacks its red crest. We could hear the Iberian Woodpecker in the distance, but it did not respond and only a Mistle Thrush could be seen in the

calm forest, so we went back to the nice hotel for lunch. Before leaving in the beautiful garden of the hotel an incredible joy was waiting for us to say goodbye to the tour, the esteemed Crested Tit, a bird that marks the hearts of birdwatching visitors with such a crest and beautiful contrasting colors. We headed for Madrid and on the road the number of birds flying over the van was amazing in a flowery and very green landscape typical of this rainy spring like no other. The mighty medieval walls of the city of Avila and even the Roman bridges in the vicinity give the landscape a unique touch, typical of the most beautiful landscapes. We conclude the trip at the comfortable Artiem Hotel in Madrid, to say goodbye to ten visitors from the United States and Canada who return to the American continent with a lot of new species in their ebird list and of course a lot of good experiences and landscapes in their retina, during this fantastic birding tour Spain with Eagle-Eye Tours. Spain 2024 birding tour species list (eBird)