

THE START OF SPRING IN EXTREMADURA...Birds and orchids with Martin Kelsey

**(late February to early April: now almost fully booked for
2019, but taking bookings for 2020!)**

We will visit all the important habitats: open plains, dehesa, mountains, heathland, river valleys and wetlands. Depending on the spring migration, the abundance of a few of the species may vary during this period. However, by indicating which species you are particularly interested in seeing, you can be advised on the best time to visit and the itinerary will be tailor-made to focus on your interests.

Early spring is the best time of all to enjoy watching the birds of the open plains and is excellent for orchids and early butterflies, with perhaps 15-20 species possible.

We have recorded a total of 240 bird species on spring tours and in early spring depending on the precise timing and your interests, at least 130 species should be expected.

THE TOUR

Day 1

You will be met at the airport (Madrid, Lisbon or Seville). Depending on your arrival time, we will stop on the way to Casa Rural El Recuerdo for some birding, to provide an initial taste on what the region has to offer. This may be at the Arrocampo Reservoir which is en route from Madrid, where emergent vegetation provides habitat for Purple Swamphen, Penduline Tit, Savi's Warblers, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron and Little Bittern. There is a good chance of late wintering Bluethroats. One of Extremadura's top orchid spots is just a few minutes from this area.

Bird watching around the garden and lanes around Casa Rural El Recuerdo will quickly produce Hoopoe, Iberian Magpie, Red-rumped Swallow, Serin and Sardinian Warbler, whilst as night falls the sounds of Scops and Little Owls form a wonderful setting to prepare for dinner in the old wine cellar of the house.

Day 2-7

The sequence of places visited and the time spent in each will vary according to your particular interests, as well as factors like the weather. Our house is excellently situated to be within easy reach of all the different habitats and best sites, without having to do a huge amount of driving. This tour provides plenty of time to both find and enjoy the birds, as well as to get an insight into this fascinating part of Spain.

We will visit the plains near Trujillo and Cáceres to look for Great Bustards (which will be in display in early spring), as well as Little Bustards. This is the habitat too for Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, as well as Stone Curlew, and we will enjoy the wonderful mimicry of Calandra Lark song as they circle above us. We should also see Short-toed, Thekla and Crested Lark. Bee-eaters and Rollers will be present from early April, whilst Montagu's Harriers will glide with their wavering flight low over the ground. Corn Buntings and Iberian Grey Shrike will be perched on the fences along the road, as well as Spanish Sparrow, usually in noisy flocks. We should see the splendid Great Spotted Cuckoos and this habitat is also an excellent foraging area for raptors such as eagles and vultures.

The dehesa is one of the classic landscapes of Extremadura. It is a traditionally managed system, providing acorns for extensively reared pigs, shade for cattle, wood for charcoal and cork for wine bottles. It is also of huge importance for birds, being the breeding area of Black Vulture and Spanish Imperial Eagle, as well as Black Kite, Booted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Woodchat Shrike, Woodlark, Rock Sparrow. We will stop in good dehesa areas and also spend time exploring the rocky valleys and ravines of the rivers that cross the dehesa. This is where we will look for Cirl and Rock Buntings, as well as Bonelli's Eagle, Black Wheatear, Black Stork and Crag Martins.

A morning visit to an area of heathland will yield Spectacled (from late March) and Dartford Warblers, as well as Thekla Lark, Short-toed Eagle and in the nearby cork oak woodland, we should see Short-toed Treecreeper, the Iberian race of Long-tailed Tit and Hawfinch.

We will pay a visit to an area of irrigated rice fields, where depending on the water level, we may find migrant waders, as well as Cattle and Little Egrets, Zitting Cisticolas and Tree Sparrows, and the introduced Red Avadavats and Common Waxbills. Cetti's Warblers will sing from the wooded river banks. This is a good area for that sought-after species the Black-winged Kite. Some wintering Common Cranes remain in the area until early March.

At least one whole day will be spent in the amazing Monfragüe Natural Park, home to a large breeding population of Black Vulture, several colonies of Griffon Vulture, as well as Egyptian Vulture, Golden, Bonelli's, Spanish Imperial, Booted and Short-toed Eagles. We will have the opportunity of seeing breeding Black Storks, Blue Rock Thrush and Alpine Swift. The park holds some of the best conserved Mediterranean woodland in Spain, home to warblers like Subalpine. With luck we may even see Eagle Owl too.

We can also visit areas in the centre of Extremadura which are outstanding for orchids and also for birds such as Black Wheatear.

No visit to the heart of Extremadura would be complete without a visit to Trujillo, our local town. Not only is the town square one of the most beautiful places in Spain to enjoy a drink at one of the pavement cafes, it is also an excellent place to watch Lesser Kestrel, Pallid Swift, Common Swift and White Stork at one's leisure! We can walk up to the old castle and take in the breathtaking views of the plains and dehesa, whilst keeping an eye open for passing raptors.

Day 8

Return transfer to the airport, with a stop on route (time permitting) to savour for one last moment the joy of birding in Extremadura.

Price

8 day/7 night itinerary ground price 1420 euros per person (based on two or more people). Please contact us for the price for a single person tour or for tours of shorter or longer duration.

Price excludes flights, insurance, extra drinks, entrance fees to historic monuments (optional to itinerary) and other items of a personal nature. All other holiday expenses are fully inclusive: full board, wine with dinner, transport, guide fees, trip report and taxes. There are no hidden extras.

Accommodation

You will stay at our house, which has six guest rooms with either double or twin beds. All rooms have en suite bathrooms. Lunches will be picnics.

Transport

Transport is by Land Rover (with the airport transfer by Citroen Berlingo). Walks are short and easy. We will enjoy spending time at vantage points for passing birds of prey.

What to bring

The weather in spring will be variable, with warm sunny days, but still the chance of rainy periods. The evenings and early mornings in early spring can be chilly. Suncream and a hat are advisable.

Other interests

Please let us know whether you would like to include into the itinerary visits to historic monuments such as Roman sites in Mérida and near Cáceres, the monastery of Guadalupe.

For further details

Email: info@birdingextremadura.com