

Spain – Aragon & Catalonia

Cranes, Lammergeiers & Wallcreepers

Saturday 11 February – Saturday 18 February 2017

Leader: Steve West

Saturday 04 November – Saturday 11 November 2017

Leader: Steve West

2017 Cost: **£1,799** single room supplement **£100**

Saturday 10 February – Saturday 17 February 2018

Leader: Steve West

2018 Cost: **£1,899** single room supplement **£100**



Spain in the colder months can be magical as this time of the year sees the gathering of thousands of Common Cranes at their single most important stopover site in Western Europe. These birds breed in the swamps and marshes of Scandinavia, Finland and Russia. Some stop over on their annual migration, which will take them between their breeding grounds and the dehesas of Extremadura, while others will stay around Gallocanta to benefit from the safe haven provided by the lagoon and the food available in the surrounding fields. We shall be treated to one of the world's great spectacles as these birds fly in large flocks overhead, trumpeting as they go. Spain can also offer some other superb specialities in the colder months, as Wallcreepers descend from their high mountain breeding areas to winter at lower levels. Spain's mountains can also tempt us with Bonelli's Eagle, Lammergeier, Alpine Accentor and Citril Finch. Moreover, this itinerary has other surprises in store, as we visit the grasslands and plains to spot both Little and Great Bustards and Black Wheatear, and the Ebro Delta for Audouin's and Slender-billed Gulls, Glossy Ibis, Greater Flamingo, Bluethroat and many other wetland species. We stay at three very comfortable and well-located hotels. This tour is packed with some great birds and some little-visited locations and our local guide Steve West will make sure you have a memorable and bird-filled holiday, so why not visit Catalonia and Aragon and enjoy Spain in the winter.

ITINERARY

Days 1 to 3

We leave London, or regional airports, on a flight to Barcelona, arriving around midday. We meet up with Steve West and drive out towards the plains near Lleida where we can begin our birding. Among the birds we can look for are species such as Little Bustard, Northern Goshawk, Penduline Tit, Hen Harrier, Black-winged Kite, Iberian Green Woodpecker (sharpei race), Calandra Lark and White Stork. We then continue our drive towards

the mountains and to Bierge in the Sierra de Guara, where we stay for three nights. This eye-opening mountain range is a large Natural Park and has a couple of very special birds that most of us will be very keen to see – Wallcreeper and Lammergeier. We visit a number of sites where both of these emblematic species are regularly encountered, and at close quarters at this time of the year. Over the next two days we can bird along the mountain roads and valleys, exploring tracks and streams for the local birdlife. The mountain scenery will be spectacular and we should be able

to see Alpine Accentor, Black Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Thekla Lark, Common Rock Sparrow, Rock Bunting, Cirl Bunting, Hawfinch, Firecrest, Dartford and Sardinian Warblers and Crested Tit. Another option for the last day in this area is to drive into the Pyrenees proper to look for species such as Citril Finch, Black Woodpecker, White-throated Dipper and Alpine Chough.

Days 4 & 5

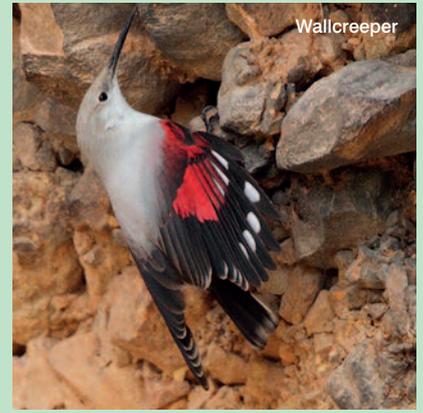
Today we transfer to Daroca for a stay of two nights. The shortest route between two points is a

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse





Common Cranes



Wallcreeper

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Fly to Barcelona and transfer to Bierge
- Days 2-3** Bierge
- Days 4-5** Daroca
- Days 6-7** Ebro Delta
- Day 8** Depart Barcelona

Party Size

Maximum of seven clients.

Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms with private facilities.

Transport

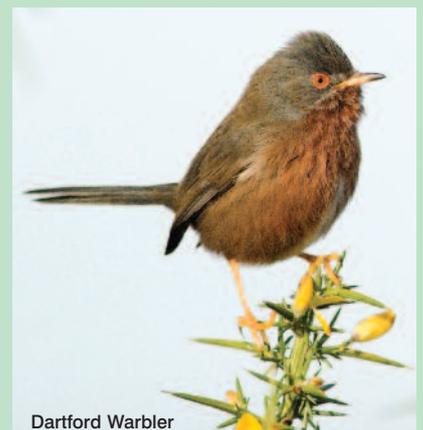
By minibus driven by the leader.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leader, VAT, airport taxes and tips.

Gradings

- Good
- 140
- Cool
- Low
- Normal
- Relaxed
- Good
- Moderate
- Scheduled



Dartford Warbler

straight line, but “short” is not the best option if you are a birder! We will choose our route and timing to give us the best options of enjoying a wide variety of interesting birds, which could include the likes of Great Bustard, Golden Eagle, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, and Calandra, Thekla, Crested and Lesser Short-toed Larks. We should also encounter additional species like Iberian Grey Shrike and Little Owl. Our route is likely to take us past the locality of Belchite where, among its bombed out ruins (from the Spanish Civil War), we can spot birds such as Crag Martin, Blue Rock Thrush, Serin, Black Redstart and others. If time permits we can visit a nearby secluded gorge, where the Spanish Ibx roam and where a further selection of interesting birds awaits. The next day we can visit the Gallocanta area and look for the large flocks of Common Cranes, and it would take a hard-hearted naturalist not to be thrilled by the sights and sounds of flock after sonorous flock flying overhead to and from the lagoon, and etching their slender silhouette on the skyline above the high plateau. The lagoon of Gallocanta itself doesn’t always contain much water, but when it does it is home to a variety of ducks and waders, which may include Black-necked Grebe, Ruff and Kentish Plover. The surrounding open steppe-type farmland holds a regular population of Calandra and Crested Larks and numbers of Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Raptors are often noteworthy, and in the course of a day it would not be unusual to see species such as Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier, Eurasian Griffon Vulture, Merlin, Western Marsh Harrier and Red Kite. The afternoon is usually spent visiting a secluded and picturesque gorge, inhabited by Rock Buntings and Red-billed Choughs, and then to finish the day a late return

visit to Gallocanta is highly recommended, to witness one of the spectacles of nature, as thousands of Common Cranes descend in noisy formations on their roosting spot in the lagoon.

Days 6 & 7

We take leave of Daroca and make our way to our hotel in the Ebro Delta, where we stay for two nights. The choice of route is open to us although one of the most interesting options would be to seek out the rather secretive Bonelli’s Eagle in one of its placid and scenic mountain haunts before reaching our final destination. We spend our last full day of birding in the rice fields, reed beds, lagoons and sandy shores of the Ebro Delta, where we can hope to see Common Kingfisher, Eurasian Penduline Tit, Cetti’s Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Moustached Warbler, Bluethroat, Kentish Plover, Audouin’s Gull, Slender-billed Gull, Greater Flamingo, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill and lots of waders and ducks.

Day 8

We leave the Ebro Delta after some final birding and then make our way back to Barcelona. If we have time we can visit the small reserve of the Llobregat Delta close to the airport. This reserve of lagoons and tamarisk bushes has excellent hides where we could find a good array of wetland species to complement those seen in the Ebro Delta. Alternatively, we could make a rapid incursion into the Garraf massif to search for more raptors or songbirds, and commanding views over the Barcelona coastline – time will tell which option prevails before our transfer to the airport for our flight back to London or regional airports.