

Spain – Coto Doñana & Extremadura

Spring Tour

Wednesday 05 April – Wednesday 12 April 2017

Leader: Steve West

2017 Cost: **£1,749** single room supplement **£100**

Wednesday 04 April – Wednesday 11 April 2018

Leader: Steve West

2018 Cost: **£1,799** single room supplement **£100**



This tour allows us to explore these two rich and contrasting areas. The Coto Doñana is justifiably famous as one of the major wetlands in Europe. The area around Matalascañas, El Rocío and Almonte is a superb complex of open water, reed bed, sand dune and mixed woodland which allows a highly diverse range of species to survive here. Spanish Imperial Eagle, Purple Swamphen, Marbled Duck (now scarce), Azure-winged Magpie and Red-necked Nightjar all breed in this area, and the whole region acts as a staging post for an enormous number of migrant waders and passerines on their journey northwards at this time of year. Extremadura holds one of Spain's most interesting national parks - Monfragüe. It is one of the best sites for seeing Eurasian Black Vulture and Black Stork. The grasslands of this region are threatened by modern agricultural methods, but large areas still remain untouched and we shall be able to enjoy views of both Great and Little Bustards and with luck both Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. Ornitholidays possesses unrivalled experience in these areas of Spain and we have been running tours here since the 1960s.

Rock Bunting



ITINERARY

Days 1 to 4

In the morning we fly from London to Madrid. We pick up our minibuses and drive to our hotel on the edge of the National Park of Monfragüe, where we stay for four nights.

Uppermost on our list of priorities will be a visit to the National Park, where the rocky, scrub-covered slopes and steep river valleys allow rich hunting for a few pairs of Spanish Imperial as well as Golden Eagles, and the cliffs hold nests of Black Stork. The rocky crag of Penfalcón will allow us to watch squadrons of Eurasian Griffon Vultures (interspersed with the smaller Egyptian and the larger Eurasian Black) patrolling the skies. Further on, El Portillo del Tiétar is a well-known spot for the powerful Eurasian Eagle Owl, nesting pairs of Black Stork, and rock-loving birds such as Blue Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting. The whole park is a superlative site for raptors and, if the weather conditions are right, it is possible to see all five Spanish eagles in a single day – Spanish Imperial, Golden, Booted, Short-toed and Bonelli's!

The beautiful town square of Trujillo still looks much as it must have done when the Conquistadors built their palaces here. Lesser Kestrel soar overhead and White Storks attend their rooftop nests and small numbers of Pallid Swift mingle with the more abundant Common Swift. Trujillo is also well located for exploring the surrounding grasslands and mountain ridges, as well as the Cork Oak dehesa, which is lightly wooded, savannah-like country. This is the habitat where we should find Great Spotted Cuckoo, Spanish Sparrow, Woodchat Shrike, Azure-winged Magpie and Western Orphean Warbler, among others.

To the east and west of Trujillo lies the more open steppe, where we hope to see Great Bustard displaying, looking not unlike a pile of snow on sticks! Little Bustard will also be in breeding plumage and in addition there are Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Stone Curlew and European Roller. Montagu's Harrier patrol the cultivated fields, Red-rumped Swallow hawk the insects, and White Stork are everywhere -



White-headed Duck

feeding on the steppe, following ploughs, nesting on trees, farmhouses and pylons.

Although bird-rich wetlands are few and far between in Extremadura there is in fact one within easy reach of our hotel. A mixture of reed-fringed wetland, with hides, grazing land and cultivated fields offer a number of interesting species, not least of which is Black-winged Kite. Other species regularly encountered here include Great Spotted Cuckoo, Lesser Kestrel, Savi's Warbler, Common Kingfisher, Great Reed Warbler and Little Bittern. En-route we will also search areas where in the past we have seen Hawfinch and Dartford Warbler.

Days 5 to 7

After breakfast we begin the drive southwards to our hotel in Villamanrique de la Condesa for a stay of three nights.

We eagerly begin our exploration of the marshes, dunes and woodlands encompassed by the Coto Doñana. The 'Wild West' town of El Rocío, with its white buildings and church, which houses the famous "Madonna of the Marshes", makes an amazing backdrop to the marismas. The marshes here, and the varied habitats of El Rocina, teem with birds – European Spoonbill, herons and egrets fly over the reed beds and Western Marsh Harrier teeter on up-turned wings, looking for ducklings to feed to their growing young. In the shallow water, Greater Flamingo and White Stork feed, surrounded by passage waders, many of which will be in their summer breeding dress. Whiskered Terns hawk over open water, swooping down to the surface to pick off a small insect or tiny fish, and Savi's Warbler reel from great swards of juncus rush. In the more wooded areas, European Serin and Common Nightingale seem never to stop singing and European Bee-eaters glide overhead, uttering their liquid evocative calls.

Some time could be well spent in the series of hides at the Acebuche Centre which overlooks another area of marsh, where Purple Swamphen can often be seen and Little Bittern occasionally

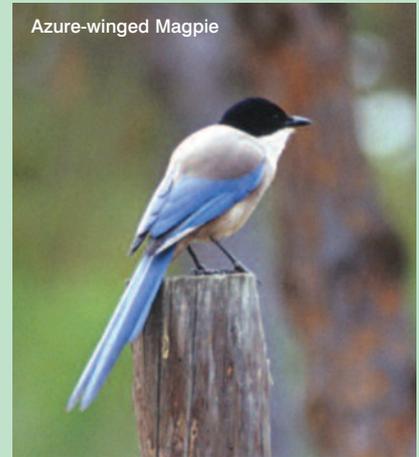
take a brief flight across to another patch of reeds. Marbled Duck are now very rare breeders in this area and they skulk in these overgrown waterways, and male Red-crested Pochard display to drabber females on the open water. We shall also search the sandy scrub areas for Dartford and Melodious Warblers and keep looking up for Black and Red Kites and Booted Eagle. On the larger lakes there will be flocks of pink Greater Flamingos, and we can scan the groups of Common Coots for the occasional Crested. In the scrub we shall hear the rattling calls of Sardinian Warbler and hopefully see one of the black masked males perched in a bush. Overhead will be large numbers of migrant swallows and martins heading northwards.

A whole day will be spent exploring what is known as the 'pre-park' zone to the north of the National Park. We will aim to reach the remote visitor centre Jose Antonio Valverde at Cerrado Garrida by lunch where we would hope to find a wide range of waterfowl. The journey there and back will provide an opportunity to compare four lark species - Crested and Thekla, Greater Short-toed and Lesser Short-toed. We would also hope to find Crested Coot, a range of waders (including Collared Pratincole) as well as Spectacled Warbler. One evening at dusk or as a pre-breakfast walk we will go in search of Red-necked Nightjar.

High on our list of priorities will be a visit to the area on the other side of the River Guadalquivir, the Bonanza salt pans and surrounding pools and marshes. In past visits this has proved to be a wonderfully bird-rich area, with the salt pans buzzing with a great variety of waders and terns, and large numbers of the elegant Slender-billed Gull. In nearby areas we have further chances of observing White-headed Duck and Crested Coot if we haven't been lucky with our previous attempts in the Doñana marshes

Day 8

After some further birding in the area, we transfer to Seville where we catch the flight back to London.



Azure-winged Magpie

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Fly to Madrid and transfer to Torrejón el Rubio
- Days 2-4** Torrejón el Rubio
- Days 5-7** Villamanrique de la Condesa
- Day 8** Depart Seville

Party Size

Maximum of seven clients.

Accommodation

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

Transport

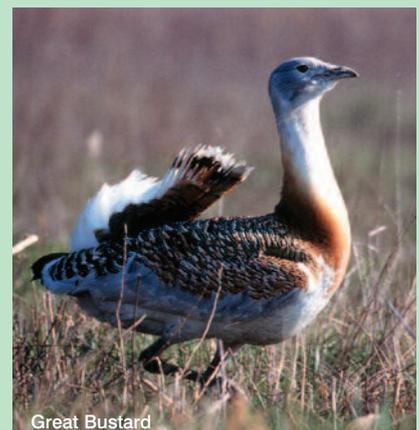
By minibus driven by the leader.

Includes

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

Gradings

- Good
- 170
- Warm
- Low
- Normal
- Moderate
- Good
- Easy
- Scheduled



Great Bustard