

Spain – Tarifa & Southern Andalucía

Autumn Migration

Wednesday 13 September – Wednesday 20 September 2017

Leader: Steve West

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



A visit to Southern Spain in autumn provides the opportunity to witness many birds moving south to their wintering grounds in Africa. We have put together a two-centre tour, where we should see some great visible migration at Tarifa, and then on to the surrounds of Fuente de Piedra, an interesting area with much added interest in terms of birds, including White-headed Duck, Red-crested Pochard, Greater Flamingo, Azure-winged Magpie and Black Wheatear, plus Spanish Ibex and striking scenery.

Geographically, Tarifa lies at the southern-most tip of Europe, with the African coast visible just over 10 miles away. This small town with Moorish architecture has been a strategic military viewpoint for hundreds of years. Nowadays, in the autumn, this area becomes the focus of attention for literally tens of thousands of storks, herons, bee-eaters and birds of prey making their way from their northern breeding areas to their winter quarters in Africa. This tip of the Iberian Peninsula gives them the shortest over-sea crossing to Morocco and, given the right wind and climatic conditions, the visible migration on the hillsides above Tarifa can be awesome. It is estimated that perhaps 700,000 large soaring birds (raptors and storks) use this crossing point each autumn. For the second part of the holiday we drive to the northeast of the province of Malaga for a new twist to this tour. The area around the town of Fuente de Piedra is bird-rich and scenically varied and well warrants our attention. The lagoon of the same name, six kilometres long and three kilometres wide, is the largest natural lagoon in Spain and home to a large breeding population of Greater Flamingo. On smaller, less saline lakes nearby there are usually good numbers of Red-crested Pochard and the rare White-headed Duck. We'll also seek out interesting birds such as the Azure-winged Magpie along river gorges and the surrounding countryside, and search spectacular karst formations for the likes of Black Wheatear, Rock Bunting and the Spanish Ibex.

Throughout the holiday you will have the expertise of Steve West who has been studying the bird life in Spain since he took up residence there, more than 20 years ago and has led many Ornitholidays' tours over the last few years.

ITINERARY

Days 1 to 5

We take a morning flight from London (or regional airports) to Malaga and then make the two hour drive to Tarifa and check into our hotel, where we stay for the next five nights. During our time here we can visit some of the migration watch-points on the hills above Tarifa. The southern migration is very dependent on wind direction. The two winds that tend to dominate here are the Poniente, a warm dry westerly wind and the Levante which is an easterly wind. These two winds produce cross-winds for the birds wishing to move south, so depending on which

direction the wind is blowing from may determine where the birds will try to depart from on their crossing. We hope to witness some large departing flocks of White Storks which have bred in Europe. Over 110,000 have made this crossing in recent years and they make an impressive sight as they gain height on a thermal and pass southwards. Without a doubt we shall also find some small flocks feeding in local fields. There should also be a few Black Storks making the migration as well.

Birds of prey are the most exciting species to look for and we can hope for some impressive numbers of European Honey Buzzards as this

should be their peak period for migration – often over 5,000 birds can move in a single day. Eurasian Griffon Vultures are common in southern Spain and they have been joined recently by a few Rüppell's Vultures from sub-Saharan Africa. We shall make sure we check all vultures for this rare visitor. Their smaller cousins, the Egyptian Vulture can also be seen at this time of year. Short-toed and Booted Eagles and Black Kites will also be obvious, and we can hone our identification skills as the birds pass overhead. Smaller birds of prey include Common and Lesser Kestrels, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Eurasian Hobby. We can also hope to see Osprey, Montagu's and Western Marsh Harriers,



White Storks

Eurasian Griffon Vulture



Squacco Heron

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Fly to Malaga and transfer to Tarifa
- Days 2-5** Tarifa
- Days 6-7** Martín de la Jara
- Day 8** Depart Malaga

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
-  Warm
-  Low
-  Normal
-  Relaxed
-  Good
-  Easy
-  Scheduled



Booted Eagle

Peregrine Falcon, Common Buzzard and maybe some scarcer species such as Northern Goshawk, Long-legged Buzzard, Black-winged Kite or perhaps an Eleonora's Falcon or two.

It is not only storks and raptors that are on the move at this time of year. Large numbers of colourful European Bee-eaters stream southwards, along with thousands of Barn and Red-rumped Swallows, Yellow Wagtails and Northern Wheatears. We can also search for some of the smaller migrants which occur in the area, as well as some of the resident species. We would hope to see Eurasian Crag Martin, Iberian Chiffchaff, European Serin, Sardinian Warbler, Thekla Lark, Common Quail, Woodchat Shrike, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, Common and Black Redstarts, Eurasian Hoopoe, Hawfinch, Crested Tit, Cirl Bunting, Blue Rock Thrush and Short-toed Treecreeper.

From Tarifa we can take a boat trip out into the Straits of Gibraltar to look for dolphins and seabirds. We may find Common, Striped and Bottle-nosed Dolphins and the local pod of Long-finned Pilot Whales. We should also find the larger Scopoli's (Cory's) Shearwater as well as the smaller Balearic Shearwater, plus some Northern Gannets and perhaps Arctic Skua.

La Janda was once a vast lagoon before it was drained for agriculture. However, its patchwork of ditches, channels, rough pastures and ricefields still manages to retain much of interest for the visiting birdwatcher. Recent visits here have shown it to be an excellent site for raptors, including Montagu's Harrier, Black-winged Kite, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle and Lesser Kestrel, in addition to a variable selection of wetland and farmland birds. A short drive away from La Janda is a well-known site for the endangered Bald Ibis, now successfully breeding in the region after reintroduction of captive birds, mostly from Jerez zoo.

We will dedicate one full day to exploring the area to the north of Cadiz, and the fringes of the Doñana Natural Park. The Bonanza salt pans are a great attraction for large numbers of waders, such as Pied Avocet, Kentish Plover, Little Stint and more. Here we also hope to see Slender-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, Osprey and an almost non-stop

parade of bird life that will keep us occupied for hours! We can also explore nearby pools for White-headed and Marbled Ducks, as well as a variety of herons and egrets. The rest of the day can be taken up by visiting a coastal site to look for the very localized Little Swift and also a small park where previously we have seen Mediterranean Chameleon and Spanish Pond Turtle.

Days 6 & 7

After breakfast we depart for the mountains and the unique and spectacular setting of Ronda. After a stop here to breathe in some of the atmosphere we head northwards to try our luck at spotting some of the small population of Great Bustard which still inhabits Andalusia, before driving the final stretch to our rural hotel and the last birding of the day.

We spend the last day exploring the variety of different settings and bird communities that this area has to offer. The Fuente de Piedra lagoon usually has little water until the autumn or winter rains arrive, nevertheless flocks of Greater Flamingos still crowd in the remaining patches of water, where we may observe other species such as Pied Avocet and Common Shelduck. Smaller freshwater lakes nearby often hold important populations of White-headed Duck and Red-crested Pochard, and offer the chance of seeing ducks, herons and raptors associated with this kind of habitat.

Then we turn our attention to the abrupt limestone mountains and secluded river gorges to look for an array of birds, some of which could be new for the tour. The list of possible species includes Black Wheatear, Common Rock Sparrow, Rock Bunting, Red-billed Chough, Dartford Warbler and Blue Rock Thrush, while Spanish Ibex lead the mammal interest. Elsewhere we may still have time to seek out Azure-winged Magpie if we haven't seen it already, before returning to our hotel.

Day 8

It is only an hour's drive that separates our hotel from Malaga Airport, so depending on the flight time we can have a relaxed breakfast and take the scenic route to Malaga via some delightful mountain scenery and hopefully a bird or two before catching our flight to London (or regional airports).