

Flyway of the Mediterranean

Bird-watching in Southern Spain

Monitor Europe's most impressive bird migration on this week-long, expert-led birding itinerary to Andalusia, visiting Tarifa Island, Rio Guadalhorce Nature Reserve, and Donana National Park.



The Strait of Gibraltar, where the Mediterranean Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean, is the setting for one of Europe and Africa's most spectacular bird migrations. Every autumn, large numbers of raptors make the journey across the Strait and into north Africa, turning this southernmost tip of Europe into a birdwatcher's paradise. Among the many species that take part in this migration are booted and short-toed eagles, black kite, Egyptian vulture, sparrowhawk, European honey-buzzard, osprey, Montagu's and marsh harrier, hobby and lower kestrel.

On this week-long birding safari, you'll track the migration in the company of an expert ornithologist, as you explore the southern coast of Spain, including Tarifa Island, Rio Guadalhorce Nature Reserve, and Donana National Park. In addition to the excellent raptor viewing, the tour will also offer sightings of a great many Mediterranean birds, with a special focus on water birds and waders, as you discover the coastal and wetland regions near Tarifa. Other wildlife encounters can also be expected, as you explore Donana National Park and enjoy whale-watching off the coast of Tarifa Island. And of course you'll also find time to learn about the fascinating history of the region, as you tour the Roman archaeological remains at Baelo Claudia and the amazing city of Ronda, with its dramatic location atop El Tajo Gorge.

This is a small group tour departing at fixed dates and accommodating a maximum of 9 guests. It can also be arranged as a private tour.

Day 1: Malaga – Guadalhorce Nature Reserve – Tarifa

On arrival in Malaga this morning, you will be met by your guide and the other members of your group for the short drive to Guadalhorce Nature Reserve, where your bird watching adventure begins.



Guadalhorce is a small reserve approx. 67 hectares in size, yet it attracts over 250 varieties of bird. Its rich wetlands provide an excellent opportunity to observe Mediterranean birds such as the European bee-eater, Whiskered tern, Iberian yellow wagtail, Spotless starling, red-rumped swallow, zitting cisticola, European serin, Sardinian warbler and booted eagles. You can also expect to see many waders and water birds, including flamingo, spoonbill, ibis, Caspian tern, Kentish plover, and black stork, to name but a few. The unique combination of river and sea water provides the ideal environment for waterfowl and seabirds, while the estuary's dense reedbeds provide a habitat for flat fish, eels and chameleons. Mammals and reptiles found here include foxes, weasels, otters, snakes and rabbits. The vegetation is a mix of poplars, willows, eucalyptus, tamarisks and giant reeds.

You'll spend part of the morning and early afternoon exploring Guadalhorce with your guide, stopping to rest at one of the migration observatories for a picnic lunch, before continuing south to Tarifa, where you check-in at the very comfortable Mesón de Sancho Hotel for the next five nights (full-board basis).

Meson de Sancho is located just south of Los Alcornocales Nature Reserve. It is a small hotel with 40 ensuite rooms, a restaurant and bar, terrace, gardens and swimming pool.



Day 2: Los Lances and La Janda

After breakfast, your guide will take you 7km north of Tarifa to the wide sandy beach of Los Lances, which is backed by low lying sand dunes which form part of a national park. The observatory here overlooks the coastal lagoon, providing views of the dunes, beach and salt



meadows. Expect to see some or all of the following – Kentish plovers and terns, Audouin’s and Mediterranean gulls, passerines including Zitting cisticola, Corn bunting, yellow wagtail and tawny pipit. Afterwards, continue to the raptor observatories in the Tarifa area, checking local raptor counters to ensure the best spot to view their movement. Sightings of Black kite, Egyptian vulture, short-toed and botted eagle, march and Montagu’s harrier, and Eurasian sparrowhawk are likely.

Enjoy a picnic lunch before continuing to La Janda wetland, which encompasses a diversity of habitats from pastureland to marshes. Here you can expect to see various waterbirds and raptors, as well as large communities of passerines. This is also one of the best places to observe Bonelli’s eagle and the Spanish imperial eagle.

Late afternoon, return to Meson de Sancho for dinner and overnight.

Day 3: Tarifa Island and Sierra de la Plata

Today your guide will take you to visit the southernmost point in Europe, at the southern tip of Tarifa Island, which is home to a large colony of yellow-legged gulls. Time spent sea-watching here will reveal Scopoli’s and Balearic shearwater, northern gannets, and great & parasitic skua. Continue on to the migration observatories to watch for raptors.

Later this morning, you’ll explore El Estrecho (the Strait) Natural Park, the southernmost national park in Europe. El Estrecho has several ecosystems, including vast cork forests. The high cliffs of the park are home to the endangered Egyptian vulture and a large colony of Griffon vultures, as well as Blue rock thrush, Thekla’s lark, Ruppel’s griffon and Cirl bunting.



After a picnic lunch in El Estrecho, you’ll continue to beautiful Bolonia and Sierra de La Plata, where you can enjoy views across the Strait into north Africa. Here are also found the majestic ruins of the once prosperous Roman city of Baelo Claudia which flourished during the reign of Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) until it was largely destroyed by an earthquake in the 2nd century. Late afternoon, return to Meson de Sancho for dinner and overnight.



Day 4: Full day in Donana National Park

After an early breakfast, set off with your guide for the 1¾ hour drive to Donana, a UNESCO world heritage site and Spain's most impressive national park.

Your focus as you explore Donana will be on the region east of the Guadalquivir River, which comprises one of Europe's largest wetland areas. This region is massively rich in birdlife and encompasses a mix of wild and cultivated land, including lagoons, meadows, salt works, vineyards and fish farms. Expect to see numerous waders (around 20 species reside here), flamingos, little and Caspian terns, lesser short-toed larks, western swamphens and slender-billed gulls. Donana is also the location of the only breeding colony of little swift in Europe.

Late afternoon, return to Meson de Sancho for dinner and overnight.

Day 5: Barbate marshes, northern Bald Ibis and Whale Watching

This morning will see you explore one of Spain's best preserved coastal areas, the Barbate Marshes. Here are found high cliffs (up to 100 metres), salt marshes, freshwater lakes and pine forests. The marshes are home to the very rare northern bald ibis, which has been re-introduced to Spain in an effort to increase the population (outside of Spain, there are only limited numbers of northern bald ibis in Morocco and Turkey). Other species found here include a colony of greater flamingo, yellow-legged gulls, peregrine falcon, stone curlew, great white egret, tawny pipit, greater short-toed lark and jackdaw. This is also a good spot to observe migrating passerines.



After a picnic lunch, return to Tarifa, where this afternoon you'll enjoy a change of pace as you embark on a whale watching boat ride on the Strait of Gibraltar. During the autumn, it's possible to see long-finned pilot whales and migratory species including fin and sperm whale. Dolphins can also be sighted, including common, bottlenose and striped, as can orca, with the Strait of Gibraltar home to one of the last remaining pods of orcas in western Europe. Orcas are usually

spotted in summer as they chase tuna which have just spawned in the Mediterranean, though can still be seen as late as mid-September.



Following the boat ride, return to Meson de Sancho for dinner and overnight.

Day 6: Grazalema and Ronda

This morning you'll say goodbye to your hosts at Meson de Sancho and journey up into the mountains of Cádiz and Málaga province. This is a very different landscape, where the limestone outcrops create spectacular scenery. En route you'll pass several of the white towns ("pueblos blancos") typical of the region, including the picturesque Grazalema.

The birding is of course excellent, with likely sightings including black wheatear, rock bunting and rock sparrow. Raptors which may be found here include griffon vulture, golden eagle and Bonelli's eagle. The area is also home to the Spanish ibex.

In the afternoon, you'll continue to the historical city of Ronda, the largest of Spain's white towns, dramatically located on El Tajo gorge 750 metres above sea level. Ronda's setting, and the views it offers across the surrounding mountains, is simply spectacular. Bird species to be found here include Alpine swift, crag martin, and red-billed chough.



Dinner and overnight in Ronda at the Hotel Maestranza. The Maestranza is a charming hotel situated in the historic heart of Ronda, a 5-minute walk from the famous Puente Nuevo bridge and gorge. The Maestranza offers 64 air conditioned and en-suite rooms. There is free wi-fi in the common areas, a restaurant and coffee bar.

Day 7: Lagunas de Campillos Natural Reserve – Malaga Airport

Breakfast and drive to the Lagunas de Campillos Natural Reserve. This small reserve centres on five seasonal saltwater lakes, which are home to the largest colony of flamingos in Spain. The vegetation is composed of salt cedars, sedge, reeds and rosebays, which have adapted and flourish in the saline soil. In addition to flamingos, there are good numbers of water birds, waders and passing passerines. Other species include western olivaceous warbler and Iberian grey shrike.



After a morning spent exploring the reserve, continue to Malaga Airport (approx. 1½ hours' drive) to catch your homeward flight/onward connections.

Price Guide:

The cost to join this scheduled small group departure is **£1,470 per person**. For upcoming departure dates, please [contact us](#). The single supplement is £300.

This itinerary can also be organised on a private basis for groups of 2 or more. For more detail, including rates, please [contact us](#).

Includes:

- Accommodation as specified
- All meals (picnic lunches)
- Services of an expert birding guide throughout your trip
- Shared airport transfers at itinerary start and finish

Excludes:

- International flights – please ask us to quote
- Travel insurance
- Items of a personal nature
- Tips
- Drinks with meals
- Single supplement