

EXTREMADURA....MORE THAN BIRDS with Martin Kelsey

(Late May to early July: in 2019 availability from mid-June only, now taking bookings for 2020!)

Extremadura is one of Europe's top birding destinations, but also offers the visitor an incredible wealth of other wildlife experiences. Late spring and early summer is an ideal time to combine birding with butterflies and dragonflies. There are over 120 species of butterflies and 55 species of dragonflies occurring in the region and we should be able to see at least half of these during a week's private tour. About 20% of the dragonfly fauna are species of African-origin and therefore of particular interest. Birds, especially late spring specialities and mountain-breeding species can also be expected, with the first signs of autumn passage from the start of June.

We will visit all the important habitats: open plains, dehesa, mountains, heathland, river valleys and wetlands, but the focus will be on water courses, deciduous woodland and mountain meadows. 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.

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 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 several interesting dragonflies, such as Long Skimmer and Northern Banded Groundling. It is also excellent for birds in late spring with Purple Swamphen, Penduline Tit, Savi's and Great Reed Warblers, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron and Little Bittern.

Around the garden and lanes around Casa Rural El Recuerdo birds will include Hoopoe, Bee-eaters, Golden Oriole, Iberian Magpie, Red-rumped Swallow, Serin, Sardinian and Melodious Warblers, whilst as night falls the sounds of Scops and Little Owls, Nightingale and Red-necked Nightjar, 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. This tour provides plenty of time to both find and enjoy nature, as well as to get an insight into this fascinating part of Spain.

The open plains are one of the first habitats to show the change from spring to summer, with the vegetation blonded in the drying conditions. However, late flowering plants attract large numbers of butterflies, including False Ilex Hairstreaks and Knapweed Fritillaries. The deep river valleys provide good opportunities of finding dragonflies like Violet Dropwing and Epaulet Skimmer. First thing in the morning we will look for Great Bustards, Little Bustards, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse. It is great habitat for hunting raptors such as eagles (five species could be seen in one day here).

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, Alpine Swift and White-rumped Swift. It is an excellent site for butterflies, including the amazing Two-tailed Pasha, Spanish Purple Hairstreak and Nettle-tree Butterfly.

We will pay a visit to the centre of Extremadura, an area of more intensive agriculture where we will look for dragonflies such as Faded Pincertail and Orange-winged Dropwing. Birds such as Rufous Bush Robin, Isabelline Warbler and Black Wheatear are also possibilities. Beside the River Guadiana in Extremadura's capital, Mérida, more dragonflies and damselflies are on offer, as well as butterflies such as African Grass Blue.

The two regions with the highest diversity of both dragonflies and butterflies are the spectacular Villuercas Mountains and the massive Gredos Mountains. We will spend at least a day in each of these areas. Here the deciduous woodlands and flower-filled clearings are extraordinary for butterflies, such as various species of fritillary, blues, coppers and skippers. The mountain streams are excellent for dragonflies such as pincertails and demoiselles. These woodlands hold good populations of birds like Western Bonelli's Warbler, Golden Oriole and Honey Buzzard. On the broom moorlands on the Gredos are breeding Ortolan Bunting, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and Bluethroat.

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 watching nature 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. Depending on your particular interests, we might spend one or two nights in a hotel in the Gredos Mountains.

Transport

Transport is by Land Rover (with the airport transfer by Citroen Berlingo). Walks are short and easy. Journeys to the Gredos Mountains may be done in the Berlingo because of the distances covered.

What to bring

The weather in late spring and early summer will be settled, with warm sunny days, sometimes hot, with little likelihood of rain. Suncream and a hat are strongly advisable. There is little problem with biting insects, but you may wish to bring repellent.

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 nearby Cáceres, the monastery of Guadalupe.

For further details

Email: info@birdingextremadura.com