Spain

Best of Birding



Bearded Reedling by Clayton Burne

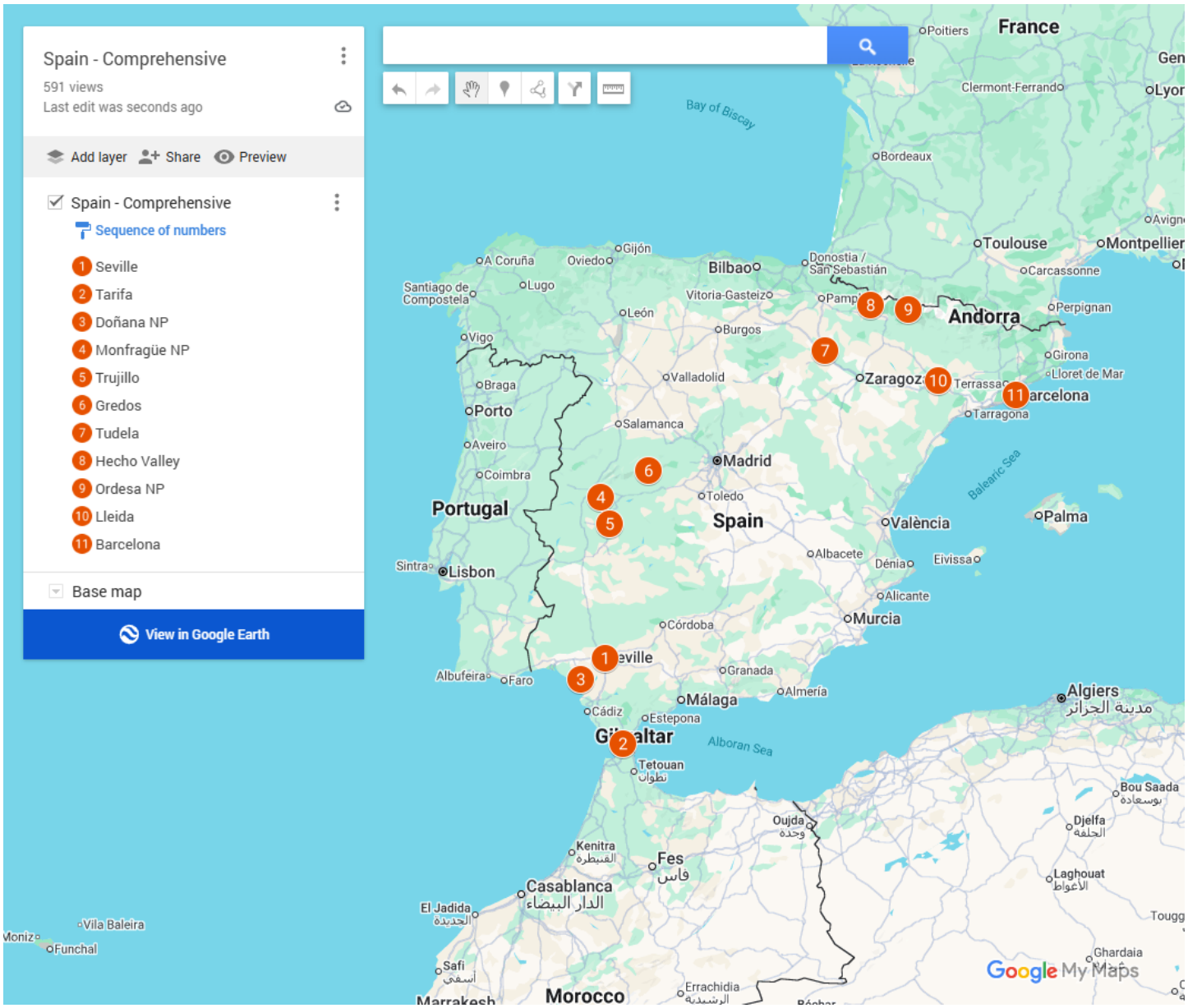
Spain is one of Europe's premier birding destinations, a country where vast steppes, rugged mountain ranges, ancient cork-oak dehesas, and internationally renowned wetlands combine to create an extraordinary diversity of habitats and birds. Our comprehensive journey traverses the length of the country, from the Atlantic marshes of Andalucía to the soaring peaks of the Pyrenees, exploring some of the finest birding sites in the Western Palearctic. Along the way, we'll experience spectacular scenery, rich cultural heritage, and charming rural landscapes far removed from the typical tourist trail.

Spring is the ideal season to explore Spain. Resident specialities are joined by a wave of migrants returning from Africa, filling the countryside with colour, song, and activity. Over the course of the tour we'll search for an impressive array of species, including Spanish Imperial Eagle, Great and Little Bustards, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Wallcreeper, Alpine Accentor, White-throated Dipper, Spectacled Warbler, and both Alpine and Red-billed Choughs. Raptors are a particular highlight, with the possibility of recording more than twenty species during the journey.

Our route begins in the historic city of Seville before exploring the wetlands of Doñana, the dramatic landscapes of Extremadura and Monfragüe, the vast steppes of central Spain, and the alpine habitats of the Sierra de Gredos and Pyrenees. The tour concludes in Catalonia after birding the productive plains around Lleida and the coastal wetlands near Barcelona. Comfortable accommodation, excellent local cuisine, and relaxed travel in spacious vehicles ensure that this remarkable birding adventure is as enjoyable as it is rewarding.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrive in Seville; Brazo del Este and drive to Tarifa**
Day 2	**Strait of Gibraltar**
Day 3	**Tarifa to Doñana National Park via Bonanza salt pans**
Day 4	**Doñana National Park**
Day 5	**Doñana National Park to Monfragüe**
Day 6	**Monfragüe National Park**
Day 7	**Trujillo to Gredos**
Day 8	**Sierra de Gredos**
Day 9	**Gredos to Tudela**
Day 10	**Tudela to Hecho Valley**
Day 11	**Hecho Valley**
Day 12	**Hecho Valley to Ordesa National Park**
Day 13	**Ordesa to Lleida area**
Day 14	**Lleida to Barcelona**
Day 15	**Delta del Llobregat & final departure**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Sequence of numbers
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Terrassa
Barcelona
Tarragona
Bilbao
Donostia / San Sebastián
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Burgos
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Oviedo
A Coruña
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Birding sites in detail



White-headed Duck by Rob Williams

Brazo del Este. We'll set off from Seville early on the first morning, heading to Brazo del Este, a wetland area along the eastern bank of the Guadalquivir River on the outskirts of Doñana National Park. This rich ecosystem is a haven for birds, including Marbled Duck, Black-winged Kite, Savi's Warbler, and a good variety of shorebirds.

Later, we'll explore the vineyards around Jerez in search of Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin. Montagu's Harrier and Lesser Kestrel can also be found here.

Strait of Gibraltar. We will have a full day to explore this rich area, sharing our time between seabirds, raptors, and the rare Northern Bald Ibis. Some of the places we will visit include Los Lances, Barbate Marshes, and La Janda. If conditions are right, we might even enjoy some raptor migration, including Booted Eagle, Short-toed Snake Eagle, and European Honey Buzzard, as well as some birding in the cork forest, with the possibility of Iberian Chiffchaff.

Bonanza Salt Pans. This is one of the most rewarding birding sites in the Doñana area. En route to the pans, we should encounter several common and widespread species including Common Wood Pigeon, Eurasian Collared Dove, Pallid Swift, White Stork, European Bee-eater, Common Kestrel, Eurasian Magpie, Northern Raven, Crested Lark, Eurasian Blackbird, Spotless Starling, and catch our first glimpses of the abundant water birds we will seek over the following few days.

Near the mouth of the River Guadalquivir is the best place to look for the globally threatened and range-restricted White-headed Duck, as well as the uncommon Marbled Duck in the province of Cadiz. This is also an excellent place for waders, including Kentish Plover, Common Greenshank, Common Redshank, Ruff, Wood and Curlew Sandpipers, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Sanderling, Dunlin, Little Stint and Common Snipe as well as Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns. In addition, the saltpans here are our best place for seeing Mediterranean Short-toed Lark and Spectacled Warbler.



Northern Bald Ibis pair at the breeding colony by Yeray Seminario



Purple Swamphen by Rob Williams

Some special raptors for the area are Osprey and the lovely Red Kite, as well as the possibility for Spanish Imperial Eagle that nests inside the national park. However, the most remarkable sight of the day will probably be the large numbers of Slender-billed Gull, Greater Flamingo and Eurasian Spoonbill that gather on occasions in the saltpans. There is also a chance for Caspian Tern, Purple Heron, Black Stork, Great Egret, Little Bittern and even though it is quite early in the season, we should keep our eyes open for the dainty Little Tern as well.

Doñana National Park. We will bird a number of sites within the Doñana National Park complex and surrounds. The acres and acres of marshland on the mouth of the Rio Guadalquivir form one of the largest wetland complexes in Europe with much of the area protected within the Doñana National Park. The national park was established in 1969 and is recognized as a Ramsar Convention "Wetland of International Importance," an "Important Bird Area" (IBA), and a UNESCO "World Heritage Site" with a site list of no less than 300 bird species. The park harbours several species that are rare or absent in much of Western Europe and we will seek out notable species like White-headed Duck, Marbled Duck, Eurasian Spoonbill, Greater Flamingo, Purple (Western) Swamphen, Yellow-legged Gull, the rare Ferruginous Duck, Red-necked Nightjar, and the lovely Iberian Magpie. More common breeding species here include Squacco and Purple Herons, Red-crested Pochard, Booted Eagle, Western Marsh Harrier, Pied Avocet and Mediterranean Short-toed Larks, Western Olivaceous Warbler, Common Nightingale, and European Serin. The flooded fields attract a variety of migrating shorebirds that could include Ruff, Sanderling and Black-tailed Godwit. The national park is vast and some sections are difficult to access, but we will bird the most productive sites by following dirt tracks around the marshy areas, moving further inland to bird areas of cork oaks and umbrella pines. The wilderness at the heart of the park is home to a variety of mammals, including Red Fox, Red Deer, Fallow Deer, endemic Iberian Hare, European Rabbit and Wild Boar.

In the evenings, we'll venture out after dark to look for the Red-necked Nightjar, which is relatively common here. Doñana is also one of the last refuges for the Iberian Lynx, one of the most threatened cats in the world.



Red-necked Nightjar by Glen Valentine

Extremadura region. As we journey north, the route passes through



Bluethroat by Rob Williams

unspoiled countryside where the unique dehesa, a magnificent park-like habitat of cork and evergreen oaks dominates and this habitat is frequented by Melodious, Dartford, Sardinian, Western Subalpine, and shy Western Orphean Warblers. The entire Extremadura region is fantastic for raptors with a dozen species possible and we will keep an eye to the sky for Red and Black Kites, Common Buzzard, Short-toed Snake, Booted, and Spanish Imperial Eagles, Peregrine Falcon, Common Kestrel, and plenty of Cinereous and Griffon Vultures.

Alange Reservoir. Here we will look for Alpine and Pallid Swifts, Eurasian Crag Martin, Thekla's and Wood Larks, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Redstart, Black Wheatear, Rock Sparrow and Rock Bunting.

Monfragüe National Park. The Monfragüe National Park, covering 18,000 hectares, was protected as a Natural Park from 1979 but only recently declared a National Park in 2007. There is an additional 11,700-hectare buffer zone, culminating in a vast area that is rich in wildlife. This fabulous region of mountains, gorges, forest and woodland holds Spain's major breeding sites for the rare Spanish Imperial Eagle and during our stay here, we will hope for daily sightings of this impressive species. The area is also home to one of the world's largest breeding colony of Cinereous Vulture. These huge birds are often visible throughout the region and can often be seen attending to goat or sheep carcasses, along with the more numerous Griffon and Egyptian Vultures.

Other birds that we'll be searching for during our time here include Black Stork, the impressive Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Bonelli's Eagle, smartly plumaged Iberian Magpie, Black-winged Kite, European Roller, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Long-tailed Tits, Great Spotted Cuckoo, European Red-rumped Swallow, White-rumped (rare) and Pallid Swifts, Sardinian and Spectacled Warblers, and Ortolan Bunting. The liquid calls of stunningly plumaged European Bee-eaters will no doubt attract our attention to these newly arrived flocks from their wintering grounds in Africa.



White-throated Dipper by Rob Williams



Bearded Vulture by Adam Riley

Trujillo. We'll make a quick visit to this ancient, fortified town where Lesser Kestrels and Eurasian Scops Owl have often been found.

Trujillo to Gredos. We'll make our way towards the Sierra de Gredos, birding the many farms and tracks en route. We have good chances for various lark species, including Calandra, Thekla's, Crested and Greater Short-toed Larks. The area also holds good numbers of Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, best seen as they commute between water holes and feeding sites, as well as populations of Great and Little Bustards. Other species we seek on these vast steppes include Great Spotted Cuckoo, Iberian Grey Shrike, Northern Raven, Western Black-eared Wheatear, and Corn Bunting, while Eurasian Stone-curlews are present in small numbers. The edge habitats in these steppes are home to Common Hoopoe and Spanish Sparrow. We will also increase our raptor tally here with Montagu's and possibly Hen Harriers, and Little Owl. The open landscape and great number of birds will make for a very enjoyable and productive day.

Sierra de Gredos. The dramatic Pico Almanzor and verdant pine forests serve as a splendid backdrop as we search for Iberian Green Woodpecker, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Eurasian Nuthatch, Goldcrest, Common Firecrest, Northern Wheatear, Rock and Cirl Buntings, Dunnock and Citril Finch. At higher elevations White-throated Dipper, Grey Wagtail, European Crested Tit, European Pied Flycatcher and Red Crossbill are possible. In alpine meadows breeding species include Western Yellow Wagtails and Ortolan Buntings and thickly vegetated hillsides are home to the rare



Dupont's Lark by Rob Williams



Little Bustard by Rob Williams

Bluethroat. The highest reaches of the beautiful Reserva Natural de Gredos, play host to Golden Eagle, Water Pipit and the distinctive Common Rock Thrush. The park also harbours several large mammals, including Red Fox and the rare, spectacular, Spanish Ibex.

Tudela. Here we will focus on one of the main targets of the site, the elusive and scarce Dupont's Lark that breeds in the area. This is a very range-restricted bird so we will try our best to find this enigmatic species and we will carefully listen for its distinctive song among the more numerous Calandra, Wood, Thekla's and Crested Larks.

Tudela to Hecho Valley. We will travel to higher Pyrenean mountain passes at 1 800 – 2 100m (6 – 7 000ft) elevations, amidst spectacular scenery. Targets at these heights, from just below the tree line to the open alpine zone above, include the very attractive Red Kite, Alpine Accentor, Ring Ouzel, Citril Finch, Water Pipit, Eurasian Crag Martin, Yellowhammer, Red-billed and Alpine Choughs and, depending on weather conditions and snow cover, perhaps a chance encounter with White-winged Snowfinch. At higher elevations the rocky summits host breeding Bearded Vultures. In the afternoon, after getting our first morning of birding in the Pyrenees, we will traverse the Hecho Valley.

Hecho Valley. The Hecho Valley near the village of Siresa holds a variety of habitats. One of our main targets is the unique Wallcreeper. This stunning crimson, grey and black species is a regular breeding bird in the deep, rocky gorges just minutes away from our accommodation, and we have several sites to try for this gem. Other target species at these mid-elevations are Alpine Swift, Black Woodpecker, Blue and Common Rock Thrushes, Eurasian Treecreeper, Red-backed Shrike, European Crested Tit and Mistle Thrush. This whole area is prime raptor country with more chances for Bearded Vulture along with Golden, Short-toed Snake and Booted Eagles, many Eurasian Griffons and migrating European Honey Buzzards.

Ordesa National Park. The community of Torla sits in the glacial valley of the River Ara and is surrounded by stupendous mountains. It offers access to the Ordesa Valley and Ordesa National Park. The world-famous Ordesa National Park was one of the first declared in Spain and the park protects large swaths of raging rivers, waterfalls, gorges, vertical rock faces, coniferous and deciduous woodland, and mountain pastures. Trails and paths offer chances to seek additional high elevation species that we may have missed at earlier sites. Here we will again seek Alpine Accentor, Red-billed and Alpine Choughs, White-throated Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Water Pipit, Alpine



Ortolan Bunting by Rob Williams



Wallcreeper by Clayton Burne

Swift, Citril Finch, Black Woodpecker and the fabulous Wallcreeper, plus with great luck White-winged Snowfinch.

Ordesa to Lleida. After we enjoy the fine vistas of the magnificent mountain scenery one last time we will travel south out of the mountains towards the city of Lleida. Along the way we will make several birding stops. We have many options, including some great alternative sites for species still missing on our lists, or to obtain better views for anyone who may have missed out earlier. We can also visit further mountain areas if necessary, as well as some very scenic cliffs where we have a good possibility for Black Wheatear. We will, in addition, call in to wetland reserves for chances of Black Tern, Eurasian Bittern, Bearded Reedling and Common Kingfisher.

Lleida. The arid areas around the town of Lleida represent the largest, non-irrigated lowlands in the Ebro Valley. Many species typical of the Spanish steppes are at their easternmost limits here and we have a full day to explore the varied habitats. While the area is relatively quiet in summer and winter, during the spring it erupts with life and species like Great Spotted Cuckoo, European Roller and Little Bustard reach some of their highest densities here. We will seek any species we may have missed earlier in the tour and species typical of the open steppe habitats include Black Kites, Montagu's Harrier, Lesser Kestrel, Eurasian Hobby, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Calandra Lark, Black Wheatear and Sardinian Warbler while Red-footed Falcon is possible as a passage migrant.



Alpine Accentor by Clayton Burne

The area will also offer us another chance to study the diversity of larks found in Spain. The riparian copses could hold



European Honey Buzzards by Rob Williams

Eurasian Penduline Tit and even Lesser Grey Shrikes occur. Although the shrike population here is small, a captive breeding project is currently carried out to reinforce its numbers. Black-winged Kites are recent colonists and breed in small numbers.

Delta del Llobregat. The Delta del Llobregat is located on the outskirts of Barcelona. Although the reserve here is relatively small and surrounded by the city, a system of short walking trails and well-placed hides offer access to productive wetland habitats. The area can be teeming with waterfowl, including Common Shelduck, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, Green-winged Teal, Red-crested and Common Pochards. A variety of terns, gulls (Mediterranean and Audouin's) and shorebirds are also present. Migrants can include Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, European Golden Plover, Northern Lapwing, Kentish, Common Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Little Stint, Common Snipe, Common and Green Sandpipers, Spotted and Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper and even Moustached Warbler and Collared Pratincole are possible.

We will also have another chance for the active Eurasian Penduline Tit, which shares the reedbeds with Fan-tailed, Great Reed and Cetti's Warblers here. With luck and patience, we may glimpse Little Bittern and Water Rail. Time and weather permitting a sea-watch nearby could produce distant views of Scopoli's and Mediterranean (Balearic) Shearwaters. After what is sure to be a productive final birding session, we will transfer to the airport where the tour ends.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels.
Birding Ease		Undemanding. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions.
Accommodation		Comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Moderate. Mostly short walks on flat ground, with some areas of uneven/rocky ground. Some hiking with a few steep sections in the mountainous areas around Gredos.
Vehicles / Roads		Good quality sealed roads & unsealed dirt roads. Some long drives broken up with birding stops.
Photography		Worthwhile to good.
Annoyances		Some bright sunny days, rain is possible.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 15 on the Best of Birding tour;
- All lodgings;
- Bottled water & wine on some evenings with meals;
- Ground and boat transportation;
- Reserve and historical site entrance fees;
- All local guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (**including bottled water** and mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short notice due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 18kg (40 lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.
- Fitness: this tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health. Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a generally high standard and the hotels and resorts that we make use of are very comfortable. There is no camping on this trip.
- Some hiking, particularly in the mountainous areas is involved. These are easy hikes on clean trails, but they can take a few hours each. These will be done in an easy and comfortable pace, as we will be birding along the route.
- We will change the order of days and locations on the extension depending on weather conditions at the time, to take advantage of the best opportunities for viewing the area's many migrants. For instance, if the wind is strong the migrants don't cross The Strait, we will then take the opportunity to visit some other areas, heading back to the observatories once the wind drops and the birds commence with their crossing.

Seasonal Timing & Weather Variability

This tour is scheduled to coincide with what has historically been the most productive period for birding in the region. However, weather patterns, including temperature, rainfall, snow cover, wind strength and wind direction, as well as broader environmental factors such as food availability, can significantly influence migration timing, breeding activity and bird distribution from year to year. In some seasons, key events such as migration peaks, breeding cycles or post-breeding dispersal may occur earlier or later than average, and the duration of these peak periods can be surprisingly brief. At migration bottlenecks in particular, prevailing wind conditions can have a major impact on the volume and diversity of birds moving through an area on any given day. While our itinerary is designed around long-term historical patterns and offers excellent birding prospects, no fixed-date tour can guarantee that it will coincide precisely with the absolute peak of every seasonal phenomenon. Guests whose primary objective is to experience a specific migration event or seasonal spectacle at its peak may wish to consider a Tailor-made Tour, where travel dates and locations can be adjusted closer to departure in response to prevailing conditions.

Arrival and Departure Details

The Best of Birding departs from Seville on the morning of day 1 (do ensure you arrive the day before) and will conclude around mid-day at Barcelona International Airport on day 15.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Seville International Airport, Seville (IATA: SVQ) is the main port of entry and exit for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.