Spain

Birds, Wine and Iberian Lynx (Small Group)



Iberian Lynx by Javi Eloraggia

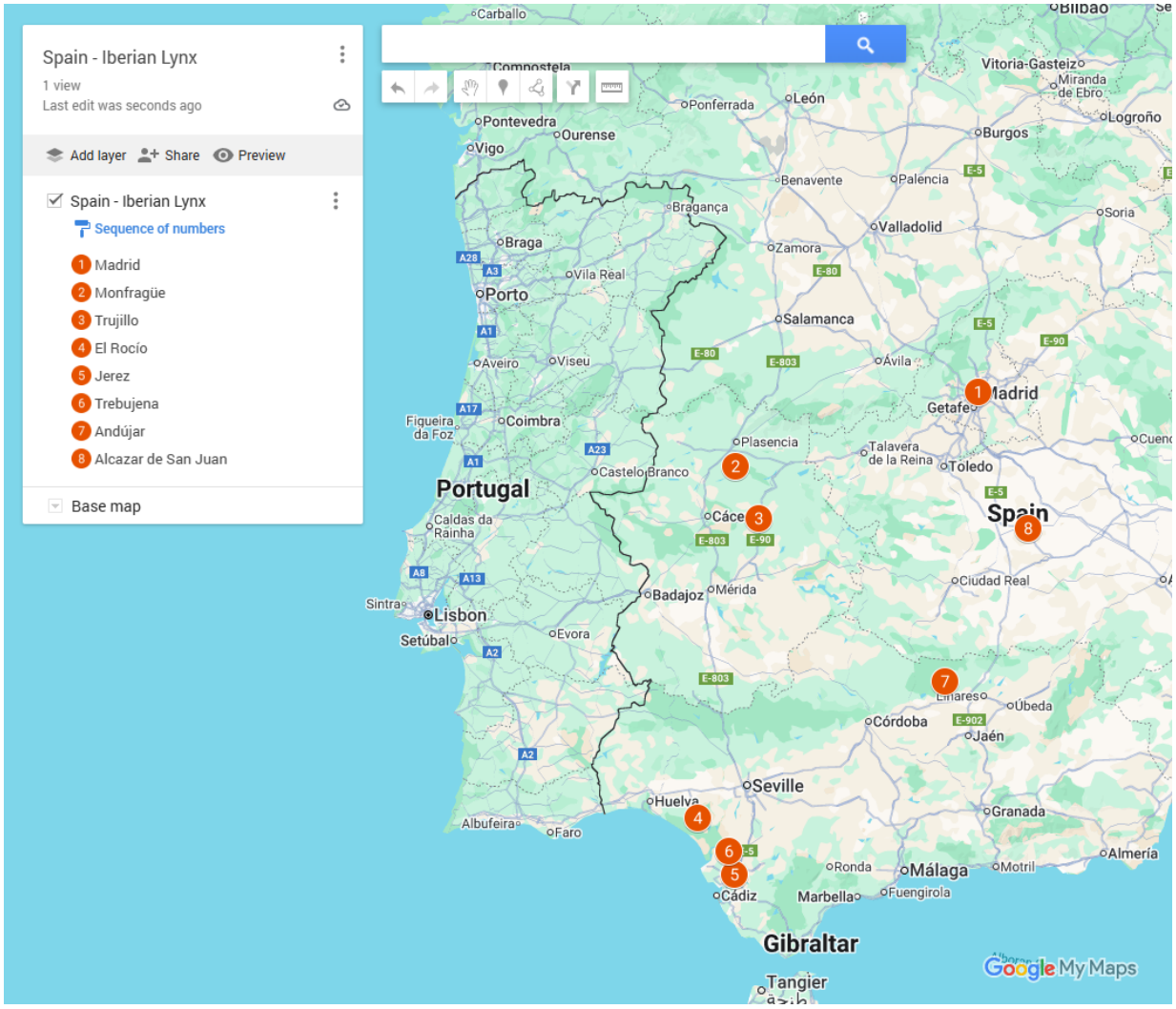
Spain has long been a very popular birdwatching destination, offering a wide range of Mediterranean habitats along with safe, easy and excellent birding. Many sites are in beautifully scenic settings, featuring Romanesque architecture and ancient, fortified hilltop villages; whilst much of interior Spain that we visit is very rural and way off the tourist trail. Our itinerary is specially designed for a great diversity of birds and concentrates on two major and distinct habitats: the semi-arid steppes and cork-oak dehesas (a type of wooded pastureland) of the central and northern interior and the Guadalquivir River with its associated wetlands and marshes feeding into the Gulf of Cádiz on the Atlantic Ocean. Top birds included White-headed and Marbled Ducks, Spanish Imperial and Bonelli's Eagles, Little and Great Bustards, Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Azure-winged Magpie and Black-bellied Sandgrouse.

The other major aspect of this tour is the wine and food, which will be extremely interesting and varied. Spain's wine-making tradition spans more than 2000 years and the country is producing wines of increasingly good quality. There are several excellent reds that we will get to enjoy and these days a few fabulous whites are also being made with traditional Spanish grapes.

Our tour ends in the beautiful Sierra de Andújar where time will be spent exploring this wonderful region in search of the most endangered feline on the planet – Iberian Lynx. We travel in spacious and comfortable vehicles; the food is delicious and plentiful; while our accommodations are extremely well-appointed and nestled in quiet and charming villages. A trip for those who love birds, amazing locations and the fine things in life!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Madrid, transfer to Plasencia with wine tasting**
Day 2	**Plasencia to Monfrague National Park**
Day 3	**Santa Marta steppes with wine tasting in Trujillo**
Day 4	**Trujillo to El Rocio with wine tasting**
Day 5	**Doñana National Park**
Day 6	**Brazo del Este & Laguna de Medina with wine tasting in Jerez**
Day 7	**Bonanza & Trebujena with wine tasting**
Day 8	**Drive to Andújar, afternoon visit to Sierra de Andújar**
Days 9 & 10	**Sierra de Andújar & surrounds**
Day 11	**Andujar to Alcazar de San Juan with wine tasting in Valdepeñas**
Day 12	**Alcazar de San Juan to Madrid & final departure**



Birding sites in detail



Griffon Vulture by Yeray Seminario

Plasencia. This charming city in northern Extremadura is rich in history, with impressive medieval walls, a beautiful cathedral, and numerous historic squares and palaces. In the evening we'll enjoy our first Spanish wines, including the excellent reds produced by Bodegas Arrayán, made from Garnacha, Syrah, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petit Verdot. These wines offer a perfect introduction to the flavors of the region.

Monfrague National Park. This scenic park is located in the Extremadura region. En route to Monfrague NP there will be plenty of time for some great initial birding, allowing us to acquaint ourselves with many of the region's commoner species, such as Spotless Starling, Eurasian Jay and European Serin, as well as specialties that may include Iberian Magpie.

The Monfrague 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 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 carcases, along with the more numerous Griffon Vulture.



Juvenile Spanish Imperial Eagle & Western Jackdaws by Yeray Seminario

Other birds that we'll be searching for during our time here include the impressive Eurasian Eagle-Owl, smartly plumaged Iberian Magpie, Black-winged Kite, Hawfinch, Sardinian Warbler and Spanish Sparrow. We will also make our first searches for Bonelli's Eagle and Great and Little Bustards.



Slender-billed Gull by Rob Williams

Santa Marta steppes. We depart our base in the early morning for the small village of Santa Marta de Magasca. The bird rich Santa Marta steppes, declared a Special Protection Area for Birds in 1998, meander down gentle slopes to expansive plains, dehesa pastureland, plentiful wetlands and the occasional Cork Oak thicket of the Magasca which in turn attract an array of species including Crested and Calandra Larks, Corn Bunting, Spanish Sparrow, Iberian Magpie, Red Kite, Red-legged Partridge, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Golden Eagle, Short-toed Eagle and both Little and Great Bustards.

Trujillo. We will have time to visit a local wine cellar in this ancient, historic, fortified town. We will then settle into our accommodation, the perfect base for our exploration of the area, while the option for an after dark excursion will allow us to venture out to look for Western Barn Owl around the village. We will also enjoy a wine tasting with a sommelier at our hotel.

El Rocio. This is a famous pilgrimage town, close to the neighboring UNESCO World Heritage Site; Parque Nacional de Doñana. En route we will have the opportunity to locate Cinereous and Griffon Vultures, Golden, Bonelli's and Spanish Imperial Eagles and Red Kite, whilst also enjoying some of the region's finest wines.

Doñana National Park. Positioned on a major migratory route between Europe and Africa; Doñana National Park represents an important site for more than half-a-million wintering waterfowl and waders attracted to the region by its abundant food supply and mild climate. Dominating the right bank of the Guadalquivir River at the estuary which feeds into the Gulf of Cádiz the reserve is a kaleidoscope of marshland, lagoons, sand dunes, scrubland and maquis shrubland which provides refuge for five threatened bird species and supports one of the largest heronries in the Mediterranean region.



Short-toed Eagle by Yeray Seminario

We will spend time scanning through the myriad of species in the hopes of locating Eurasian Wigeon, Marbled Duck, Greylag Goose, Squacco and Purple Herons, Eurasian Stone-Curlew, Western Swamphen, White Stork,



Firecrest by Yeray Seminario

Red-crested Pochard, White-headed Duck and Slender-billed Gull while also providing an important breeding site for Marbled Duck, Red-knobbed Coot and Spanish Imperial Eagle among others. The Cork-Oak, Pine woodlands and interspersed scrubland also play host to Booted and Short-toed Eagles and the striking Iberian Magpie.

Brazo del Este & Laguna de Medina. This area represents the remnants of the eastern branch of the Guadalquivir River floodplain which has been dramatically affected by commercial activities upstream. Despite this, the river still passes through the region, with much of the associated natural vegetation intact, flanked by rice fields and various other agricultural crops, which supports a host of species including Booted Eagle, Squacco Heron, Black Stork, Glossy Ibis, Marbled Duck, Western Swamphen, Eurasian Penduline Tit and Bluethroat.

Laguna de Medina, the largest lake of the region, will then provide us with further opportunities to find an array of waterfowl including the elusive White-headed Duck and Eurasian Coot, while Ferruginous Duck, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Water Rail, Black-headed and Yellow-legged Gulls and Red-crested Pochard are also possible. The muddy shores also attract an array of waders including Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper while raptors are well represented with Common Buzzard, Red Kite and Western Marsh Harrier regularly encountered.

Jerez. Southern Spain is well known for producing one of the most famous wines in the world – sherry, and on arrival in Jerez we will make our way to one of the areas fine local wineries. Sherry can only be made in one place and that is within the province of Cádiz. The area is often referred to as the Sherry Triangle and lies in the area between Jerez de la Frontera, Puerto de Santa María and San Lucar de Barrameda. The soil here is key while the damp climate encourages the growth of the flor, which is a coat of yeast that forms on the aging wine and prevents it from oxidizing. Also key is the solera



Little Owl by Yeray Seminario



Little Bustard by Rob Williams

system used to blend the different vintages. Jerez has roughly 10,000 hectares of vineyards, where the predominant grape is the Palomino, named after a 13th-century Spanish knight. In other areas Palomino grapes are barely worth taking notice of as the varietal is often prone to oxidation. In the Sherry Triangle however things are very different and due to the magic combination of the soil and the prevailing humidity, which allows the growth of the protective flor yeast, sherry acquires its exceptional dryness and earthy aroma.

Later, after our wine tasting, we will get to enjoy a Flamenco show, which highlights traditional Spanish dance and features singers and guitarists. Our time in Jerez will certainly be unforgettable!

Bonanza and Trebujena. The Bonanza Salt Plants and the outskirts of Doñana National Park are among the less visited but most rewarding sites in the Doñana area. We'll leave early to ensure arrive at the best time of the day in terms of light and bird activity.

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, Black-tailed Godwit, Sanderling, Dunlin, Little Stint and Common Snipe. In addition, the saltpans here offer our best chances for seeing Lesser Short-toed Lark and Spectacled Warbler.

Some special raptors for the area are Western 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 a large breeding colony of Gull-billed Tern and the impressive 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 and Little Bittern. After a fantastic birding session, we will spend the latter part of the afternoon wine tasting in Trebujena.



White-headed Duck by Rob Williams



Dartford Warbler by Clayton Burne

Andujar and Sierra de Andújar. The morning will be dedicated to travelling as we depart the coast of Spain and head inland to Andújar and in particular; Sierra de Andújar, home to the Iberian Lynx, a species considered to be the most endangered feline in the world, with 70% of the population found in this stronghold.

The majestic oak trees which blanket the valleys of Sierra Morena range in Sierra de Andújar will be our base for the next few days, the park representing Andalucia's best preserved and protected natural tract of Mediterranean forest and scrubland. It is in this park that we will search for Iberian Lynx while also allowing us the chance to locate other noteworthy mammal species including Iberian Ibex, Mouflon and the southernmost 'Eurasian' Grey Wolf population. The Cork-Oak woodlands also support an incredible array of avian gems; Spanish Imperial Eagle is the main attraction while Golden, Bonelli's and Short-toed Eagles, Griffon, Cinereous and Egyptian Vultures, Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Black Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Hawfinch, Rock Bunting, Cirl Bunting, Crested Tit, Firecrest, Short-toed Treecreeper, European Serin and both Sardinian and Dartford Warblers can all be located while traversing this amazing park.

La Mancha Húmeda. Time permitting we may be able to enjoy an exploration of the Biosphere Reserve of La Mancha Húmeda, offering the opportunity to explore a network of lagoons in the arid region of Alcazar de San Juan. These wetlands provide refuge for Western Marsh Harrier, Common Shelduck, Gadwall, Mediterranean Gull, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, Ringed and Kentish Plovers, while the surrounding agricultural land and gently undulating alluvial plains support Little Owl.

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 to very comfortable.
Walking / Trails	■ ■ ■	Moderate. Mostly short walks on flat ground, with some areas of uneven/rocky ground.
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 dinner on day 1 to lunch on day 12;
- Bottled water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Access to private estates to search for Iberian Lynx;
- Reserve entrance fees and permits;
- Local wines during dinners;
- All wine tastings;
- Flamenco show in Jerez;
- Tips (including local guides, drivers and hotels);
- Extra activities as mentioned in the itinerary; and

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (ie**:** 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 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.**

- 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.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins in the early afternoon of day 1 with a group transfer from Madrid to Plasencia and will conclude in Madrid in the mid-afternoon of day 12.

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.

Madrid-Barajas International Airport, Madrid (IATA: MAD) 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.