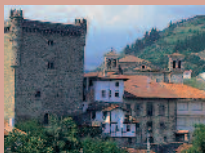
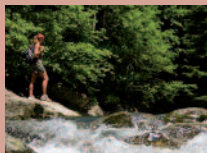




100 BIRDS

100 REASONS TO VISIT SPAIN



SEO/BirdLife



GOBIERNO
DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO
DE AGRICULTURA, ALIMENTACIÓN
Y MEDIO AMBIENTE

ORGANISMO
AUTÓNOMO
PARQUES
NACIONALES

Text:

Pedro Cáceres, Fernando Guerrero, Ramón Martí and Jordi Prieto

Illustrations:

Juan Varela

Translation:

Dave Langlois and David Howell

Design:

Espacio de ideas

Maps:

Lynx Edicions

Pictures:

Turespaña and Fernando Guerrero

Legal deposit: M-22100-2013

ISBN: 978-84-940398-5-0

© SEO/BirdLife 2013

Printed in Spain

C/ Melquiades Biencinto, 34

28053 Madrid, Spain



SEO/BirdLife



Turespaña, the State Secretariat for the Environment and the National Parks Authority have joined forces with SEO/BirdLife in the international promotion of Spain as a birdwatching-tourism and ecotourism destination. This guide is part of the actions provided for in the agreement signed for that purpose in April 2013.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Industry, Energy and Tourism or the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment.

[illegible]

Turespaña, the State Secretariat for the Environment and the National Parks Authority have joined efforts with SEO/BirdLife in order to strengthen Spain's international promotion as an ecotourism and birdwatching destination.

This guide reflects our rich biodiversity by including a selection of 100 bird species which it is hoped will be of interest to enthusiasts from other countries considering a visit to Spain, as an exceptional destination for this growing tourist market.

Travellers attracted to Spain by conventional and better-known tourist resources, will also be able to discover other places of interest and value in our country by searching out these species, and following the short texts and other information contained in this guide.

As its title indicates, these birds also evoke other emotions and experiences in relation to their surroundings and human presence there, which has been instrumental in the shaping and conservation of Spanish landscapes and biodiversity.

The text includes snippets of information related to culture, architecture, history, crafts, gastronomy or local traditions, and in this way the birds take on a central role in this voyage through Spain's rich biodiversity.

Birds act, not only as bioindicators of an impressive natural richness, but also as attentive local experts, guiding the traveller through the length and breadth of our territory, pointing out several aspects of interest in each of our autonomous regions.

As well as their function as tools for environmental education and awareness-raising, wild birds and their environment are in themselves a tourism resource which contributes, through a responsible, sustainable and quality offer, to the wellbeing and development of our rural areas by generating local wealth and prosperity.

We hope this guide will help you to discover Spain's natural richness. Come and see us, we are waiting to meet you!

Isabel María Borrego Cortés
Secretary of State for Tourism
Ministry of Industry, Energy and Tourism

Federico Ramos de Armas
Secretary of State for the Environment
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment

Basilio Rada Martínez
Director of National Parks Authority
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment

Eduardo de Juana Aranzana
President, SEO/BirdLife

Introduction

This Miniguide to the Birds of Spain reflects Spain's immense potential for ecotourism and international birdwatching tourism, quite apart from its world-famous seaside and beach resorts.

It is intended not only for nature lovers *per se*, but also for any international tourists who wish to complement their more traditional holiday visits with a closer look at Spain's other delights. Rather than a consuming interest in birds, all you need to enjoy this guide is the sensitivity, interest or simple curiosity to check out Spain's rich biodiversity and scenic variety on your Spanish holiday. As well as the birds themselves, you will find out about Spain's natural resources and how they are traditionally harnessed, discover off-the-beaten-track byways and observe Spain's flora and fauna while getting to know its villages and people, its culture and traditions, its cuisine, history and crafts... all the hallmark features that make up and define Spain's rich natural environment understood in the broadest sense.

Birdlife will always be one of the main magnets for such a nature-loving tourist. The selection of birds in this guide will be of use not only to birdwatchers keen to see a particular species but also to more laidback visitors who wish to enjoy a simple country walk and spot birds as they go, together with wayside flowers, butterflies and mushrooms, the cattle grazing in the fields and the mountains looming up on the skyline. Ecotourists, birdwatching tourists, nature lovers, country holiday-makers or anyone interested in Spain's birdlife will all get something out of this book.

This birdlife can also serve as the catalyst that opens the tourist's eyes to the vast range of nature-tourism alternatives on offer in every region of the country. The websites www.spain.info and www.seo.org give links and detailed information on these tourism options supplied by the various public authorities, institutions and professional ecotourism and birdwatching tourism organisations.

Tourism of this sort is not only eco-friendly but also socially, environmentally and economically sustainable, offering top-quality products and services that generate jobs and wealth, boost development and encourage settlement in otherwise deprived areas. Tourism, in short, that taps into Spain's incomparable natural heritage in an ongoing and responsible way.

Birdwatcher's Code of Ethics

1. The welfare of the birds themselves must always be the overriding concern.

Whether you're a ringer, nature photographer, scientist or simple birdwatcher you must never lose sight of the fact that the birds' welfare ALWAYS comes first.

2. The habitat must be protected.

The habitat is vital for the birds that live in it. We should therefore make sure we never cause it the least harm. We should always leave it just as we found it.

3. Never alter the birds' behaviour in the slightest.

Tolerance to human nuisance varies from one bird species to another and also depends on the time of year. We must make sure we never disturb them at any time but especially during the breeding season, otherwise birds might abandon the nest and that year's clutch is lost. In winter too any disturbance might be fatal if we force the birds to expend energy that might be difficult to restore in the harsh weather conditions. We should also be especially careful during both spring and autumn passage when birds are tired after their epic voyages.

4. If you find a species of bird in danger, inform the authorities but don't spread the information indiscreetly.

If you find a breeding species of bird in danger and think it needs some protection, inform any environmental authority or SEO/BirdLife office as quickly as possible. This is the best way of protecting and conserving it and will also help to build up a valuable database for protecting this species. Avoid giving the birds' exact location on any forum that might be exploited by egg collectors or other groups intent on harming them and don't visit the site during the breeding season.

5. Don't disturb vagrants.

Vagrants or rarities should never be disturbed. If you ever find any, report the observation to SEO/BirdLife so that it can be vetted by our Rarities Committee, rarezas@seo.org. Apart from this bear in mind that a flood of birdwatchers to the spot might cause a major disturbance to the bird. Likewise, if you think the sighting might involve an introduced species, report it to our Introduced Birds Group at exoticas@seo.org

6. Abide by bird protection legislation at all times.

Birds are protected by law. The Biodiversity and Natural Heritage Protection Act 42/2007 (*Ley del Patrimonio Natural y la Biodiversidad*) has been drafted on the strength of observations and comments made by several generations of professional and amateur birdwatchers and scientists.

7. Don't trespass.

Never trespass on private property or enter a site without permission just because a target bird has turned up there. Keeping to public rights of way is an essential part of species conservation.

8. Respect the rights of other visitors at all times.

Whenever you coincide with other visitors in any bird observation spot, never forget that they have the same rights as you to enjoy the site and its birdlife, or any other interests.

9. Share your sightings with other local observers.

Much of the current knowledge of common bird species has been built up from many individual sightings shared voluntarily by other birdwatchers in the past. Add your own records to this stock of knowledge in the interests of better protection and conservation of birds.

10. Behave as you would like others to behave in the birdwatching site.

Proper behaviour and abidance by these simple rules makes each and every birder an ambassador of bird- and habitat-conservation.

Birdwatching Tourism

Spain's vast birdwatching potential, now at last being realised, has fuelled a birdwatching-tourism boom within the current options for nature-based tourism in general. Seeing this, many government authorities, institutions and companies have taken notice.

In our opinion, birdwatching tourism should not only encourage the observation and enjoyment of birds but also a deeper understanding of their interrelations with the environment, with human beings and human use of natural resources. The interest generated by tourism of this type is reflected in many tourism-promotion initiatives. All of them are now duty bound to pay special heed to the risks and threats that this type of tourism might pose for the very resource they aim to tap into, the living and fragile resource that is Spain's birdlife. Furthermore, the tourism supply side to meet this demand must be top quality, meticulous in its approach and suited to the tourists' needs and expectations.

The importance of a top-quality birdwatching tourism supply is therefore obvious, and quality is synonymous with training, sound guidance, interest and knowledge. SEO/BirdLife, as an NGO working for the conservation of birds and their habitats, has therefore become involved in a wide range of actions and initiatives that aim to ensure a truly eco-friendly and sustainable birdwatching tourism supply.

SEO/BirdLife has led and conducted various initiatives and prepared a varied range of materials; these can be found in the birdwatching tourism section (<http://www.seo.org/turismo-ornitologico-2/>) of our website (www.seo.org). Among other things these compromise: an online training course for birdwatching tourism called *iberaves: una apuesta formativa por el turismo ornitológico*. This is made available free of charge to everybody and particularly tourism firms and other local stakeholders (hoteliers, café and restaurant owners, local craftspersons, nature-tour guides, etc). There is also a Handbook of Good Environmental Practices (*Manual de Buenas Prácticas Ambientales*) and initiatives like *Iniciativa iberaves* and *turismo ornitológico* (birdwatching tourism). All tourism stakeholders such as hoteliers, managers of rural accommodation and self-catering cottages, restaurant owners, managers of local crafts and/or natural-products shops, tourism-service and -activity firms, nature guides, etc, can opt into these mutual-support schemes if they agree to abide by certain fundamental commitments. They will then be supported as an "establishment", "company" or "freelancer" working alongside SEO/BirdLife in a new initiative to encourage a responsible and sustainable range of ecotourism and birdwatching-tourism activities in Spain.

These initiatives, together with those of many other government authorities, institutions, companies and freelancers, ensure that progress is being made in the right way, with true respect for the resource itself and a sustainable approach overall. This will all be conducive to the conservation of Spain's birdlife and its habitats and will also have valuable knock-on effects for local communities and the countryside in general.

How to use this guide

In this brief guide we have kept the species down to a “shortlist” of 100 birds that European birdwatchers might be keenest to see in Spain. Instead of the traditional taxonomical grouping by orders and families we have decided to classify the birds by the habitat in which you are most likely to see each particular species. These categories are very general but give a quick idea of what might be found in each particular spot for those with little time to spend there.


Readers will therefore find the species grouped into those most likely to be found in the following habitats: wetlands and rivers; the sea and coastline; woodland; towns and parks; Mediterranean woodland and scrub; high mountains; rocks and cliffs; plains and grassland and, last but not least, the Canary Islands, which constitute a world apart with many endemic species.

Each species has a colour-coded map of Spain and Portugal to show when they are present. Green means year-round residents; yellow means summer visitors and blue means winter visitors, broken down further into dark blue for common winter visitors and light blue for the rarer or sporadic birds.

The text is a nutshell account of each bird’s appearance and distinguishing features, its typical behaviour, range, territorial preferences and good spots to see it. Then we have allowed ourselves a slight poetic licence to tie the bird into certain scenic highlights, sights or even the culture and cuisine of Spain. These non-birdwatching comments help us to understand better the bird’s relationship with its general surroundings and also to get to know the whole area better. This coincides in with one of the goals of this guide: birds in this book become standard-bearers of Spain’s vast range of scenic and cultural delights so that the readers who use and enjoy the guide become in turn ambassadors of Spain’s other tourist attractions, besides its traditional seaside resorts.



wetlands and rivers



sea and coastlines



woodland



towns and parks



mediterranean woodland and scrub



high mountains



rocks and cliffs

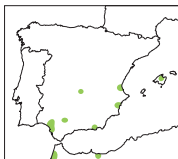


plains and grassland



Canary Islands

1



Marbled Duck

Marmaronetta angustirostris

Cerceta pardilla



2



Red-crested Pochard

Netta rufina

Pato colorado



This duck, with a characteristic speckled or “marbled” appearance, is very rare overall and currently in grave danger of extinction, though it can be locally quite common in favoured spots. In the western Mediterranean basin it is heavily dependent on the wetlands of North Africa. In Spain it breeds in shallow waters; the wintering population is particularly scarce and localised. The main strongholds are the *Marismas del Guadalquivir* (Guadalquivir marshes) and the wetlands of Alicante province, such as El Hondo and Salinas de Santa Pola. Alicante city is a seaside resort famous for its beaches, its castle-fortress and its “*Moros y Cristianos*” (Moors and Christians) fiesta, a living relic of Islamic presence in Spain from the eighth to fifteenth centuries. ■

The drake is a large colourful duck with a characteristic red beak; the female is plain brown. A plant eater breeding in areas with abundant underwater vegetation, whether lakes, marshland or reservoirs. Although this duck is one of the flagship species of the nature reserve *Parque Nacional de las Tablas de Daimiel* in Ciudad Real, 50% of the breeding population is currently found in the *Parque Natural del Delta del Ebro* in Tarragona. Recently listed as a Biosphere Reserve, this nature park includes wetlands and ricefields in the delta built up by sediment brought down by Spain's largest river. ■

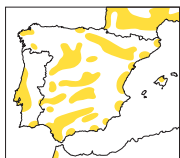
A peculiar-looking and unmistakable duck, small and chunky with a short neck and large head; the breeding drake's beak has a swollen sky-blue base. An avid diver with a long tail that it often holds stiffly upright. It has a patchy range on a few wetlands of southern Spain, the population increasing in recent decades. One of its main threats is the expansion of the introduced species Ruddy Duck (*O. jamaicensis*), which interbreeds with the native population. Good sites to see this duck are the lakes called *Charcones de Miguel Esteban* in Toledo and *Laguna de Pedro Muñoz* in Ciudad Real. These two lakes are both in *La Mancha Húmeda*, the stamping ground of Don Quixote, a low-lying, low-rain-fall continental-climate plain dotted with oasis-like lakes. Special arrangements are made for tourists with reduced mobility or other handicaps (www.seo.org/2012/05/08/siente-red-natura/). ■



White-headed Duck
Oxyura leucocephala
Malvasía cabeciblanca



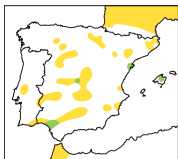
Frequent on marshland edges and lakes with thick vegetation. Quite secretive and easily overlooked except when feeding along the reedbed fringe. It often stretches its neck and beak bolt upright to blend in with the reeds among which it lives. It nests inland in almost all river catchment areas and also on the Mediterranean coast. A small population regularly overwinters, even in sites with heavy human pressures, such as the gravel pits and rivers of the *Parque Regional del Sureste* only a few kilometres from Madrid. ■



Little Bittern
Ixobrychus minutus
Avetorillo común



5



Black-crowned Night Heron

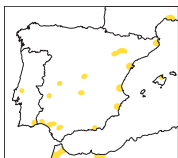
Nycticorax nycticorax

Martinete común



Broad winged and stout beaked, this gregarious heron nests in colonies and congregates in huge roosts in winter. Haunts the middle and lower reaches of mainland rivers; most often seen at dusk since it is quite nocturnal, as the name suggests. The best wintering sites are the Guadalquivir estuary, the Ebro Delta, the *Albufera de Valencia* (Albufera means “coastal lagoon” from the Arabic for “small sea”) and Gerona, where it also breeds on the Medas Islands, a marine paradise for flora and fauna, famous for its seagrass beds. ■

6



Squacco Heron

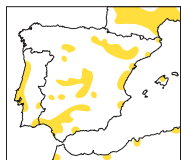
Ardeola ralloides

Garcilla cangrejera



A small, chunky and usually solitary heron with a stout beak. Often seen standing stock still in typical heron posture in shallow water to hunt insects, small fish and amphibians. Fairly restricted in range, its main breeding colonies are in the Ebro Delta, *Marismas del Guadalquivir* and wetlands of Valencia region. For many years it has been the logo of the *Sociedad Española de Ornitología*, SEO/BirdLife. ■

Two sites account for almost half Spain's breeding population: Doñana-*Marismas of Guadalquivir* and Ebro Delta. Other important sites are the catchment areas of the rivers Ebro, Guadalquivir and Tagus. Smaller than the Grey Heron, it is often seen in the same motionless posture among lake vegetation ready to lash out and catch fish and frogs, etc. One of the best sites for seeing this bird is the *Laguna de la Nava* in the province of Palencia, a restored former wetland in the Castilian plains. This is a relic of the *Mar de Campos*, a huge wetland that once covered the whole area. One of the typical scenic features here are the eye-catching adobe dovecotes, still used today for breeding feral pigeons. ■

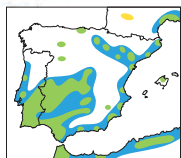


7

Purple Heron
Ardea purpurea
Garza imperial



A very gregarious species often forming huge flocks at breeding or roosting sites. A common sight in nearly all Spanish river catchment areas, it feeds both in wetlands and open fields where it often shadows the grazing cattle and sheep to catch the insects they flush in passing. Strikingly white overall with yellow flashes on head and back in breeding plumage, it is distinguished from the Little Egret in flight by the much shorter legs, hardly projecting beyond the tail. One of its most important sites is *Laguna de La Janda* in Cádiz, once a huge lake and veritable paradise for birds that has been drained to produce rich farmland. It is still an important stop-off point in their migratory route towards the Strait of Gibraltar. ■



8

Cattle Egret
Bubulcus ibis
Garcilla bueyera



9



Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Garceta común



A beautiful snowy-white egret with black legs and beak (unlike the Cattle Egret) and long flowing neck feathers in breeding plumage. It feeds on fish, amphibians and invertebrates and is frequent on both inland wetlands and on estuaries and coastal marshland. Breeding colonies are usually mixed with other heron and egret species. Its strongholds are Doñana, Ebro Delta and *Albufera de Valencia*. It has recently started breeding also on the Cantabrian coast and can now be easily spotted in the *Bahía de Santoña* in Cantabria, an enclosed bay well known for its attractive marshland and the production of delicious canned anchovies. ■

10



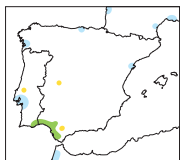
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

Morito común



The ibis with the biggest world range, currently in expansion in Spain at various wetland sites like Doñana, Delta del Ebro and *Albufera de Valencia*, where a new colony has formed in an artificial wetland, comanaged by SEO/BirdLife, constructed to purify the lagoon's inflow water. It also takes to ricefields, planted up to produce the main ingredient of one of Spain's most famous dishes: paella. An interesting organic rice growing scheme is now underway at Ebro Delta (www.rietvell.com). ■

Most frequent on shallow coastal wetlands, breeding in the south of Spain; rarer inland. The best wintering sites are the wetlands of northern Spain like *Ría de Arousa*, Santoña marsh and Ebro Delta. In Santoña there is a very interesting scheme called NACAR, short for Nature and Prison (*Naturaleza y Cárcel*) in Spanish. Every year inmates from El Dueso prison take part in Spoonbill migration counts as part of an overall scheme to rehabilitate them back into society. ■



11

Eurasian Spoonbill
Platalea leucorodia
Espátula común



An unmistakable and spectacular bird that prefers very salty water (lakes, marshes and salt-flats...). It breeds in a few spots in southern and eastern Spain and winters mainly in Mediterranean wetlands (basically in and around Doñana and in the Ebro Delta). Both its breeding and wintering population are heavily dependent on water levels in the various wetlands. Its stronghold is the lake near Fuente de Piedra in Málaga, a typically Andalusian town of whitewashed houses with wrought-iron balconies and linteled doors. ■

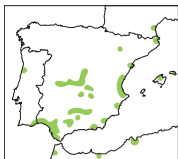


12

Greater Flamingo
Phoenicopterus roseus
Flamenco común



13



Purple Swamphen

Porphyrio porphyrio

Calamón común



Living in dense wetlands and ricefields, this sizeable bird is unmistakable with its iridescent blue plumage and thick red bill and red legs. It uses its long toes to drag towards it the plant stems it feeds on. Spain accounts for 85-90% of the European population, and numbers are currently growing, helped by some reintroduction schemes (*Aiguamolls del Empordà*, *Albufera de Valencia* and *Albufera de Mallorca*) after the population reached rock bottom in the 1960s. SEO/BirdLife's Riet Vell S.A. nature reserve has one of the biggest wintering concentrations of the Ebro Delta. ■

14



Red-knobbed Coot

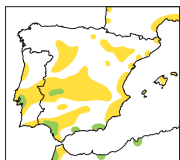
Fulica cristata

Focha moruna



Similar to the Common Coot but, as the name suggests, sporting two red knobs above the facial shield in the breeding season. Very scarce and local, breeding only on a few Andalusian and east-coast wetlands. Several reintroduction and reinforcement schemes have been carried out in Andalusia, Valencia Region, *Albufera de Mallorca* and Catalunya. Easily seen in the *Reserva Natural Concertada de la Cañada de los Pájaros* and *Dehesa de Abajo*, both in Puebla del Río, between Seville (Andalusia) and also around the *Marismas del Guadalquivir* and *Parque Nacional de Doñana*. ■

A handsome, frail-looking wader like a tiny, long-legged stork, boisterous and feisty with easily triggered alarm calls. It feeds along the edges of shallow, fresh or brackish wetlands: ricefields, marshes, estuaries, lakes and rivers. One of Spain's commonest breeding waders, it is abundant in the breeding season on nearly all wetlands of the southeast; much rarer in winter. Spain has Europe's biggest breeding population. A good site for seeing them is the saltflats known as *Salinas de San Pedro del Pinatar* and other wetlands of the Region of Murcia. This popular tourism region hosts the *Mar Menor*, Europe's biggest saltwater lake, well known for its beaches, spas and therapeutic mud baths. ■



15

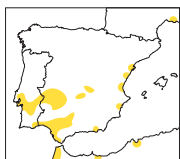
Black-winged Stilt

Himantopus himantopus

Cigüeñuela común



It's camouflaged plumage helps it to blend into the background. In flight, often hawking for insects in flocks, it looks like a marsh tern or large swallow with its long wings and deeply forked tail. Rather uncommon as a whole. It breeds in bare or arid zones close to water, especially in Andalusia and Extremadura. In the Ebro Delta, where the population is small and seems to be dwindling, SEO/BirdLife reached an agreement to leave some ricefields fallow on its Riet Vell S.A. nature reserve to favour breeding of the species. ■



16

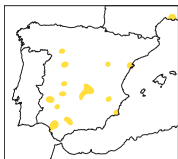
Collared Pratincole

Glareola pratincola

Canastera común



17



Gull-billed Tern

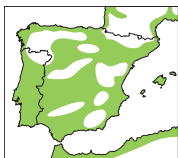
Gelochelidon nilotica

Pagaza piconegra



Distinguishable from the similar Sandwich Tern by its short, thick and completely black bill. In the Iberian Peninsula it breeds mainly in and around brackish lakes, both on the coast and inland, feeding predominantly on insects or small animals. The biggest breeding populations are in Doñana, Ebro Delta and the lakes of La Mancha, but a relatively important colony has recently settled in Sierra Brava reservoir in Cáceres, a well-known fishing resort. ■

18



Zitting Cisticola

Cisticola juncidis

Cisticola buitrón



This tiny bird, formerly called Fan-Tailed Warbler, is easily recognised by its airborne buzzing call, one buzz for each dip of its undulating flight. It breeds in flat open ground with good ground cover, where it often perches while flicking its tail. It is very common in wetter parts of the Mediterranean regions of Spain, and a fragment sighting in the *Parque Nacional de las Tablas de Daimiel*, a unique inland wetland in Ciudad Real, attracting many visitors in years when the wetland holds a lot of water. ■

This is the only one of the streaked *Acrocephalus* species that habitually breeds in Spain, albeit locally and patchily in reedbeds. It tends to avoid single-species reedbeds, preferring an inter-sprinkling of reedmace and bulrush, etc. Commonest on the Mediterranean coast, it faces the same threats as other birds of Mediterranean wetlands, with habitat changes and losses. One of Spain's biggest populations lives in *Albufera de Alcudia* on the island of Mallorca. ■



19

Moustached Warbler
Acrocephalus melanopogon
Carricerín real



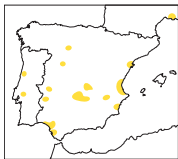
Its most notable features are its black mask and rich brown back. The song of short trills and whistles is very discreet, and it builds a hanging nest in downward-growing twigs of deciduous trees (Black and White Poplar, Willow). One of the best spots to look for it is in and around Aranjuez, a city of Madrid region on the banks of the River Tagus. Its historical buildings and landscaped gardens and hedges have won it UNESCO listing as a World Heritage site. ■



20

Eurasian Penduline Tit
Remiz pendulinus
Pájaro-moscón europeo





Whiskered Tern

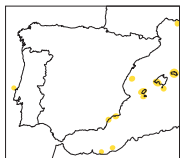
Chlidonias hybrida

Fumarel cariblanco



The commonest marsh tern with striking white cheeks. The tail, only slightly forked, and grey rump help to tell it apart from other terns. Like the other marsh terns it tends to flutter low over the water picking up insects from the surface. It breeds very locally (with fluctuating numbers depending on water levels) on Andalusian wetlands above all, and also the Mediterranean coast, thinning out inland. From SEO/BirdLife's *Centro Ornitológico Francisco Bemis* in Doñana it can be seen together with many other wetland birds. As well as being the site of the *Parque Nacional*, Doñana is also famous for the religious procession called *Romería de El Rocío*, attracting hundreds of thousands of people in spring. ■

This bird has now been divided into two separate species, the Mediterranean Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*), breeding in the Balearic Islands, Chafarinas, Columbretes and islets off the coast of Murcia and Almería, and the Atlantic Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris borealis*), breeding in the Canary Islands but also in the Chafarinas Islands. It turns up off Mediterranean coasts and the Gulf of Cádiz in passage, from March onwards, and even during the breeding season when it often ranges far and wide in search of food. Look for it in summer-autumn off the coast of Tárrifa, in the Strait of Gibraltar. The more adventurous among you can take a boat trip out on the open sea to enjoy close-up views of this shearwater and other seabirds and cetaceans. ■



22



Cory's Shearwater
Calonectris diomedea
Pardela cenicienta



The Balearic Islands, whose beaches and nightlife attract millions of tourists each year, are still home to this unique bird, endemic to these islands. It breeds in colonies in caves and cliffs, coinciding here with the Yelkouan Shearwater (*P. yelkouan*). In the breeding season it often flies across to the Spanish mainland and North Africa in search of food. In winter it is seen in passage right round the Mediterranean coast of Spain to the Atlantic and as far round as the English Channel. Counts are especially high off the east coast. It normally lives far out at sea but can sometimes be glimpsed from beaches and cliffs, especially close to its breeding areas. ■



23

Balearic Shearwater
Puffinus mauretanicus
Pardela balear



24



Yelkouan Shearwater

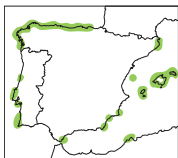
Puffinus yelkouan

Pardela mediterránea



A Mediterranean endemic with breeding colonies on various islets. It is very similar to the Balearic Shearwater but can be distinguished by the much sharper contrast between upper- and underparts as it shears. It is seen in winter off the Catalan coast but seldom spotted south of the Ebro Delta. A breeding colony has recently been found on the island of Menorca, which was held by Great Britain for a short spell a few centuries ago. It is the only place in Spain where gin is still distilled using the traditional method inherited from those times. ■

25



European Shag

Phalacrocorax

aristotelis

Cormorán moñudo

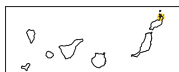


A cliff nester rarely straying far from this habitat; most often found on the north coast and in the Balearic Islands. It is smaller and slimmer than the Cormorant with a more buoyant flight, usually seen skimming low over the water. Close up, its attractive green eye is a distinctive feature. One of the places where it can be seen is the *Parque Nacional de las Islas Atlánticas* in Galicia, sharing estuaries and cliffs with mussel farmers and small fishing craft that picturesquely work the sea to harvest the area's famous fish and seafood. One of the most important showcases of this traditional trade, happily recovered from the devastating Prestige oil spill back in 2002, is the seafood trade-fair called *Feria del Marisco de O Grove*. ■

Named in honour of Leonor de Arborea (c. 1350-1404) of Sardinia, famous for having brought in the first ever raptor-protection legislation (though in all probability solely to reserve the use of these birds in falconry by the nobility). It times its arrival on Spain's coasts (late summer and autumn) to coincide with the return passage of passerines to ensure plentiful prey species to feed its young. It breeds in small colonies on island and islet cliffs of the Balearics, Columbretes and Canaries. In summer, however, it moves inland to feed on woodland insects, when it might be seen around Cuenca (Castilla-La Mancha), a historical city famous for its picturesque hanging houses perched vertiginously atop a sheer riverside cliff. ■



26



Eleonora's Falcon

Falco eleonorae

Halcón de Eleonora

Midway in size between the Ringed Plover and Little Ringed Plover and distinguished from both by its black legs. It tends to prefer beaches rather than lakes, favouring the Mediterranean and Atlantic-Andalusian coast, numbers thinning out inland and northwards, and nests on bare ground in a simple scrape among pebbles and shells. One of the best places to see it is the *Parque Natural de la Bahía de Cádiz*, a wader paradise around the city of Cádiz. This city is famous for its February carnivals and also as the city where Spain's first constitution was drawn up in 1812. ■



27

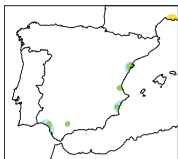


Kentish Plover

Charadrius alexandrinus

Chorlitejo patinegro

28



Slender-billed Gull

Chroicocephalus genei

Gaviota picofina



A fairly scarce and slim gull species, breeding on sandy soil in brackish marshes of shallow water, especially in saltflats. The biggest breeding colony is in the Ebro Delta with smaller colonies in *Albufera de Valencia* and *Marismas del Guadalquivir*. There is another important population in La Mata-Torre Vieja, one of Alicante's most popular seaside resorts. ■

29



Audouin's Gull

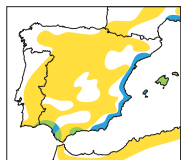
Larus audouinii

Gaviota de Audouin



A Mediterranean endemic, breeding nowhere else. The bulk of the population winters on the North African Atlantic coast. Dapper, with a characteristic stout dark red bill, its lifecycle is closely bound up with man's fishing activities, a traditional trade around the whole Spanish coast. At night it might follow the purse seine fishing boats that attract fish to the surface with lights, but also habitually follows trawlers to scavenge discards. It feeds above all on small ocean-going fish like sardines and anchovies, both typical dishes of the Malaga coastline. The world's biggest breeding colony is in the Ebro Delta, with over 70% of the Spanish population. ■

Smaller than the Bonelli's, this eagle turns up in two different morphs (dark and pale), breeding in wooded areas with a mixture of open land and hills or mountains. It feeds on mammals, reptiles and birds, most often caught close to the ground after swooping down with folded wings. Frequent in wooded areas of the whole of Spain, its numbers peak in the province of Salamanca (Castilla y León). University town par excellence since the middle ages, Salamanca is a Word Heritage city with a distinctive orange tone due to the sandstone from which its buildings are constructed. The atmosphere is young, bustling and cosmopolitan. De rigueur visits nearby are stunning natural sites like Sierra de Béjar or Sierra de Francia or Arribes del Duero. The city's cuisine is also well worth trying, especially its charcuterie like the horseshoe-shaped sausage called *farinato* and the meat pie called *hornazo*. ■



Booted Eagle
Aquila pennata
Aguila calzada



31



Eurasian Scops Owl

Otus scops

Autillo europeo



Spain's smallest owl, it lives in riverside woods and copses, dehesas, etc. (rarely in mountainous zones), but is more often heard than seen. Its call is a two-syllable hoot, repeated indefatigably (sometimes by day too), which could be confused with the similar call of the Midwife Toad, though the latter is shorter and more metallic. It also turns up in parks and thickets of some cities. For example, in the city of Santander (Cantabria) SEO/BirdLife is currently running a project to investigate its distribution and organise a nest-box scheme. ■

32



Short-toed Treecreeper

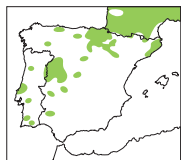
Certhia brachydactyla

Agateador europeo



A small woodland bird with a speckled back and long, thin, down-curved beak. Undemonstrative as it creeps mouse-like up the tree trunks in search of the insects and grubs it feeds on. It takes to various sorts of woodland (Oak, Holm Oak, Birch and Pine...), at a lower altitude than the Eurasian Treecreeper. One of Spain's most heavily wooded regions is Galicia, whose famous pilgrim route, the *Camino de Santiago*, crosses many of these lovely woods. ■

Spain's smallest woodpecker, not much larger than a sparrow, it's insistent 'kii-kii-kii' call is especially heard in spring and autumn in broadleaved woodland, parks and plantations, where it nests in small holes in dead trunks. The plumage is mainly black and white, with flecks and stripes on the wings, back and tail, and a pale brown underside, and the top of the head a rich red in the male (white in the female). It is more frequently found in the north and west mainland than the Mediterranean, but is absent from the islands. Not easily seen, Navarre is one of its strongholds, where ancient carnival rituals take place in the village streets and country roads between late January and Easter. ■



33

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos minor

Pico menor



This attractive bunting has a rusty brown back, orange-brown underparts and grey head and neck adorned with black and white stripes. It breeds in open land, often rocky, or woodland clearings on hills of middling altitude and usually drops down to lower ground in winter. Its range takes in the whole of Spain, numbers peaking in the open countryside of the northern meseta, such as the province of Burgos. This land is known as the birthplace of El Cid and also for its castles, its cathedral and some of its typical dishes like *Morcilla de Burgos* (black pudding made from pig's blood and rice). ■



34

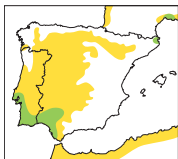
Rock Bunting

Emberiza cia

Escribano montesino



35



White Stork

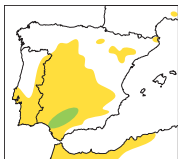
Ciconia ciconia

Cigüeña blanca



A very common sight in many towns and villages where it often nests on man-made structures like church belltowers and roofs of buildings. Increasingly overwintering in Spain nowadays, instead of migrating to Africa. There are breeding rooftop colonies in some of Spain's World Heritage cities like Cáceres or Alcalá de Henares, the latter only 30 minutes from Madrid. The church called *Colegiata de Alfaro* in La Rioja boasts the world's biggest breeding colony on one building, while there is a fine "natural" rock-breeding colony in Los Barruecos at Malpartida de Cáceres, Extremadura. ■

36



Lesser Kestrel

Falco naumanni

Cernícalo primilla



This small raptor frequents open countryside of farmfields and pasture. The males have a blue-grey head, red-brown unspotted back and no facial moustache; told apart from the Common Kestrel by its smaller size, paler plumage and, close up, its white claws. It is very gregarious, breeding in colonies, often in old buildings like castles and cathedrals, with good invertebrate-rich hunting grounds nearby. The World-Heritage city of Cáceres boasts nearly 300 pairs, making it one of the world's biggest urban breeding colonies and without any doubt one of the best places to see them. ■

One of Spain's commonest birds, living and breeding in nearly any village, town or city. A glossy purplish black in spring, it is in fact, despite its name, speckled with white spots in winter. Similar in its habits to the Common Starling, often forming garrulous flocks; it walks rather than hops along the ground in search of food. Abundant in Madrid's Botanical Gardens, *Jardín Botánico de Madrid*, next door to the world-famous Prado Museum, boasting one of the world's most important holdings of paintings. ■

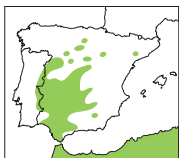


37

Spotless Starling
Sturnus unicolor
Estornino negro



Similar to the House Sparrow but has a rich red-brown crown, black bib and breast and white eyes-tripe. It sometimes nests in buildings alongside man but, unlike the House Sparrow, also breeds in more open countryside of tall scrub and riverside thickets. It often forms huge flocks, the biggest in the middle reaches of the Tagus and Guadiana rivers, where colonies of up to 30,000 nests have been found. It is associated above all with the villages and countryside of south-west Spain. ■



38



Spanish Sparrow
Passer hispaniolensis
Gorrion moruno



39



Black Stork

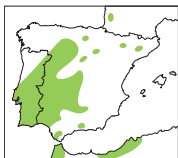
Ciconia nigra

Cigüeña negra



Much less abundant than the White Stork and shuns human beings. It nests on cliffs or large trees in wooded areas of western and central Spain, fishing in nearby streams and ponds; a few overwinter. One area with a healthy breeding population is the *Parque Natural de la Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche* in Huelva, an area also famous for its famous *Jabugo* ham, produced from free-range, mast-feeding pigs, and its pottery craftsmanship. Castles, fortresses and mosques like the *Castillo de Cortegana* are all living legacies of the past. Legend has it that Zufre Town Hall was once headquarters of the Spanish Inquisition. ■

40



Black-winged Kite

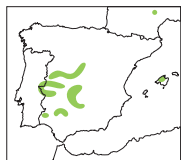
Elanus caeruleus

Elanio común



A small, striking raptor with a dove-like appearance and large head. It breeds in trees in the open grazing woodland known as *dehesas* or in fields and pastureland with scattered trees. Although not yet common, its numbers are increasing and it is now spreading outwards from its habitual range in the centre and west of Spain. Single birds or pairs are often seen perched on roadside telegraph poles or other prominent lookout points. Close up, its red eye is particularly striking. One of the "banker sites" for this bird is *Las Vegas del Río Guadiana*, the meadowland around River Guadiana in the province of Badajoz (Extremadura). ■

This species, also sometimes called Monk Vulture and Black Vulture, has the biggest wingspan in Spain, sometimes verging on 3 metres. Its plumage, unlike the Griffon, is uniformly dark and its tail is slightly wedge shaped. It nests on mountain cliffs or tall trees on hillsides and *dehesas*. There is a small colony in Mallorca but its site *par excellence* is the *Parque Nacional de Monfragüe* in Extremadura, a paradise for raptors in general and the Cinereous Vulture in particular. The Sierra de Guadarrama (Madrid-Castilla y León) has an important colony near Madrid (Rascafría) and another near sightseeing musts like the Palace and Gardens of *La Granja* and the city of Segovia (World Heritage). ■

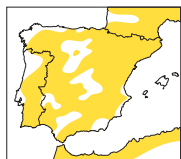


41

Cinereous Vulture
Aegypius monachus
Buitre negro



A large, striking raptor that, from a distance, looks all white below with a dark head. Its favoured habitat is mountains and hills within the Mediterranean-climate belt, where it nests in all types of woods and copses. Often seen hovering with rippling wings over scrub and forest clearings ready to drop on its prey, mainly snakes – hence its name in Spanish of “snake-eating eagle”. In September it crosses the Strait of Gibraltar to spend the winter in Africa, forming part of one of the most spellbinding migration showcases of the whole Mediterranean area. The same wind that sets up these spectacles of migrating raptors and other soaring birds has also made Tarifa’s beaches a world-famous kite-surfing site. ■



42

Short-Toed Snake Eagle
Circaetus gallicus
Culebrera europea



43



Spanish Imperial Eagle

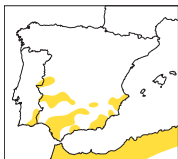
Aquila adalberti

Águila imperial ibérica



The flagship species of Mediterranean woodland and scrub. It lives only in the Iberian Peninsula, favouring forests and scrubland of the centre and south of Spain, where the climax woodland is made up of the characteristic evergreen oaks of Spain. Slightly smaller than the Golden Eagle, its plumage is even darker, and the striking white shoulder patches of adult birds are a tell-tale feature. Like the Iberian Lynx, another Iberian Peninsula endemic, it is heavily dependent on the rabbit as its main prey species. Rabbit populations, suffering from two infectious diseases, have plummeted in recent decades, putting both lynx and eagle under pressure. The Imperial Eagle was once teetering on the verge of extinction but its numbers are now slowly but surely increasing on the strength of various conservation schemes. SEO/BirdLife has set up a webcam in the Parque Nacional de Cabañeros showing the daily life of the pair on the nest. www.aguilaimperial.org/webcamcabaneros.php ■

44



Rufous-tailed Bush Robin

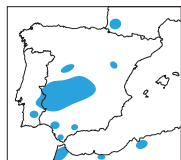
Cercotrichas galactotes

Alzacola rojizo



Easily recognised by its long reddish tail, which it often fans out, waves up and down or holds erect over its back, showing off the black and white points at the tip. Scarce and scattered in the southern third of Spain (from Alicante or Murcia in the east, right round the whole of Andalusia to Badajoz in the west). A late trans-Saharan migrant that takes to dry open areas with bushes, hedgerows, drought-hardy trees or prickly pears. ■

A winter visitor to the Iberian Peninsula, mainly in Extremadura and bordering provinces like Ávila, Toledo, Ciudad Real and Córdoba. The brackish lake of Gallocanta in Teruel (Aragón) attracts vast pre-migratory flocks before their flights back to their breeding grounds in northern Europe. It typically flies in large V-shaped skeins. The crane is one of the flagship species of Extremadura's *dehesas*, where it shares habitat and the acorn food store not only with wintering Wood Pigeon flocks but also the free-range, acorn-grazing herds of Iberian pigs, source of the famous Iberian ham and other delicious charcuterie and serving as a fine example of the sustainable management of natural resources. ■



45

Common Crane
Grus grus
Grulla común



Slightly bigger than the Cuckoo and found in Mediterranean type countryside with scattered copses. Like the Cuckoo it is a nest parasite, laying its eggs in other birds' nests, especially Magpies but also sometimes other crow species. The biggest populations live in pinewoods and *dehesas* in the centre and south of the country. A good example is Guadix in Granada. Roman in origin, this is one of the Iberian Peninsula's oldest settlements, lying between the stunning nature parks of *Sierra de Baza*, *Sierra de Huetor* and *Sierra Nevada*. Guadix is famous for its cave houses hewn out of solid rock and still lived in today. ■



46

Great Spotted Cuckoo
Clamator glandarius
Críalo europeo



Tourism websites for the Autonomous Communities and Autonomous Cities

Andalusia/Andalucía

www.andalucia.org/es

Aragón

www.turismoaragon.com

Balearic Islands/Islas Baleares

www.illesbalears.es

Basque Country/País Vasco

www.turismo.euskadi.net

Canary Islands/Islas Canarias

www.turismodecanarias.com

Cantabria

www.turismodecantabria.com

Castilla-La Mancha

www.turismocastillalamancha.com

Castilla y León

www.turismocastillayleon.com

Catalonia/Cataluña

www.catalunya.com

Comunidad de Madrid

www.turismomadrid.es

Comunidad Valenciana

www.comunitatvalenciana.com

Extremadura

www.turismoextremadura.com

Galicia

www.turgalicia.es

La Rioja

www.lariojaturismo.com

Navarre/Navarra

www.turismo.navarra.es

Principado de Asturias

www.turismoasturias.org

Región de Murcia

www.murciaturistica.es

Ceuta

www.ceutaturistica.com

Melilla

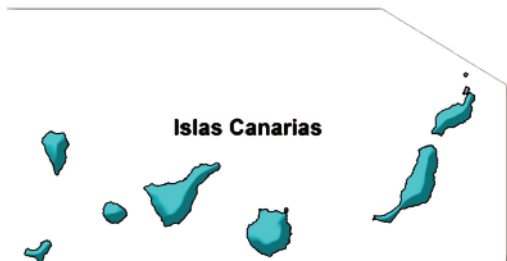
www.melillaturismo.com



Galicia



Extre



Islas Canarias



Other websites of interest

Institute of Tourism of Spain (Turespaña):
www.spain.info / www.tourespain.es

Agriculture and Environment Ministry:
www.magrama.gob.es

Tourism Ministry:
www.minetur.gob.es

National Parks network:
www.magrama.gob.es/es/red-parques-nacionales/default.aspx

SEO/BirdLife:
www.seo.org

'Iberaves' tourism initiative:
www.seo.org/iberaves

Spanish cities declared as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO:
www.ciudadespatrimonio.org

Paradors (national luxury hotels):
www.parador.es/es

47



Red-necked Nightjar

Caprimulgus ruficollis

Chotacabras cuellirrojo



A crepuscular and nocturnal, insect-hawking species with long wings and tail. It spends the day perched on a branch or on the ground, where its camouflaged plumage makes it almost impossible to see; at night it often lands on paths and roads and is frequently run over by cars. Slightly larger than the European Nightjar with warmer tones and a ruddy neck, cheeks and throat. It breeds in open Mediterranean woodland or even in wasteland. A good spot to see it is the countryside of flat plains and farmland around Seville known as *Campiña Sevillana*. Here are grown many of the products that make up the Mediterranean diet, one of the healthiest in the world; the area is also famous for its outstanding desserts and sweetmeats. ■

48



European Bee-eater

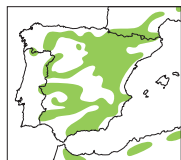
Merops apiaster

Abejaruco europeo



One of Spain's most vividly coloured birds, taking to a great variety of open habitat. Usually seen in sociable flocks and breeding colonies, which tunnel out their nests in sand or earth embankments, often along rivers. It perches on dry twigs or on overhead cables from where it swoops out to catch insects in flight (especially hymenoptera like bees, etc.). We recommend a stroll through the *Parque Natural de la Sierra de Andújar* in Jaen, where Bee-eaters are a common sight along the banks of the River Jandula together with dozens of raptors and mammals of interest like Otter and the beautiful and enigmatic Iberian Lynx. Once in the area you could also drop into the shrine called *Santuario de la Virgen de la Cabeza*, where Andalusia's oldest religious ceremony is held. ■

A mighty tree- and cliff-nesting raptor with almost uniformly dark plumage as an adult but white wing and tail patches when immature. It haunts mountainous or hilly countryside of varying altitude. It is a versatile hunter that can soar high to look for prey over a wider area or quarter low over the ground for surprise attacks on rabbits, hares, birds, reptiles, carrion, etc. It is present throughout nearly the whole of Spain, with particularly high numbers in the mountain zones and riverside cliffs of La Rioja, whose vineyards produce the world-renowned “La Rioja” wine, covered by its own Protected Designation of Origin scheme. ■

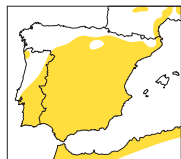


49

Golden Eagle
Aquila chrysaetos
Aguila real



The biggest of the *Sylvia* scrub warblers; the males have a black hood and white eye ring. It breeds in open woodland of Holm Oak, olive groves and riparian woodland or areas of tall scrub, often on sunny slopes. Population densities are particularly high in the Juniper and Savin woods of the province of Soria, such as the *Sabinar de Calatañazor*, an upland area with an extreme continental climate and many dense conifer woods. ■



50

Western Orphean Warbler
Sylvia hortensis
Curruca mirlona



51



Sardinian Warbler

Sylvia melanocephala

Curruca cabecinegra



The males have a black hood, in this case extending to below the eye, which has a distinctive bright-red eye-ring. The female's hood is brown. It readily shows itself, unlike some of the more secretive scrub warblers and feeds on insects and small fruits, and breeds in varied scrubland, hedgerows and other areas with thick vegetation. It takes readily to parks and gardens in some big cities, like *Parque Güell* in Barcelona. This park, together with the *Sagrada Família* cathedral and other famous buildings of Barcelona, is part of the indelible legacy left by the world-famous architect Antoni Gaudí. ■

52



Little Owl

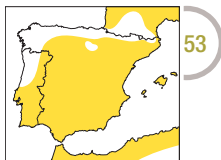
Athene noctua

Mochuelo



A chunky, broad-headed, earless owl with big yellow eyes that lives in hollow trees, tiled roofs, ruins and rocks, feeding on small rodents, lizards and invertebrates. Its call, heard by day and by night, can be confused with a mewling cat. A favoured habitat is the olive groves that produce one of Spanish cuisine's hallmark products, its exquisite virgin olive oil. ■

With a black and white body with a rufous cap, this Shrike breeds in open wooded areas or farmland with scattered trees. Despite its small size it is a fearful predator, waiting immobile on its favourite perch before pouncing on insects, lizards, small birds and rodents. It famously keeps “larders”, pinning its captures to thorns or barbed wire fences to eat them at leisure later. ■



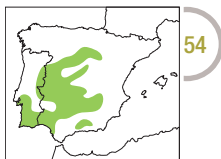
Woodchat Shrike

Lanius senator

Alcaudón común



Slightly smaller than a magpie with a black hood, brown back and blue wings and tail. It is restless and inquisitive, often seen hopping over the ground, sometimes in family groups. One of its favoured habitats is the *dehesas* of Mediterranean woodland and scrub, where it shares habitat with the famous Spanish fighting bulls. How it got to Spain is controversial. Apart from Spain and Portugal, its world range otherwise is restricted to the Far East (Japan and Korea). It has therefore long been thought that it was introduced into Iberia by Spanish and Portuguese sailors from the fifteenth century onwards. Recent studies, however, have separated the eastern and western populations into two different species. ■



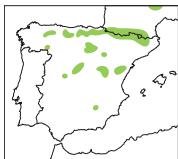
Azure-winged Magpie

Cyanopica cookii

Rabilargo ibérico



55



Citril Finch

Carduelis citrinella

Verderón serrano



Breeding in mountain woods, mainly conifers, above 1000 m, often on the edge of Alpine meadows, with greenish yellow plumage with pale grey sides of neck and nape. It is yellow wing flashes distinguish it from the Serin and the unmarked tail from Greenfinch and Siskin. Its Spanish range takes in the mountains of central Spain, like the recently declared *Parque Nacional de las Cumbrres de Guadarrama* in Madrid and Segovia, plus the lovely mixed fir-and-beech woods on the southern slopes of the Pyrenees, the *Sistema Ibérico* (Iberian System) and a small population in *Sierra Morena* (Andalusia). ■

56



Alpine Accentor

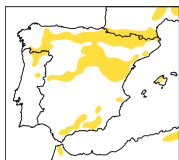
Prunella collaris

Acentor alpino



Spain is the EU's second most mountainous country and this bird breeds on its highest peaks, some dropping down to lower levels in winter. Discrete in behaviour but often quite tame, it shares its breeding grounds with the free-range cattle that summer on the high alpine pastures. It often exploits the easy pickings around ski resorts and mountain refuges, making it easier to see in these places. One good example is the cable-car station of Fuente De in *Picos de Europa* (Cantabria). ■

It breeds on dry, steep rocky slopes and alpine meadows, at higher altitudes than the Blue Rock Thrush, usually above 1500m. The male is a striking bird in summer with bright orange breast and pastel blue back. In the green Asturian mountains, where it is abundant, it is known as *El Roxu* or "The Red One". There it shares habitat with other species of the Cantabrian cordillera like the Brown Bear and Capercaillie. One of the best spots: *Parque Natural de Somiedo* in Asturias. ■



57

Common Rock Thrush
Monticola saxatilis
Roquero rojo



An alpine bird that nests high up in crannies of inaccessible crags from 1000 to 3000 m, though it does drop down to lower levels in winter when it might be seen in other rocky areas or even on buildings or in quarries. (For example it winters on the huge rocky massif called *Montaña de Montserrat*, one of the most visited sites in Catalonia due to its eyecatching crags and the famous monastery of the "*Moreneta*", the Virgin Mary of Montserrat.) The bird looks dowdy grey overall until it suddenly flashes its vivid red shoulder patches in its butterfly-like flight or while it moves over the rock face, continually twitching and flexing its wings. Good sites to look for it are Foces de Arbayún and Lumbier in Navarre, deep limestone river gorges, or in *Picos de Europa*. ■



58

Wallcreeper
Tichodroma muraria
Treparriscos



59



Alpine Chough
Pyrrhocorax graculus
 Chova piquigualda



It breeds at a height of 1500 m plus in steep rocky crags of the Pyrenees and Cantabrian Cordillera. Gregarious, often seen in big flocks. Around high-mountain restaurants, ski resorts and mountain refuges it has learned to search brazenly for scraps of food left by humans. Its cousin, the Red-Billed Chough, is abundant in rocky areas of the rest of the country and even in some cities like Segovia, where it might be seen flying alongside the Roman aqueduct. ■

60



White-winged Snowfinch
Montifringilla nivalis
 Gorrión alpino



A high-mountain bird breeding on Pyrenean and Cantabrian peaks, some dropping to lower altitudes in winter and often looking for easy pickings round ski resorts. Striking black and white wings in flight. The best site for this bird is the *Parque Nacional de Picos de Europa*, Spain's first declared national park (the highest protection level) back in 1918. This park straddles Asturias, Cantabria and Castilla y León, a district that produces the delicious, cave-matured cheeses called "*Cabrales*", made from goat, sheep and cows' milk. ■

A striking vulture with handsome brown plumage flushing to orange on the underparts, a wedge-shaped tail and a wispy “beard” near the beak that gives the bird its alternative name of “Bearded Vulture”. Usually solitary, haunting the high mountains of the Pyrenees where it breeds on the most inaccessible cliffs, though it might often be seen patrolling surrounding open areas in search of the animal bones it feeds on. Reintroduction schemes are currently underway in the *Parque Natural de las Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y Las Villas* (Andalusia), Spain’s biggest protected site with 214,000 hectares, and in *Picos de Europa* (Asturias-Cantabria-Castilla y León), Spain’s first listed *Parque Nacional* (National Park) in 1918 and now the second most visited after El Teide in the Canary Islands. ■

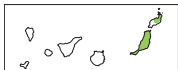
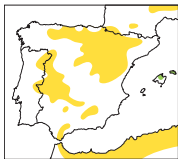


61

Bearded Vulture
Gypaetus barbatus
Quebrantahuesos



62



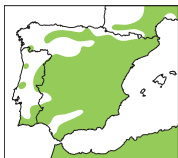
Egyptian Vulture

Neophron percnopterus
Alimoche común



The smallest of Spain's four vultures with black and white wings and a wedge-shaped tail in flight. The untidy ruff around its bald yellow face gives it a rather peculiar "unkempt" look. An opportunistic scavenger, seeking out corpses and carrion to descend on with other vultures and also feeding on rubbish dumps. A cliff nester like the other vultures, it soars effortlessly in search of carrion; usually solitary. Abundant throughout the province of Huesca, both in the verdant mountains of the Pyrenees and in the contrasting but nearby arid knolls of Los Monegros. An endemic subspecies in the Canary Islands. ■

63



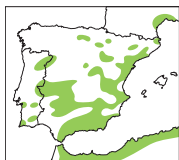
Eurasian Eagle-Owl

Bubo bubo
Búho real



Unmistakable, the biggest of Spain's nocturnal raptors with two big "ear" tufts standing up from its head. Close up views in flight show its impressive wing span, especially the female's which is bigger than the male. Its hoot, audible up to 4 kms away, is deep and resounding (ooh-hoo), the second note falling in pitch. Nocturnal and crepuscular; absent from many areas in the north. One good spot for seeing it is the gullies around Castrejón Reservoir in the Province of Toledo, in typical countryside of central Spain. ■

One of Spain's scarcest and most threatened eagles. It breeds on cliffs in hilly and mountainous areas within dry, Mediterranean-climate regions. Feeding on medium-sized birds like partridges and pigeons and also rabbits, in recent decades its numbers have fallen worryingly due to adult mortality. Its main threats are direct persecution (shooting and poisoning), power-line collisions and electrocution and the loss of suitable habitat for its prey species. One of the healthiest populations is hanging on in the rugged hills of *Serranía de Ronda* (Málaga). Ronda, one of the finest examples of Andalusia's "*pueblos blancos*" (white villages), is famously perched atop a steep cliff called *Tajo de Ronda*, home also to other interesting rock-nesting birds. Some of its most famous sights are the Arab baths and Mudejar courtyards; it is also well-known for its "tapas" or bar snacks if you get peckish after sightseeing walks. ■

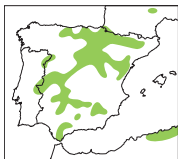


64

Bonelli's Eagle

*Aquila fasciata**Águila perdicera*

65



Griffon Vulture

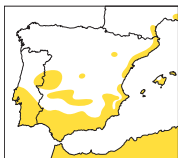
Gyps fulvus

Buitre leonado



Its vast 2.5-metre wingspan make this vulture an unmistakable sight in many of Spain's limestone areas, which together are home to the world's biggest population of 25,500 breeding pairs. Breeds on mountain- and river-cliffs in fairly dense colonies from where it spreads out, often in flocks, to soar for hours over open land in search of carrion, sometimes straying hundreds of kilometres from the nest site. A "must visit" is the medieval city of Sepúlveda (Segovia), also famous for its roasts, and the nearby gorge of the River Duratón (*Ermita de San Frutos*), to see Spain's biggest breeding colony of 500 pairs in a stunning setting. Other good sites are the gorges of Arlanza (400 pairs) or of the Ebro and Rudrón (Castilla y León), Foz de Arbayún (Navarre) or *Parque Nacional de Monfragüe* (Extremadura). ■

66



Pallid Swift

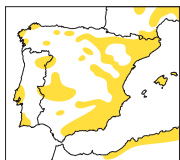
Apus pallidus

Vencejo pálido



Very similar to the Common Swift; the subtle differences in hue are visible only in very good light. Breeds above all on cliffs and buildings of coastal cities, towns and villages but also on bridges and buildings inland. One of the best colonies lives around the famous flea market called *El Rastro* and the district called *Barrio de La Latina* right in the middle of Madrid, where it shares habitat with the Common Swift. After visiting the nearby royal palace, the *Palacio Real*, you might like to rest up in a pavement café and try to pick them out among the circling swifts while enjoying an al fresco bar snack. ■

The biggest of Spain's swifts and similar in shape to the rest but easily told apart by its white breast and throat divided by a brown chest band. Its long piercing cry in the sky is one of Spain's harbingers of spring along with the early swallows and the first snatch of nightingale song. It breeds in colonies on cliff faces and often on buildings, so it can often be spotted in some of Spain's towns and cities. If you fancy combining Alpine-Swift sightings with a good football match, *Futbol Club Barcelona's* Nou Camp stadium has one of Catalonia's biggest nesting colonies. ■

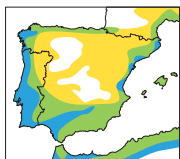


67

Alpine Swift
Apus melba
Vencejo real



Brown with no breast band; its lightly forked tail has two prominent white spots at the tip. It lives and breeds on coastal cliffs, mountain crags or river cuttings, incessantly hawking for insects like the other hirundine species. Its nest is similar to the swallow's. This martin is resident all year though inland birds often winter on the coast. One of the cities where this agile flier might be seen flitting overhead is Santiago de Compostela, near its striking cathedral, destination point for hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who come to this city from all over the world, walking along pathways that have been traditional since medieval times. ■



68

Eurasian Crag Martin
Ptyonoprogne rupestris
Avión roquero



69



Red-Rumped Swallow

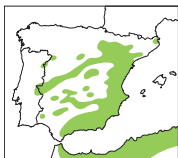
Cecropis daurica

Golondrina dáurica



More of a country dweller than the Barn Swallow and easily distinguished by its pinkish rump, lack of any breast band and whitish face. Its bottle-shaped mud nests are stuck to the roof of caves and abandoned structures like bridges. Fairly common throughout the southwest. One of the best places for seeing it is the rugged mountain landscape of Sierra Morena in Andalusia. ■

70



Black Wheatear

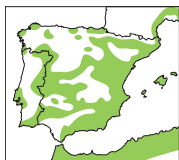
Oenanthe leucura

Collalba negra



Black all over except for the white rump and outer tail feathers. Unmistakable, as the only black coloured wheatear occurring in Spain. It breeds on steep dry slopes with rocky outcrops and bare ground with few bushes and shuns flat ground and thick woods. One of the best viewing spots for this species is the *Parque Natural de la Sierra de Gata-Níjar* in Almería, where you can also enjoy some of Spain's last virgin beaches surrounded by desert-like and volcanic scenery. ■

The male is a lovely steely blue colour. Its rather chunky, short-tailed shape is often silhouetted at the top of its breeding cliffs or rocks on coasts, gorges, scree slopes or even on surrogate habitat such as castles, ruins and bridges, etc. Certainly one of the most eye-catching sites for seeing this bird is Granada's famous Alhambra, palace and fortress of the Islamic Kingdom of Granada, the last Muslim redoubt in Spain until 1492. ■



71

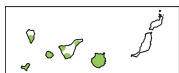
Blue Rock Thrush
Monticola solitarius
Roquero solitario



A sparrow of dry, open areas, similar to a female House Sparrow but with pale stripes above the eye and along the crown. The yellow throat patch is often very hard to see. Non-breeding birds form large noisy flocks with a constant cacophony of squealing chirps. As the name suggests it often nests in rocks, cliffs, quarries and ruins. Nesting colonies can in fact be seen in some of Spain's historical walled cities, such as Ávila, Segovia or Zamora, a city well known for its Easter (*Semana Santa*) celebrations. ■



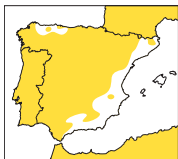
72



Rock Sparrow
Petronia petronia
Gorrión chillón



73

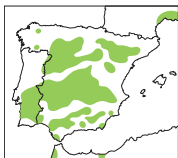


Black Kite
Milvus migrans
 Milano negro



A fork-tailed raptor with versatile feeding habits, catching young rabbits, fish and amphibians and also scavenging for carrion and edible remains on rubbish dumps. A very common tree nester in any sort of wooded countryside; gregarious and often seen in daytime flocks or huge roosts. Numbers dwindle on the Mediterranean coast and peak in Extremadura. Often seen, for example, plying the skies in *Parque Natural de Cornalvo*, a nature reserve conserving a huge Roman reservoir and lying only a few kilometres from the historical World Heritage city of Mérida. ■

74



Little Bustard
Tetrax tetrax
 Sisón común



Similar in shape but smaller in size than the Great Bustard, it breeds in extensively farmed cropfields with fallow land and hedgerows, where males set up leks for their breeding display of short hops in the air and far-carrying snorting calls. Females, more camouflaged, blend into the long grass where they seclude and protect both nest and chicks. Loosely scattered in the breeding season, the birds flock together in winter (the southern *meseta* has 60% of the population at this time). The pastures and grassland of La Serena or La Siberia in Badajoz (Extremadura) are good places to see them. Here they rub shoulders with the sheep whose milk produces the famous creamy cheeses called "*tortas*" of Serena or Casar. ■

Common throughout almost the whole of Spain, preferring open Mediterranean countryside of patchwork farmland with good cover (hedgerows, scrub, vineyards...). It flees by running rather than flying, breaking into a whirring and gliding flight close to the ground only as a last resort. Feeds on grass seeds and insects; in good breeding years females might be seen with rows of up to ten chicks following in single file behind. Spain's main small-game species, its numbers are particularly high in hunting grounds in rural areas of Toledo, southeast of Ciudad Real or southwest of Albacete (Castilla-La Mancha), where it also forms part of the area's traditional cuisine. Miguel Delibes, one of Spain's great twentieth-century novelists, has often written about partridge hunting and countryside life, a paean to the conservation of the rural world, its traditions and natural values. ■



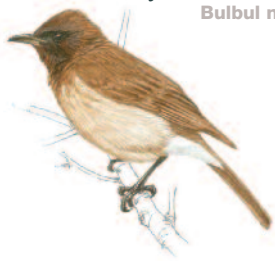
Red-legged Partridge
Alectoris rufa
Perdiz roja



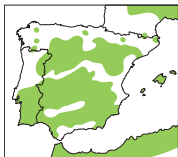
Widespread in Africa, this species only occurs in Spain in the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, two enclaves bordering the Mediterranean coast of Morocco. The common bulbul is active and noisy, about the size of a blackbird, found in pairs or small groups in the streamside scrub, parks and gardens of both cities, often emitting a loud and melodious 'doctor-quick doctor-quick be-quick be-quick' call from a bushtop perch. The male and female are similar in colour: mostly greyish-brown above and whitish-brown below, with a dark crested head and dark chin. The underparts are grey-brown with a white or yellow patch around the vent. A lively bird for the lively cities of Ceuta and Melilla, both full of the sights, smells and sounds of Spain mixed with North Africa, with Morocco just a few kilometres away. ■



Common Bulbul
Pycnonotus barbatus
Bulbul naranjero



77

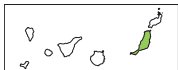
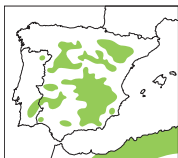


**Eurasian
Stone-curlew**
Burhinus oedicephalus
Alcaraván común



A ground-hugging bird with excellent camouflage, which normally flees by walking or running (with horizontal body and retracted neck) rather than flying. Close up, its huge yellow eye is striking. Mainly active from dusk to dawn though daytime calling is not uncommon. Found in more or less open countryside with low vegetation. Well distributed in the south and centre of Spain, barring the mountainous areas. ■

78

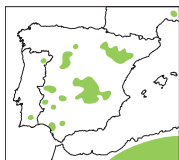


**Black-bellied
Sandgrouse**
Pterocles orientalis
Ganga Ortega



A pigeon-like, seed-eating ground bird with long wings and excellent camouflage, it nests on the ground in dry, wide-open plains and extensive dry-farming areas. Numbers are dwindling; the main threats are changes in farming practices (disappearance of fallow land, intensification of crop-farming, change from dryfarming to irrigation in some areas...), reforestation of farming land, scattered populations, etc. Some of the biggest populations live in the province of Zaragoza, a city known for its cathedral called *El Pilar* and its candied fruit, among other local delicacies. ■

Scarcer with more scattered populations than the similar Black-Bellied Sandgrouse and equally well camouflaged on the ground, where it tends to spend most of its time. Often seen in largish flocks, it breeds in dry, open plains and rarely moves elsewhere in winter. The population trend is downward and the species faces much the same problems as the other birds that breed in Spain's grassland plains. Some of the healthiest populations are holding on in the grasslands of Aragón, for example in the nature reserve called *Reserva Ornitológica de El Planeron* run by SEO/BirdLife in Belchite. ■

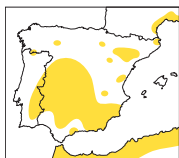


79

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
Pterocles alchata
 Ganga ibérica



Close up, this is a staggeringly beautiful bird with myriad hues of blue, which breeds in dry, warm areas of open land with scattered trees, where it feeds on large insects caught on the ground and in flight. Its raucous call is very similar to the sound made by one of those old-fashioned football rattles or wooden ratchets; this gives it its name of *carraca* in Spanish. A typically African bird in essence and, as such, a tell-tale sign of Spain's closeness to the old continent. The same goes for Europe's only palm wood called *Palmeral de Elche*, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, around which the Roller itself can be seen along with Mediterranean scrub warblers and Hoopoes, etc. ■

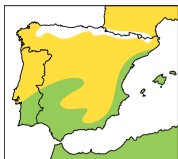


80

European Roller
Coracias garrulus
 Carraca europea



81

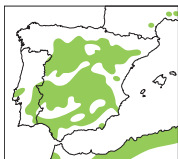


Hoopoe
Upupa epops
Abubilla



Absolutely unmistakable, not only because of its shape and colours but also its characteristic, low-pitched, far-carrying and onomatopoeic call of "hoop-oo-oo". It spends much of its time on the ground catching insects and grubs, and lives in farming areas and open land dotted with bushes and copses, etc, breeding in holes in trees, stone walls and ruins. Common in nearly the whole of Spain except the wetter northern parts and in mountainous areas. It increasingly overwinters here and even turns up in green areas of the big cities like the *Casa de Campo* on the edge of Madrid. Historically the *Casa de Campo* was crown property and a royal hunting ground but today it is Madrid's biggest public park and a very agreeable place to escape the noise and bustle of the big city. ■

82

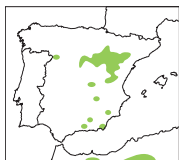


Calandra Lark
Melanocorypha calandra
Calandria común



A robust lark with a thick beak, black patches on each side of the neck and distinctive dark underwings in flight. A fine mimic of other bird-songs, it is one of the most typical birds of the flat dryfarming and cereal-growing land of central Spain. Numbers are highest in Castilla y León, a region of spectacular Medieval castles like *Castillo de Coca* (Segovia), *Castillo de Zamora* or *Castillo de La Mota* in Medina del Campo (Valladolid). ■

Very rare and listed as in danger of extinction, the Dupont's is similar to a Crested Lark but slimmer with a long curved beak. Difficult to see but often betrays its presence by an easily recognisable fluty call, onomatopoeically rendered as "*ricoti*" in its Spanish name. Ground hugging, rarely taking to the air, it frequents flat, stony or chalky terrain with sparse low vegetation such as thyme or broom. The SEO/BirdLife-owned reserve called *Reserva del Planerón* in Belchite (Zaragoza) is one of its last redoubts. In the surrounding fields are grown the cereals from which the organic pasta of Riet Vell is made: www.rietvell.com. ■

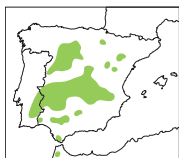


83

Dupont's Lark
Chersophilus duponti
Alondra ricoti

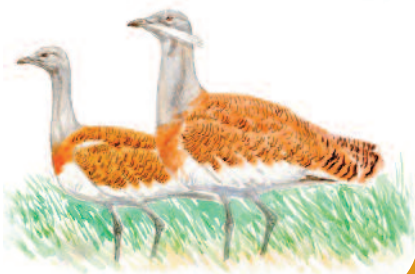


Europe's heaviest flying bird, with males weighing in at between 8-16 kilos and almost matching the habitat-sharing sheep for size. It breeds on open plains in Spain's dryland crops, mainly in the centre of the country, shunning human habitations and busy roads. A gregarious species; the males put on spectacular female-wooing displays in communal leks. Its main threat is the loss of suitable habitat although numbers are holding steady in Spain, which boasts the world's biggest population with 27,500-30,000 birds). One of the iconic spots for watching them is the *Parque Natural de las Lagunas de Villafáfila* in Zamora (Castilla y León), although it is also quite easy to see them only a few kilometres from Madrid and in some spots of Castilla-La Mancha. ■

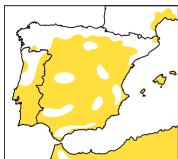


84

Great Bustard
Otis tarda
Avutarda común



85



Greater Short-toed Lark

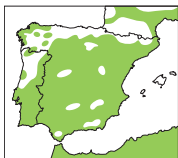
Calandrella brachydactyla

Terrera común



A small gregarious lark with sandy, largely unstreaked plumage and dark patches on each side of the neck like the Calandra Lark. Its flight is undulating and agile with sudden swoops and it feeds on both seeds and insects and lives in flat, dry and open countryside. A good spot for seeing it is the district known as *Bajo Martín* in the north of Soria province, one of the areas with the lowest population density in Spain. ■

86



Crested Lark

Galerida cristata

Cogujada común



Sandy coloured like the Calandra Lark but smaller with a characteristic crest, it favours dryfarming land, the outskirts of towns and roadside paths and ditches. Much more accustomed to man than other larks, it is often the commonest bird of dryfarming areas. This sort of habitat has changed radically in recent years because of the population drift to the towns and the increased intensification of farming methods; recent studies show that such regions are now losing much of their birdlife. ■

Very similar to the closely-related Crested Lark but told apart by its shorter, straighter beak, lower-lying crest and thicker breast streaks. It often sings from high perches, unlike the more aerial Crested Lark. It lives in wasteland and is frequent in rocky areas, and is very common on the Balearic Islands, where there are no Crested Larks. ■



87

Thekla Lark

Galerida theklae

Cogujada montesina



The male's plumage varies from ochre to light cream; the tail is black with noticeable white outer-tail feathers. It breeds in open land with bushes, trees and scattered rocks, singing from songposts or in flight. The open countryside of La Mancha is a good place to see them, living today in much the same landscape as described in Miguel de Cervantes's *Quixote*, one of the enduring gems of Spanish literature. ■



88

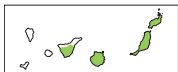
Black-eared Wheatear

Oenanthe hispanica

Collalba rubia



89



Southern Grey Shrike

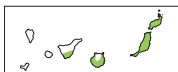
Lanius meridionalis

Alcaudón real



This species lives in drier and more open terrain than the Great Grey Shrike, which it resembles closely, though the Southern has a thin white line above the black eyestripe and a pink flush to the light grey breast. Wintering birds congregate above all in the centre and west of the country. Shrikes are one of the bird families that have suffered the steepest declines in recent decades. ■

90



Trumpeter Finch

Bucanetes githagineus

Camachuelo trompetero



A small chunky bird with a pinkish breast, brownish back and grey head with a short thick bill. It is abundant in North Africa, and prospers in the very arid, almost desert-like terrain of the easternmost Canary Islands (especially Lanzarote and Fuerteventura), where it is easy to see moving around in small busy flocks. It also lives in the southeast part of Spain from where it is colonising new territories, the *Desierto de Tabernas* in Almería is a good site to see it. ■

A dark pigeon, the same size as the Wood Pigeon, with wine-coloured breast and dark tail tip. It is a sedentary, endemic and threatened species nesting in Laurel forests of Tenerife, Gomera, La Palma and El Hierro. It feeds on the fruits of the Laurel species *Persea indica* and other trees. The best viewing spot is *Parque Nacional de Garajonay* on the island of Gomera. This island boasts a valuable remnant of the subtropical Laurel woods that cloaked the Mediterranean area several million years ago in the Tertiary period. ■



91

Bolle's Pigeon
Columba bollii
Paloma turqué



This pigeon has a dark chestnut breast and a characteristic white tail tip. It nests in rocky gorges and steep Laurel forests of Tenerife, Gomera and La Palma. A sedentary, endemic and threatened species whose healthiest populations are found in La Palma's Biosphere Reserve called *Bosque de los Tilos*, the site also of singular trees like the Canary Islands Dragon Tree or "Drago" (*Dracaena drago*). ■



92

White-Tailed Laurel Pigeon
Columba junoniae
Paloma rabiche



93



Canary Islands Stonechat

Saxicola dacotiae

Tarabilla canaria



Similar to the Common Stonechat but with a white eyestripe, throat and rump. The orange of the chest fades out towards the belly. It haunts gorges and arid zones with spiny scrub on the Island of Fuerteventura, the closest to Africa of the Canary Islands and the most desert-like due to the absence of the balmy trade winds that cool down the rest of the archipelago. Sedentary and threatened, the healthiest population lives on *Peñínsula de Jandía* in Fuerteventura, the remains of an old volcanic crater famous today for its virgin beaches of white sand. ■

94



Blue Chaffinch

Fringilla teydea

Pinzón azul



Sedentary and endemic to the Canaries, it is divided into two subspecies, one more abundant in Tenerife and another duller-plumaged bird in Gran Canaria. Males are blue-grey in colour, brightest on the head and mantle; females are dull brown. The best place to see them is the Canary Island Pine woods growing round the volcanic rock of *Parque Nacional de las Cañadas del Teide* in Tenerife. The pines themselves are singular in that they sprout anew after fires, and the volcano, at 3718 metres, is the highest peak in the whole Spanish territory. Its summit, snow-covered in winter, is visible from the island's beaches. ■

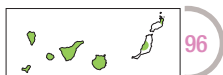
One of the commonest birds in the Canary Islands, except for Lanzarote and Fuerteventura. It is smaller than the Common Chiffchaff with more rounded wings. An endemic species living in forest edges, gardens and urban parks and very frequent in the islands' market gardens, where grapes and potatoes are grown to make the delicious "Malvasía" wines and such famous dishes as "*papas arrugadas con mojo picón*" (wrinkly potatoes with spicy sauce). It was precisely in the Canary Islands that the potato gained its first foothold in European territory after being shipped in from the Americas. ■



Canary Islands Chiffchaff
Phylloscopus canariensis
 Mosquitero canario



The wild forerunner of the canary cagebird, endemic to Macaronesia (Canaries, Madeira and Azores), and bigger but slimmer than a Serin. The male is less streaked than the female and with much more yellow on the belly and flanks. It is present on all islands of the archipelago and regarded as one of the symbols of the islands together with the Canary Palm or the famous centenarian Canary Islands Dragon Tree. It lives in market gardens and open wooded land. ■



Atlantic Canary
Serinus canaria
 Serín canario



97



Berthelot's Pipit

Anthus berthelotii

Bisbita caminero



A pipit with a greyish back and whitish, heavily streaked breast and belly, with frequents arid farmland on all the islands. Common on higher ground such as the iconic crag called *Roque de los Muchachos* in *Parque Nacional de la Caldera de Taburiente* (2396 m). This site is also home to one of the world's most complete astronomical observatories. A drive up from the beach takes you through all the island's ecosystems one after the other. ■

98



Cream-Coloured Courser

Cursorius cursor

Corredor sahariano



A slim, sandy-coloured, long-legged plover frequenting desert-like areas of Fuerteventura and, to much a lesser extent, Lanzarote. Formerly present too in the island of Gran Canaria but it became extinct there. It feeds on insects and other invertebrates. ■

A medium-sized bustard, very quick, agile and graceful over the ground. Sandy brown in colour with a characteristic black line running down the side of the neck. It lives in desert-like areas of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote, feeding on insects and plants, but it is in danger of extinction due to habitat destruction. SEO/BirdLife runs its own reserve where this species lives: *Cercado de El Jarde* in Fuerteventura. ■



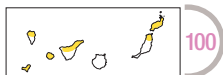
99

Houbara Bustard

Chlamydotis undulata
Avutarda hubara



A large, very dark, shearwater-like petrel with long wings and tail. It is an agile flier which breeds on islets and steep cliffs of practically all the islands. One of the biggest populations breeds on the cliffs of *Parque Nacional de Timanfaya*, a national park with over 25 volcanoes. Some of these volcanoes are still active today, reaching temperatures of 600°C only thirteen metres down. The park lies on the island of Lanzarote, listed as a Biosphere Reserve. ■



100

Bulwer's Petrel

Bulweria bulwerii
Petrel de Bulwer



Much more than sun and beaches

Every year 50 million tourists come to Spain, attracted mainly by its beaches, sunny climate and cultural heritage. Quite apart from all these well-known attractions, however, its biodiversity and varied landscapes make it a unique destination for observing and enjoying an exceptional flora and fauna, all too often overlooked by hasty tourists with other sights on their minds.

Spain boasts a host of different ecosystems, with a botanical diversity and wealth of fauna that are practically unique in Europe. These range from a sizeable collection of endemic invertebrates to large mammals like the bear, wolf and lynx, as well as a quite spectacular birdlife.

No other European country can match Spain's biodiversity. Fifty per cent of the continent's vertebrates live in Spain and 30% of the territory is included in the EU's Natura 2000 Network on the strength of the singular and well-conserved habitats and species.

Several factors account for Spain's wealth of wildlife, such as its geographical position, its hilly and mountainous terrain, climatic diversity and traditional land uses. Lying between two continents and straddling two seas, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, the Iberian Peninsula has served as a crossroads for animal movements for millions of years. Many cold-climate species took up residence here during the glaciations and now take refuge on the highest mountain tops; other sub-tropical species have hung on here since the hot humid times of the Tertiary period; yet others, acclimatised to colder and drier times, have also found their niche.

Spain's nature, its exclusive species and ecosystems, are therefore unmatched elsewhere. This is especially true of the plant world, though the fauna too has many endemics, especially among the invertebrates, continental fish species and, to a lesser extent, amphibians, reptiles and mammals. The same does not go for its birds, nearly all of which are shared with other countries, especially European ones, barring some especially rare or restricted-range one-offs.

Nonetheless, Spain is one of Europe's best birdwatching countries. According to the latest official list drawn up by SEO/BirdLife in 2012, 569 species of birds have now been recorded in Spain, including migrants and rarities. Many of them are scarce or difficult to see in the rest of Europe; others are basically African species existing here on the northern edge of their range; others still are exclusive to Spanish territory. Endemic birds are few however, restricted to Spanish Imperial Eagle and Iberian Chiffchaff on the mainland, Balearic Shearwater and Balearic Warbler on the Balearic Islands and Bolle's Pigeon, White-Tailed Laurel Pigeon, Blue Chaffinch, Canary Islands Stonechat and Canary Islands Chiffchaff on the Canaries.

Spain is therefore home to northern species on the southern edge of their range, sub-Saharan species on the northern edge of their range and a whole host of birds that have evolved in all the infinitely varied habitats in between.

Spain is Europe's second most mountainous country after Switzerland, with various peaks thrusting up to 3000 metres or more. This is an essential factor for understanding its wealth of ecosystems today. These mountains range from the Alpine ecosystem of the Pyrenees, in the north, to the idiosyncratic Sierra Nevada, a lone snowy peak in the hot south.

The spectacular mass migration across the Strait of Gibraltar is another hallmark feature of Spain's birdlife. With only 14 kms of sea separating Europe and Africa, this area funnels in millions of migrating birds every year. Especially striking and eye-catching is the autumn passage of large soaring birds. These are heavily dependent on wind conditions to be able to make the crossing, and when the wind is unfavourable wait in their thousands on dry land until the weather allows them to cross the Strait safely.

Spain's traditional farming practices have also favoured its birdlife over time. Time-honoured crop-farming systems and extensive livestock rearing with seasonal movements to higher and lower ground (transhumance) have generated a land-use system in which wildlife and human activity have been able to coexist harmoniously for thousands of years. The classic example of this is the typical open grazing woodland called *dehesa*, a patch-work landscape in which Holm Oaks and Cork Oaks alternate with pastureland and crop fields. The *dehesa* and the surrounding thickly scrubbed hills are home to flagship species like the Imperial Eagle and Iberian Lynx, the only endemics of this type of terrain. In these environments both have evolved in close relationship with a basic food source, also native to the Iberian Peninsula: the wild rabbit. Such is the importance of this lagomorph as a prey species that it would have to be rated alongside bear, vulture, eagle or wolf as one of Spain's key wildlife components.

Notes

