

# Spain

## Extremadura & Gredos

2022

**Sunday 15 - Sunday 22 May (8 days)**

**Small group tour with Fernando Enrique Navarrete**



A male Blue Rock Thrush stops by to inspect our group in lovely Monfragüe National Park © Fernando Enrique Navarrete, Limosa

First run over 30 years ago, this hugely enjoyable **two-centre birdwatching tour to Central Spain** remains one of Limosa's all-time favourite trips. After seeking a host of rare and spectacular breeding birds amid the rolling steppe grasslands and *dehesa* oak woodlands of Extremadura, we climb high into the beautiful Sierra de Gredos in search of alpine specialities. The bird list for this Spain birding tour is exceptional, with the possibilities including Great and Little Bustards, Great Spotted Cuckoo, White-rumped Swift, Iberian Magpie, Bluethroat and Citril Finch. Add Spanish Imperial Eagle among more than a dozen different birds of prey, plus two wonderfully situated hotels, so join us for a trip that offers the best birding in all Iberia... at the very best time of year!

### Highlights

- Unrivalled spring birding amid the steppes and sierras of Central Spain
- 5 nights in Extremadura - THE best place in Europe for birds of prey
- Based at a superbly situated hotel overlooking beautiful Monfragüe National Park
- Spanish Imperial Eagle, Great and Little Bustards, Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, Roller
- Plus 2 nights at a characterful *Parador*, set high in the splendid Sierra de Gredos
- Great Spotted Cuckoo, White-rumped Swift, Iberian Magpie, Iberian Grey Shrike, Bluethroat, Citril Finch
- Small party size - maximum of 10 participants
- Expertly led by Limosa's English-speaking Spanish specialist Fernando Enrique Navarrete

## What's Included?

- Limosa Tour Leader with second added if group size is above six.
- 7 nights accommodation in Spain, staying at two good and comfortable hotels (5 nights in Extremadura, 2 nights Sierra de Gredos)
- All main meals and drinking water provided
- Minibus transport
- All excursions, entry fees and permits
- All tour-based tips (hotels, meals etc) & taxes
- Limosa Checklist of birds



A roadside Roller, Extremadura © Fernando Enrique, Limosa

## Outline Itinerary

### Day 1

Fly to Madrid. Transfer to our hotel in Extremadura which is right on the doorstep of the Monfragüe National Park. Night Monfragüe

### Days 2-5

From our base near historic Trujillo, we have four days to explore wild and beautiful Monfragüe National Park and the rolling steppes and sierras of Extremadura. Four further nights Monfragüe

### Day 6

We travel north through Monfragüe National Park and climb up into the Sierra de Gredos. Night Parador de Gredos

### Day 7

We enjoy a full day of alpine birding in the Sierra de Gredos. Night Parador de Gredos

### Day 8

Return to Madrid, fly to UK

## Tour Overview

A dusting of snow on distant sierras, Bee-eaters hawking over the *dehesas*, hillsides filled with the heady scent of *Cistus* and picnics beneath pine trees topped by the nests of bill-clattering White Storks... The distant 'raspberry' of a Little Bustard unseen in the grasslands, warm Spanish skies thronged by over a dozen species of birds of prey, the gaze of an Eagle Owl squinting back at us from a crag in the bright afternoon sun... This long-running holiday to the rugged steppes and wild sierras of Spain's 'Secret Wilderness' offers all this and more!

Our trip begins in Madrid, from where we head west to Extremadura, the 'wild heart of Spain', and the fabulous Spanish steppes. We spend the first five nights staying at a wonderfully situated *Hospederia* which is right on the approach to beautiful Monfragüe National Park and with great birding right on the doorstep.

From seemingly endless horizons of evergreen oaks to the wide blue skies and broad sweep of the region's glorious steppe grasslands, our days here are

typically filled with sunny days and a spectacular selection of birds!

Nowhere else in Europe do birds of prey breed in such variety, while the likes of Black Stork, Western Swamphen, Roller, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Iberian Grey Shrike, Little Bustard and the spectacular Great Bustard are among a long list of other possible treats in store.

During our stay in Extremadura, we will make a thorough exploration of magnificent Monfragüe National Park. Western Orphean Warbler, Rock Sparrow and Iberian Magpie will occupy our time in the delightful woodlands as we keep a keen eye on the skies for Monfragüe's plentiful birds of prey. All five Iberian eagles - Booted, Bonelli's, Short-toed, Golden and Spanish Imperial can be found here and Black, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures breed here too with hordes of Griffon Vultures often thronging the dramatic rock pinnacle of Peñafalcon.

We will also seek the elusive Black-winged Kite, scan the cliffs and crags for Eagle Owl, look for the rare White-rumped Swift and pay a visit to the historic old town of Trujillo with its splendid medieval architecture adorned by nesting Lesser Kestrels, Pallid Swifts and White Storks.

We conclude our holiday with two nights at a characterful and comfortable Parador which is set high in the Sierra de Gredos. With views out over the pinewoods and a chance of seeing Citril Finch on the lawn outside, these lovely mountains are another of Spain's best-kept secrets! Melodious and Western Bonelli's Warblers, Firecrest and Pied Flycatcher frequent the forests and Ortolan Buntings serenade us from alpine slopes heavy with the scent of yellow-flowering broom.

As the road winds higher, and rare and imposing Spanish Ibex gaze down from the ridges above, we enter the realm of the exquisite Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting, Water Pipit and the localised Bluethroat. It should all make for a thrilling finale to this wonderful two-centre holiday which is our often our best-loved European tour.

Limosa has been operating a wide-ranging annual programme of birdwatching tours to Spain since 1990, including dozens of trips to Central Spain. Led by our highly rated English-speaking Spanish specialist **Fernando Enrique Navarrete**, who has lived in Extremadura and knows the area well, this five-star, small group tour will introduce you to the very best birdwatching in all Iberia and at the very best time of year!

For those wanting to turn their Iberia holiday into a truly comprehensive birdwatching extravaganza, this tour can be combined with our trip to the Ebro Delta. Please contact our office for details.



We hope to find Iberian Ibex during our time in the Gredos Mountains © Colin Bushell

## Daily Itinerary

### Day 1

#### TO MADRID & MONFRAGUE

Our May birdwatching holiday to central Spain begins with a morning flight to Madrid, where Fernando will be waiting to welcome us.

We set off west towards the rolling steppe, beautiful oak woodlands and wild sierras of Extremadura. The journey should take around three to four hours, although we will pause along the way to enjoy a light *tapas* lunch at a nice little *venta* Fernando knows. Scanning the grasslands, we could find our first Montagu's Harrier or Bee-eater and maybe have a first try for the ever-elusive Black-winged Kite!

Early evening arrival at our hotel for five nights, a wonderfully situated *Hospederia* that lies right on the approach to the magnificent Monfragüe National Park. Cattle Egrets and White Storks forage for lizards and grasshoppers in the pastures, handsome Spanish Sparrows and Spotless Starlings nest in numbers around the scattered Extremaduran farmsteads and Black Kites float effortlessly over the grasslands. *Night at a hotel overlooking Monfragüe National Park*

### Days 2 - 5

#### MONFRAGUE, STEPPE GRASSLANDS & SIERRAS OF EXTREMADURA

Monfragüe National Park sits amidst mile upon mile of unspoilt countryside, where centuries of traditional land management have created the unique *dehesas* - a timeless, park-like habitat of cork and evergreen oaks, foraged by pigs and alive in spring with calls of Hoopoes, Woodlarks, Rock Sparrows, Woodchat Shrikes and beautiful Iberian Magpies. The rocky fields and verges brim with an exuberance of wild flowers at this



Griffon Vulture © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

season whilst Sardinian Warblers give their scolding 'rat-a-tat-tat' call at almost every stop we make and dusty, pink-chested Iberian Grey Shrikes perch boldly beside the road.

Monfragüe is arguably the finest place in all of Europe for birds of prey and we can expect to encounter a dozen or more different species. Immense Griffon Vultures patrol the skies, along with the even larger Black Vulture, as well as Egyptian Vulture, Red and Black Kites, Peregrine and five species of eagle: Short-toed, Booted, Bonelli's, Golden and Spanish Imperial. The latter is one of the world's rarest and most endangered raptors but despite this we stand an excellent chance of seeing it.

The scarce Black Stork is perhaps easier to see well at Monfragüe than anywhere else we know and we will also check a favourite spot for the powerful Eurasian Eagle Owl with chances that we could see the young of both these species.

Truly a magical spot, Monfragüe's plunging valleys and herb-scented hillsides are equally rich in small birds. Crag Martin, Thekla Lark, Blue Rock Thrush, Dartford, Subalpine and Western Orphean Warblers,

Short-toed Treecreeper, Hawfinch and Red-billed Chough should all be about. Parties of Alpine Swifts sweep past beneath us to their nests and, with luck, we will find the scarce and declining Black Wheatear. The rare White-rumped Swift is an essentially African species that we have often seen at Monfragüe in the past. This is a late arrival to Europe that is best looked for from the middle of May onwards.

The sweeping plain that lies to the south of Monfragüe is a major stronghold of the aristocratic Great Bustard. Early mornings offer the best chance to see these magnificent birds (don't worry, it doesn't get light until about seven!), before the grasslands disappear beneath a sea of shimmering heat-haze. With Hoopoes, Stone-curlews and Calandra Larks calling around us, we shall scan the steppe for the dominant males as they perform their quite extraordinary display which culminates in the great birds shaking and turning themselves 'inside-out' to become a mass of white feathers that is variously likened to a foaming bath or a giant chrysanthemum!

We should also see and hear the 'raspberry-blowing' Little Bustard, with its distinctive Newcastle United-stocking neck!

Extremadura's flowing grasslands are interrupted by chains of low rocky sierras and slow-flowing rivers, and for sheer variety of birds this whole region is hard to beat.

Little Bittern, Black-crowned Night Heron, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Short-toed Lark, Spectacled Warbler, Penduline Tit and Golden Oriole are among many that await our discovery and Spanish Sparrows, which despite their name are actually rather scarce in Spain, can be locally common here with flocks of several hundred sometimes seen.

We may also hear the unmusical rattling cackle of the Great Spotted Cuckoo (which boldly lays its eggs in the nest of Magpies), watch Red-rumped Swallows swooping low to their nest in a culvert beneath the road or come face to face with the squat form of a Little Owl glaring down at us from one of the massive 'erratic' boulders that are so characteristic of these 'hard lands'.



Resplendent in chestnut, white and blue, there is no mistaking a male Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush! © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

We also plan to visit a productive wetland site that is home to Purple Heron, Western Swamphen and Savi's Warbler and have further chances to look for Black-winged Kite, whilst out in the rice fields we may encounter two tiny finches: Common Waxbill and the startling Red Avadavat. Both have been introduced here and in breeding plumage, the male Avadavats can resemble a fast-flying strawberry!

Before leaving Extremadura, on one day we intend to pay a short visit to Trujillo and spend some time wandering the narrow, cobbled streets of this historic hilltop town. The Conquistadors may have long since departed this famous place but there are still plenty of White Storks, Lesser Kestrels and Pallid Swifts to enjoy as we sip an ice cold beer in the beautiful main *piazza*.

Bring your camera as on a clear day, the views across the plains from atop the medieval battlements are superb! *Four further nights at our hotel overlooking Monfragüe National Park*



Ortolan Bunting, Gredos Mtns © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

## Days 6 - 7

### SIERRA DE GREDOS

Bidding a reluctant farewell to our hotel, we travel north, passing once again through spectacular Monfragüe National Park. Along the way, we will watch for raptors such as Bonelli's and Golden Eagles and have further chances to try for Western Orphean Warbler, White-rumped Swift and any of the region's more elusive inhabitants which we may not have seen. If it is hot, we may picnic in Monfragüe beneath the shade of some fine old Cork Oaks, with bill-clapping White Storks and Nightingales to serenade us.

We will then continue into the delightful Gredos Mountains, where the creaking, oak-boarded corridors of our second super hotel and a whole suite of new birds await!

With views out across a patchwork of upland meadows and bottle-green pines to distant snowy peaks, the imposing *Parador de Gredos* makes the perfect base to conclude our tour. The sound of cowbells drifts up the hillside from fields below, Firecrests and Western Bonelli's Warblers breed nearby and Honey Buzzards clap their wings in Nightjar-like display high above the forests. For those who can manage to tear themselves away from the comfort of their hotelroom, a pre-breakfast amble might well be rewarded with the likes of Crag Martin, Crested Tit, Black Redstart and Cirl Bunting.

We will devote the whole of Day 7 to birding in the mountains, soaking up what is surely some of the loveliest countryside in all Spain. Iberian Green Woodpecker, Melodious Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, Dipper, Grey Wagtail and Common Crossbill frequent the pinewoods that flank the tumbling streams in the valleys, with the lilting spring song of pastel-coloured Ortolan Buntings to tempt us up on to the higher slopes.

Higher still, we will search for the extremely localised Bluethroat (unusually, the birds found here have an all-blue throat), while on alpine hillsides heavy with scent and laden with yellow-flowering Spanish Broom, we should add Rock Bunting and Water Pipit.

The handsome Rufous-tailed (or Common) Rock Thrush breeds here with the exquisite spring males resplendent in chestnut, white and blue. The elusive Citril Finch is another possible treat and we will have to try to avoid 'sharing' our picnic with a rare and imposing Iberian Ibex! *Two nights Parador de Gredos*

### Day 8

#### DESCEND TO MADRID, FLY LONDON

After another hearty *Parador* buffet breakfast and a last chance to look for the likes of Citril Finch, Hobby and Dipper, we head down from the mountains towards Madrid.

Our route there may take us past the fortified medieval town of Avila, with its castellated pink stone walls looking for all the world as though they must have been built for some blockbusting Hollywood epic. Though our birding is sadly all but over, we may still be lucky to spot the odd vulture, Booted Eagle or Red Kite along the way.

Arriving back in Madrid, we catch a late afternoon flight to back to the UK, where our spring birdwatching tour to Spain concludes.

### Trip Information

**Group Size** Max 10 participants and 2 leaders (or 6 participants and 1 leader)

**Birds** 130-160 species



Raptor watching in the Sierra de Gredos on our May tour to Central Spain © Fernando Enrique, Limosa

**Accommodation** 7 nights accommodation in central Spain, staying at two good and comfortable hotels. All rooms have private facilities.

Our trip commences in Extremadura, where we spend five nights at the *Hospedería Parque de Monfragüe* overlooking magnificent Monfragüe National Park, some 25 miles north of the town of Trujillo.

We conclude our holiday with two nights at the comfortable and characterful *Parador de Gredos*, at the heart of the picturesque Sierra de Gredos.

**Meals** All main meals are included in the tour price, commencing with a light *tapas* lunch on Day 1 and concluding with a packed lunch on Day 8.

Breakfasts and dinners will usually be at the hotels. Lunches will generally be picnics in some of our favourite places.

**Walking** Overall easy. The short but steep walk up to the Castillo de Monfragüe to enjoy the spectacular view and to scan for White-rumped Swift is optional and involves climbing some steep steps, but all taken slowly.

In the Gredos Mountains, we offer one longer and more moderate walk (optional and weather permitting) for a maximum of 1-2.5 miles (2-4 kms) depending on where our target birds are this year.

There are some uphill sections on the path, but it is all taken at a gentle pace and with good chances of seeing song-flying Bluethroat as a reward!

Comfortable walking shoes with sturdy corrugated soles are advised here.

**Weather** The weather on the Extremaduran steppe in May is usually warm to hot and sunny, with occasional showers or thundery rain.

It is generally more variable in the uplands of the Sierra de Gredos, where our hotel is situated at an elevation of c.1500m (5000ft). It is often warm and sunny in the mountains but it can feel cool, especially early and late in the day.

As with all upland areas, it can occasionally be cold and/or rainy. Snow is unlikely (but not impossible) in the Sierra de Gredos in May.

**Flights** Due to the pandemic, it is proving extremely difficult to predict future flight prices and schedules, especially when a trip is scheduled for beyond the period when flights can be booked. As a result, we have taken the decision to price our holidays as excluding all flights.

To keep the process as simple as possible for our clients, however, we are now working closely with a dedicated agent at Travel Counsellors who will be able to advise you which flights we are recommending and he will be able to book these for you.

For those not wanting to travel via London, there are options via some regional airports.



Rock Bunting © Fernando Enrique Navarrete

**Ground Transport** By minibus

**Photos** Opportunities for incidental bird photography can be good to excellent, especially for flying raptors and storks at Peñafalcon in Monfragüe National Park.

## Tour Cost

**2022 (8 days):**

Land only cost: £1895

Single supplement: £295

Deposit: £500

### Cost includes

- Limosa Tour Leader(s)
- 7 nights accommodation in Spain
- All main meals and drinking water provided
- Minibus transport
- All excursions, entry fees and permits
- All tour-based tips (hotels, meals etc) & taxes
- Limosa checklist of birds

### Cost excludes

International flights, insurance, drinks, airport/in-flight meals and snacks & other items of a personal nature.

## Combining with Ebro Delta & Steppe

The dates of our Ebro Delta tour and the subsequent holiday to Extremadura and Gredos have been deliberately set to allow clients to combine these to give you a truly comprehensive trip to Spain.

Please contact our office to discuss if you are interested in the option of doing this.

## About Your Guide

**Fernando Enrique** is our resident Spanish expert, an English-speaking bird tour guide, all-round naturalist and biologist whose home is in Andalucia.

As a child, he was fascinated by the flocks of raptors that formed above his home and being born in the Strait, Europe's most important bird migration route, helped shape his love of birds and nature.

At age 18, Fernando became one of the youngest bird-ringers in Spain, while his eagerness to learn about more and more species led him to travel widely in Europe, Africa, Asia and Central America. Now in his mid-thirties, he has worked with many species, including Montagu's Harrier, Lesser Kestrel, Griffon Vulture and White Stork, as well as on projects studying the effects of wind farms on birds.

Spanish is, of course, Fernando's first language but his command of English is also excellent and he is a delight to travel with, earning rave reviews from participants.

He leads our tours to Guatemala, Belize and northern Morocco as well as those across Spain. Having lived and worked in north, central and southern Spain, he knows the birds of all these regions exceptionally well.

Our 2022 trip will be his 5<sup>th</sup> May tour to *Extremadura & Gredos* for Limosa.

## What You Say...

*"A tour perfectly designed to show off the bird-rich, grand beauty of Spain, packed with variety but done at a relaxed pace."*

**SF, Extremadura & Gredos tour**

*"Good transport, excellent guides, fantastic birds - the best!"*

**DH, Extremadura & Gredos tour**

*“A marvellous holiday. We just never imagined the Spanish steppes could be so beautiful! ... the fragrance and colour of the wild flowers and herbs, the birds, the butterflies and the sun! Add two superb guides and a group that just gelled. Perfect.”*

**R&BP, Extremadura & Gredos tour**

*“Good transport, excellent guides, fantastic birds - the best!”*

**DH, Extremadura & Gredos tour**

### How To Enquire

Due to the considerable uncertainty created by the pandemic, Limosa Holidays are not currently accepting bookings for any trips, however, you are welcome to contact us either by email or phone to register your interest in any of our holidays.

Whilst some tour companies may be willing to take a deposit from you and say a trip is a “confirmed departure”, our approach is going to be to wait a little longer as we consider this both honest and realistic.

Once we are confident that the trip can run, we will be in touch to confirm your place and ask for a deposit.

We do encourage you to register your interest as we are expecting considerable demand, once the consensus is that it is safe to travel again.

### Any Questions

Please do not hesitate to contact us by email or phone. Our office is generally open from 09:30-17:30 but you are welcome to contact us outside these times too. We are happy to take calls in the evening and at weekends but if no one is available the call will go to our answerphone.

***Thank you for your interest in our tours. We do hope that you will be able to join us once the pandemic is over and we look forward to hearing from you.***

