



## SPRING BIRDING IN SPAIN: FROM THE ATLANTIC COAST TO THE HIGH PYRENEES

APRIL 22–MAY 9, 2025

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*VENT's Spanish birding tour has been designed based on over 30 years of experience of birding in Spain. This itinerary incorporates important bird areas in Central and Northern Spain and additional important wetlands on the Atlantic coast. The route has been planned to add further exciting species and to make this an extremely comprehensive birding tour, with the possibility of including Middle Spotted Woodpecker, breeding Bluethroats and Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin to an already very impressive tour list that stands at a total of 275 species and regularly exceeds 200 species.*

*Spain has long been an extremely popular destination for European birders, offering as it does a wide range of typical Mediterranean habitats, along with easy, safe, and excellent birding. Many sites are in beautifully scenic settings featuring Romanesque architecture and ancient, fortified hilltop villages. Despite its appeal within Europe as a "sun and sand" holiday destination, much of interior Spain is very rural and way off the tourist trail. This is the finest region to sample a large array of southern European species and is especially good for raptors, with 24 species possible.*

*Our very comprehensive itinerary is specially designed for American birders and provides a greater diversity of birds, concentrating on three major and distinct habitats: the semi-arid steppes and cork-oak dehesas of central Spain's interior; the scenic sierras and high, alpine Pyrenees and Picos de Europa to the north in Aragon and Cantabria; and the Doñana wetlands and marshes on the Atlantic coast. During spring, the many resident and breeding birds of this region are joined by migrants en route from Africa to breeding areas in the north and the Arctic.*



*Our first birding will be in the incredible Doñana National Park (also known as Coto de Doñana). The impressive variety of ecosystems will provide a chance to see some of the rarest birds present in Southern*

*Europe. Squacco Herons, Collared Pratincoles, Black-winged Stilts, Whiskered Terns, Greater Flamingos, Eurasian Spoonbills and Glossy Ibis are abundant, while Little Bittern, Red-crested Pochard, Red-knobbed Coot, Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, Western Olivaceous Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Audouin's Gull, Iberian Chiffchaff and the endangered Spanish Eagle are all present. Besides, Doñana is one of the last refuges for the Iberian Lynx, one of the most threatened felines in the world.*



Greater Flamingos are a common sight at Doñana National Park © Brian Gibbons

*The hills and cork-oak dehesas of Extremadura and particularly in the Monfragüe region will be the second region visited. Our target species, which will not be found further north, include Black Stork, Cinereous Vulture, Black-winged Kite, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Red-necked Nightjar, Red-rumped Swallow, Iberian Magpie, Spanish Sparrow, White-rumped Swift, and, most importantly, Spanish Eagle—a recent split from the Imperial Eagle of Eastern Europe and the only full endemic species in Iberia.*

*To the west and still within the Extremadura region, the steppes are a fast-disappearing habitat being lost to arable agriculture. Certain areas have been protected by international efforts and are now splendid reserves that we shall visit. It is a land of flat stony plains, mesas, scrubby river valleys, and maquis vegetation not unlike some semi-desert regions of the southwest U.S. Primary birding goals will be Great and Little bustards (sadly Little Bustards are declining and have become very difficult to see in recent years), Pin-tailed and Black-bellied sandgrouse, Montagu's Harrier, Red-legged Partridge, Lesser Kestrel, Eurasian Thick-knee (or Stone Curlew), Spectacled Warbler, and six species of larks. White Storks are common, found nesting on village rooftops or precariously perched on ancient church spires.*

*On the way to the two main mountain regions of Northern Spain we will explore the beautiful and scenic Gredos Mountains, the best spot in Spain for seeing breeding Bluethroats. Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, Northern Wheatear, Citril Finch and Ortolan Bunting are all target birds too. Our hotel, surrounded by mountains and Scots Pines, has an excellent reputation for its local cuisine.*

*The Picos de Europa and the high Pyrenees offer some of the most spectacular scenery of the tour. At lower elevations are unspoiled habitats of box scrub, olive groves, and stunted oak forest amidst impressive steep, deep limestone gorges and massifs of pink, red, and gray. Here are many classic Mediterranean species such as Eurasian Hoopoe; European Bee-eater; Woodchat Shrike; Black-eared and Black wheatears; European Serin; Cirl, Ortolan, and Rock buntings; plus, many warbler species including Sardinian, Western Orphean, Subalpine, and Western Bonelli's. Here, too, is one of the greatest concentrations of raptors found anywhere in Europe, with 20 species possible. Eurasian Griffons are abundant, and just about guaranteed are Egyptian Vulture; Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier); Golden, Booted and Short-toed Snake-eagles; and Red and Black kites. The two areas*



Picos de Europa © Brian Gibbons

*have magnificent villages, massively built of stone with immense walls. In the Pyrenees, there are old cathedrals, churches, monasteries and castles dating back to the twelfth to sixteenth centuries when Spain was divided into the separate states of Castile, Aragon, and Catalonia and occupied in some areas by the Moors from Northern Africa.*

*At higher elevations are true alpine habitats of coniferous forests; fast-flowing streams; open, flower-rich meadows; and splendid craggy mountain peaks, some still snow-covered. Other specialties we hope for here are Alpine Accentor, Red-billed and Yellow-billed choughs, White-throated Dipper, Gray Wagtail, Alpine Swift, Citril Finch, Black Woodpecker, and the fabulous Wallcreeper. If lucky, we may find White-winged Snowfinch breeding in the Picos de Europa area.*

*And last but not least, we will explore the plains south of the Ebro River known as Belchite steppes. Sandy hills, open and flat natural grasslands and some agricultural fields characterize this particular region of Spain. The temperatures here are extreme in winter and summer, making the spring the best time to visit this superb spot for the steppe species such as both sandgrouse and the elusive Dupont's Lark, a species only present in North Africa and Spain!*

*We travel in spacious and comfortable vans, allowing for maximum flexibility. Optional pre-breakfast birding and after-dark owling are offered for the keenest, while those who wish to relax at times may opt out without disrupting the schedule. Food is generally good and plentiful, and it is customary in Spain to provide wine free with the evening meal. Some accommodations are in small, clean and simple, family-run rural hotels, delightfully individual and pleasant. Other accommodations are larger, exclusive, and four stars. All have private bathrooms.*

*Your leaders enthusiastically look forward to sharing with you the marvellous birds, spectacular scenery, and special magic of this splendid region of Europe. This tour does not require a great deal of walking or steep hiking to see the bulk of the birds, though there are opportunities for longer hikes for those who choose.*

*We have plenty of time and a good client/leader ratio to ensure that just about everyone gets great views of most every bird! The highest altitudes involved are usually just 6,000 to 7,000 feet, but only for two or three days of the tour.*

**April 22-23, Days 1-2: Travel to Sevilla; Transfer to Doñana National Park.** You should plan your flights to arrive into Seville International Airport (airport code SVQ) no later than 10:00 a.m. on Day 2. After clearing immigration and customs, you will be met by your leaders and depart immediately for the eastern section of Doñana National Park where we will explore some wetlands suitable for White-headed Duck, Marbled Teal and Western Swamphen amongst others. Should time permit, we will visit the only known colony of the rare Little Swift, an African visitor established recently in Europe.

Those wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting or desiring more rest time after the lengthy international flight are strongly encouraged to arrive into Sevilla before April 23 and spend the night at a nearby hotel. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with these arrangements.

NIGHT (April 22): In transit

NIGHT (April 23): Ardea Purpurea Lodge, Doñana Natural Park

**April 24-25, Days 3-4: Doñana National Park.** Doñana was declared a national park in 1969 with more than 300 species of birds recorded. Doñana National Park is recognized as a Ramsar Convention “Wetland of International Importance,” an Audubon “Important Bird Area” (IBA) program, and a UNESCO “World Heritage Site.” Among its 127 breeding species, some of them globally threatened, we should not forget to mention White-headed Duck, Marbled Teal, Red-knobbed Coot, Spanish Eagle, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron and Red-crested Pochard. The different ecosystems present in Doñana and the surrounding areas provide excellent chances to record quite a high number of species.



Male White-headed Duck © Brian Gibbons

Birding along the Atlantic coast should offer the possibility to see some of the rarest European gulls such as Audouin’s and Slender-billed, while the marshes lodge a wide diversity of ducks, waders and herons. Many different types of Mediterranean bushes and flowers, like *Halimium halimifolium* and *Pistacia lentiscus* grow well here and are fantastic places to find Spectacled, Subalpine, Dartford and Sardinian warblers. In the two days visiting this region, we will explore the wetlands and dry fields around the Jose Antonio Valverde visitor center, where we’ll have good chances to see Mediterranean and Greater Short-toed larks, Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, European Bee-eater, Yellow Wagtail (the Spanish race *Iberiae*), the scarce Western Olivaceous Warbler, and Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin amongst many others. We will also explore some of the most attractive wetlands on the Atlantic coast like the Nature Reserve of Marismas del Odiel while trying for gulls, waders, spoonbills and flamingos.

NIGHTS: Ardea Purpurea Lodge, Doñana Natural Park

**April 26, Day 5: Doñana to Monfragüe.** Although this will mostly be a travel day, we will stop in some strategic spots for birding en route to Monfragüe. Leaving the Andalucía region behind us after crossing the mountains of the

Huelva province (known as Sierra de Huelva) and driving northwards, we will cross into Extremadura, the wildest region amongst all in Spain. Its sierras (low mountains) and dehesas (savanna-like habitats of Cork and Holm Oaks) probably lodge the largest community of raptors in Europe. Five species of eagles, three species of vultures, three kites, three harriers, two kestrels—this is no doubt a paradise for birds of prey! Amongst the birds we should see are Eurasian Griffon and Cinereous Vulture, Booted and Short-toed Snake-eagles, Alpine Swift, Rock Bunting, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Eurasian Wryneck, Short-toed Treecreeper, Western Orphean Warbler and a good chance for the scarce Bonelli's Eagle.

NIGHT: Hospederia Monfragüe, Torrejon el Rubio



Eurasian Griffons at Monfragüe © Brian Gibbons

**April 27, Day 6: Monfragüe National Park.** We will have plenty of time here to check out the different ecosystems of Monfragüe for the specialties of the region: breeding Spanish Eagle, Black Stork, and Cinereous Vulture in particular. Other great birds we'll be searching for are Iberian Magpie, Red-rumped Swallow, Spanish Sparrow, Black-winged Kite and even the rare White-rumped Swift, all species difficult or impossible to find further north. We will also make our first searches for Bonelli's Eagle and Egyptian Vulture.

NIGHT: Hospederia Monfragüe, Torrejon el Rubio

**April 28, Day 7: Cáceres Plains "Los Llanos".**

Between the two historic towns of Trujillo and Cáceres lays a vast and undeveloped flat area called "Llanos de Cáceres" with almost 260,000 acres. The traditional uses of the land have managed to preserve most of the farms as they were 200 years ago when Spaniards still survived from products obtained directly from sheep (cheese and wool). This will be our best day to see some of the specialties of the steppe habitats such as Eurasian Thick-knee (Stone Curlew), Black-bellied and Pin-tailed sandgrouse, Montagu's Harrier, European Roller, European Bee-eater, Great and Little bustards, Lesser Kestrel, Corn Bunting, Calandra Lark and Western Black-eared Wheatear.

NIGHT: Hospederia Monfragüe, Torrejon el Rubio

**April 29, Day 8: Monfragüe to Gredos Mountains.** The journey to the Gredos Mountains usually takes about three hours. We will break up this long journey with a few birding stops to hunt for a variety of warblers like Spectacled, Dartford, Sardinian and Subalpine. We will also bird in the marshes and open fields around Arrocampo Reservoir searching for Black-winged Kite, Spanish Sparrow, and Little Bittern. Arriving in the early evening, we may be able to find our first Red Crossbills, Coal Tits and Common Firecrests of the trip. If we are very lucky, we might even see a Citril Finch.

NIGHT: Parador de Gredos, Navarredonda de Gredos

**April 30, Day 9: Gredos Mountains.** After breakfast, we will drive to the "Plataforma de Gredos" where we will start our walk uphill (a bit tiring but we will slowly bird along) to reach the breeding grounds of Bluethroats, our main target. During the walk we should also see Ortolan Bunting, Water Pipit, Northern Wheatear, During the walk we should also see Ortolan Bunting, Water Pipit, Northern Wheatear, Bunting, Water Pipit, Northern Wheatear,



Bluethroat © Brian Gibbons

Red-billed Chough, Eurasian Skylark, Rock Bunting and Dunnock with good chances for Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush and the Spanish Ibex of Gredos, a type of wild goat that only survives in some mountains of Central Spain. All the high mountain birding will be accessed on a cobbled road. Down in the valley we will try for the Iberian race of European Pied-Flycatcher (*iberiae*), Red Crossbill, Common Firecrest, Goldcrest, Crested Tit, Coal Tit, Red Kite, Black Redstart, Iberian Green Woodpecker and before traveling back to our hotel, we will visit a traditional site for Citril Finch.

NIGHT: Parador de Gredos, Navarredonda de Gredos

**May 1, Day 10: Gredos to Cervera de Pisuerga.** This is a journey of almost 400 km, so it will take us most of the day before reaching our destination at Fuentes Carrionas Natural Park. If time allows, we will do some birding in the Pyrenean Oak woods around our hotel, an excellent site to find Middle Spotted Woodpecker. We will certainly see some common species such as Great, Blue and Long-tailed tits; Eurasian Nuthatch; Great Spotted Woodpecker; and Red-backed Shrike. We will also search the grounds of the hotel for the beautiful Eurasian Bullfinch. In Fuentes Carrionas Natural Park, brown bears and wolves still survive.

NIGHT: Parador de Cervera de Pisuerga, Cervera de Pisuerga

**May 2, Day 11: Cervera de Pisuerga to Tama (Liebana Valley).** On our travel into the Picos de Europa Mountains, we will see some good samples of Romanesque architecture. It will be worthwhile to stop a few minutes to see the church of San Salvador de Cantamuda from the twelfth century. The scenic road to Potes crosses some good beech forest suitable for Black Woodpecker, Marsh Tit and Eurasian Bullfinch. We will check-in to our hotel in the village of Tama and will dedicate the rest of the day to birding locally along the Liebana Valley while trying to find Common Redstart, Red-backed Shrike, Eurasian Wryneck, Yellowhammer and European Honey-buzzard.

NIGHT: Posada El Corcal de Liébana, Tama

**May 3, Day 12: Fuente De (Picos de Europa Mountains).** This will be one of the most exciting days of our tour. We will take the cable car in Fuente De to the top of the mountains (over 1,800 meters) and after a short walk we will start to see some of the special birds present in this corner of Spain: Wallcreeper, White-winged Snowfinch, Alpine Accentor and Yellow-billed Chough will be our main targets while we should also find Northern Wheatear, Water Pipit and Egyptian Vulture. There is no better place in the country that will give us the chance to see all these birds without doing any strenuous hiking. We will explore the rocky cliffs and glacier ponds where we might find the rare Alpine Newt.

Please note: our ride on the cable car in Fuente De is dependent on weather conditions or maintenance works. We will make every effort to do this excursion and will know more as we get closer to the tour date.

NIGHT: Posada El Corcal de Liébana, Tama, Cantabria

**May 4, Day 13: Tama to the Pyrenees.** Today we will transfer from the Picos de Europa to the high mountains of the Pyrenees, birding en route. We will break up this long day with a few marshes and mudflat stops. Shorebirds, waterfowl and other migrants will be targeted. Along wooded streams we hope to find the handsome Common Kingfisher. After arriving in the early evening at the Hotel Usón, we will have time for a relaxing walk before dinner, enjoying the beautiful scenery that surrounds our accommodation. White-throated Dipper, Yellowhammer, Cirl Bunting, Eurasian Blackcap, Eurasian Crag-Martin and Gray Wagtail may be recorded.

NIGHT: Hotel Usón, Echo, Huesca

**May 5-6, Days 14-15: The High Pyrenees.** Two full days based in the Hecho Valley will give us optimal chances of finding alpine species. One day will be spent travelling to higher Pyrenean Mountain passes at 6-7,000 feet elevation amidst spectacular scenery. Target species at these heights, from just below the tree-line to the open alpine zone, are Alpine Accentor, Citril Finch, Eurasian Crag-Martin, Water Pipit and Yellow-billed Chough. Our second day may be spent visiting wooded regions or traveling further west to different beautiful mountain habitats in search of new birds like Marsh Tit, Common Firecrest, Eurasian Bullfinch, Red Kite, Yellowhammer, Eurasian Jay, and Red Crossbill. Our hotel is in a scenic valley surrounded by mountains and woods close to prime birding sites, particularly for Wallcreeper. This stunning crimson, gray, and black beauty is a regular breeding bird in the deep, steep, rocky gorges just minutes away from our



**Bearded Vulture in the Pyrenees © Brian Gibbons**



**San Juan de la Peña 10th century Monastery © Brian Gibbons**

accommodation. Other target species at these mid-elevations are Black Woodpecker, Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, Crested Tit, White-throated Dipper, Gray Wagtail, and, of course excellent chances for Bearded Vulture!

NIGHTS: Hotel Usón, Echo, Huesca

**May 7, Day 16: Echo Valley to Belchite; Belchite Steppes.** After leaving the Hotel Usón and the high mountains behind us, we'll travel to Belchite. Along the way we will bird the grounds of an amazing 11<sup>th</sup> century monastery, San Juan de la Peña. While the monastery is stunning, we hope to catch a glimpse of the Black Woodpecker while roaming the forests that surround the monastery. We will then drive to the Belchite Steppes to try to see Eurasian Thick-knee, Tawny Pipit, Little Owl, Eurasian Hoopoe, Thekla's Lark, Black-bellied and Pin-tailed sandgrouse and of course the elusive Dupont's Lark, a very special bird whose entire European population breeds only in Spain.

NIGHT: Hotel Oleum, Belchite

**May 8, Day 17: Belchite Steppes.** We will spend a few hours this morning trying to get good looks at the rare Dupont's Lark and other rare steppe

birds we haven't seen yet. After a late breakfast we will depart mid-day for Madrid, where we will enjoy a final checklist session and farewell dinner.



DuPont's Lark singing at El Planeron Reserve © Brian Gibbons

NIGHT: Hotel Nuevo Boston, Madrid

**May 9, Day 18: Departure for Home.** Transfers to Madrid Barajas International Airport (airport code MAD) will be provided in time for various morning and afternoon departures.

**TOUR SIZE:** The tour will be limited to 10 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Santiago Villa and David Ascanio



**Santiago Villa** has operated his own birding tour company, Spainbirds Nature Tours, since 1999. He has also led tours for some of the well-known UK tour companies, as well the American Birding Association and several RSPB local groups. Santi has participated as an ecotourism expert at meetings and conferences in different localities of Spain such as Madrid, Cádiz, Trujillo, Monfragüe, and Doñana, as well as Lisbon (Portugal). Santi has guided tours in Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Colombia, Portugal, Scotland, Romania, Finland, Norway, Poland, Turkey, Estonia, The Gambia, Morocco, and Kazakhstan.





**David Ascanio**, a Venezuelan birder and naturalist, has spent over 39 years guiding birding tours throughout his native country, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Costa Rica, the Orinoco and Amazon River basins, Trinidad & Tobago, Suriname, the Guianas, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, the Lesser Antilles, Cuba, Chile, and Panama. He is especially interested in bird vocalizations and has a private library containing voices of more than 70% of all the birds of Venezuela.

David combines superb birding skills with an astonishing command of bird vocalizations. He has published a book for children about bird songs and coauthored the descriptions of two new species, the Rio Orinoco Spinetail and the Delta Amacuro Softtail. David has also published numerous papers about the birds of the llanos (plains), Orinoco River Island species, and the pan-tepui endemic species on which he has become an authority. He is the senior author of the Field Guide to the Birds of Venezuela (2017). David is an excellent communicator, has a great sense of humor, and is tireless in helping others find birds and wildlife. These traits have made him one of the most popular naturalists and guides in the Neotropics.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$7,495** per person in double occupancy from Seville (ending in Madrid) and includes all meals beginning with lunch on Day 2 to dinner on Day 17, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. The tour fee does not include airfare from your home to Seville and return from Madrid, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for the tour is **\$800**.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard, Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (November 23, 2024).

### **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:**

#### **Cancellation by Participant:**

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant's refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant's deposit minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

### **Cancellation by VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A "**Force Majeure**" event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit.** VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a "Cancel for Any Reason" benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: [ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird](http://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird); or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as

individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/)

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES:** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.\* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

**BAGGAGE:** We request participants limit their luggage to one medium-sized bag and one carry-on, if possible. Check with your airline for specific weight limits, as each airline is different.

The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

**CLIMATE/CLOTHING:** Weather at this time of year may vary from hot, dry, and sunny to cooler (or, if unlucky, cold!) with some rain. Snow is possible (although unlikely) in the high Pyrenees, Gredos or Picos de Europa. Most of the time, light cotton clothes, shirts, and light walking shoes will be fine. However, for the evenings and at higher elevations, layers are advisable as is long underwear for folks that tend to get cold easily. You should carry a light raincoat, a sweater and an anorak with you for many of the outings.

Temperature ranges from 35-85° F should be expected. Some will find gloves and a stocking cap helpful for staying warm on cold mornings; wind/rain pants also help at higher elevations where it's often windy and cold. A sun hat and sunglasses are advisable, plus a light belt pack or day pack. Although there is no requirement for any long or arduous walking, you may wish to wander further off the trails, so a pair of walking shoes or boots is advisable as well as lighter shoes or sneakers. Laundry services are available at some locations during the tour. A few hikes over dirt/rock roads will be planned and may vary in length from one to three miles; a walking stick is advisable for folks that need them on uneven surfaces.

**CONDITIONS:** Driving across this large country is essential for this tour; we will drive more than 3,000 km. Long drives will be broken up with birding and coffee breaks, a necessity for bathroom facilities in this country where public restrooms are non-existent. The highways are mostly in excellent condition. Breakfasts usually start at 7:30-8:00 a.m., lunches start at 1:30-2:30 p.m., and dinners start at 8:00-8:30 p.m. It's rarely light before 7:00 a.m. so late evenings are not too difficult. In Spain washcloths are not provided; bring one if you would like to use one during the tour. Three hotels do not have elevators and rooms are one to two stories above the main floor.

**CURRENCY:** Euros - €; Bring either a small amount of Euros with you or you can exchange money on arrival. There will be limited access to ATMs during the tour. Cash may be needed for drinks and small expenses such as laundry, postcards and stamps.

**INTERNET ACCESS:** Expect Wi-Fi to be available at all lodges and hotels (may be slow in some rural locations).

**DOCUMENTS:** For United States citizens, a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Spain is required. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

**EQUIPMENT:** Pack a pair of binoculars in good condition, along with a belt pack or day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, lunch, etc.). Your leaders will have a spotting scope; but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so, especially if you plan on digiscoping as the leaders' scopes will not be available for this. Items such as toothpaste, soap, deodorant, cosmetics, sunscreen, sunglasses, etc. can be purchased in Spain.

**HEALTH:** Spain is free of all the tropical diseases requiring inoculations, etc., as compared to more exotic destinations. There should be plenty of bottled water available, although tap water is safe at all of our hotels. Bring sunscreen and perhaps a little mosquito repellent (though these are not usually a problem, especially at this time of year). Do not anticipate being at any great altitude. You will probably reach 7,000 feet to do some high Picos and Pyrenean birding, but will not be this high for very long.

VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely, as access to shops and pharmacies may be somewhat limited. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

**Insect Repellents** – There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF!®, Cutter™, Ultrathon™, etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone® (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield® technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield® apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

### **MISC:**

Departure Tax - none  
Electricity - 220 volts, 50 cycles; round 2-pin plugs  
Language - Spanish (Castilian), Catalan, Galician and Basque  
Time - 6 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** There should be excellent scenic, cultural, historical, and bird photography but small European birds are notoriously furtive for good reason and can be very challenging to shoot.

**SUGGESTED READING:** A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in

ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Europe is well-covered with many adequate pocket-sized bird identification guides. Your tour leader has an extensive library on all aspects of natural history. If you are interested in a particular subject, please let VENT know prior to departure and your leader will bring along relevant guides.

***Birds:***

Svensson, Lars, Peter J. Grant, Killian Mullarney, and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe Second Edition*. Princeton University Press, 2010. This field guide to the birds of Britain and Europe received rave reviews! It is packed with 3,500 color illustrations, masses of detail on identification, and beautifully produced. *Highly recommended!* Also available in a very user-friendly App.

**The Cornell Lab. Merlin Bird ID. App. Coverage is not comprehensive but most of the birds we encounter on this tour can be found in the Europe: Iberian Peninsula Bird Pack. This is a new free reference.**

Jonsson, Lars. *Birds of Europe with North Africa and the Middle East*. Princeton University Press, 1996 (Reissue edition). A good field guide with lovely illustrations.

Peterson, Guy Mountfort and P.A.D. Hollom. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe*. Houghton Mifflin, 2001. Somewhat outdated.

***Flowers:***

Grey-Wilson, Christopher and Marjorie Blamey (illustrator). *The Alpine Flowers of Britain and Europe*. Norfolk: Jackdaw Books, 1985. Out of print: try [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

Polunin, Oleg and B. E. Smythies. *Flowers of South-West Europe, a Field Guide*. Oxford University Press.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

**RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “VENT”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on July 2, 2024, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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