



Photo: Black-eared Wheatear, by Pedro Marques

12 Days Birds & Wine Programme in Portugal (Group Tour)

Lisbon Estuaries, Alentejo, International Douro & Douro Valley

(Group size: Maximum 7 Participants)

Birds & Nature Tours Portugal

Overview

Portugal offers a fantastic diversity of habitats and consequently of birds in a relatively small area, so the birding programmes designed by Birds & Nature Tours Portugal enable you to visit several species rich areas without needing to travel long distances.

In practical terms, the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve is a mere 20 minutes' drive from Lisbon's city centre and its International Airport. This remarkable protected wetland area has an extensive bird list that include Greater Flamingo, White Stork, Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Little Bittern, Squacco

and Purple Herons, Booted Eagle, Black-winged Kite, Purple Swamphen, Little Bustard, Collared Pratincole, Pallid Swift, Bluethroat, Savi's and Melodious Warblers, Iberian Chiffchaff, Iberian Grey and Woodchat Shrikes, Spotless Starling, Rock Sparrow, European Serin and an excellent selection of ducks, waders, gulls and terns.

A further one hour's drive takes you to complementary biotopes and consequently new bird species in the Alentejo. Here, you will visit both the rolling plains of Castro Verde (the home of Great Bustard, Common Crane, Red Kite, Montagu's Harrier, Lesser Kestrel, Stone Curlew, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Great Spotted Cuckoo, European Roller, Calandra Lark, Tawny Pipit, Rufous Bush Robin, etc...) and the bluffs and hills of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park, noted for species like Iberian Imperial, Golden and Bonelli's Eagles, White-rumped Swift, Iberian Green Woodpecker, Eurasian Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Black-eared Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Spanish Sparrow and Rock Bunting. After exploring these South Alentejo biotopes, we shall visit the North Alentejo, a contrasting region rich in different habitats, including Pyrenean Oak and Sweet Chestnut woods, characteristic of the Serra de São Mamede Natural Park. In this area we should find species like Eurasian Black Vulture, Little Owl, Red-necked Nightjar, Eurasian Hoopoe, Common Kingfisher, European Bee-eater, Sardinian, Spectacled, Western Subalpine, Dartford and Western Bonelli's Warblers and Iberian Magpie.

After exploring these Alentejo habitats, a two and a half hour drive takes you to the beautiful International Douro Natural Park, a prime protected area in Portugal for rock loving birds and especially rewarding for species like Black Stork, Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Turtle Dove, Eurasian Eagle Owl, Eurasian Scops Owl, Alpine Swift, Western Orphean Warbler, Red-billed Chough, Golden Oriole and Hawfinch. Here, we shall visit the most important open-air Palaeolithic rock art site in the world, the Foz Côa Valley, a World Heritage Site.

The last days of the tour will be spent in the World Heritage Alto Douro Region, where the wine has been produced for some 2.000 years. Since the 18th century, its main product, Port wine, has been famous for its quality. This long tradition of viticulture has produced a unique landscape of outstanding beauty. The region is also good for bird species like Black Kite, Honey Buzzard, Dunnock, Black Wheatear, Eurasian Bullfinch and Cirl Bunting.

All this birding activity is combined with visits to some of the most important wine producers in the main wine regions of Portugal (including the Douro, for Port wine), giving an opportunity throughout the whole of our route to better understand the country's rich wine heritage. At various times we'll be joined by qualified wine makers who will help us learn to discern the subtle differences between the various regions, terroirs, wines and grapes. And

besides the great wines, we'll have numerous opportunities to sample Portugal's many culinary delights.

Itinerary

Day 1 – Transfer from Lisbon Airport (or from your Lisbon hotel). Travel to Alcochete. Visit several areas and a variety of habitats within the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve, including the inter-tidal mudflats and salt marshes of Hortas, the salt pans of Atalaya, Ribeira das Enguias and Samouco and the Barroca d'Alva rice fields and pastures. Overnight stay at the Hotel Quinta da Praia das Fontes, in Alcochete (or equivalent).

Day 2 – Visit other interesting sites and habitats in the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve, including the open fields, rice fields, reed beds, lagoons, inter-tidal mudflats and salt marshes of the Ponta da Erva area and the cork oak woodlands of Pancas. During the breeding season, we visit a heronry on the river Tagus. Wine tasting at Companhia das Lezírias. Overnight stay at the Hotel Quinta da Praia das Fontes (or equivalent).

Day 3 – Travel to Mértola, in the south Alentejo region. Visit the great Castro Verde rolling plains. Overnight stay at the Hotel Museu, in Mértola (or equivalent).

Day 4 – Visit the bluffs and hills of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park, including the Mértola, Mina de São Domingos and Alcaria Ruiva areas. Wine tasting at Bombeira do Guadiana. Overnight stay at the Hotel Museu (or equivalent).

Day 5 – Visit other interesting areas of the great Castro Verde rolling plains and of the Guadiana valley. Wine tasting at Herdade de Balanches. Overnight stay at the Hotel Museu (or equivalent).

Day 6 – Travel to Portalegre, in the north Alentejo. Visit the Serra de São Mamede Natural Park, including the Castelo de Vide region. Overnight stay at the Hotel Cabeças do Reguengo, in Portalegre (or equivalent).

Day 7 – Visit other areas of the Serra de São Mamede Natural Park, including Póvoa e Meadas, Beirã and Marvão. Wine tasting at Cabeças do Reguengo. Overnight stay at the Hotel Cabeças do Reguengo (or equivalent).

Day 8 – Travel to Castelo Rodrigo, in the Beira Alta region. Visit the escarpments of the International Douro Natural Park, including the Barca d'Alva, the Mosteiros and the Penedo Durão sites. Visit the open air Palaeolithic rock art site in the Foz Côa Valley. Overnight stay at the Hotel Casa da Cisterna, in Castelo Rodrigo (or equivalent).

Day 9 – Visit other sites in the International Douro Natural Park, including the viewing points of Lagoaça, Bruçó, Picote and Freixiosa. Wine tasting at Quinta do Cardo. Overnight stay at the Hotel Casa da Cisterna (or equivalent).

Day 10 – Travel to Alijó, in the Alto Douro Wine Region, visiting on the way Miranda do Douro and São João das Arribas (International Douro Natural Park). Overnight stay at the Pousada Barão de Forrester, in Alijó (or equivalent).

Day 11 – Visit the Douro Valley, namely Pinhão and São João da Pesqueira. Wine tasting at Quinta do Bonfim. Overnight stay at the Pousada Barão de Forrester (or equivalent).

Day 12 – Return to Lisbon, visiting on the way the Douro estuary and the city of Porto. Lunch at the Graham Winery, in Gaia. Overnight stay at the Hotel Zenit, in Lisbon (or equivalent). End of programme.

Price

3.800 Euros per person. Price includes guide fees (including a professional historian guide in Foz Côa), transfer from the airport/hotel, ground transport (in air-conditioned vehicles), accommodation (including breakfast), meals (lunches in local cafes and dinners in local restaurants, including quality wine at dinner), visits to vineyards, cellars and wine tasting sessions as detailed in the programme, visit to the open air Palaeolithic rock art site in the Foz Côa Valley, bottled water throughout the tour, free use of optical equipment (quality binoculars and telescopes) and field guides, bird list, entrance fees to private or protected areas, a contribution of 60 Euros to our Conservation Project in the Guadiana Valley Natural Park (Portugal), participant's accident insurance and VAT. Single supplement: 490 Euros. Not included are flights and items of a personal nature.

Note

The tours start and end in Lisbon. If you need accommodation for the nights before and/or after the tour, we are happy to help. We suggest you discuss your flight details with us before booking your flights. These are small group tours with a maximum of 7 participants. We guarantee that any tour will run for 2 people or more.

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