

GREDOS VIVO NATURE TOURS



Discover the outstandingly beautiful scenery and exciting wildlife of Western Spain with Gredos Vivo Nature Tours.

Spring - Summer 2010



The Gredos Mountains (Claire Graham)

Gredos Vivo (The Living Gredos) organises tours in Western Spain: in the centrally located mountain range of the **Gredos**, to the North in the plains, wetland areas and river canyons of **Castille**, and to the South in parts of **Extremadura**. Various itineraries are offered to explore different areas of this still little known yet beautiful and biodiverse part of Spain. The tours are led by Claire Graham at a leisurely pace to enjoy and take in the landscapes whilst discovering their birds and other wildlife; a chance also to enjoy the local culture, tradition and gastronomy. There is no rushing from one place to another to tick as many species as possible. Walking is generally easy unless otherwise specified, generally not more than 2-3 miles at a time.

THE LAND OF THE IBERIAN WOLF: MOUNTAINS, VAST PLAINS, WETLANDS AND RIVER CANYONS OF NORTH-WESTERN SPAIN

5 days

Dates: 20 – 24 April 2010

Cost per person: 900 Euros (single supp. 100€)

Minimum group size: 4

The region of *Castilla y León* which spans over a great part of the North-Western portion of Spain, has some of the richest natural heritage in Europe, hosting a great diversity of landscapes and, of course, birds. This tour will take us through rivers, vast plains, lagoons, forests, moors and river canyons. It is also the home of the Iberian Wolf.

On **Day 1**, after meeting at Madrid airport, we drive North-West through the cereal-growing plains of Castille until we reach the small reserve of **Castronuño**, on the banks of the river *Duero*, which hosts a colony of **Purple Heron** and where **Night Heron**, **Marsh Harrier** and **Kingfisher** breed. We then continue to our final destination of the day, the small medieval town of **Toro** where we shall be spending our first night.

Day 2 will be spent a little further North in vast undulating agricultural plains, a steppe-like habitat which is home to the largest population of **Great Bustards** in Europe. Birds such as **Lesser Kestrels**, **Montagu's Harrier** and various species of **larks** also inhabit this area. We shall visit the lagoons of **Villafafila** where **Black-winged stilt**, **Avocet** and

Gull-billed Tern breed. In the afternoon we shall head to our next destination: the **Sierra de la Culebra**, the stronghold of the Spanish population of **Iberian Wolf**. Possibilities of seeing these secretive animals are always scarce but, for those interested, we shall go to strategic places at dawn and dusk to try to see them. We shall be staying in a small country house-hotel beautifully located in this remote and wild part of Spain.

Day 3 will be spent exploring the pine woods and heath lands of this long ridge of moderate altitude where **Crested Tit, Firecrest, Bonelli's Warblers, Dartford Warblers** may be seen.

On **Day 4** we head South towards one of the most spectacular landscapes of Spain: the canyons formed by the river *Duero* (known in Spanish as the *Arribes del Duero*) and which form the border with Portugal. This is an excellent place for raptors, especially **Bonelli's and Golden Eagles, Griffon and Egyptian Vulture**, and also for **Black Stork, Chough, Blue-Rock Thrush, Red-rumped Swallows** etc. Our last night will be spent in one of the small villages of the area.

On **Day 5** we make our way back to Madrid, aiming to be at the airport around 15h00. We shall make an early start to stop for an hour in **Salamanca**, to allow you to visit on your own one of the most spectacular Renaissance cities in Europe and then, time permitting and depending on what species we have seen or missed so far, we shall stop at various locations on our way to Madrid.

EXTREMADURA IN SPRING

6 days

The stunning beauty of Spain's birding paradise

Dates: 12-17 April 2010

Cost per person: 1200 €

Single supp. 120 €

Minimum group size: 4



Honey Buzzard (Chema García)

A spring holiday based in a single hotel exploring the wide diversity of birds found in the varied habitats of **Extremadura**, one of the best birding areas in Spain: the National Park of Monfragüe, *dehesas*, steppes, small wetland areas and the foothills of the Gredos mountain range.

Day 1: Meeting at Madrid airport around midday, we head straight towards our base for the duration of the tour, the small country hotel of El Alcaudón, in the small village of Serrejón located on the edge of the National Park of Monfragüe, amidst extensive plains of *dehesas*. Having settled and rested in the hotel, we will start exploring the area around the village which holds a range of warblers, larks, shrikes and raptors.

Day 2: The whole day is spent in the **National Park of Monfragüe**, one of the best areas in Europe to watch raptors. It is a magnificent example of the genuine Mediterranean forest and scrubland interspersed with impressive rocky outcrops which rise above the rivers of the Tajo and Tiétar. **Griffon, Black and Egyptian Vultures, Spanish Imperial, Bonelli's and Golden Eagles, Eagle Owl** and other raptors can be found in the reserve as well as **Choughs, Alpine Swifts, Blue Rock Thrush** and the shy and scarce **Black Stork. Sardinian, Sub-alpine and Dartford Warblers** are often seen in the bushes of sweet scented Daphne and rock roses.

Day 3: We spend the whole morning on the shores of the nearby **Arrocampo reservoir** which has an interesting community of wetland birds such as **Purple Gallinule, Little Bittern, Night and Purple Heron and Marsh Harrier** among many others. In the afternoon we tour through the beautiful surrounding *dehesas* in search of their typical birds such as the **Hoopoe, Azure-winged Magpie, Woodlarks, Bee-eaters, Great-spotted Cuckoos, Southern Grey and Woodchat Shrikes** as well as the elusive **Black-shouldered Kite**.

Day 4: A day spent touring the huge expanse of **rolling plains** which surround the monumental town of **Trujillo**, South of Monfragüe. This is a steppe bird paradise where **Great and Little Bustards, Black-bellied and Pin-Tailed Sandgrouse** are found. Other birds such as **Montagu's Harrier, Lesser Kestrel, Roller, Crested and Calandra Lark, and Spanish Sparrow** to name a few also breed here. Time permitting, we shall visit a small reservoir where **Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Kingfisher, Sand Martin and Fan-tailed Warbler** nest.

Day 5: Extremadura is bordered to the North by the **Gredos Mountains**, the only high mountain area of Extremadura and where the best areas of native woods remain, basically Pyrenean Oak. Here, we can find many woodland and mountain scrubland species with possibilities of seeing **Pied Flycatcher, Bonelli's Warbler, Firecrest, Ortolan Bunting, Dartford Warbler, Thekla Lark, Honey Buzzard, Dipper and Grey Wagtail** in mountain streams, and also **Pallid Swift**.

Day 6: We drive back to Madrid airport aiming to arrive there at 15h00, making various stops along the way and keeping an eye open for the many raptors that soar through the sky above these vast plains of Extremadura and Toledo, with the Gredos Mountains in the background. Our final halt before heading towards the airport will be for a drink and some typical Spanish *tapas* by the medieval castle of **Oropesa** from which we shall enjoy spectacular views of the landscape and the acrobatic displays of many Swifts, Swallows, Martins, and Jackdaws.



Bluethroat (Javi Ruiz)

THE GREDOS MOUNTAINS AND MONFRAGÜE

6 days

A trip to discover the rich and varied habitats and birds of these sierras and northern Extremadura

Dates: 31 May-5 June 2010

Cost per person: 1100 €
Single supp. 120€

Day 1: After meeting at Madrid airport at a pre-arranged time (usually around midday) we spend the day making our way to the Gredos Mountains, stopping at various points with chances of seeing raptors such as **Booted Eagle, Spanish Imperial Eagle and Montagu's Harrier** as well as **Lesser Kestrel, Chough and Rock Sparrow**. Depending on time, we may stop at the small medieval town of Ávila to enjoy the site of hundreds of **Common Swifts** coming in and out of their nest holes in the XIIth century city walls. Our final destination will be a small country hotel in one of the villages tucked away in the heart of the Northern slopes of the Gredos, our base for the next 3 nights. The **Gredos Mountains**, a magnificent range of granitic ridges with several peaks well above 2000 metres, divide the great central plateau of the Iberian Peninsula into the Northern and Southern *Mesetas*. The two faces of the mountain range are very different which, together with the dramatic changes in altitude within a short range, make for a wide diversity of habitats and wildlife in a relatively limited area.

Days 2-3-4: We spend these three days exploring the various habitats, birds and wildlife of the area of the gently rolling slopes of the northern side of the mountains where the climate is globally continental, and characterised by small Pyrenean oak woods, Scots pine forests, mountain streams, mountain pastures, heaths and scrubland where **Bluethroats, Ortolan and Rock Buntings, Rock Thrushes, Skylarks** and many birds of prey breed. We start our first day here with a gentle walk near the *Tormes* river and its valley where we can expect to see **Golden Oriole, Red-rumped Swallow, Cirl Bunting, Melodious Warbler, Southern Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, Dipper and Grey Wagtail**. In the afternoon we visit a nearby pine forest where we shall look for **Pied Flycatcher, Crested Tit,**

Firecrest, Crossbill, the shy and secretive **Citril Finch**, and other forest dwelling species.

On our second day, we take a circular route in the car to visit a number of habitats from high mountain pasture to lowland plains and holm oak woodlands, stopping at a series of "hotspots" for a flavour of these varied landscapes and their characteristic species. We may hope to see **Golden Eagle, Short-toed Eagle Honey Buzzard, Hoopoe, Bee-eater, Tawny Pipit, Crested and Thekla Larks, Subalpine Warbler, Woodchat Shrike, Griffon and Black Vulture**, and many more.

The third day is spent exploring the higher grounds of the mountains where we will be enchanted by the harsh landscape of huge granitic slabs, boulders and screes covered in fluorescent green lichen, witnesses of the past glacial era. This and the surrounding area home to a interesting variety of amphibians, reptiles, butterflies and flora. Healthy populations of **Bluethroat, Ortolan Bunting and Dartford Warbler** breed here in the low-growing broom scrub, and **Yellow Wagtail, Water Pipit, Northern Wheatear, Skylark** may be seen in the subalpine meadows. We can expect to see Vultures and other raptors fly overhead. The **Spanish Ibex** lives in these mountains in large numbers and we shall stand a good chance of admiring these beautiful animals. The terrain on these upper grounds is a little bit rugged and can be steep and therefore walking on this third day will be more strenuous than on other days. However, the pace will be slow and there will be plenty of time to stop and rest as we go. In the afternoon we shall drive down the Southern slopes of the mountain range, through terraced plantations of olive, cherry and fig trees, cluster pines and sweet chestnut trees, finally reaching the wide open country of the plains of **Extremadura** studded with cork and western holm oaks, the so-called *Dehesas*. The climate here is Mediterranean and temperatures will be high. However, a nice cool drink in the hotel's patio in the evening will help us cope with the heat.

Day 5: After an early start we spend the morning on the shores of the nearby **Arrocampo reservoir** which has an interesting community of wetland birds such as **Purple Gallinule, Little Bittern, Night and Purple Heron** and various species of **egrets** among many others. **Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler and Fan-tailed Warbler** also breed here. Having rested at our hotel during the hottest hours of the day, we set off again in the late afternoon to explore the National Park of Monfragüe where we may hope to add sightings of **Egyptian Vulture, Bonelli's Eagle, Eagle Owl, Black Stork, Alpine Swift, Blue Rock Thrush** among others.

Day 6: We return to Madrid with possibilities of various stops along the way depending on time and birds that remain to be seen. We aim to be at Madrid airport by 14.00 hours.



White Storks (Chema Garcia)



For all trips:

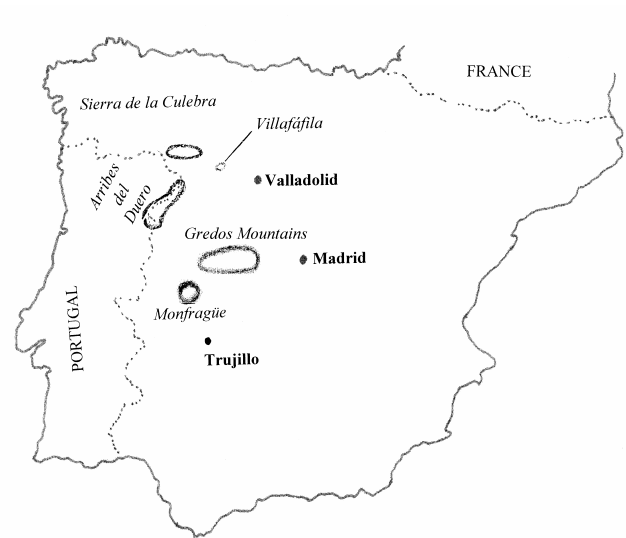
Included in the cost: Ground travel in Spain in 9-seater minibus, accommodation, all meals (lunches may be picnics), guide/leader throughout the trip.

The price excludes: Flight to Spain, holiday insurance, extra drinks and other personal expenses. Clients will have to provide a copy or details of their travel insurance before travelling.

Deposit: 200 €

Balance due 60 days before departure date

Maximum number of participants: 6



Please note that tailor-made trips can also be arranged for a minimum of 2 travellers.

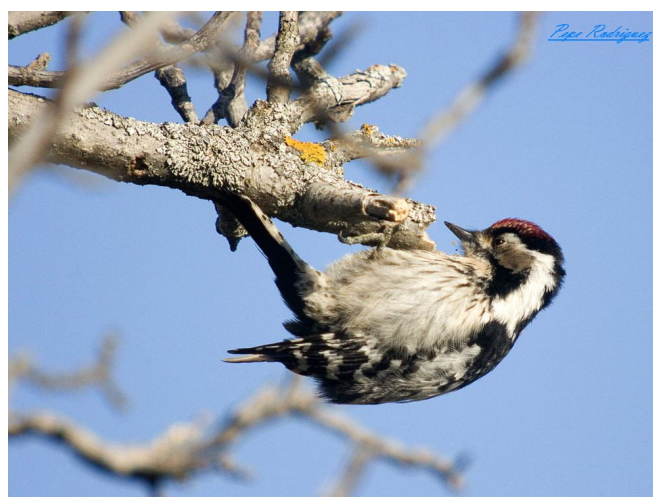
All tours are led by **Claire Graham** who has now been leading her own nature tours for four years. Claire, who lives in a small village in the Gredos Mountains, is a graduate in Biology from the University of East Anglia in the UK, is completely fluent in English, Spanish and French, and has explored the Gredos Mountains and adjacent areas since she was a child.

For more details:

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Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (Pepo Rodríguez)