

Andalucia

Itinerary

Days 1, 2, 3 & 6

Benaolan & Sierra de Grazalema

The magnificent scenery of the Sierra de Grazalema Biosphere Reserve surrounds our hotel, from the River Guadiaro just below us to the craggy limestone cliffs above the classic Andalucian white villages of Benaolan and Montejaque. We shall wander valleys where Cork Oaks have long been cultivated, their boles glowing red in the sun where the bark has been harvested, while Griffon Vultures wheel overhead and Cirl Buntings, Firecrests and Bonelli's Warblers sing above the pink Cistus Roses. Limestone crags are home to Chough, Black Wheatear and Blue Rock Thrush while everywhere brilliant Spanish Festoons and Moroccan Orange-Tips flutter. Cliffs are festooned with stunning *Ornithogalum reverchonii*, a species found nowhere else in the world, whilst delicate pink *Orchis olbiensis* and bright yellow *Ranunculus rupestris* are frequent. Depending on how advanced Spring is we may see acres of beautiful *Iris planifolia* while the tiny golden trumpets of *Narcissus requienii* and *jonquilla* emerge from rocky fissures, or if Spring is early we may find the huge red flowers of *Paeonia broteroi* bursting forth along with many species of bee orchid and the delicate bells of *Fritillaria lusitanica*. A visit to Grazalema village in its magnificent mountain setting will ensure a further mix of wonderful rock plants including the localised *Narcissus cuatrecasasii*. Giant Orchids are common, while Man Orchid, Naked Man Orchid and *Ophrys bilunulata* may all be seen.

Day 4

Teba Gorge and Fuente de Piedra

Northeast of Ronda lies a rural landscape which grades imperceptibly into the rolling plains of Castilian Spain. Limestone rocks cut this gentle scene and sprout a mesmeric variety of plants, often sheltering below the fronds of the ubiquitous Dwarf Fan Palm. Rare Bonelli's Eagles and Egyptian Vultures soar over a small gorge and later we visit the huge Greater Flamingo colony at Fuente de Piedra, where an assortment of ducks, terns and waders can also be seen.

Day 5
Sierra de las Nieves

A scenic track takes us high into the Sierra de las Nieves. The sub-alpine zone has the gorgeous 'blue gorse' *Erinacea anthyllis*, amongst which grow the rich golden trumpets of *Narcissus hispanicus* and delicate *Viola demetria*. Dartford Warblers and Black Redstarts chatter amidst all this glory and delightful Crested Tit inhabit beautiful forests of gnarled Spanish Firs.

Day 7
Ronda

A chance to relax and explore the extraordinary old town of Ronda, maybe taking in the beautiful old Moorish Mondragon House, or perhaps shopping in the main street, before taking lunch at a restaurant overlooking the spectacular gorge where Chough and Lesser Kestrel wheel a few metres from us. We shall do no more than quote Stocken on its charm; "It is a favourite haunt of *Iris planifolia*... and a view from here standing amidst this lovely blue iris is unforgettable: the blend of pink almond blossom and blue skies is in complete harmony with the golden cliffs framing the foaming white torrent roaring down between them"

Days 8-10
Coto Donana

El Rocio is simply unforgettable with its sand streets, imposing church and 'spaghetti western' feel. The surrounding Coto Donana, one of Europe's premier reserves, is home to a staggering array of species - over 340 bird species have been recorded in Donana! Our local guide is licensed to take visitors into the heart of the National Park where Spanish Imperial Eagle will be a particular target amongst a wealth of other raptors, ducks, waders and herons. We'll visit El Acebuche where inquisitive Azure-winged Magpies may be tempted close with titbits at the picnic site. White Storks also nest on the roof of the centre giving us a chance to admire them at close quarters. Spiny-footed Lizards scurry past as we admire recently arrived Great Spotted Cuckoos. There's a distinctive and unusual flora as well. *Halimium*'s, relatives of the rockroses, come in a variety of species and there's plenty of the Iberian cousin of the crowberry, *Corema*. Delicate Three-leaved Snowflake, blue Barbary Nut and plentiful *Narcissus papyraceus* will all be seen.

Day 11

Los Lances via Laguna de Medina

Set amid the rolling hills of Cadiz province are the bird-rich waters of the Laguna de Medina. Stunning summer-plumaged Black-necked Grebes and comical White-headed Ducks will be our quarry here. Bonanza Salt pans host vast flocks of waders, gulls (including Slender-billed Gulls), terns and Greater Flamingos. Then we'll drive on to Tarifa and our beach-side hotel, the Dos Mares.

Day 12

Los Lances

The Mediterranean littoral will be awash with colourful blooms. The delightful crocus-like *Romulea clusiana* flowers in profusion among dunes clad in Umbrella Pine. Here we can admire some particularly fine Sawfly and Woodcock Orchids as well as the unusual green-flowered orchid, *Gennaria diphylla*. In open areas there is a multi-coloured show of red Hottentot Fig, yellow Lotus creticus and white *Lygos monosperma*. Migrant flocks of Black Kites will be arriving from Africa as well as plenty of Short-toed Eagles. Hoopoes, various larks and many smaller migrants inhabit the dunes and various waders, terns and egrets can be seen along the rivers and sandy beaches. Inland we'll search the fields of La Janda for Little Bustards and if we are lucky, the now very rare Great Bustard.

Day 13

Alcornocales National Park

Inland colourful hills have fabulous views across the Straits of Gibraltar to Africa. Beautiful plants such as Sword-leaved Helleborine, Violet Limodore and swathes of *Romulea bulbocodium* and *Scilla monophyllos* will occupy the botanically minded today. *Aristolochia baetica* is common under the Cork Oaks and on the hillsides above we will find the bizarre insectivorous *Drosophyllum lusitanicum*, a relative of the sundews. Butterflies will undoubtedly include the flamboyant red, yellow and black patterned Spanish Festoon. Lizards and Moorish Geckos are a frequent sight, whilst Fire Salamanders rest in damp hideaways, and the occasional Egyptian Mongoose may cross our path.

Day 14

Barbate Woodlands

Perched behind high cliffs above Cape Trafalgar is a peaceful pine forest which is now an important nature reserve. The whole day will be spent

exploring this beautiful place with the jangling song of Serins an almost constant accompaniment. Swallowtails, Western Dappled Whites and Clouded Yellows are all common, and here we should encounter our first green and orange Provence Hairstreaks and impressive Monarchs. The flora is exceptional. Bulbs carpet the forest floor and include *Scilla ramburei* as well as various orchids and the strange *Dipcadi serotinum*. The luminous blues of *Anagallus monelli* will vie for our attention with the exquisite fur-rimmed Mirror Orchid. Later we will take a look at the excellent Barbate estuary, where we should see Caspian Terns, Little Egrets and a variety of other water birds.

Day 15

Transfer to Malaga Airport.

Trip reports are available from previous trips. If you would like to see a copy, or to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please contact us on 01298 83563 or email on enquiries@greentours.co.uk.