

Andalucia – Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 & 2

Benaolan

The magnificent scenery of the Sierra de Grazalema Biosphere Reserve surrounds our hotel, from the River Guadiaro just below, to the craggy limestone cliffs above the classic Andalusian 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 Moroccan Orange-Tips flutter and other more local butterflies include the delicate Lorquin's Blue and the strikingly marked Panoptes Blue, both found only in Iberia. Spanish Festoons flaunt their brilliantly patterned wings and we'll also find the distinctive Spanish Marbled White. Beautiful flowers such as Sword-leaved Helleborine, Violet Limodore and swathes of Romulea gaditanus and Spanish Bluebell will occupy the botanically minded. Aristolochia baetica is common under the Cork Oaks and we'll also encounter Paeonia coriacea, the delicate blue Barbary Nut and the fabulous Iris xiphium, the Spanish Iris, here locally abundant. In the local oak woods the huge red flowers of Paeonia broteroi will be bursting forth along with many species of bee orchid and the delicate bells of Fritillaria lusitanica. Man Orchid, Naked Man Orchid and Ophrys bilunulata may all be seen.

Days 3 & 6

The Sierra de Grazalema

A visit to Grazalema village in its magnificent mountain setting will ensure a further mix of wonderful rock plants including the golden Narcissus assoanus. 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. At the base of Grazalema's great cliffs the lovely Sawfly Orchid grows with beautiful Linaria aeruginea and Linaria incarnata among Ulex baeticus, the endemic gorse of this region, the specific name is from an old Arabic word for this part of Spain, and is a name which will appear frequently on the tour. Other Afro-Iberian endemics are Ballota hirsute, the spectacular Echium albicans, and the lovely toadflaxes Linaria anticaria and Linaria platyclayx. Orchids include several very fine species in Yellow Bee Orchid, Serapias lingua and Orchis champagneuxii. Colourful European Bee-eaters will be arriving

from their wintering grounds and their liquid calls will be a constant reminder of spring. Melodious Warblers and Woodchat Shrikes will also be setting up territories swelling the already abundant local birdlife. Sheets of pale green Euphorbias mix with flowering Cistuses, attractive Shrubby Gromwell and Blue Aphyllanthes on slopes where we'll find the spectacular *Scilla peruviana*. We'll encounter impressively large Ocellated Lizards and furtive Moorish Geckos, whilst Fire Salamanders rest in damp hideaways, and the occasional Egyptian Mongoose may cross our path – Wild Cat was seen well on our tour in 2009!

Day 4

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 bloom the rich golden trumpets of *Narcissus hispanicus* and delicate *Viola demetria*. Dartford Warblers, Subalpine Warblers and Black Redstarts chatter amidst all this glory and delightful Crested Tit inhabit beautiful forests of gnarled Spanish Firs. The population of Spanish Ibex has long been protected and is now expanding and becoming habituated to the presence of visitors. So now they no longer run at the slightest sign of humans, a welcome change! Butterflies will undoubtedly include the flamboyant red, yellow and black patterned Spanish Festoon as well as the much more local Portuguese Dappled White. Saxifrages, a feature of the area, include *Saxifraga globulifera*, *Saxifraga boiseri* and, endemic to the Serrania de Ronda, *Saxifraga bourgeana*. The latter emerges from rock crevices in company with golden *Narcissus assoanus* and some very architectural fern species.

Day 5

Teba Gorge and Fuente de Piedra

Northeast of Ronda lies a rural landscape which grades imperceptibly into the rolling plains of Castillian 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. Swallowtails, Western Dappled Whites and Clouded Yellows are all common, and here we should encounter our first green and orange Provence Hairstreaks. Black-eyed Blue flutters above exquisite fur-rimmed Mirror Orchids, dark red Asparagus Peas and yellow Palmate Anemones. Rare Bonelli's Eagles and Egyptian Vultures soar over a small gorge and later we'll visit the huge Greater Flamingo colony at Fuente de Piedra, where an assortment of ducks, terns and waders can also be seen.

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. Ronda's charm was captured well by Stocken's botanical notes "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". Those that wish can join the leaders for a walk down into the gorge where we'll look for Green-striped White and Aetherie Fritillary.

Day 8
Return to the UK.

Depending on flight times we may have time for another walk out from Molino del Santo before transferring to Malaga Airport for our departing flights.

Call 01298 83563 or visit www.greentours.co.uk for the latest trip report from our Wildlife at Leisure tours to Andalucia. If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.