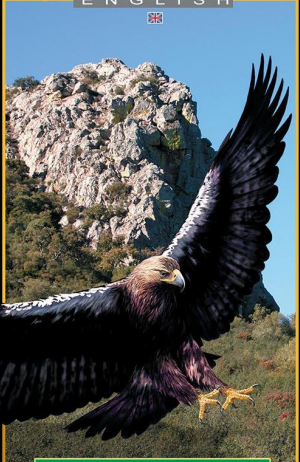


Recommended Seasons: SPRING AND WINTER

ILLUSTRATED MAP

Birds of Extremadura

ENGLISH



JUNTA DE EXTREMADURA

Recommended Seasons: SPRING AND WINTER

Pastures and dry farming land

These pastures are the final phase of the degradation of the Mediterranean forest now that most of the trees and shrubs have disappeared with their accompanying heaths. It is often difficult to believe that once these same lands were dense with vegetation. They tend to occupy large extensions of land and form a particularly flat landscape. In general, the pastures are associated with the dry farming of cereals such as wheat, barley and oats.

Many species of bird find this an ideal habitat for breeding whereas others are attracted by the abundance of food and breed in rocky areas, forests or grazing lands.

The most typical species to be found on the pastures is the **Great Bustard** with populations in Extremadura in excess of 6,500 birds whose spectacular courtship ritual is one of the major birdwatching attractions in the region. In this flat habitat, other frequently seen species are **Little Bustard**, **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse**, **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, **Collared Pratincole**, **Little Owl**, and **Stone Curlew**.

In the cereal fields, colonies of **Montagu's Harrier** which are sometimes accompanied by pairs of **Marsh Harrier** and, more rarely, of **Hen Harrier** establish themselves.

On rural buildings, **Roller** or colonies of **Lesser Kestrel** frequently breed and both species are fond of occupying the hundreds of nesting boxes mounted on electricity poles through the region.

As in the cereals, the abundance of **Maggies** makes possible the presence of the **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, the parasite of its nests.

Small bird communities are also very numerous, especially species like **Tekla Lark**, **Crested Lark**, **Calandra Lark**, **Short-toed Lark**, **Tawny Pipit**, **Zitting Cisticola**, **Black-eared Wheatear**, **Southern Grey Shrike** and **Corn Bunting**. It is the habitat par excellence for the **Red-legged Partridge** and at times the **Quail**.

In winter the area is enriched by the presence of species arriving from the North such as **Common Crane**, **Golden**

Recommended Seasons: SPRING AND WINTER

The mediterranean forest

The Mediterranean forest is considered to be the habitat most closely resembling that which covered Extremadura thousands of years ago. The activities of mankind throughout history have brought about change to the forest towards other kinds of vegetation which are also of value such as **dehesas**, **heaths** and **pastures**.

The best preserved Mediterranean forests are to be found on the slopes and upper parts of certain mountain ranges as well as in certain river valleys. The dominant species are the **holm oak**, **cork oak** and **pyrenean oak**, which can grow so densely that their branches become entwined. They tend to grow alongside shrub and bush species which sometimes grow so thickly that they become an impenetrable jungle of vegetation.

Some of the Iberian Peninsula's most threatened bird species such as **Black Vulture**, **Spanish Imperial Eagle** and **Black Stork** breed in this habitat, choosing the highest trees and seeking the protection which the dense vegetation of the mountain slopes offers.

Often the forest is made up exclusively of trees, with the shrubs and bushes having been almost completely overwhelmed. Here the bird species are typically forest dwelling such as **Jay**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Wryneck**, **Nuthatch**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Redstart**, **Crested Tit**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Chaffinch** and **Hawfinch**. In the oak forests Bonelli's Warbler are also found.

Where bushes and shrubs are abundant **Robin**, **Nightingale**, **Wren** and **Blackcap** nest.

This is also a perfect habitat for birds of prey such as **Honey Buzzard**—especially in the oak forests—**Sparrowhawk**, **Gosawk**, **Little Owl** and **Tawny Owl**.

The SPAs most typical of this habitat are the 'Sierra de San Pedro' (San Pedro Range), **Montfragüe** and the surrounding **dehesas**, 'Sierra de Villuercas' (Villuercas

Recommended Seasons: SPRING AND WINTER

Plover, Lapwing, Hen Harrier, Merlin, Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Goldfinch and White Wagtail.

The abundance of food favours the presence of other birds of interest which nest in different habitats such as **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, **Bonelli's Eagle**, **Golden Eagle** and **Short-toed Eagle**, or carrion feeders attracted by the herds of animals such as **Griffon Vulture**, **Black Vulture** and **Egyptian Vulture**.

The SPAs with the largest area of pasture and crops are 'La Serena', 'Llanos de Cáceres', 'Llanos de Trujillo', 'Mogasca', 'Llanos de Alcántara y Brozas' and 'Campiña Sur y Embalse de Arroyo Conajío (Conajío Brook Reservoir)'. Certain areas within the 'Dehesas de Jerez (Jerez Dehesas)', 'Llanos and Campiño Inguar de la Albuella (Lakes Complex in Albuera)' and 'Llanos de Zorita and Embalse de Sierra Brava (Sierra Brava Reservoir)' are also significant.

Recommended Seasons: WINTER

Irrigated Agricultural Crops

In Extremadura more than 200,000 hectares of land are dedicated to irrigation agriculture favoured by the extensive network of dams and channels in the Rio Guadiana basin and, to a lesser extent, in the Tago basin.

From the birds' point of view the most attractive of the irrigated crops are maize and rice (with 25,000 hectares Extremadura is the second most important rice-growing region in Spain), especially in winter. Once these crops are harvested (between October and November), the birds take advantage of the split grain which remains in the stubble after the harvest. Furthermore, the rice fields which continue under water for most of the winter become an attractive but shallow wetland. In spite being areas used for intensive cultivation, they receive large populations from a variety of species. Among the birds associated with irrigated agriculture are the wintering populations of **Common Cranes**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Lesser Black-backed Gull**, **Black-headed Gull**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Grey Herons**, **Cattle Egrets**, **Squacco Heron**, **Little Egrets**, **Great Egrets**, **White Storks**, **Greyland Goose**, **Pin-tail**, **Shoveler** and **Lapwing**.

Among waders, the numbers of **Curlew**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Redshank**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Golden Plover**, **Common Snipe** and **Ruff** are significant.

Recommended Seasons: SPRING, AUTUMN AND WINTER

Dehesas

The dehesas are, without doubt, the most characteristic landscape in Extremadura, occupying 35% of the total area of the region. The dehesas are the result of the progressive clearance of the Mediterranean Forest, the reduction in the number of trees and the increase in the number of bushes and shrubs. At the same time, through periodic pruning of the trees and the clearing of shrubbery, mankind has managed to create a complex eco-system which is an unmistakable symbol of sustainable development in the region. The dehesas are composed mainly of **holm oaks** and of **cork oaks**, whilst in the upper reaches there are dehesas made up of **deciduous oaks**.

In the denser dehesas with between 20 and 40 trees per hectare, the bird species are typical of forest, including **Hoopoe**, **Woodpecker**, **Turtle Dove**, **Green Woodpecker**, **Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **Chaffinch**, **Blackbird**, **Mistle Thrush**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Orphean Warbler**, **Woodchat Shrike**, **Azure-winged Magpie**, **Rock Sparrow**, **Spanish Sparrow** and **Greenfinch** during the breeding season.

Where the dehesa retains shrubs such as the **rock rose**, **retamas** and **brooms**, **lavender** or **osapling oaks** which have not been pruned, it's enriched by the presence of other species such as **Woodlark**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Orphean Warbler**, **Subalpine Warbler** and **Dartford Warbler**.

When tree density reduces to fewer than 15 per hectare with a predominance of pastures with occasional shrubs, other species appear such as **Thelid Lark**, **Stonechat**, **Corn Bunting** and even **Stone Curlew**.

In winter, one of the most typical species is the **Common Crane**, truly symbolic of the dehesas at this time. Similarly **Wood Pigeons**, also attracted by the abundance of acorns, arrive in large numbers in the holm oak dehesas. Other frequent visitors in winter are **Lapwing**, **White Wagtail**, **Robin**, **Black Redstart**, **Song Thrush**, **Redwing**, **Chiffchaff** and **Bullfinch**.

The dehesas are also the nesting habitat for various birds of prey such as **Black-shouldered Kite**, **Black Kite**, **Buzzard**, **Booted Eagle**, or the

Recommended Seasons: SPRING AND WINTER

Reservoirs and dams

The two main rivers, the Tago and the Guadiana, are dammed for almost all of their passage through Extremadura, being used for hydro-electric production and the supply of water to the population and the irrigation of crops. The shortage of water during the summer months, which can be prolonged, has led to the building of numerous reservoirs and dams. In fact, Extremadura is the region with the greatest length of interior coastline in the Iberian Peninsula, measuring almost 2,000 kilometres. These artificial wetlands are used intensively by birds for which they are a real oasis.

On the islands in the reservoirs, breeding colonies of **Collared Pratincole**, **Little Tern**, **Gull-billed Tern**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Little Ringed Plover** and, occasionally, **Common Tern** can be found. **Great Cormorant** has also begun to nest in recent years on some reservoirs.

In the shallower dams with floating vegetation **Little Grebe**, **Great Crested Grebe**, **Coot** and at times, **Whiskered Tern** and **Lapwing** make their nests. Amongst the nesting duck are **Gadwall** and **Shoveler** and sometimes **Red-crested Pochard** and **Pochard**.

The ornithological value of these wetlands is much greater in winter as Extremadura is one of the most important regions in Iberian peninsula for wintering waterbirds, with over 250,000 birds including populations of **Mallard**, **Pintail**, **Wigeon**, **Gadwall**, **Shoveler**, **Pochard**, **Tufted Duck**, **Teal** and **Red-crested Pochard**. The wintering popula-

Recommended Seasons: SPRING

Heaths

The loss of trees from the dehesas together with the reduction in the cultivation of crops and animal rearing combined with other factors such as forest fires have favoured the consolidation of a type of vegetation where Mediterranean heathlands and bushes predominate. The most common vegetation is **rock rose**, **retama**, **broom** and **wild olives**, whereas in the higher areas there are **heaths** and **broom**.

The bird species associated with this type of vegetation are more numerous than might be expected, dependent to a large part on the variety of species which make up the heaths, their complexity (height, cover) and the presence of other elements such as pastures or isolated trees.

Among the breeding species are to be found **Dartford Warbler**, **Sardinian Warbler**, **Speckled Warbler**, **Subalpine Warbler**, **Tawny Pipit**, **Stonechat**, **Rufous Bush Robin** and **Linnet**.

When clearings are made on the heaths to make way for pasture, **Northern Wheatear**, **Black-eared Wheatear**, **Thelid Lark** and even the **Montagu's Harrier** can often be found.

In higher areas where snow often falls in winter and where only **Broom** and **Heather** grow mixed with mountain pastures **Duncock**, **Ortolan Bunting** and **Bluethroat** can be found nesting.

Amongst the SPAs with large areas of heathland are the 'Sierra de Gata' (Gata Range) and **Valle de las Pilas (Pilas Valley)**, 'Hurdas', and 'Nacimiento del Río Gévora (source of River Gévora)'.

Recommended Seasons: SPRING AND WINTER

Rivers and streams

The river courses can be very different—dependent on the associated vegetation, the width and depth of the flow and the altitude.

The most frequently found tree species on permanent water courses are the **alder**, **ash**, **poplar** and the **willow**. On the seasonal water courses, almost always dry in the Summer months, the tree species best adapted to the **lack of water** predominate such as **oleander** and **buckthorn**.

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Towns and villages

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The huge nests of **White Storks** in the bell-towers of churches in Extremadura have become a typical image of the

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ILUSTRATED MAP

Birds of Extremadura

JUNTA DE EXTREMADURA

Extremadura is considered to be one of the most important European regions for birds, an ornithological paradise due to the excellent state of preservation of its natural habitats and the great diversity of landscapes. The snowy peaks of the Sierra de Gredos, the vast pastures of the high-plains, the forests - still intact - the interminable dehesas, the steep mountains which break-up and yet form the backbone of the landscape, the lakes, rivers and streams and the immense and varied cultivated fields together form an environment which is highly favourable to bird-life where they find perfect habitats for nesting.

So far, some 344 species of bird have been seen in Extremadura - a record from any point of view - revealing the impressive ornithological treasures of the region. Of these 344 species, at least 228 nest here regularly whilst the remainder winter here either on their migratory route or appearing occasionally.

In response to the European Directive on Preservation of Wild Birds (79/409/CEE), the Junta de Extremadura has designated 71 Special Bird Protection Areas (known as SPAs), the purpose of which is to protect the most threatened species and their habitats. This network of SPAs is one of the most extensive on the Iberian Peninsula and covers 26.15% of the area with 1,089,936 hectares.

To get to know the birds of Extremadura, a visit to the most representative habitats is recommended to enjoy watching the species most associated with them. In addition to its ornithological riches, Extremadura also has a wealth of culture associated with the landscape, the mark of history and tradition on its people and its cities without forgetting the hospitality offered to visitors.



The mediterranean forest

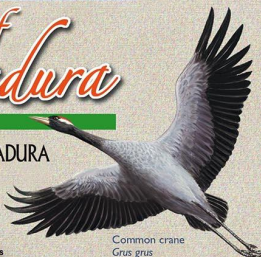
Black stork

Ciconia nigra



Spanish imperial eagle

Aquila adalberti



Common crane

Grus grus



Black vulture

Aegypius monachus



Azure-winged magpie

Cyanopica cyana

Roller

Coracias garrulus



Dehesas

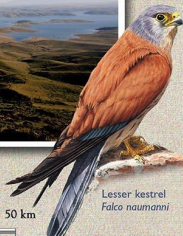


Black-shoulder kite

Elaanus caesus

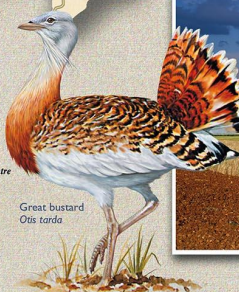


Reservoirs and dams



Lesser kestrel

Falco naumanni



Great bustard

Otis tarda



Pastures and dry farming land

ESPACIOS NATURALES DE EXTREMADURA

- National Park
- UNESCO
- World Geopark
- Villuercas Ibores Jara
- Nature Park
- Nature Reserve
- SPA (Special Protection Area for birds)
- Natural Monument
- Site of Scientific Interest
- Conservation and Leisure Park
- Ecological and Biodiversity Corridor
- Protected landscape
- Information-Reception Centre
- Accommodation
- Tourist Information Office
- Peri-urban Conservation and Leisure Parks
- Ramsar area
- National Reserve