



APEX
EXPEDITIONS



Spain's Wilderness

September 10 - 24, 2016





Expedition Overview

Prime wildlife viewing is not what comes to mind when one considers a trip to this great and storied country. But, in fact, Spain is the last stronghold of several large mammals that have all but disappeared in the rest of Europe. Begin this 15-day journey visiting two remote regions of Northern Spain, staggering in their pristine beauty. Here, the Iberian Wolf and Cantabrian Brown Bear still run wild. Once hunted to the brink of extinction, their numbers are creeping back, and these are the best spots on earth to see them. Stop in at Gredos National Park to feast your eyes on the massive-horned Ibex, before heading south to Andalucia, to the last two bastions of the rarest cat in the world, the Iberian Lynx. The wetlands of Coto Doñana are also a birder's dream, harboring 500 resident and migratory species, including the endangered Spanish Imperial Eagle. Get to know the unknown Spain on Apex's thrilling journey into its most remote and untouched corners.



This image and cover © Ignacio Yllera

Photos: (Cover) Iberian Wolf, Iberian Lynx, Western Spanish Ibex





Itinerary

Saturday, September 10: Arrive Madrid

Arrive in Madrid and transfer to *Meliá Barajas Hotel* for a welcome dinner, briefing and overnight.

Sunday, September 11: Somiedo Natural Park

After breakfast, drive north through the high, dry plains of Castilla y León, and into the spindly peaks of the Cantabrian Mountains in the verdant province of Asturias. Here, Somiedo Natural Park consists of 150 squares miles of jagged rock formations, pristine valleys, ancient beech and oak forests, rivers and crystalline lakes, and wildflower meadows. It is home to one of Europe's largest populations of wild bears, and the next two days will be spent looking for the Cantabrian Brown Bear, among much other wildlife. In the late afternoon, stretch your legs with a short trek and acclimate to the crisp mountain air and the tinkling of cowbells. Dinner and overnight at the charming *Casa Miño*.

Monday and Tuesday, September 12 & 13: Somiedo Natural Park

You have two full days to take in the astounding beauty of Somiedo and watch for its prolific wildlife. See the native goat antelope, or Chamois, and Red and Roe Deer ambling in the meadows on morning and evening game drives. Watch for some of the area's more than 100 bird species, including Alpine Accentor, Wallcreeper, the exceedingly rare Grey Partridge, and Black Woodpecker. Wild Cat, Pine Marten, Genet, Broom Hare, otter, boar, and several species of bats all live here, and are commonly seen by visitors. In the late afternoons, watch for the park's most famous (and hardest to spot) inhabitant, the Cantabrian Brown Bear, from special vantage points. Search the streams for the shrew-like Pyrenean Desman and the endemic Golden-striped Salamander. There will be time midday to explore the rest of the park on foot and look for butterflies and reptiles like the beautiful Green Shreiber's Lizard. Dinners and overnights at *Casa Miño*.



Photos: Cantabrian Brown Bear, Somiedo Natural Park, Pine Marten



Wednesday, September 14: Villafáfila / Sierra de la Culebra

Spend a last morning watching for bears, before packing up and descending into Castilla y León's Zamora Province. Stop to explore the seasonal brackish lagoons of Villafáfila, an important wintering site for thousands of Greylag Geese, ducks, sandpipers, plovers, lapwings, and other migrating waterfowl. The surrounding steppe is home to the Stone Curlew, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Calandra and Short-toed Lark, Little Bustard, and over 2,500 Great Bustards, the largest concentration of the species in Spain. Dovecotes in town attract a great number of doves and pigeons, which in turn make for a sizeable Peregrine population. After lunch, drive to the Sierra de la Culebra—"Snake Mountain," referring to its undulating topography—in Northwestern Zamora, bordering Portugal. Within this stark mountain range resides the largest wolf population in Western Europe. Dinner and overnight at the *Pensión El Remesal*.

Thursday and Friday, September 15 & 16: Sierra de la Culebra

After decades of near-extinction, the Iberian Wolf is at last making a comeback. In 1972, a 17,000-acre reserve was created and a large number of Red Deer were reintroduced. An accurate headcount is nearly impossible, but figures of between 1,700 and 2,260 wolves have recently been quoted for Spain and Portugal combined. La Culebra, with its relatively high density of 5 wolves per 40 square miles and its wide vistas, may be the best place in Europe in which to observe them. Spend the next two days at different vantage points, scanning the area for signs of the elegant gray-brown predators—there are roughly ten packs in the area. Other wildlife present are Red and Roe Deer, Wild Boar, Red Fox, and Golden Eagles. Dinners and overnights at *Pensión El Remesal*.

Saturday, September 17: Sierra de Gredos

After breakfast, head to the colossal granite Sierra de Gredos range in Ávila Province, due west of Madrid. Its highest peak is the 8,200-foot Almanzor, set amidst sheer gorges and Europe's southern-most glacial valleys. Wildlife abounds here—almost 1,400 plant species are represented, including 11 unique to Sierra de Gredos, and an estimated 60 percent of Spain's animal species, most notably the endemic Western Spanish Ibex. Long the hunting grounds of Spain's kings and dictators, Gredos is now a protected Regional Park and the once-scarce ibex is plentiful again. After settling into your hotel, trek along the park's main trails and watch for heavy-horned ibex. Also endemic to the park are the Almanzor Fire Salamander and Gredos Toad. Birders, keep an eye out for Black and Griffon Vultures, eagles, Western Honey-Buzzard, Eurasian Eagle Owl, Great Spotted Cuckoo, and more. Dinner and overnight at the stunning *El Milano Real*.

Sunday, September 18: Sierra de Gredos / Coto Doñana

Enjoy another hike in the Gredos this morning before loading up and heading south, via Sevilla, to Coto Doñana National Park in Andalucía. This 209-square-mile park is one of Europe's most important wetland reserves, consisting of salt marshes, shallow streams, and sand dunes in the Guadalquivir River Delta. These varied ecosystems shelter a biodiversity that is unique on the continent. Thousands of European and African migratory birds, Fallow and Red Deer, Wild Boar, European Badgers, otters, rabbits, Egyptian Mongoose, and endangered species such as the Spanish Imperial Eagle and the Iberian Lynx, the most endangered of all wild cats, call Doñana home. Get settled into your hotel, then venture out to the marshes to watch for water birds. Dinner and overnight at *El Cortijo de los Mimbrales*.



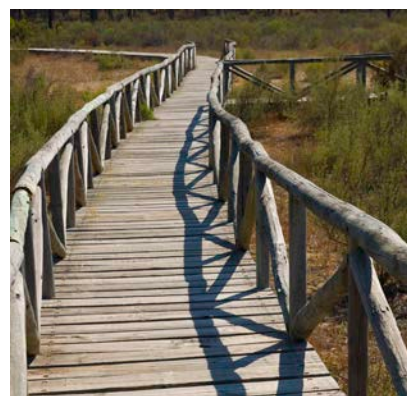
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Photos: Alpine Accentor, Iberian Wolf, Western Spanish Ibex, Coto Doñana National Park



Monday, September 19: Coto Doñana National Park

Access to the park is strictly controlled to limit tourism's impact. After an early breakfast, enjoy a ranger-guided 4x4 tour inside the protected portion of Coto Doñana. Explore the park's three ecosystems and keep watch for signs of Iberian Lynx (there are 25-35 in the park), along with many marsh birds, including herons, sandpipers, snipes, and wagtails, and raptors such as osprey, kites, and eagles. The tour ends with a visit to the park's main headquarters at Acebuche, with a variety of boardwalks linking several bird hides that look out across the lagoons. Spend some time here watching the smart and beautiful Azure Magpies that frequent the area. After lunch, explore the wetlands outside the park, and head to the Atlantic to see shore birds and watch for whales as the sun sets. Dinner and overnight at *Cortijo de los Mimbrales*.

Tuesday, September 20: Coto Doñana National Park

Today, visit different birding areas to the west and north of the park. See lagoons teeming with flamingos, egrets, spoonbills, and wild horses. After lunch, take the short trip to one of the best-preserved wetlands in Iberia, Marismas del Odiel, which provide a fantastic collection of habitats—salt pans, lakes, forest, sandbanks, tidal channels, rivers—for over 200 bird species. Though the spoonbill is the historic emblem of Odiel, another bird has taken center stage here in recent years—it is Spain's principal wintering site for Osprey, with around 30 individuals represented, half of Andalucía's entire population. Before returning to the hotel, explore the remarkable village of El Rocío. Its dusty, sand-blown streets and sweeping verandahs evoke the American Wild West more than southern Spain. Dinner and overnight at *Cortijo de los Mimbrales*.

Wednesday, September 21: Sierra de Andújar

Drive today to Sierra de Andújar Natural Park, via Córdoba. The gently rolling 18,500-acre Andújar, part of the vast Sierra Morena range, is densely wooded and boasts one of Andalucía's best-preserved expanses of Mediterranean forest and scrubland. It is inhabited by an impressive number of endangered species, such as Iberian Lynx, Iberian Wolf, Black Vulture and Imperial Eagle. Check into your hotel and freshen up. The gardens of the hotel are often alive with butterflies—look especially for the beautiful Cardinal Butterfly. Acquaint yourself with the park with an introductory drive this evening. Dinner and overnight at *Los Piños*.

Thursday and Friday, September 22 & 23: Sierra de Andújar

Two full days will be spent viewing the area's wildlife. For the best chances of spotting Lynx, curly-horned Mouflon Sheep, Wild Cat, and otters, be prepared to hunker down at dedicated vantage points and scan the open woodland for long periods. The area is also incredibly rich in birds of prey. Spanish Imperial Eagle has its largest density here. Both Griffon and Black Vultures are common, as are Southern Grey Shrike, Stonechat, and Red-legged Partridge. The rocky outcrops are good for Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting and Short-toed Eagle. Walk through a small tunnel that is home to Greater Mouse-eared and Geoffroy's Bats. Depending on the first day's success, explore the same area or visit another part of the park, to the north, the following day. Optional night drives offer a different view of the park, and up your chances to see Genet, Egyptian Mongoose, badger, Lynx, and Wild Cat. On the last night, toast to your journey and the animals seen at a farewell dinner and overnight at *Los Piños*.

Saturday, September 24: Sierra de Andújar / Madrid

After breakfast, drive back to Madrid and transfer to the airport for your international flights home.



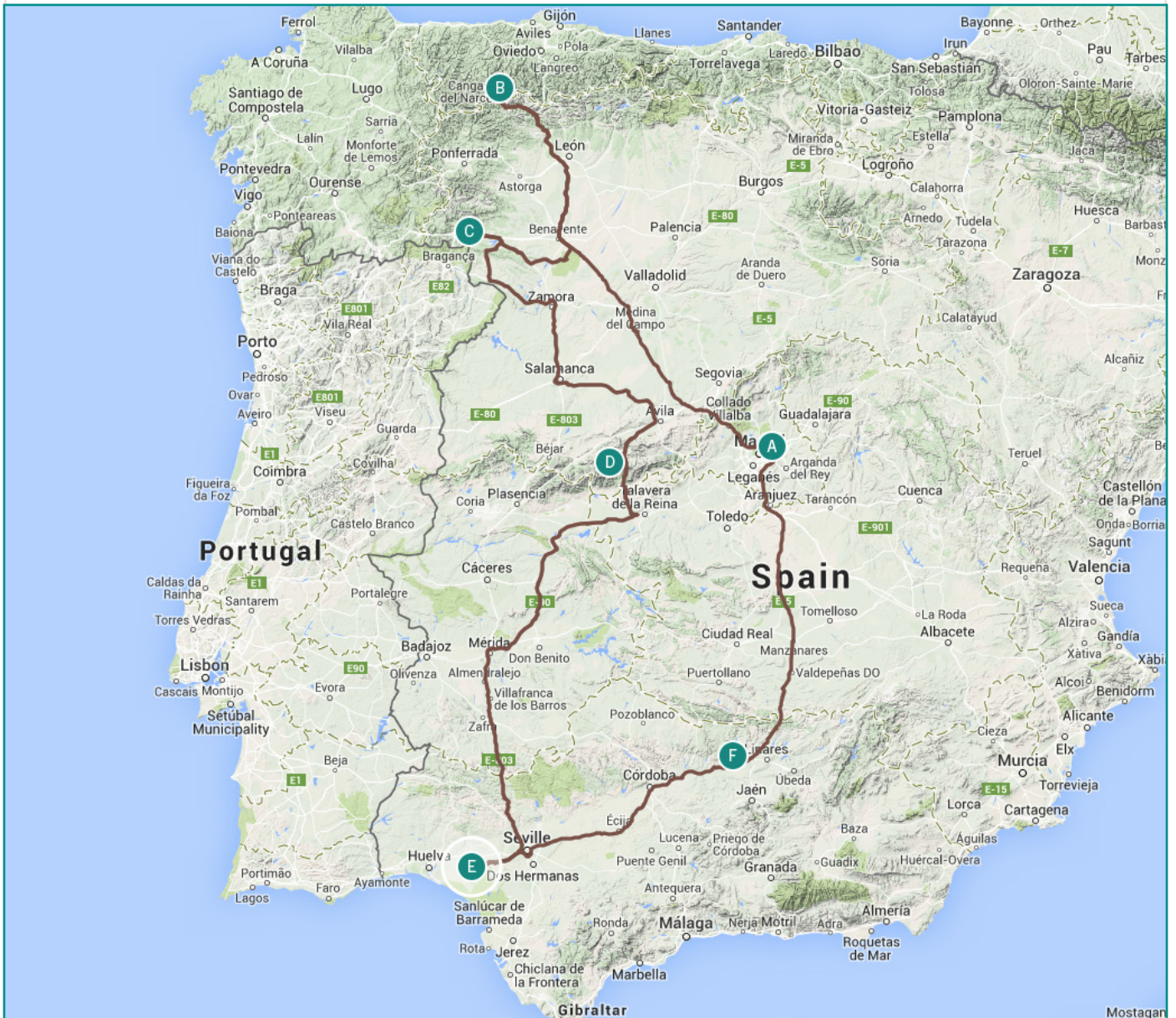
© Gerald Brodzisz



Photos: El Rocío, Two-tailed Pasha, Black Vultures, Genet



Expedition Map



A – Madrid

B – Somiedo Natural Park

C – Sierra de la Culebra

D – Sierra de Gredos

E – Coto Doñana National Park

F – Sierra de Andújar

 By Road



Your Expedition Leaders

Peter Harrison

Peter Harrison has led expeditions throughout the world, from the Arctic to the Antarctic and everywhere in between. Peter has written and illustrated over a dozen books, of which *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*, is considered the bible of seabird identification. Peter is only one of a handful of authors to both write and illustrate bird books, but Peter Harrison is so much more than just a "bird man." In addition to being a professional birder, entrepreneur, artist, author and screenwriter, Peter has devoted much of his time to conservation efforts. In recognition of his outstanding work in natural history and his dedication to conservation projects, Peter was invited to Buckingham Palace and honored with the title, Member of the British Empire by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. More recently, Peter was invited to Westminster by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to receive their prestigious Conservation Gold Medal Award. This honor is bestowed upon one individual each year in recognition of their support and dedication to wild bird protection and global habitat conservation. Past recipients have included Prince Charles and Sir David Attenborough. Exploration and discovery remain a driving force for Peter and during a recent expedition to Chile he led a six-person team to locate, catch and describe the first completely new storm petrel species to be discovered in nearly 100 years, the Pincoya Storm Petrel. It is safe to say that with Peter leading the charge, adventure always abounds.



Shirley Metz

Shirley Metz's careers and accomplishments have spanned the globe. Born in Minnesota, she grew up in Europe and Hawaii, graduating from the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. Shirley became a certified diver at age 16 and while at UH did shark research earning her degrees in Marine Biology and Communications. She met her first husband in Hawaii with whom she founded Hobie Sports. She also developed several active clothing lines and consulted to companies such as The North Face.

In early 1988 Shirley visited Antarctica and became inspired to work in Antarctic conservation. To raise awareness, Shirley became a member of an international expedition that would attempt to ski 800 miles from the edge of Antarctica to the South Pole. On January 17, 1989, the nine-member expedition arrived at world's end; Shirley made history and her way into the Guinness Book of Records as the first woman to ski overland to the South Pole. A member of the Explorers Club and The Society of Woman Geographers, Shirley continues to raise awareness and support for international environmental and cultural projects. Following a chance meeting in Antarctica in 1990 Shirley married Peter Harrison and together formed the successful travel firm, Eco-Expeditions. Together with four partners, they also founded Zegrahm Expeditions, a small-ship expedition company.

Shirley continues to lead expeditions, both private and commercial. As a professional photographer Shirley documents her travels and lectures on various topics, including her South Pole expedition.



"Our lives have been enriched by the 17 journeys we have undertaken with the Apex team leaders. Simply put, no one does expedition travel better."

– Jim M., California



Expedition Details

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\$10,470 Per Person Rate

\$11,970 Solo Rate

15 Days Trip Length

15 Guests Group Size

Madrid / Madrid Start/End

Included

Apex Expeditions' rates include all accommodations; all meals, activities and excursions as described in the itinerary; services of two Apex Expeditions leaders, plus an expert local guide throughout the itinerary; all gratuities, local beer and wines at lunch & dinner; airport transfers, permits and entrance fees; all taxes.

Not Included

Costs not included in the price of your Apex expedition include travel to and from start and end point of trip; premium brand drinks and liquor; travel insurance (Trip Cancellation and Interruption, as well as Emergency Medical and Evacuation insurance, are highly recommended); airport departure taxes; excess baggage fees; passport and/or visa fees; items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, souvenirs, etc.); and independent travel arrangements pre- or post-trip.

Payments & Terms

20% of the trip cost will confirm your place on the expedition. The final balance is due 150 days prior to departure. All prices are quoted in U.S. dollars and must be paid in U.S. dollars. Per person pricing is based on double occupancy. The solo rate is paid by participants who specifically request single accommodations and is subject to availability. If you are traveling alone and wish to share accommodations, we will try to match you with a roommate of the same gender. However, if a roommate is not available, the published solo rate will be charged. Upon confirming your reservation you will be required to pay the published Solo Rate, if we are able to pair you with a roommate, the applicable difference will be refunded at the time that the final trip payment is due for all participants. Please note that solo accommodations are limited and cannot always be guaranteed throughout. For our full set of Terms & Conditions, please visit our web site at www.apex-expeditions.com/expeditions/the-fine-print/

One-of-a-kind adventures to the world's most fascinating places. Join us.



Sierra de Guadalupe © Gerald Brodtkorb



Reservation Form

Spain's Wilderness September 10 – 24, 2016

Person 1: (Primary Contact)

Passport Name: _____

Preferred Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Email Address: _____

Mailing Details:

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP Code: _____ Country: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Double Solo

Person 2: (If applicable and at same address, otherwise please submit a second Reservation Form.)

Passport Name: _____

Preferred Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Email Address: _____

Deposit Information:

My deposit check is enclosed (20% of total tour fare)

Charge my deposit to my: VISA MasterCard American Express

Card #: _____ Expires: _____ CCV Code: _____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____

**Please return this completed form to Apex Expeditions.
E-mail: info@apex-expeditions.com or Mail: 3275 36th Ave SW, Seattle, WA 98126**

