

Butterflies of Spain's Montana Palentina

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Santander; Transfer to hotel
Day 2	Port of Piedrasluengas
Day 3	Protected Natural Area of Las Tuerces
Day 4	Peña Tejado
Day 5	Perapertú
Day 6	Fuente Dé or Pico Espigüete
Day 7	The Castillery; Fly London

Departs

July

Focus

Butterflies and other wildlife

Grading

A/B – Gentle paced walks but some uphill (optional longer trek on one day)

Dates and Prices

Visit <http://www.naturetrek.co.uk> (tour code ESP53).

Highlights

- 70-100 species of butterflies
- Páramos and lastras (limestone moorland areas): Apollo, Twin-spot Fritillary, Esper's Marbled White
- Forest: Pearly Heath, Dark Green and Silver Washed Fritillary and Black-veined White
- Grasslands and peat bogs: Dusky Large Blue, Lesser Marbled Fritillary and Chapman's Ringlet
- Walks in one of the most spectacular parts of Spain, inhabited by Brown Bear & Wolf



Apollo



White-winged Snowfinch



Chapman's Ringlet



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Introduction

This trip takes place in the Palencia Mountains and the Picos de Europa National Park, which make up some of the most unique natural areas of the Cantabrian Mountains. The tour will cover a great diversity of environments and landscapes, ranging from valley bottom pastures, oak groves, beech forests, heathland and high mountain grasslands, peat bogs and Mediterranean limestone wastelands. On this tour we will see a great variety of species and whilst the focus is very much on butterflies we can also expect birds, mammals and flora.

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly Santander, Transfer to hotel

We fly from London Stansted to Santander airport and, depending on the time of arrival at the hotel, there may be a chance to explore the hotel surroundings.

Day 2

Port of Piedrasluengas

Today we will visit the port of Piedrasluengas, a spectacular vantage point from where you can see the entire central massif of the Picos de Europa. The limestone slopes of this port are home to Cantabrian flora endemic species such as the bugloss *Echium cantabricum*, the rock-jasmine, *Androsace cantabrica* and the violet, *Viola palentina*.

The altitude of the area will allow sightings of butterflies such as the magnificent Apollo and several montane species such as the Piedmont, Large and Chapman's Ringlet, the latter an endemic of the



Purple-edged Copper

Cantabrian Mountains. We should also see a great variety of butterflies in the valley floor such as Purple-edged Copper, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Olive Skipper and Red-underwing Skipper.

Bird species such as Red-billed and Yellow-billed Chough, Griffon and Egyptian Vulture can be seen, while beech and oak forests host an important community of flycatchers, warblers and tits.

Day 3

Las Tuerces

Las Tuerces is another Protected Natural Area that is currently in the process of being designated as a UNESCO World Geopark. It is a limestone karst landscape with fluvial canyons, synclines and curious rock formations sculpted over thousands of years by wind and ice. The upper part of the area forms limestone wastelands known as 'lastras', which are the perfect refuge for many species of Mediterranean butterflies such as the Twin Spot Fritillary, Berger's Clouded Yellow, Ripart's Anomalous Blue and False Grayling that co-exist with Cantabrian species such as Apollo, Esper's Marbled White and Chapman's Ringlet.

In these flat areas we can also find steppe birds such as Montagu's Harrier, Greater Short-toed Lark, Calandra Lark and Northern Wheatear.

From the viewpoint of Valcabado we will enjoy a spectacular view of the valley of Valderedible, and we will also see the "chorco de lobos", an ancient and gigantic trap built centuries ago by man to capture wolves.

Day 4

Peña Tejedo

Peña Tejedo is an area located on the subalpine floor where there is a formidable landscape of limestone rocks and high mountain grasslands.

Several species of the genus *Erebia* should be found, such as the Piedmont, Chapman's and Mountain Ringlet. In the small peat bogs we will find species such as Shepherd's Fritillary and Purple-edged Copper. Other species that will be encountered include Apollo, Black-veined White, Spanish Argus and Safflower Skipper.

During the afternoon, we will stop at the Celada oak grove, an old oak forest where we will enjoy forest butterfly species such as Silver-washed and Dark Green Fritillaries and Pearly Heath.



Among the birds we hope to see on this day will be Water Pipit, Yellow-billed Cough, Egyptian Vulture, Honey Buzzard and Short-toed Eagle.

Day 5

Perapertú

Today we will head for the Sierra de La Coriza, a magnificent oak forest of great size where there are stands of holly, rowan and hawthorns. The lower areas of the grove also contain stands of Quercus Oak (*Quercus faginea*).

The limestone substrate of this sierra contains species such as Chapman's and de Prunner's Ringlet, Weaver's Fritillary, Turquoise Blue, Marbled Skipper and, with a bit of luck, the scarce Chequered Blue.

The oak groves and small clearings in the interior of the forest are the habitat of species such as Dark Green and Silver-washed Fritillaries, Cardinal, Ringlet, False Ilex Hairstreak and the scarce Sloe Hairstreak.



Day 6

Fuente Dé (or Pico Espigüete)

Today, if the weather looks good for the high mountains, we will drive the short distance to Fuente De and take the cable car which ascends 800 meters to the top of the huge cliffs which form the southern buttress of the Peña Vieja. This remarkable ascent will take us up Europe's longest single



span cable - 3,000 meters in length - with spectacular views en route! Look out for Wallcreepers! At the top we alight on a vast flat area of limestone scree and pavement. Here we will try to see as many alpine plants as possible. We will look for the miniature daffodil, *Narcissus asturiensis*, Pyrenean Columbine (*Aquilegia pyrenaica* ssp. *discolor*), Henbit Dead-nettle (*Lamium amplexicaule*), Alpine Buttercup (*Ranunculus acraeus*), the buttercup, *Ranunculus*

parnassifolia ssp. *cabrenensis*, Sad Stock (*Matthiola fruticosa*), Alpine (*Linum alpinum*) and Pyrenean Flax (*L. suffruticosum*), Spring Squill (*Scilla verna*), Moss Campion (*Silene acaulis*), Alpine Milkwort (*Polygala alpestris*), the saxifrages *Saxifraga conifera* and the yellow *Saxifraga arethioides*, plus masses of Spring Gentian (*Gentiana verna*) and Pyrenean Trumpet Gentians (*G. occidentalis*). We will make our way off the beaten track to look for more high altitude specialties including Alpine Accentors and White-winged Snowfinches and stop at a small wet flush, which holds a population of the rare Alpine Newt as well as Common and Midwife Toads.

As we make our way up to the main track taking us under the towering cliffs of Peña Vieja, we will look out for some of the most unusual butterflies of the area, including the endemic Peaks race of Gavarnie Blue as well as the elusive Lefebvre's Ringlet. At this altitude, the non-migrant alpine specialist butterflies will only just be on the wing and should be in beautifully fresh condition. We will probably also see the unusual yellow and black, high mountain, day-flying moth *Eurranthis plummistraria*.

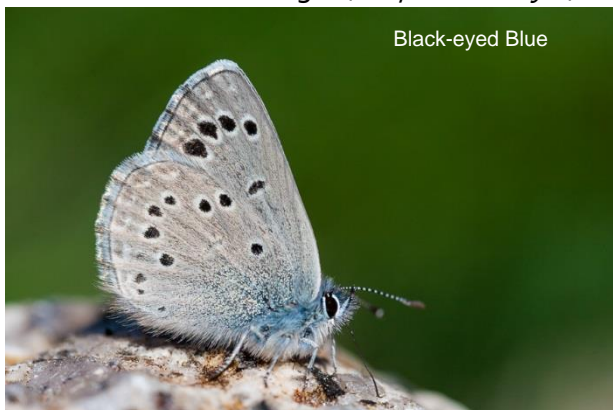
Re-joining the track we will walk along the base of the cliffs watching out for Isard (the Iberian version of the Chamois) and Snow Vole as well as continually watching the boulder-scrub and high cliffs for our most sought after bird species – the Wallcreeper. In previous years we have found nest sites and even seen mating pairs, although they can be highly elusive and in very low abundance.

After our picnic lunch, which will be spent watching for Wallcreepers in one of their most favoured areas, those with abundant energy may choose to join the tour leaders down the rough road to the Refugio de Aliva, and onwards down the Espinama Valley all the way back to Espinama (a walk of about 12 kilometres), whilst the less energetic may prefer to further enjoy the alpine meadows before returning back down in the cable car to Fuente De.



Wallcreeper

As we leave the alpine meadows and scree behind and pass through the Puertos de Aliva, a gateway through the valley, we descend into a very different habitat. Below us are the beechwoods and lush meadows lining the Rio Nevandi, which we will follow back to Espinama. There is a huge change in the associated flora and fauna and we usually notice the temperature rise a few degrees! The fields are usually full of orchids; Heath Spotted (*Dactylorhiza maculata*), Fragrant (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), Pink Butterfly (*Orchis papilionacea*), Burnt-tip (*Orchis ustulata*), and various *Ophrys* species, Spreading (*Campanula patula*) and Peach-leaved Bellflowers (*C. persicifolia*), White Asphodel (*Asphodelus albus*), Common (*Rhinanthus minor*) and Greater Yellow Rattle (*R. angustifolius*), Greater Burnet-saxifrage (*Pimpinella major*), Small Cow-wheat (*Melampyrum sylvaticum*), the



Black-eyed Blue

lousewort, *Pedicularis verticillata*, Pyrenean Germander (*Teucrium pyrenaicum*) and the endemic harebell, *Campanula arvensis*. A large number of butterfly species are possible in this area including Black-eyed, Green-underside, Silver-studded and Small Blues, Dark Green Fritillary, Green Hairstreak, Sooty and Purple-edged Coppers, de Prunner's Ringlet and Western Dappled White.

An excellent variety of birds should also be encountered as we descend into the lower meadows and forest. We will look for Black Woodpecker, Nuthatch, Crested, Marsh, Long-tailed and Coal Tits, Pied Flycatcher, Firecrest and Short-toed Treecreeper before finally arriving back into Espinama in time for a cool drink and a well-deserved ice-cream.

Espigüete Peak is an imposing limestone mountain of 2,450 meters. On its southern face, a track ascends to subalpine pastures located at 1,800 meters. This point is an excellent gateway to find

some of the special butterflies of the Cantabrian Mountains, such as Lefèbvre's Ringlet, Mountain Clouded Yellow and Common Brassy Ringlet. Other possible species will be Dusky Heath, Queen of Spain and Meadow Fritillaries and Scarce Copper.

On this visit, the high mountain flora, which has endemic species such as the houseleek, *Sempervivum giuseppii* and lady's-mantle, *Alchemilla nieto-felineri*, will also be especially noteworthy.

There will also be high mountain birds such as the Alpine Accentor, White-winged Snowfinch, Yellow-billed Chough and Water Pipit.

Day 7

The Castillery

The valley of the Castillería is formed by a landscape where oak groves alternate with grazed



pastures. These livestock meadows also have small peat bogs and humid turf where species such as the Dusky Large Blue, Bog, Heath and Lesser Marbled Fritillaries, Southern Brown Argus and Tufted Skipper can be found.

The forests of this valley have some oaks of respectable size, such as "El Roblón" a wonderful example of Oak Melon (*Quercus pyrenaica*), which is 16 metres in circumference. These forests host many woodland birds such as Marsh Tit, Nuthatch and Middle-spotted

Woodpecker. Our exploration should give us the opportunity to enjoy forest butterflies such as False Ilex Hairstreak, Rock Grayling and White Admiral.

For our final afternoon, depending on the departure time, a short walk through Cillamayor may be possible. Cillamayor is a limestone wasteland of several hundred hectares where species of low plants typical of Mediterranean environments such as thyme (*Thymus sp.*) and *Stipa* grasses. In these "lastras" there are interesting species of butterflies such as the Black Satyr, Great Banded Grayling, Sage Skipper and the first specimens of summer species such as the Forster's Furry Blue and Ripart's Anomalous Blue could be on the wing.

The bird fauna is also different, with species such as Stone Curlew, Short-toed Treecreeper and Crested Lark.

Focus

Butterflies but also plants, birds and other wildlife

Regional Flights

Flights are from London Stansted to Santander. There are no regional departures for this tour.

Tour grading

A/B - Gentle paced walks sometimes with significant altitude gain but not over difficult terrain. There is an optional longer trek (12km) on one day.

Food & accommodation

All food is included in the price. The accommodation is in three old terraced farm cottages, beautifully restored with a mixture of private and shared facilities.

Casa Montes, the largest, has a double room, bathroom, kitchen and living space (where group meals will be had) upstairs, with 2 twin rooms, a bathroom and a room with a jet bath downstairs.

Casa del Arco has 2 bedrooms upstairs (1 twin, 1 double) with 1 bathroom, together with toilet, kitchen and living space downstairs.



The cottages

Casa Gutierrez has a twin and a double upstairs with a bathroom, kitchen and living room downstairs.

You will be assigned a twin share room, unless you would prefer a single room, in which case please let us know and make your payment before departure or, preferably, on booking.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please give us a call or request one via our website.