

SPAIN: BIRDS AND ART IN ASTURIAS

SEPTEMBER 7-16, 2022

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The Principality of Asturias, an autonomous province in northernmost Spain, bills itself today as Spain's Natural Paradise, with wild rocky coasts, placid beaches, and some of the highest, most rugged mountains on the continent. This is also one of Europe's most culturally complex regions, continuously inhabited since the dawn of the Paleolithic, and it is in the caves of Northern Spain some thirty thousand years ago that western art was born.



Near Ubiñas © Malte Beringer

Our new tour samples it all at the most beautiful time of year, from murals painted before the dawn of history to medieval cathedrals, from shorebird concentrations on the Bay of Biscay to flocks of colorful tits and finches roving the heights of the Picos de Europa. With our base in a single hotel in the historic Asturian capital of Oviedo, our relaxed schedule of birding and cultural sightseeing—both activities often pursued at the same time, at the same site—makes this an ideal opportunity for birders and their non-birding (or less-birding) partners, spouses, and traveling companions to explore a rich and rewarding landscape.



September 7, Day 1: Departure from Home. Participants should arrange to arrive in Oviedo (Asturias Airport code OVD), with connection from Madrid-Barajas Airport (code MAD) on September 8. Most flights from the United States and Canada will depart on September 7, arriving in Spain the following day. Upon arrival, you will be provided with a transfer to our hotel in Oviedo (approximately 40 minutes). On request, the VENT office will be happy to assist early arrivals with extra hotel arrangements.

NIGHT: In transit (overnight flight)

September 8, Day 2: Arrival in Oviedo. We will assemble at 6:30 p.m. in the lobby of our Oviedo hotel for introductions and our first dinner together, a chance to get to know one another and to discuss our plans for the days to come.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

September 9, Day 3: Oviedo. The sun rises late here at the western edge of the Central European time zone, making it easy for us to get an “early” start in our exploration of the Campo de San Francisco, one of the largest urban parks in northern Spain. Tracing its origins to the thirteenth-century orchards and gardens of the local Franciscan monastery here, the park was redesigned two hundred years ago on the informal, English model, with paths and avenues winding through stands of dense vegetation beneath towering trees. Migrant and resident birds gather here among the sculptures and monuments to Asturia’s richly varied past—among them the Romanesque portal of the otherwise vanished Franciscan church. Our slow walk may produce good views of common



A Dunnock greets the day. © Rick Wright



The irresistible and often common White Wagtail
© Rick Wright

breeders such as the White Wagtail, Short-toed Treecreeper, Dunnock, or Song Thrush, and like urban oases the world over, San Francisco serves as an excellent migrant trap.

If the birding is good, as it so often is, we may spend most of the morning in a leisurely stroll through these 250 acres. Afterwards we will take a relaxed walking tour of Oviedo's historic center, capital of the Asturian kings from the early ninth century on. The city's cathedral is a gem of the Iberian Gothic; the south tower, with its delicate octagonal steeple, is justly world-famous, and the recently restored choir stalls, carved in walnut in the 1490s, are a priceless visual encyclopedia of late medieval life.

The south transept of the cathedral leads to the Camara Santa, the "holy chamber," a small chapel built in the year 802 for the Asturian King Alfonso II. This World Heritage Site now houses some of the most precious relics in Spain, including two jewel-encrusted crosses from the ninth and tenth centuries, venerable symbols of Oviedo and Asturias.

As time permits, those who wish can also pay a visit to the city's archaeological museum, housed in the former monastery of St. Vincent, with neatly designed and displayed exhibits ranging from prehistoric tools and jewelry to armor and medals from the late Middle Ages.

There will be time for a rest or for further exploration before we gather again for dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

September 10, Day 4: The Picos de Europa. The spectacularly rugged mountains of the Picos de Europa National Park cover more than 250 square miles in Asturias, Cantabria, and Castilla and León. The highest peaks here tower more than 8,000 feet above the sea, their bare, windswept tops the home of Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Red-billed and Alpine choughs, Alpine Accentor, European Snowfinch, and Wallcreeper. It is extremely unlikely that a visit of a single day will produce all of these first-rate specialties, but given reasonable weather and patience, we have a chance at any of them, along with such other high-elevation species as Crag Martin, Alpine Swift, and White-throated Dipper.

We'll maximize our chances by leaving early this morning, arriving in the mountains at sunrise (ca. 8:00 am at this season). Our precise destinations will depend on the weather—it can be quite cool and damp at high elevations, especially in the morning—but we will plan on taking short walks from a series of parking pull-outs.



Everywhere scarce, everywhere unpredictable: the Wallcreeper. © Rick Wright

Mountain birding is always unpredictable, never more so than in migration, and we can count on quiet periods punctuated by bursts of activity as we search the skies, the bushes, and the cliff faces for movement. We'll break for a restaurant lunch in the mountains, perhaps in the company of choughs or snow finches, then keep moving from montane site to site before returning to Oviedo for a well-deserved break and dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

September 11, Day 5: Ría de Villaviciosa. We'll make up for yesterday with a late start today, lingering comfortably over breakfast before making the half-hour drive to the ominously named Villaviciosa, a fine estuary northeast of Oviedo. We'll choose our vantage points based on the tide: high tides are best for migrant shorebirds and waterfowl on the low meadows, while other tide levels are ideal for watching the beaches and mudflats. Like the birds, we will move with the ebb and flow of the sea, hoping to catch up with such delightful residents and migrants as the Spotless Starling, Garganey, Pied Avocet, Spotted Redshank, and Bluethroat. Virtually anything is possible here on the coast in September, with vagrants regularly recorded from Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

Lunch will be in the town of Villaviciosa or nearby. Depending on time and inclination, we'll bird another site or two on the estuary or make our way back to Oviedo, perhaps with a brief visit en route to the beautiful and simple—some say “primitive”—ninth-century church of San Salvador de Valdediós.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

September 12, Day 6: Parque Natural de las Ubiñas-la Mesa. Most famous as a stronghold of the Wolf and the Brown Bear, this vast park in southern Asturias also offers excellent birding opportunities. An hour's drive from Oviedo, Las Ubiñas-la Mesa is home to low densities of resident Citril Finch, Yellowhammer, and Rock Bunting. Migrants can include European Honey Buzzard and Ortolan Bunting, and autumn sometimes sees such sought-after high-elevation species as Wallcreeper, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, and Ring Ouzel descending from their mountain fastnesses. As always, mountain birding is unpredictable, but whatever the day's bird list, the landscapes will be more than memorable. While we are unlikely to see the area's bears or wolves, we have a better chance of spotting other, less secretive mammals, including Chamois, Red Deer, and Roe Deer.



The sublime landscapes of Ubiñas. © Malte Beringer

On the return trip to Oviedo, we will hope to pause at the particularly lovely pre-Romanesque Church of Santa Cristina de Lena, built in part with materials salvaged from a seventh-century Visigothic construction. This small stone church differs strikingly in style and plan from any other we will see, comprising a single rectangular hall and apse with an elevated chancel.

We plan to be back in Oviedo with time for a break before dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

September 13, Day 7: Cabo Peñas and Monte Naranco. An optional sunrise excursion will take us half an hour north to the beaches, dramatic cliffs, and green meadows of Cabo Peñas, where we will take advantage of the dynamism of fall migration. This is the northernmost point in Asturias and one of the most northerly in all of Spain. In addition to admiring the lighthouse and the spectacular views, we will be looking for resident birds such as European Shag, Black Redstart, and European Stonechat. The entire peninsula is a well-known migrant trap and vagrant hotspot, and at this season, virtually anything can show up, from any direction. We'll keep our eyes peeled for such regularly occurring migrants as the recently “split” Common Scoter, Balearic Shearwater, Eurasian Wryneck, Whinchat, and European Pied Flycatcher, and be certain to follow up on any recent reports of rarities—from Richard's Pipits to Eurasian Dotterels.

Once back in Oviedo we will gather to visit Monte Naranco, a line of steep hills on the northern edge of the city. In addition to the spectacular views, Naranco is the site of two of the most remarkable pre-Romanesque structures extant anywhere in Europe, both dated to the mid-ninth century; the fanciful, even grotesque sculptural ornament of San Miguel de Lillo recalls Roman models, while Santa Maria features an ingenious trompe l'œil ceiling.

We will have lunch together, then take the afternoon for shopping, sightseeing, and strolling on our own before reassembling for dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

September 14, Day 8: Ribadesella and Tito Bustillo Cave.

Perched at the mouth of the Sella River, the pleasant town of Ribadesella, an hour from Oviedo, is surrounded by low-lying meadows that attract a good variety of waterfowl, herons, and migrant passerines. We will take a short walk along the banks of the river here in search of Tufted Duck, Purple Heron, and Eurasian Spoonbill. The real draw here, though, is Tito Bustillo, a 2,000-foot-long cave inhabited by early humans as long as 33,000 years ago. This World Heritage Site, discovered in 1968, preserves one of the most extensive series of paleolithic wall art known, depicting horses, deer, a whale, and human figures in more than 100 paintings and incised images. Admission to the cave is strictly timed, so our birding activities will shift depending on the hour we are assigned. Officially, the hour-long tour is offered only in Spanish, but many guides are willing to accommodate English-speaking visitors; in any event, the art here speaks eloquently for itself across the many millennia.



The coast at Ribadesella. © Malte Beringer

We will also pay a brief visit to the adjacent Center for Rock and Cave Art. We plan on lunch in Ribadesella, followed by more birding along the Sella, depending on the timing of our tour of Tito Bustillo. On our return to Oviedo, we will hope to have time for another short walk in San Francisco Park before dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

September 15, Day 9: Villaviciosa and San Julián de los Prados. Especially in fall migration, the estuaries of northern Asturias are different on each visit, the location and composition of roosting and feeding flocks shifting continually with weather and tide. We will spend a leisurely morning checking a variety of vantage points around Villaviciosa, enjoying birds we will have grown familiar with and looking for the almost inevitable new arrivals on the mud and the meadows.

After lunch we will visit another of the superlative pre-Romanesque churches of Asturias, the early ninth-century San Julián in Oviedo. Imposing in its size and sternly geometric structure, San Julián is particularly well-known for its unusual honeycomb windows and the extensive murals on the interior walls, an ensemble unparalleled in any western European church of the same date.

We will meet after a short break for a final festive dinner together as a group.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

September 16, Day 10: Departures. Transportation will be provided for departures from Asturias airport at any time today.

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 12 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Rick Wright and Virgilio Beltrán



Rick Wright is a widely published author and sought-after lecturer and field trip leader. A native of southeast Nebraska, Rick studied French, German, Philosophy, and Life Sciences at the University of Nebraska before making a detour to Harvard Law School. He took the Ph.D. in German Languages and Literatures at Princeton University in 1990, then spent a dozen years as an academic, holding successive appointments as Assistant Professor of German at the University of Illinois, Reader in Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, and Associate Professor of Medieval Studies at Fordham University. His numerous scholarly publications include two books on the Latin animal literature of the later Middle Ages. Among Rick's recent books are the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of New Jersey* and the *ABA Field Guide to Birds of Arizona*; his *Peterson Reference Guide to American Sparrows* was published in 2019. He is also the co-

author with Sanford Sorkin of *Watching Birds in Montclair* and *Watching Birds in the New Jersey Meadowlands*. Especially interested in the history and culture of birding, he is hard at work on a study of hummingbird collecting in France from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. In his spare time, he teaches Latin courses online for the Paideia Institute. Rick lives with his family, Alison Beringer and Avril Huang, and their black lab, Quetzal, in northern New Jersey, where he offers private birding tours to the marshes, woodlands, and ocean beaches.



Virgilio Beltrán Jordá, (54), has a degree in Zoology from the University of Valencia and a Master's in Environmental Education, recognized by the IUCN, from the University of Cádiz. Throughout his professional career he has accumulated teaching experience in the area of Biology-Geology in Secondary Education, has designed and implemented Educational Programs in the fields of Food and Health, and has taught Postgraduate Socio-Environmental Educator Courses for a Private School of Magisterium in Valencia. During the last 20 years Virgilio has been focused on the fields of Environmental Education, Rural Tourism, and Family Tourism experiences in Nature, through ACTIO Actividades Educativas SL. He has developed environmental programs for schoolchildren and family tourism products in nature related to the **ACTIO**

Rural Hostel, and has worked in consulting and design of signaling and enhancement of touristic and environmental routes and tourism promotion materials for different municipalities of the Valencia Region and other provinces in Spain. In 2013 he started a birdwatching company, **ACTIO Birding**, where his professional skills merge with his hobby and knowledge of birds. ACTIO Birding explores new possibilities of experiential tourism combining "birdwatching" with wine-tasting, cultural activities, and family tourism. Virgilio works as a tour leader and birding guide in travel programs organized by ACTIO Birding, as well as in different fam trips, press trips, and other promotion by those responsible for tourism in the Valencia Region. He also acts as a consultant, lecturer, and assistant at international birdwatching fairs on issues related to birding in the Valencia Region. Virgilio is a member of the Board of Directors of the Bird Watching Guides Association of the Valencia Region, and is 1st Vice President of "Tour & Kids" (Family Tourist Product Club of the Valencian Community). In September 2013 he joined "SER Viajeros Comunitat Valenciana" (the tourism magazine of Spanish radio station CADENA SER) as an expert collaborator in everything related to birds and nature: where to observe birds in the Valencia Region, birdwatching news, and environmental education.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$4,295** per person in double occupancy from Oviedo. This includes all food from dinner on Day 2 to dinner on Day 9, all lodging and ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Oviedo and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$540**.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with

MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (April 10, 2022).

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

If participant cancels:

180 days or more before departure date

179 to 151 days before departure date

150 days or less before departure date

Participant's refund will be:

Participant's deposit minus \$500*

No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded

No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A "**Force Majeure**" event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available.

Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion**, and a “**Cancel for Any Reason**” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: <https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

The coronavirus pandemic has brought uncertainty for many people currently holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint has added a **Coronavirus FAQ page** to its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more. Among the most important points: 1) Trip cancellation solely for concern or fear of travel associated with COVID-19 is not covered; 2) Should you request cancellation of your policy, a full refund of your premium is available only under a limited set of conditions; and 3) Should you request cancellation, you may be eligible to receive a pro-rated refund of the unused portion of your premium or a travel insurance credit. Travel insurance credit (“Premium Credit”) is for the value of the policy purchased and may be applied to future policies. Premium Credits have no expiration dates. Rules and regulations apply.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:
https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

Additionally, as countries begin opening up for travel, many are instituting an array of COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 Illness and accommodation in case of quarantine. Ripcord’s comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to

satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a “letter of confirmation” that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based on the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made

to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is impossible to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based on the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. ***Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be responsible for any air ticket penalties.***

BAGGAGE: As a precaution, please pack your travel documents, optics, medications, basic toiletries, a change of clothes, and other essential items in your carry-on bag. Please check with your airline for restrictions and fees. Because security regulations change constantly, we recommend that you consult the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for information about permissible carry-on items: www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm.

Our vehicle will be comfortable for our daily excursions, but space for bags may be tight. As we may be making the transfers between the airport and our Oviedo hotel as a group, please limit your baggage to one piece of luggage and one smaller carry-on or daypack. Soft-sided luggage is recommended.

CLOTHING: The following items are recommended:

- **Pants:** A couple of pairs of pants are essential. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable in the field. On our visits to restaurants, churches, and museums, neater but still informal clothing will be best.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela’s and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular.
- **Shirts:** Several comfortable long-sleeved shirts in styles suitable for warm to cool weather or for layering under a sweater or jacket; short sleeves may work for time spent in Oviedo, though at this season even the warmest days turn cool after sunset.
- **Hat:** A hat for protection from the sun is essential.
- **Sweaters and Coats:** A heavy sweater, fleece, or light coat and gloves will be useful for cool mornings and evenings and essential on our days at higher elevations. You should also bring a warm water-repellent jacket in case of rain.

FOOTWEAR: We recommend a good trail-walking shoe or light hiking boot when in the field. Athletic shoes are acceptable, but will not keep your feet dry in rain or mud. Our walk in the cave of Tito Bustillo will take us across surfaces that are damp and may be slippery. A lighter-weight walking shoe may be preferred when not in the field and for evenings in Oviedo.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available in our hotel, but it is always best to bring enough clothes to get you through the entire tour.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with the proper equipment. Be sure to bring:

- Small daypack for extra clothing, books, supplies, and optics.
- Notebook and pencils.
- Alarm clock.
- Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection and high-SPF sunscreen.
- Lip balm and lotions.
- Cameras, lenses, extra batteries, and memory cards (not always conveniently available in Oviedo and smaller towns).
- Telescoping walking stick – highly recommended for those who have trouble walking.
- Pocket packages of tissues.

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 binoculars. Do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like “minis” because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Your tour leaders will have a scope available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

OTHER ITEMS: Bring your favorite field guide. We recommend the second edition of *Birds of Europe* by Lars Svensson, Killian Mullarney, and Dan Zetterström. If you bring another guide, it should be in addition to, rather than instead of, Svensson et al.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: September is extremely pleasant in the lowlands of northern Spain, with average highs in the low 70s F and lows in the upper 50s. Rain is possible at any time, but rarely lasts more than a few hours or a day at this time of year; our schedule is flexible enough to accommodate being rained out of one or the other of our destinations. It can be much colder in the mountains, the temperature on foggy and overcast days struggling to reach the upper 50s. Rain is more likely the higher our elevation.

CONDITIONS: Our days will be full, but our pace will always be easy and relaxed. Most of our activities are optional, and it is always possible to simply take the day off to enjoy Oviedo on your own if you'd like. When we are birding, our walking will be restricted to paths and roadsides, and we are not likely to walk more than two miles at a time; all of our walking will be at a slow pace. Towns and villages often have uneven pavement, and of course paths on the coast and in the mountains can be rocky or sandy.

The physical demands of this trip are light to moderate, but please bear in mind that our visits to museums, churches, and other monuments may require a moderate amount of walking and standing. We emphasize that you will not be subjected to physical demands beyond your capabilities.

Special note: This tour offers experiences with the natural history and the architecture, culture, and art of one of Europe's richest historical landscapes. It is neither a birding itinerary exclusively nor entirely a cultural excursion, but combines the two in ways that seek to do justice to the human and natural complexity of this region. Anyone considering this trip should strongly consider these points before registering.

Though we will be visiting many of what we consider the most important and most interesting sites in Asturias, there is very much more to see than can be covered on a short trip. Participants with an interest in enjoying more of Spain or other regions should come early or stay on after the end of the tour.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

PASSPORTS - A passport valid for at least three months after your return from the tour is required, and at least six months is recommended. If your passport expires earlier than that, you must get it renewed. Also make certain that you have at least one empty page in your passport for stamps.

If you need to obtain or renew a passport or request extra pages, you should apply well in advance of your trip departure. Passports can be expedited for an additional fee. In the United States, you can apply for a passport or renewal at passport offices, most post offices, and county clerk's offices. You can also visit www.state.gov/travel for information about obtaining and renewing passports.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport and keep the copies in a safe place so that you have proof of identification if your passport is lost. Your passport should be signed and easily accessible at all times. You will need it to check in at airports and to clear immigration controls in Spain, so **do not pack your passport in your checked luggage.**

VISAS – At the time of publication, citizens of the United States and Canada do not need a visa to enter Spain for visits less than 90 days. Citizens of other countries should check with their local Spanish consulate or embassy.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your tour payment includes most necessary expenses while you are in Spain. You will need cash to cover such personal expenses as taxi rides, gifts, laundry, gratuities, and snacks and meals on your own. It is best to carry small bills, as some of the places we visit may not be able to change larger denominations.

The official currency in Spain is the euro; US dollars are not accepted anywhere in Asturias. You can see the current exchange rate at www.xe.com. You can order euros through your bank before leaving home, or withdraw them from ATMs at the airport or in towns. Please ask your bank or credit card issuer about the use of your ATM and credit cards abroad.

ELECTRICITY: Electrical current in Spain is 220V; outlets accept two round prongs. Most newer electronic devices can run on 220V, but if you have items that do not, you will need a step-down transformer in addition to a plug adapter of Europlug Type C or Schuko type F.

LANGUAGE: The official language of Asturias is Spanish. Younger people and people in the cities also generally speak good English. Malte is entirely bilingual in Spanish and English.

TIME: Spain in September is on Central European Summer Time, which is six hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time and nine hours ahead of Pacific Daylight Time.

HEALTH: At the time of publication no major shots or inoculations are required for entry into Spain. Those who are not fit for light to moderate physical activity, including those with physical disabilities that affect mobility and balance or other conditions associated with poor health, are advised not to join the trip.

VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

COVID-19: The world has been in the grip of a pandemic since early 2020, a result of the uncontrolled spread of SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes the illness COVID-19. COVID-19 is transmitted through person-to-person contact, almost always through inhaling respiratory aerosols or droplets exuded from an infected person. Common signs of COVID-19 illness include fever or chills, fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, loss of taste or smell, and more. Based on what is known about the disease, COVID-19 is far more serious than seasonal flu. Few places in the world have been unaffected. The impact on travel has been substantial, as demonstrated by the fact that VENT did not operate a tour between late March 2020 and late April 2021. The development and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines, particularly in the United States, has allowed VENT to return to tour operations. We emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. **With this in mind, VENT instituted a COVID-19 vaccination requirement.** All tour participants and tour leaders must be fully vaccinated in order to travel with us while we are still in a declared public health emergency. In accordance with the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), full vaccination is defined as an individual being 14 days beyond having received the required amount of vaccine for reaching full immunity to the degree specific vaccines confer. In the United States, so far, this means either the two-shot sequence for the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines or the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Proof of vaccination must be provided to our office at least one week before the start of the tour and kept with you while on the tour. Because the world is a very different place than it was before the pandemic, we've made a number of important adjustments to our processes to ensure that our tours can operate as safely as possible. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19>, where you may view our **COVID-19 Protocols for VENT Tours** document, which details the guidance VENT will follow in the operation of its tours in the time of pandemic. Our decision and policy are firmly rooted in the latest CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. As we move forward, VENT will continue to follow the latest information from the CDC and will update our policy accordingly. Please visit the CDC website for the most up to date information about COVID-19 and associated guidance for proper health and hygiene: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>.

Sun exposure – Prolonged exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays damages eyes and skin. Protect your skin, lips, eyes, nose, and ears whenever you are outdoors. We strongly recommend the use of high-SPF sunscreen and lip balm, along with ultraviolet-blocking, polarized sunglasses. Severe sunburn is very painful and will affect your enjoyment of the trip.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html (click on Travel Health).

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Birds

Mullarney, Killian and Lars Svensson and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. 2nd ed. Princeton UP, 2009.

Mammals

MacDonald, David and Priscilla Barrett. *Mammals of Europe*. Princeton UP, 1993.

Odonates

Dijkstra, K., and R. Lewington. *Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Britain and Europe*. British Wildlife Publishing, 2006.

Butterflies

Tolman, T., and R. Lewington. *Collins Butterfly Guide*. HarperCollins, 2009.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, “**VENT**”) act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on December 10, 2021, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant’s Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals,

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and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "***Airline***") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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12/13/21 – MA/RS