



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

## SPAIN: BIRDS AND ART IN ASTURIAS *A RELAXED & EASY TOUR*

**AUGUST 28 – SEPTEMBER 6, 2024**

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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 was in the caves of northern Spain some thirty thousand years ago that western art was born.*



Near Ubiñas © Malte Beringer

*Our 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.*

*This tour is one in our series of Relaxed & Easy (R&E) tours. These tours are appropriate for participants who want a slower-paced tour, with somewhat fewer hours in the field and light physical activity. They are ideal for persons who prefer a somewhat later start in the morning (typically 7:00 a.m., with one earlier start on Day Four of this tour), a break after lunch, and a shorter afternoon outing. They involve only short walks, usually not more than a half mile, and avoid difficult terrain.*



**August 28, Wednesday, Day 1: Departure from Home.** Participants should arrange to arrive in Oviedo (Asturias Airport code OVD), typically by way of Madrid-Barajas Airport (code MAD) on August 29. Most flights from the United States and Canada will depart on August 28, arriving in Spain the following day. On arrival, you will be provided with a transfer to our hotel in Oviedo (a drive of approximately 40 minutes). On request, the VENT office will be happy to assist early arrivals with extra hotel arrangements.

NIGHT: In transit (overnight flight)

**August 29, Thursday, 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.



The irresistible and often common White Wagtail  
© Rick Wright

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

**August 30, Friday, 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 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 guided 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.



A Dunnock greets the day. © Rick Wright

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. It is an easy walk back to our hotel from there.

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

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

**August 31, Saturday, Day 4: Ría de Villaviciosa.** We'll make a later 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, or Bluethroat. Virtually anything is possible here on the coast in early autumn, 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.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

**September 1, Sunday, Day 5: Cabo Peñas and Monte Naranco.** A sunrise excursion—like all of our outings, optional for those who would rather see more of Oviedo on their own—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 extreme 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.

Lunch in Oviedo is on your own today—ask your leaders for recommendations—followed by an afternoon of shopping, sightseeing, and strolling on our own before we reassemble for dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

**September 2, Monday, Day 6: 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



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

Vultures, Red-billed and Alpine choughs, Alpine Accentor, 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.

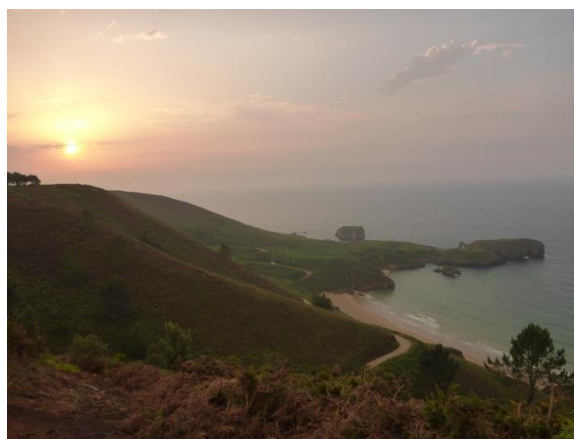
We plan to maximize our chances by leaving early this morning, with a light breakfast along the way before arriving in the mountains around sunrise (ca. 8:00 am at this season). Our precise destinations in the Picos will depend on the weather—it can be quite cool and damp at high elevations, especially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

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 Cangas, 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 3, Tuesday, Day 7: 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. After a relaxed breakfast, 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 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 have time to rest or to take another short walk in San Francisco Park before dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

**September 4, Wednesday, Day 8: 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



The sublime landscapes of Ubiñas. © Malte Beringer

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.

We expect to be back in Oviedo with time for a slightly longer break before dinner this evening.

NIGHT: Hotel de la Reconquista, Oviedo

**September 5, Thursday, Day 9: Avilès 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 Avilès, enjoying birds we will have grown familiar with and looking for newly arrived migrants on the mud and the meadows.

After lunch, we will return to Oviedo for a visit to another of the superlative pre-Romanesque churches of Asturias, the early ninth-century San Julián. 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 6, Friday, Day 10: Departures.** Transportation will be provided for departures from Asturias airport at any time today. Packed breakfasts will be available at the hotel reception desk for those flying before 11:30 am.

**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.

**CONDITIONS:** Our days will be full, but our pace will always be easy and relaxed. Because we stay in a single, comfortable hotel in the city, 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.

**Note:** This tour offers experiences of 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. The VENT office will be happy to help you with those arrangements.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is \$4,695 per person in double occupancy from Oviedo. This includes all lodging and ground transportation during the tour, guide services provided by the tour leaders, and, with the exception of lunch on Day 5, all meals from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 10. 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. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**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. 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 of March 31, 2024.

### **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 from the date of participant tour cancellation, 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**, 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 15 days of making your first trip payment. 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 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip cost in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

#### **Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

In line with the decision made by the federal government (including the CDC), Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be



considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a **Coronavirus FAQ** page on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:

[https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid\\_19\\_faq/](https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/)

**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.

**RELAXED AND EASY (R&E) TOUR INFORMATION:** Relaxed & Easy (R&E) tours are similar to our other VENT tours, but set to a slower pace, with somewhat fewer hours in the field and lighter physical activity. They are ideal for participants who prefer a somewhat later start in the morning, a little lengthier afternoon break, and a shorter afternoon outing. Walking is limited to short walks of usually not more than a mile, avoiding difficult terrain. A typical day will begin with breakfast around no earlier than 6:30 a.m., followed by birding until about 1 p.m. We will attempt to have lunch every day around 1:00 p.m., followed by an afternoon break (when possible). We will resume birding for a couple of hours in the midafternoon. On most days we will attempt to provide 45 minutes to an hour for personal time before dinner. We will have dinner between 6:00 and 6:30 p.m. Strenuous physical activity will be avoided, and all walking will be limited to well-marked roads and trails, excluding uneven or rough terrain.

Relaxed & Easy (R&E) refers only to the slower pace of a tour, not to a participant's birding skills or ability. Accordingly, birders of all levels of ability are welcome, as they are on typical VENT tours; R&E tours should not to be mistaken as tours for beginning birders. All birders are welcome regardless of skill level, as they are on regular VENT tours.

**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. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.\* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. 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 held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

**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](http://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 third 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:** Early autumn is pleasant in the lowlands of northern Spain, with average highs in the 70s F and lows in the 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.

## **TRAVEL DOCUMENTS**

**PASSPORTS** - A passport valid for at least six months after your return from the tour is required. 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](http://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](http://www.xe.com). You can order euros through your bank before leaving home, or withdraw them from ATMs at the airport or in Oviedo. 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. Virgilio is entirely bilingual in Spanish and English.



**TIME:** Spain in August and 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:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19. Please visit the **Coronavirus Travel Update** page of our website <https://ventbird.com/covid-19> for our official statement regarding COVID-19 and the operation of our tours. 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](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html](http://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](http://www.amazon.com) which has a wide selection; [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) and [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

### ***Birds***

Mullarney, Killian and Lars Svensson and Dan Zetterstrom. *Birds of Europe*. 3rd ed. Princeton University Press, 2023.

### ***Mammals***

MacDonald, David and Priscilla Barrett. *Mammals of Europe*. Princeton University Press, 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 January 16, 2024, 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, 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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