

BIRDING ROUTES

galicia

Birding

XUNTA DE GALICIA

*Canta, paxariño alegre,
Canta!
Canta porqu'ó millo medre,
Canta!
Canta por qu' á luz t' escoite
Canta!
Canta que fuxeu a noite*

Rosalía de Castro

GALICIA BIRDING

Where & When

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GALICIA'S TOP TWELVE BIRDING SITES

On the coast

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Galicia is located in a strategic place at the northwest end of the Iberian Peninsula, straddling two different worlds -the Atlantic region and the Mediterranean- which provide grounds, in a small space, for species characteristic of these two biogeographic areas.

Moreover, the scenic diversity that can be enjoyed is huge. There are mountains with peaks of some 2,000 metres above sea level in the east, forests, scrubland, peatland, lakes, plains, hundreds of kilometres of rivers and river canyons. Yet, if anything characterises Galicia on the map it is its coast. Along its approximately 1,500 km are estuaries, wetlands, dune systems, cliffs and islands that shape a diverse and attractive landscape.

Due to its geographical position, Galicia (and specifically its northern tip, the cape of Estaca de Bares) is an excellent place to watch the passage of thousands of specimens of seabirds during migration.

Modern infrastructure makes it possible to explore Galicia comfortably and within a few days a good list of birds can be compiled. It has a vast area of protected natural areas, including one national park and six natural parks. Accordingly, more than 400 species have been recorded in Galicia, including residents, winter and summer visitors and rarities.

WHY GALICIA?

RÍAS DE RIBADEO AND FOZ

Birds in the Cantabrian Galicia

Notable on the coast of the province of Lugo are two little-known estuaries hosting a large number of species. Of different size and characteristics, their diverse habitats, including notably their intertidal mud flats, are home to a number of water birds and seabirds. The very rocky stretch between the two estuaries offers many points from which shorebirds can be observed.

The best time to visit this corner of the Lugo coastline is during the migratory passage in autumn and winter, due to the abundance of specimens and the variety of species.

It is during the winter season when the presence of various wildfowl stands out, such as the Eurasian wigeon, tufted duck, common pochard and northern pintail. Grey herons and little egrets are abundant, as are great cormorants, waders such as Eurasian curlew and various gulls. Other less common species such as the black-necked grebe, the brant goose and greater scaup can also be seen. During the fall migration, along with small waders, such as dunlins and common ringed plovers, it is easy to find species such as Eurasian spoonbills.

From the coast, towards the open sea, the passage of seabirds, such as the northern gannet or common scoter, is frequent. In rocky coastal areas pay attention to see the snow bunting.



ROUTES

We propose two routes by car along both estuaries:

- ▶ In winter, in the Ría de Ribadeo watchers can spot most of the species by following the road that travels around it. Pay attention to the mud flats at low tide.
- ▶ While circling the Ría de Foz also look at the sand pits, silts and reedbeds at low tide. The port of this town is a convenient watching point.

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RÍA DE ORTIGUEIRA, CARIÑO AND CAPE ESTACA DE BARES

From the rugged cliffs to the calm waters of the estuary

The cape of Estaca de Bares is very popular among bird lovers as it is one of the best places in Europe to observe the migration of thousands of seabirds. Also, the Ría de Ortigueira and its surroundings make up one of the most important wetlands in the northwest Iberian Peninsula.

Cape Estaca de Bares is the northernmost point of Spain and the best time for bird watching runs from late August to early December, especially with winds from the north or northwest. Northern gannets, Cory's shearwaters, great and Balearic shearwaters, common and Arctic terns and skuas are just some of the species that can be seen from here.

The Ría de Ortigueira is best explored between August and February, when it will be possible to see waders such as the Eurasian oystercatcher and Eurasian curlew, various species of gulls, wildfowl, cormorants and herons.

Between Cariño and Cabo Ortegal pay attention to other seabirds such as the great northern loon and razorbill. In the nearby Capelada mountain range the snow bunting is common in winter and ring ouzel is common in autumn migration.

ROUTES

At Estaca de Bares there is an observation point with a small refuge for bird watchers, essential for enjoying migrating seabirds.

In addition, we propose two routes by car.

- ▶ The first goes around the Ortigueira estuary.
- ▶ The second route departs from Santo André de Teixido, crossing the Serra da Capelada, and ends at the spectacular cliffs and islets of Cabo Ortegal.

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COSTA DA MORTE

Birds at the end of the world

Along its more than 200 km of coastline the Costa da Morte provides grounds for watching a great variety of birds. Its spectacular cliffs, estuaries, beaches and dune systems offer us moments of great beauty, such as the autumn passage of sea and water migratory birds, or the wintering of waders and several species of gull. Moreover, the appearance of wandering species from North America such as the semipalmated plover, the American golden plover, the lesser scaup and the American herring gull is not uncommon.

From the capes the passage of seabirds can be seen starting in August. Some of the most attractive ones are Punta do Roncudo (Ponteceso) and, further south, Cabo Touriñán (Muxía).

In the wetlands the stars are water birds, including waders such as the Eurasian oystercatcher, Eurasian curlew, black-tailed godwit and bar-tailed godwit, as well as wildfowl such as the Eurasian teal. Unmissable places are the estuary of the Anllóns river at the end of the Ría de Corme and Laxe, the nearby Traba lagoon and the small and always surprising Ría de Lires, a natural boundary between the municipalities of Cee and Muxía.

On the cliffs and islets that dot the coast there are European shags, peregrine falcons and red-billed choughs.



ROUTES

We propose three routes by car to get know nearly all the Costa da Morte, its landscapes and the birds that inhabit it.

- ▶ The first takes us from Cabo Fisterra to Muxía, with mandatory stops at the Ría de Lires (Cee) and Cabo Touriñán (Muxía).
- ▶ The second reveals some of the wildest stretches of coastline, located between Camariñas and Camelle passing by Cabo Vilán.
- ▶ The latter runs along the Traba lagoon (Laxe) and then leads to the estuary of the Anllóns river and Punta do Roncudo (Ponteceso), ending at the port of Malpica de Bergantiños.

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O GROVE AND ILLAS ATLÁNTICAS MARITIME TERRESTRIAL NATIONAL PARK

Birds in the heart of the Rías Baixas

The Rías Baixas has one of the most attractive places in the north of the Iberian Peninsula for bird watching, with two distinct areas. t

The first is the O Grove and Illas Atlánticas de Galicia Maritime Terrestrial National Park, made up by the archipelagos of Cíes, Ons, Sálvora and Cortegada. The stars are their colonies of seabirds, including the European shag, yellow-legged gull and Cory's shearwater. The best sightings are had between February and July. Between August and November the spectacle of migrating seabirds can be enjoyed.

The second area is the southwest of the Arousa estuary, including notably the large intertidal plain of the O Vao inlet, along with the isthmus of A Lanzada, the mouth of the Umia river and the south of the island of Arousa. Both form an entire area to complete the longest list of birds in Galicia, to which thousands of waders, gulls, wildfowl and herons can be added, along with the largest group of Eurasian spoonbill in the north of the peninsula. The best time to visit this place is during the autumn migratory passage, from August to November, and during the winter.



ROUTES

► Although the national park's website shows different routes and the regulations governing this space, we recommend visiting the Cíes Islands and following the path that leads from the wharf to the Alto de Montefaro, which offers spectacular views of the archipelago.

► From O Grove, a journey by car to Cambados provides access to the place with the highest concentration of birds: the O Vao inlet, where there are various bird observatories, which can be accessed comfortably on foot.

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A GUARDA

Birds on the border

A Guarda shares the final stretch of the Miño river with Portugal. The mightiest of the Galician rivers flows into a large wetland with different ecosystems that host a multitude of water and land birds, especially during the autumn and winter migratory passage.

Before its waters collide with the Atlantic, the Miño river forms a large estuary where sediments have been deposited for thousands of years, thereby creating different habitats, particularly the marshes. Some of them are found on river islands such as Canosa island. Highly interesting beaches and rocky sections can also be found.

From late summer onwards many water birds, such as waders, arrive, including notably the sanderling and Eurasian curlew.

As winter approaches, great cormorants, grey herons, little egrets and various species of gulls, such as the Mediterranean gull, black-headed gull and great black-backed gull, increase in number. It is also a good place to see birds of prey such as the northern harrier and western osprey, which is present in autumn and winter.

In spring, it is easy to listen to the elusive water rail and see Eurasian reed warblers and western marsh harriers.

ROUTES

We propose two routes by foot departing from the port of A Guarda.

▶ In the first route we cross the southern coast until arriving at the estuary of the Miño to continue upstream to Canosa island, the most interesting area for bird watching.

▶ The second route leads us along the rocky coast to the north where our focus will be on seabirds and passerines.

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● Western osprey

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A TERRA CHÁ WETLANDS

Birds in the plain

A Terra Chá is an extensive region characterised by its gentle relief - its translation into English would be “flatland”. There are many rivers, such as the Miño, that cross it with well-preserved banks, as well as several lagoons that host dozens of species of water birds throughout the year. The Cospeito and Caque lagoons (Castro de Rei) are not to be missed. Other enclaves, formed by pastures and open areas, such as the Veiga de Pumar, can also be found between the municipalities of Castro de Rei and Cospeito, and A Espiñeira, which is found in the latter.

A Terra Chá is worth a visit at almost any time of year, as it offers a wide variety of birds to watch.

In the lakes water birds such as the little grebe, grey heron and common moorhen can be seen. However, the wildfowl, such as the Eurasian teal, which is present in winter, stand out most. At that time, in the pastures, there are northern lapwing, European golden plover, redwing and brambling that, depending on the harshness of the winter in central and northern Europe, may form very numerous flocks. In the spring, interesting species such as the little bustard, which nests sparingly, and Montagu’s harrier can be seen. A Terra Chá is home to the only breeding population of the Eurasian curlew on the Iberian Peninsula.

It is an excellent place for observing birds of prey. In spring, for example, it is easy to find the Eurasian hobby or Montagu’s harrier, while in late summer lesser kestrel can be seen; in winter, merlin and peregrine falcon are the stars.



ROUTES

- ▶ The first, by car, takes us through the most interesting places of A Terra Chá, both the wetlands and pastures. Winter and spring are the most recommended times.
- ▶ The second is a walk around the Cospeito lagoon, starting at the interpretation centre, and during which a wide variety of water birds can be spotted.

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● Common pochard

OS ANCARES AND MONTES DE CERVANTES

The great mountains of Lugo

This is a north-south facing range next to the Cantabrian mountain range that separates Galicia from León. Covered with snow for several months a year, its summits, some of which reach 2,000 metres, are drained by numerous rivers that flow into the Navia river. Its deep valleys are carpeted by extensive, excellently conserved old-growth forests. Scrubland and a mosaic of pastures complete the landscape that provides shelter to a large number of species.

Being a mountain area, bird watching is difficult in autumn and especially in winter. However, for the rest of the year numerous species associated with the forest can be found, including notably the black woodpecker, Eurasian woodcock and goldcrest.

Typical scrub species include very interesting species such as the grey partridge and hen harrier, in addition to other birds of prey such as the short-toed snake eagle and booted eagle; even in late summer it is not difficult to see lesser kestrels in the pastures of the hills.

In the rocky cliffs there are characteristic species such as the rufous-tailed rock thrush, peregrine falcon and northern raven, which is also very present in summits along with red-billed chough and water pipit.



ROUTES

- ▶ One of the most interesting routes, by car, is a circular route around the entire range, passing through some of the most prominent places such as Doiras, Camba Brego, Piornedo (Cervantes) and Navia de Suarna.
- ▶ The second route starts on foot from the mountain hostel next to Degrada and climbs one of its most prominent peaks, Tres Bispos.

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● Grey partridge

CANÓNS DO RÍO SIL

Birds among rocks, forests and vineyards

Towering cliffs and crags that plummet over the Sil river, dense forests of oaks and chestnut trees and vineyards cultivated in terraces from time immemorial shape one of the most scenically unique enclaves in Galicia. The area is home to an interesting catalogue of birds, especially during the breeding season between April and July.

For much of its route in Galicia, the Sil river is wedged in a deep valley. Forests of different types (depending on their orientation), crags, scrubland and even vineyards provide favourable habitats for birds.

Notable is the presence of cliff birds such as the peregrine falcon, Eurasian eagle-owl and the more rare blue rock thrush and golden eagle. Other birds of prey found in the area are the European honey buzzard, goshawk, short-toed snake eagle and booted eagle. Other species that are also common include the Eurasian crag martin, red-rumped swallow and a multitude of small forest birds such as the Iberian chiffchaff and Eurasian nuthatch. In the farming and scrub areas, at the canyon's edge, it is easy to find species such as the woodlark and southern grey shrike.



ROUTES

We propose two routes:

- ▶ The first, by car, starts at the Santo Estevo *parador* in Ribas de Sil and ends at Castro Caldelas. Stops can be made at different viewpoints, as well as short trips on foot to see the canyon and its birds.
- ▶ The second, on foot, runs from the vicinity of Parada de Sil to the Monastery of Santa Cristina, where there are some of the most spectacular views of the canyon. A walk can be taken through forests and scrubland areas to see species characteristic of the area such as the black kite, the short-toed eagle and Eurasian nuthatch.

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● Black kite



SERRA DA ENCIÑA DA LASTRA NATURAL PARK

Mediterranean rocks and landscapes

Although Galicia is often identified with landscapes characteristic of Europe's Atlantic coast, it also is home to places that do not respond to this cliché. The best example is the Serra da Enciña da Lastra Natural Park. As its name suggests, the oak tree is the most characteristic tree, although it is not alone: it is accompanied by olive trees, strawberry trees, chestnut trees and rockrose.

In addition to its Mediterranean vegetation, impressive are its crags and limestone cliffs that lend it uniqueness and provide home to more than a few species of birds of great importance, since the Egyptian vulture, peregrine falcon and golden eagle nest there. Furthermore, other rock birds such as the red-billed chough, blue rock thrush, alpine swift and Eurasian crag martin can be seen there.

In forests and open areas the flight of booted eagles, short-toed snake eagles, Eurasian wrynecks and common redstarts, among other species, provide a show for bird watchers. In the bushes a chorus of warblers, such as the subalpine warbler, can be heard, while the air is filled with the sound of European bee-eaters. In the reservoir of the Sil river red-rumped swallows perform acrobatics above its waters and great crested grebes dive in search of food.

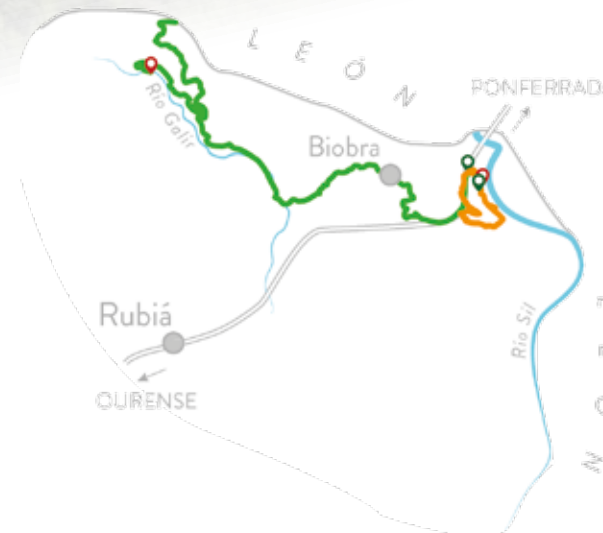
● Egyptian vulture



ROUTES

We propose two routes that depart from the village of Covas (Rubiá):

- ▶ The first route, by car, provides an overview of the entire mountain range and its surroundings as well as the opportunity to see a large part of the most interesting birds in the natural park.
- ▶ The second route is a circular route that crosses forests and farm lands to provide constant chances to see numerous cliffs, the grounds for all types of species of these habitats and to enjoy those that can be seen above the reservoir.



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A LIMIA

The spirit of Antela

Although it has undergone major changes since the 1950s, this plain in the heart of the province of Ourense stands out as an attractive bird watching destination, especially between mid-April and June, with the spring migration and arrival of the summer species. The morning chorus of birds in the sand pits (former naturalised aggregate mining areas later abandoned and turned into aquatic habitats) and the activity of birds of prey are not to be missed.

It is not often that a region as wide and flat as A Limia is found in Galicia. Its landscape is occupied by crops, copses (especially in areas close to rivers and streams), some flood-prone areas and small areas of scrubland. Its environment is no less interesting as it is surrounded by small mountains generally covered by forest. Drained in the 1960s, the Antela lake stood at the heart of the region. The current wetlands are smaller and of a different nature, since they are naturalised rivers and sand pits.

The variety of birds that can be found in this agricultural area -nearly 250 species- is amazing. Notable is the population of common quail, white stork, little bustard, greater short-toed lark, Montagu's harrier and northern harrier. Among the water birds or birds linked to river environments are little bitterns, purple herons, black-crowned night herons and northern lapwings. Spring is perhaps the best time in A Limia, when many birds occupy wetlands, crops and copses. In winter, the sand pits, where different water birds take refuge, are of great interest.



● Montagu's harrier

ROUTES

We propose two routes by car that start at Xinzo de Limia, in which mainly farming areas will be visited.

- ▶ The first roughly follows the former bed of the Antela lagoon. Of note is its channel where various water birds nest.
- ▶ The second leads to the west of the region with two points of interest: the sand pits of Sandiás and its water birds and the Veiga de Ponteliñares with its magnificent riverside vegetation.

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BAIXA LIMIA - SERRA DO XURÉS NATURAL PARK

The domains of the eagle

Southwest of the province of Ourense is the **Baixa Limia-Serra do Xurés Natural Park** which, together with the neighbouring **Peneda-Gerês National Park** in Portugal, forms a transfrontier biosphere reserve. It is a succession of granite massifs of extraordinary scenic uniqueness hosting a large biological community.

Bisected by the Limia river, the rocky outcrops and deep valleys shape the park's various sub-ranges. Small villages, farm areas, scrubland, forests and pine reforestations complement the granitic environment.

An endangered species, the golden eagle is here the subject of a reinforcement programme. It is a relatively easy species to watch in the mountains, along with many other birds of prey, including notably the short-toed snake eagle, Montagu's harrier and northern harrier. Towards the end of summer, griffon vultures and the occasional cinereous vulture fly over the natural park's peaks. Notable among forest birds is the red crossbill.

Spring and summer, especially August and September, are the best times of year to visit Baixa Limia-Serra do Xurés, although characteristic birds of the area, such as the northern goshawk, common kestrel and northern harrier, can also be seen the rest of the year.

ROUTES

- ▶ One of the most interesting routes is followed by car and leads from A Devesa (Lobios) to Olelas (Entrimo), switching between valleys and higher elevations and crossing the Lima river. On it, most of the species present in the park can be seen against the unique scenic backdrop of this corner of the province of Ourense.
- ▶ The second is a hiking path that, leaving from the hamlet of Queguas (Entrimo), runs through forest and scrubland, which provide ripe grounds to see both small birds and raptors.

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OÍMBRA, MONTERREI AND VERÍN

Mediterranean Galicia

This is one of the lesser known places in Galicia, from the ornithological point of view, but it is of great interest. Thanks to its Mediterranean climate and its level of conservation it is easy to observe a wide variety of birds that are rare in the rest of Galicia.

The Tâmega and Búbal rivers, with their riparian forests and meadows, drain large valleys surrounded by modest mountains. The landscape is dominated by scrubland, wet meadows, small forests, crops, chestnut groves, vineyards and crags that together host nearly 150 bird species. Spring is the best time to visit this region, although in winter the abundance of small passerines in crop fields can be surprising.

Some of the star species are Mediterranean species such as the black-winged kite, the European bee-eater, the subalpine warbler and the spectacled warbler. It is a good area to watch Montagu's harriers and northern harriers, short-toed snake eagles, booted eagles and an entire list of birds of prey. Species typical of rocky areas can also be seen, such as the rufous-tailed rock thrush and Eurasian eagle-owl. Other interesting birds are forest birds: Iberian chiffchaff and western Bonelli's warbler, lesser spotted woodpeckers, Eurasian wrynecks and red crossbills.



ROUTES

We propose two routes by car to get to know the region and its birds.

- ▶ The first begins at Monterrei Castle and runs along the basin of the Búbal river and its tributaries.
- ▶ From Verín, the second route follows the course of the Tâmega river to the Portuguese border and continues alongside the Dos Fornos river.

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JANUARY

Fleeing from the extremes of northern Europe

In central and northern Europe the cold presses in, so many birds travel south in search of food. It is the ideal time to travel to the large coastal wetlands.

A Guarda, the Ría de Vigo, O Grove, the Louro lagoon and Carnota marshes, the Costa da Morte wetlands, the Ría do Burgo, the Valdoviño lagoon in Ferrolterra, the Ría de Ortigueira, Mariña de Lugo and the Rías de Ribadeo and Foz provide fine areas to watch numerous species. Those birds that winter in Galicia include: gulls, wildfowl, grey herons and little egrets, waders and small birds such as meadow pipits.

Inland, a visit should be made to A Limia and A Terra Chá, where we can see other species such as northern lapwing, European golden plovers, redwings, mistle thrushes and, with some luck, bramblings.

Not to be missed

Although all gulls may look the same, nothing is further from reality. As such, in one single day we can see up to half a dozen different species, including rare birds on the Iberian Peninsula such as the Iceland gull, which nests primarily in Greenland.

Our stars of the month



FALCONS AND ROOSTING BIRDS

In winter, to defend themselves against predators, many bird species group together to sleep. Cities and towns are a great place for families to see roosting Eurasian magpie, white wagtail and western jackdaw. The most spectacular are the spotless and common starlings that can number into the thousands, which attracts an emblematic species in search of prey: the peregrine falcon. When it attacks in flight, the starlings crowd together performing spectacular aerial choreographies.

Where? Parks, gardens and the tree-lined avenues of the cities.



FEBRUARY

Our stars of the month

Preparing to say goodbye to the cold

The first days of the month are ideal for visiting the coastal wetlands such as the Rías de Ribadeo and Foz, the Ría de Ortigueira, the whole of the Costa da Morte, O Grove and the estuary of the Miño river in A Guarda. Several species of gulls, a multitude of waders and many other water birds are waiting for us. In marshes, such as those of A Guarda, western marsh harriers and northern harriers can be seen along with western ospreys.

As the month goes by, wintering birds begin to fly north and the earliest southern birds begin to arrive. The most punctual are usually the white storks, which already occupy their bulky nests, and black kites. The best places are the Serra da Enciña da Lastra, the San Martiño reservoir in A Rúa, Oímbra, Monterrei and Verín, the Canóns do Sil and the lower areas of the Baixa Limia-Serra do Xurés Natural Park.

BARN SWALLOWS

Climate change has brought an earlier arrival of these small and well-known birds and, therefore, in February we can already see the first specimens returning from winter in sub-Saharan Africa. Cheerful and tireless travellers, they are also an effective natural insecticide.

Where? In the warmer areas of Galicia such as the Sil river basin, the last stretch of the Miño river and the Oímbra, Monterrei and Verín valleys.



Not to be missed

The start of the nesting of the European shag, one of Galicia's ornithological gems. One of the best places to see them is the Illas Atlánticas de Galicia Maritime Terrestrial National Park or the Costa de Dexo.



MARCH

Spring begins

As soon as a ray of sunshine peaks out, the birds begin their breeding season. In forests it is easy to find the great tit, Eurasian blue tit, firecrest, short-toed creeper, European robin and Eurasian bullfinch. For a few days, the absence of leaves on the trees and vibrant songs make this month the perfect time to watch small birds. To do so, there is nothing better than visiting the forests of Os Ancares and Montes de Cervantes (where the black woodpecker also sings), O Courel, Fragas do Eume, the Serra do Suído and, of course, the Oímbra, Monterrei and Verín riverside forests.

Migratory species gradually make their way from Africa to stay with us. In addition to barn swallows and black kites, the first short-toed snake eagles can now be seen in mountain areas and river valleys such as the Canóns do Sil and the Serra da Enciña da Lastra.

Other species are only passing through, such as northern wheatear, which is common anywhere on the coast, such as the region of Ortegal or the Costa da Morte. Large flocks of lesser black-backed gulls can also be seen heading north.



Not to be missed

Western yellow wagtail characteristic of grassland and reedbeds also arrive in March. To watch them there is nothing better than visiting A Terra Chá, in inland areas, or the wetlands of Baldaio, Carnota and A Guarda, on the coast.

The western marsh harrier is in full nesting mode. It can be seen in the estuary of the Miño river, in A Guarda and in the Complexo Dunar de Corrubedo e Lagoas de Carregal e Vixán Natural Park.

In the inland wetlands such as A Terra Chá an attempt should be made to see birds such as the rare garganey.

Our star of the month



THE EUROPEAN CUCKOO

Everyone knows that the cuckoo exists, but is an elusive and difficult-to-find bird. In March its recognisable song reveals its gradual arrival to different parts of Europe.

Where? In countryside areas such as Oímbra, Monterrei and Verín, Soutos de Orriós and the Regions of Lugo and Sarria.



APRIL

The sound of life

Almost all the migratory birds coming from Africa are here this month. Last month's arrivals are joined now by booted eagles, Eurasian hobbies, common swifts and Eurasian hoopoes.

Visiting Os Ancares and Montes de Cervantes as well as other mountain areas such as the Serra do Xurés and Pena Trevinca and the Serra do Eixe is a good way to observe migratory raptors and small birds such as the Iberian chiffchaff. Water pipits sing on their peaks.

In inland wetlands at sunset, hundreds of barn swallows, common house martins, sand martins and common swifts fly flush to the water to catch insects. Watch out for the appearance of garganey, a rare wildfowl in migration.



Not to be missed

It is a good time to visit the Serra da Enciña da Lastra, the Canóns do Sil and O Bibei and Navea river valleys, where the Egyptian vulture, booted eagle and alpine swift can be seen, along with a large cast of small birds such as the common nightingale and European bee-eater.

Our star of the month



MONTAGU'S HARRIER

A medium-sized bird, with aerobatic flight and fascinating habits, it is an example of lightness, beauty and extreme resistance. It spends its winters in sub-Saharan Africa and in March and April it reaches Galician gorse to breed, growing among the bushes and feeding on small mammals and insects. Half of its population in Galicia has the peculiarity of being melanic, i.e. made up of completely dark individuals, something very rare elsewhere in its global range of distribution.

Where? In A Terra Chá, A Limia, Terra das Frietas, Serra do Candán and Brañas de Xestoso and, in general, in all inland areas of Galicia.



MAY

In full breeding season

In May in Galicia, most of the birds are in full breeding mode and so their activity and songs are constant. The resident and migratory species present are joined by a few others such as the European honey buzzard, which is the last to arrive.

The forests of the Canóns do Sil, the Serra da Enciña da Lastra, Os Ancares and Montes de Cervantes are perfect for listening to and watching forest birds.

Various raptors, from the golden eagle to the Eurasian hobby, hunt their prey in mountain areas, river canyons and open areas. The multitude of species that breed in woodland and scrubland are easily detectable by their songs. Thus, in warmer areas nightingales, subalpine warblers and Sardinian warblers can be heard, as can Iberian chiffchaffs and melodious warblers in any other area.

In the riverside forests orioles, which are also from Africa, betray their presence with their striking song. The marshes and grasslands are the domain of species such as the zitting cisticola.



Not to be missed

Mountain forests to see raptors and small birds while breeding. In the Serra do Xurés also look for the red crossbill and in more open areas there are raptors such as the northern harrier and Montagu's harrier, which are also common in A Limia.

This is one of the best times to see the European bee-eaters in the areas of Oimbra, Monterrei and Verín.

Our star of the month

THE SHORT-TOED SNAKE EAGLE

Large and strikingly clear in flight, its fire-coloured eyes and proud gaze are most striking. They arrive in spring to make smooth flyovers of scrub land, capturing very specific prey such as snakes and other reptiles.

Where? Any area with large expanses of scrub and forest such as Os Ancares and Montes de Cervantes, the Serra do Xurés-Baixa Limia Natural Park, the Canóns do Sil and the Serra da Enciña da Lastra.



JUNE

The breeding season peaks

The spring explosion of birds in full breeding mode continues. It is easy to see adults feeding their nestlings and fledglings just starting to fly from their nests.

A visit to the warmer areas of Galicia such as the Serra da Enciña da Lastra, the valleys of the Navea and Bibei rivers, the Oímbra, Monterrei and Verín valleys, the Canóns do Sil and Calvos de Randín and Baltar gives watchers a chance to see a large number of birds in a few hours. A range of birds can be seen, from raptors such as Montagu's harrier, booted eagle and the more rare black-winged kite, to passerines such as the European bee-eater, subalpine warbler and common nightingale. In the rocky areas other species such as the red-rumped swallow can also be seen.

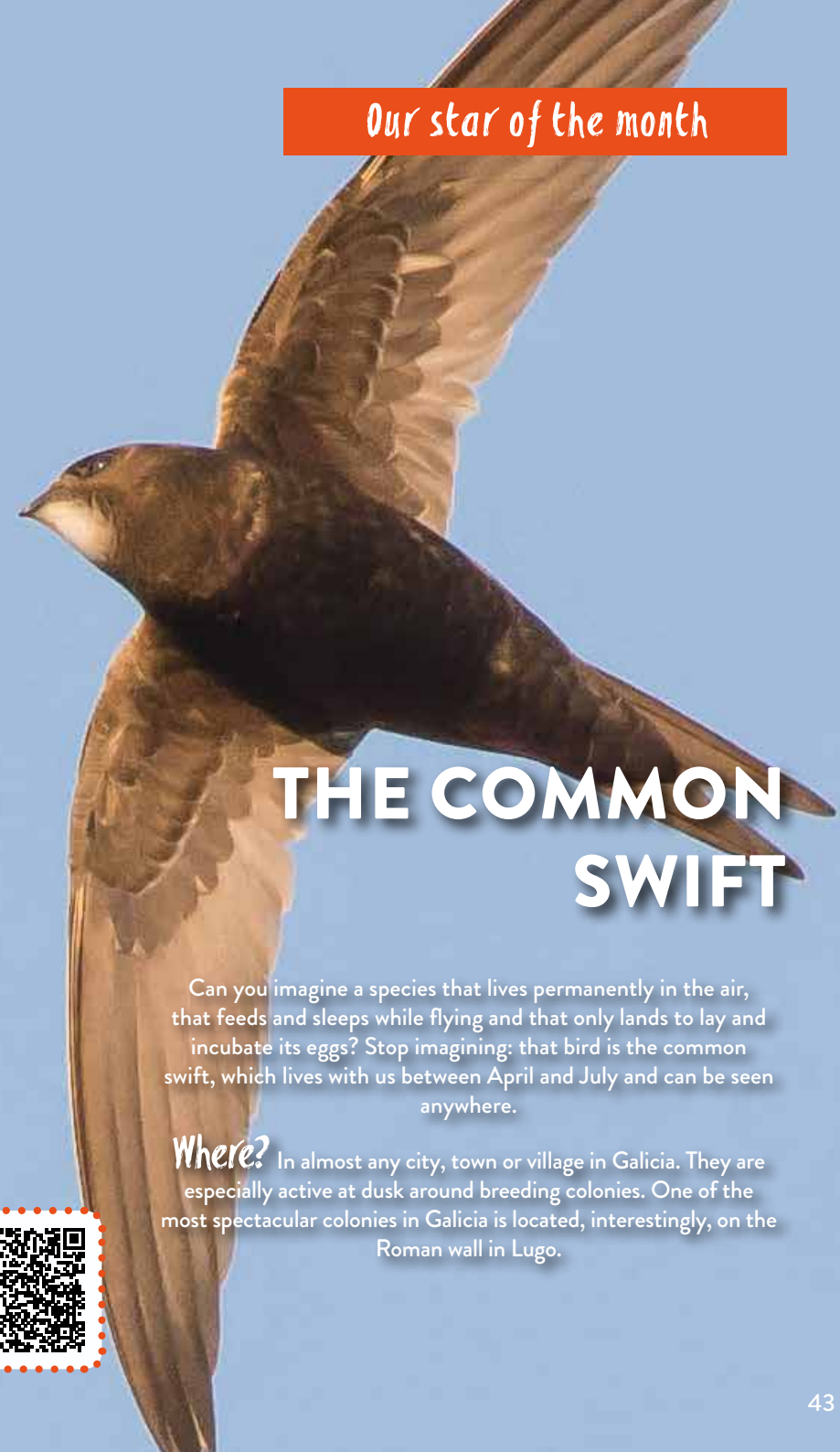


Not to be missed

It is a good time to watch -from a distance- the Kentish plover on beaches such as Carnota or those of the Complexo Dunar de Corrubedo e Lagoas de Carregal e Vixán Natural Park.

It is worth climbing to the summits of the mountainous areas to see water pipits in full breeding mode.

Our star of the month



THE COMMON SWIFT

Can you imagine a species that lives permanently in the air, that feeds and sleeps while flying and that only lands to lay and incubate its eggs? Stop imagining: that bird is the common swift, which lives with us between April and July and can be seen anywhere.

Where? In almost any city, town or village in Galicia. They are especially active at dusk around breeding colonies. One of the most spectacular colonies in Galicia is located, interestingly, on the Roman wall in Lugo.



Last chicks, first migrants

Many birds of northern latitudes have completed their reproductive cycle and begin to migrate south, while others still work to finish the nest.

July is a month full of opportunities to see, for instance, Montagu's harrier in A Limia or A Terra Chá. Mountain areas such as Os Ancares and Montes de Cervantes, the Serra do Xurés, the Serra do Xistral and Peña Trevinca are home to substantial concentrations of raptors such as common kestrels, Montagu's harriers, short-toed snake eagles, common vultures and the more rare cinereous vultures. Other places such as the Serra da Enciña da Lastra still host a multitude of species such as red-rumped swallows, common redstarts and Eurasian wrynecks.



THE BALEARIC SHEARWATER

We may think that birds generally follow certain specific patterns which, in our latitudes, would lead them to reproduce in the north and travel south for the winter. This is not the case for species such as the Balearic shearwater, which nests and breeds on the Balearic Islands and then crosses the Strait of Gibraltar and disperses off the Atlantic coast in search of food. Galicia hosts a large population that exploits the sea's high productivity in these months.

Where? Look for it at the mouth of the estuaries or on boat trips for pelagic birds.



Not to be missed

The little-known mountains of northern Galicia, such as the Serra do Xistral and A Faladoira. In July the chances of observing large groups of common vulture are higher.

Both these mountains and O Courel -both found in the province of Lugo- are home to different forest birds that can be seen in diverse forests: chestnut, beech, oak; various birds of prey can be seen in large areas of scrub.



AUGUST

The spectacle of migration

In August, an extraordinary phenomenon begins to manifest itself in all its magnitude: migration. Thousands of birds that have reproduced in more northern latitudes fly south. Seabirds are undoubtedly the most important and spectacular group of all those that pass through Galicia.

In coastal wetlands such as the Rías de Ribadeo and Foz, the Ría de Ortigueira, O Grove and A Guarda hundreds of water birds stop off, particularly waders.

In mountainous areas such as the Macizo Central, Pena Trevinca, Os Ancares and Montes de Cervantes and the Serra do Xurés numerous raptors are concentrated. Some of the most striking are common vultures and the occasional cinereous vulture.

In open areas such as A Terra Chá it is the time to watch lesser kestrels that, for a few weeks, visit us before definitively heading south.



Not to be missed

The cape of Estaca de Bares, the northernmost point of the peninsula, is one of the most prominent places in Europe for watching seabirds in passage.

In the Xarfas lagoon in Louro -Muros- and the Valdoviño lagoon many migratory birds congregate at sunset; waders, herons and gulls of various species are easy to spot.

Our star of the month



Off the coast of Galicia thousands of seabirds of dozens of species migrate each year. Of all of them, the northern gannet, due to its numbers and size, draws most attention in its travels to southern latitudes to spend the winter from its breeding grounds in the northern Atlantic.

However, it is not alone: more than two dozen species of seabirds accompany the gannets on their annual journey over the waters of the northern Atlantic.

Where? The capes are excellent points for observing northern gannets and other seabirds. The most prominent is undoubtedly Estaca de Bares although Punta do Roncudo and Cabo Touriñán on the Costa da Morte, and the Silleiro and Corrubedo capes, further south, also offer good opportunities. Boat trips also provide an opportunity to enjoy this natural event.



SEPTEMBER

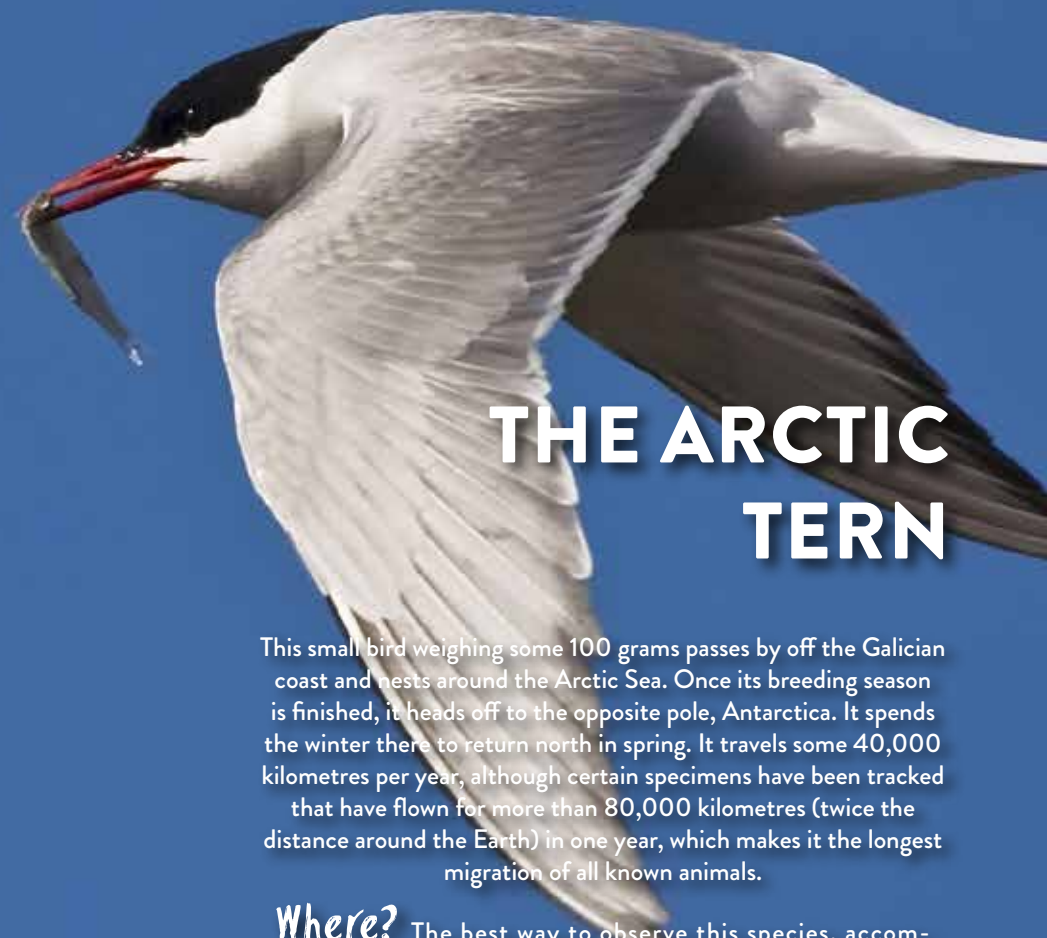
Our star of the month

A festival of water birds and seabirds

In September the wave of migratory birds reaches its peak. The coastal wetlands and capes are the best places to spot thousands of specimens. In the latter, Balearic shearwaters, northern gannets, common terns, Arctic terns and countless other species can be seen.

Inland, the phenomenon can also be seen and, for a few days, European pied flycatchers seem to invade all corners.

From the Ría de Ribadeo to the estuary of the Miño river in A Guarda, a multitude of migratory birds can be seen. Off the beaches sandwich terns fly, and there are sanderlings, dunlins and common ringed plovers at the water's edge. Bar-tailed and black-tailed godwits, common redshank and common greenshanks and the majestic Eurasian spoonbills are found in the wetlands along with an occasional western osprey.



THE ARCTIC TERN

This small bird weighing some 100 grams passes by off the Galician coast and nests around the Arctic Sea. Once its breeding season is finished, it heads off to the opposite pole, Antarctica. It spends the winter there to return north in spring. It travels some 40,000 kilometres per year, although certain specimens have been tracked that have flown for more than 80,000 kilometres (twice the distance around the Earth) in one year, which makes it the longest migration of all known animals.

Where? The best way to observe this species, accompanied by dozens of other seabirds, is the cape of Estaca de Bares, off its bird observatory, especially when the northwest wind brings them closer to the coast.



Not to be missed

The capes of Estaca de Bares, Touriñán and Silleiro are perfect places to observe the passage of seabirds.

Visit A Guarda, O Grove and the estuary of the Anllóns river on the Costa da Morte to spot many different water birds.



OCTOBER

Our star of the month

The first birds arriving from the cold

In the wetlands and along the coastline of Galicia various species that will spend the winter with us begin to grow in number. These are mostly water birds such as grey herons, little egrets, Eurasian curlews, black-tailed godwits, great cormorants and various duck species and even gulls, such as the Mediterranean gull.

Among them, one of the most interesting and beautiful species is the Eurasian spoonbill, of which a large number can be seen in October in the O Vao inlet in O Grove.

Visits can also be made to the Ortigueira estuary, the wetlands and beaches of the Costa da Morte and the estuary of the Miño in A Guarda, where western marsh harriers and, with luck, the occasional specimen of western osprey can be seen.

THE BAR-TAILED GODWIT

This species holds the record for longest non-stop flight. It has been found to fly between Alaska and New Zealand -11,000 kilometres- without stopping to rest or feed. The specimens that can be seen in Galicia during migration breed around the Arctic Ocean and travel to spend the winter on European and, particularly, African coasts.

Where? The best places to observe this discrete species are the coastal wetlands, such as those of O Grove.



Not to be missed

In addition to O Grove, it is a good time to visit the estuary of the Anllóns river in the Ría de Corme and Laxe, the Valdoviño lagoon and Doniños lagoon in Ferroltera and the Rías de Ribadeo and Foz.

In inland areas it is always interesting to visit A Terra Chá and A Limia and check whether the wintering of water and land birds such as redwings and fieldfares has begun.



NOVEMBER

Our star of the month

Wintering birds are here now

As the forests become stained in ochre and yellow, many wintering birds come both to the coast and inland Galicia.

Black-headed, common and great black-backed gulls are some of the species that can be seen almost anywhere along the coast. The first great northern loons, red-breasted mergansers and black-necked grebes can also be seen.

In the both coastal and inland wetlands, various wildfowl, newcomers from the north, can be seen: northern pintail and wigeon, Eurasian teal, northern shoveler and common pochard. To see them on the coast, it is best to go to the Rías de Ribadeo and Foz, Ortigueira and Vigo, the Valdoviño lagoon in Ferrolterra, the O Vao inlet in O Grove and the estuary of the Miño river in A Guarda. Inland, the A Terra Chá wetlands and small reservoirs are good options. Egrets, cormorants and other species complete the picture.

In any meadow or pasture small meadow pipits can be seen, which spend some months here after a trip from the north.

The migratory passage of seabirds is still intense. Off certain capes such as Estaca de Bares, northern gannet, great shearwater and black-legged kittiwake can be seen.



THE EURASIAN SPOONBILL

In November several hundred Eurasian spoonbills have begun to winter in Galicia after mostly coming from their breeding grounds in the Netherlands. It is a large, white bird with a characteristic beak and extraordinary elegance that can be easily seen -from a distance- while feeding or resting.

Where? In the O Vao inlet in O Grove, from any of the many bird observatories.



Not to be missed

The urban Ría do Burgo, near A Coruña, hosts a number of easily seen species.

Thrushes and other birds begin to be seen in the inland areas, so it is advisable to visit A Terra Chá, A Limia and Oímbra, Monterrei and Verín.



DECEMBER

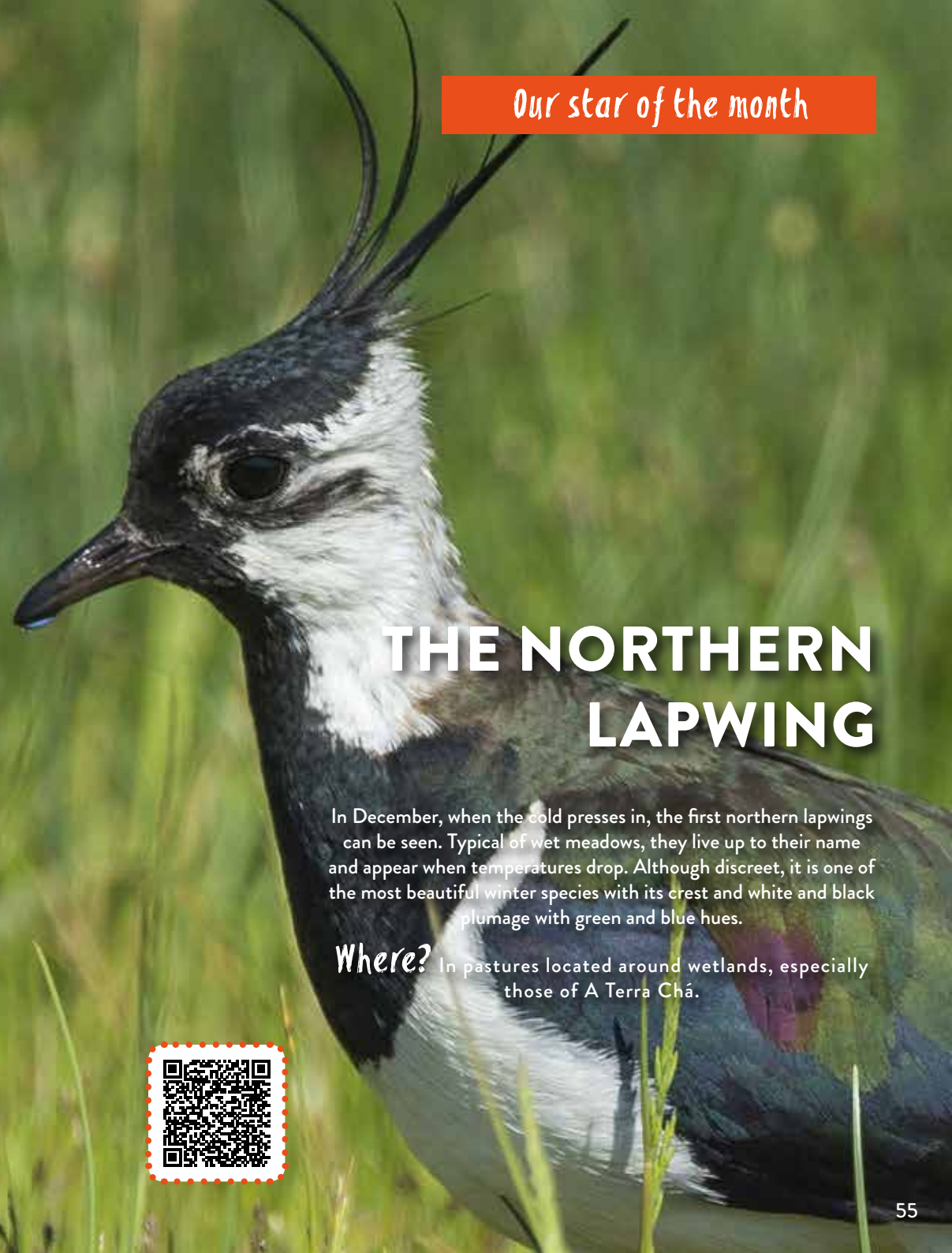
Our star of the month

The northern birds

Galicia is a perfect winter refuge for many species of birds thanks to its large coastal wetlands. We can see waders such as Eurasian curlews, black-tailed godwits, grey plovers, dunlins and common ringed plovers, among others. Various wildfowl can also be seen as can, with some luck, up to eight species of gulls together with grey herons, little egrets and great egrets.

Off the large beaches and sheltered areas watchers can see seabirds such as great northern loons and red-breasted mergansers.

Inland, the A Terra Chá wetlands and A Limia host a number of highly interesting species, such as common snipe and Eurasian teal, in addition to European golden plovers, northern lapwings, redwings and mistle thrushes.



THE NORTHERN LAPWING

In December, when the cold presses in, the first northern lapwings can be seen. Typical of wet meadows, they live up to their name and appear when temperatures drop. Although discreet, it is one of the most beautiful winter species with its crest and white and black plumage with green and blue hues.

Where? In pastures located around wetlands, especially those of A Terra Chá.



Not to be missed

Water birds in the coastal wetlands such as the Rías de Ribadeo and Foz, the Ría de Ortigueira, the estuary of the Anllóns river in the Costa da Morte, the O Vao inlet in O Grove and the estuary of the Miño in A Guarda.

The A Terra Chá and A Limia wetlands and their wintering birds. These areas, along with the Regions of Lugo and Sarria, are the landing grounds for the first common storks of the season that, somewhat surprisingly, stoically occupy their breeding grounds enduring the cold.

OTHER PLACES

The opportunities Galicia provides to observe birds are not limited to the twelve spaces covered in this guide; rather, a total of 49 have been defined, grouped by ecosystems, for which there is more information available on the website.

Birds and water - Up to six wetlands in inland Galicia to be enjoyed particularly for their indisputable stars: water birds.

On the seashore - Diverse coastal habitats: from coastal lagoons and marshes to estuaries, rocky stretches and islands, along with the natural areas close to cities such as Vigo and Ferrol. In total there are 17 interesting and accessible places.

Mountains - Up to a total of 13 mountain systems, some of which as emblematic as O Courel, Pena Trevinca and Serra do Eixe and the Macizo Central in Ourense are included on this list.

Countrysides - Places where agriculture and livestock keep a space for nature and landscapes populated by a wide variety of birds. A visit should be made to four little-known Galician regions, such as Verín.

River canyons and valleys - In the land of water there are unique spaces such as the Ribeira Sacra and the valleys of the Bibei and Navea rivers.

Cities - Some of the urban environments of the main Galician cities are home to more than a hundred species, which are easy to see along very accessible routes.



GALICIA, HOW TO GET THERE?

By plane. The fastest way to get to Galicia is by plane via one of its 3 international airports: Lavacolla Airport in Santiago de Compostela, Alvedro Airport in A Coruña and Peinador Airport in Vigo from which you can easily reach any tourist destination.

By train. RENFE, services company of rail transport for passengers and goods, connects Galicia with other Spanish and European cities. It also allows you to move easily around Galicia via the services that link the different cities.

By boat. With more than 1,600 kilometres of coastline, our Autonomous Community has almost 130 ports of different sizes and characteristics. These ports, with their own infrastructures, offer all kinds of comforts to help the arrival of visitors who choose this means of transport. At Galicia's different nautical-sports facilities you can find all the information you will need to travel here by boat.

By bus. Galicia has an important network of road infrastructures used to bring people who visit us by bus, as well as large, complete terminals in cities and stations in towns for local services.

By car. The motorways and dual carriageways, along with the general road network, configure mobility infrastructures that allow travellers to reach Galicia and move around very easily.

The main entry routes are: The A-8 that connects Galicia with the cities and provincial capitals of the north of Spain. The A-6 and the A-52 which join Galicia and Madrid. And the AP-9, which not only takes us to most of the Galician coast but also connects us with the neighbouring Portugal.

MORE INFORMATION:

www.turismo.gal

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