

# Spanish bird fiesta!

With its mix of habitats and wide range of bird species, the Ebro Delta is a fantastic destination for birders, especially during autumn migration. A new birdfair will make the most of the area at this special time of year.

The Ebro Delta is the largest wetland in Catalonia. Since 1986, almost 8,000 ha have been protected to preserve the region's extraordinarily rich wildlife. More than 340 species have been recorded in this amazing mix of habitats.

It is a fantastic area to see a large number of bird species in a short time, but it's the region's specialities that really appeal to birders. The super-abundant Audouin's Gull is probably the most famous species, but other gulls and terns such as Slender-billed Gull and Gull-billed Tern can also be found.

Squacco Herons frequent many of the small canals between the rice fields, and Little Bitterns are easy to find in the reedbeds around the main lagoons. Purple Swamphens are abundant in many parts of the Delta and Glossy Ibis gather in large flocks, which fly in daily from roosting areas to their feeding haunts. Collared Pratincole is a relatively easy target in late spring and summer.

Desirable passerines are also plentiful: Savi's Warbler nests in the area, while Moustached Warbler can be found in winter. The Ebro Delta is one of the few breeding areas in Western Europe for Lesser Short-toed Lark.

September is an excellent time for birders to visit the Ebro Delta, as this is when rarities appear. Pallid Harrier, Pacific Golden Plover, Spotted and Pectoral Sandpipers and Citrine Wagtail were all recorded during the weekend of last year's Delta Birding Festival.

## Delta birding

Now in its second year, the Delta Birding Festival offers a comprehensive

programme of activities including talks, courses, workshops and contests. A large variety of optics companies, book publishers and other products and services for birders have stands at the fair, which is attended by many dedicated naturalists and nature enthusiasts.

The festival is dedicated to raising money for bird conservation, following the very successful example of Birdfair in Rutland. In 2014, €4,000 was donated to a scientific ringing project and census work of waterfowl in the Alfacada reserve in the Ebro Delta, and for the monitoring of birdlife in an area of abandoned rice fields that will be transformed into wetlands.

Some prestigious ornithologists have been invited to give talks in the 2015 fair. Leading lights from around the world such as Hadoram Shirihai, Dick Forsman, Markus Varesvuo and Martin Garner, and Dani Lopez Velasco, Jose Luis Copete, Javier de la Puente and Juan Varela from Catalonia and Spain are all on the packed programme.

There will also be the opportunity to visit the access-restricted Alfacada lagoon, the best-guarded secret of the Ebro Delta, and to join an offshore boat trip to observe seabirds, especially Balearic and Mediterranean Shearwaters, as well as Audouin's Gulls, terns, skuas and more. The festival will also offer digiscoping workshops, free bird tours around the adjacent lagoons



of La Tancada and the Salines and a bird identification contest, among many more activities.

ORYX, a shop specialising in birding optics, equipment and natural history books, is the main promoter of the Delta Birding Festival. It has teamed up with the Catalan Ornithological Institute (ICO) and the Fundació Catalunya – La Pedrera (FCLP) for the event; the former is the main Catalan birding organisation with around 5,000 members and the latter is an active land trust that manages many endangered habitats for conservation.

The Direcció General del Medi Natural of the Catalan Government is the main fund provider of the event and both "Terres de l'Ebre" of the Tarragona Provincial Government Tourist Board and the Amposta City Council support the event. ■

- The festival will begin on Friday 18 September and finish on Sunday 20 September. See [www.deltabirdingfestival.com](http://www.deltabirdingfestival.com) for further information.

The Delta Birding Festival takes place at Spain's bird-rich Ebro Delta (left), where such species as Greater Flamingo, Audouin's Gull (above) and Collared Pratincole (inset) are numerous.

