



**BIRDWATCHING TRIP REPORT**

**Extremadura 18-25<sup>th</sup> April 2017**

**Tour leader – Chris Mills & Ricardo Montero**

**Participants:- Helen Armes, Jenny & Bob Baker, Charles Martin, David Murphy,  
Carolyn Shepherd & Graham Weaver**



© Iberian Grey Shrike – Chris Mills

## **ACCOMMODATION**

This tour was arranged on a Self-catering basis with a continental breakfast included. The group stayed in two beautiful traditional Spanish houses in the small mountain settlement of Cabezabellosa. The houses are lovely traditional examples, set in typical white walled and narrow streets.

Evening meals were not included in the cost of the tour, but were arranged each evening at the local bar & on average a 3 course meal of traditional Spanish dishes with a glass of wine/beer cost 15 euros per person. Packed lunches were also provided by the bar each day at a cost of 8 euros per day.

## **FLIGHTS**

Easyjet flights from Heathrow to Madrid are reasonably cheap and the majority of the group arrived via Easyjet and joined myself on the same flight, with the exception of David who arrived an hour before us, from Manchester

## **TUESDAY 18<sup>th</sup> APRIL**

The flight from Gatwick was slightly delayed, but by late morning we had arrived in Madrid airport. We picked up our 9-seater minibus and were soon heading south-west. It was a nice warm and dry day, with plenty of sunshine. Once we had left the city and started heading into the countryside there was plenty of birds to be seen from the minibus windows! Aerial views of **Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Griffon Vulture, Black Kite, White Stork, Marsh Harrier, Iberian Grey Shrike, Red-rumped Swallow** and **Spotless Starling** were all seen whilst travelling.

Eventually after around 3 hours we reached the town of Calera Y Chozas. We find a local bar and tucked into cheese, ham, tomato's fresh bread, olives and olive oil of course!

After lunch it was a short drive to an area of large arable fields. This area is interspersed with some remnant steppe habitat and just off the main road. We were soon enjoying views and the sounds of some good birds. A **Quail** was calling well close by, and quite amazingly **3 Quail, very** unusually decided to run along the roadside verge into the grass, providing good views for everyone! A great start, if an expensive one for poor David, who had offered up his life savings if we saw them!!

Also on a nearby pool several **Cattle Egret** were feeding close by, plus a single **Little Egret, overhead both Black & Red Kite**, plus a few **White Storks, a Booted eagle, then a Hen harrier and 3+ Marsh Harrier** – great birding! A gentle walk and foray along a field edge gave us **Spotless Starling, Corn Bunting, Crested Lark, White Wagtail** and **Zitting Cisticola**. Plus a nice smart pair of **Northern Wheatear** and several **Stonechat**.

We then drove along a track to explore another area, but were soon stopping again as **2-3 Bee-eater** perched along the fence-line. Then we also found a few **Calandra Lark**, and a wagtail like pipit, proved, as expected to be a **Tawny Pipit**.

Next to appear as I drove along the track was an extremely obliging **Short-toed Lark**, which showed well on the track just a few metres in front of the minibus.

As we headed out of the complex, we struggled to head on our way! At least **5 Marsh Harrier** were hunting the fields, a beautiful **Purple Heron** showed very well on a small marginal pool. Then we were all quickly jumping out of the minibus as a big raptor circled overhead, an adult **Golden Eagle**, high in the skies. If this wasn't enough, Jenny appeared to be watching a different Golden eagle to the rest of the group, only to realise she was watching an adult **Spanish Imperial eagle**, just outside of the view of the Golden Eagle, what a fantastic few minutes!

Though, it felt difficult to head on, time was passing and we needed to reach our accommodation before dark. So we left and hit the motorway, as is usual, the traffic was a far cry from the UK and the kilometres quickly passed!

We reached the turn off for our village and headed up the mountain, though we were soon stopping!! From the minibus windows it was just incredible to hear the number of **Nightingale** singing, from every 50m of vegetation! We parked the minibus and spent an hour by the road just below the village and accommodation. Birds were all around us! At least **4 Cuckoo** were calling. A walk through the village provided views of several **Black Redstarts**, **White Wagtail**, from the accommodation top veranda **House Martin**, **Swallow**, **Common & Pallid Swift** could all be watched at close quarters. Above the nearby ridge several **Griffon Vulture**, **Black Kite** and **Raven**.

We settled into our accommodation and then had a nice evening meal at the local bar in Cabezabellosa.

### **WEDNESDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> APRIL**

We had breakfast at 7.45am and were out birding by 8.30am. We briefly watched a smart male **Black Redstart** performing and singing from nearby rooftops. We then headed out into the local woodland just above the village and accommodation.

The beautiful wooded hillside of Cabezabellosa is excellent for some sort after birds. Almost immediately the beautiful song of **Woodlark** was ringing out, several males sang overhead. **Nightingales** were also vying for attention, as were **Cuckoos** though both far less showy! As we skirted the rocks, a super smart **Black-eared Wheatear** popped up in front of us, giving stunning scope views, a cracking male, with a lovely peach wash! **Northern Wheatears** were also in attendance and nice for comparison. A steady walk through the woodland provided good views of most of the expected birds, **Nuthatch**, **Short-toed Treecreeper** a smart male **Redstart**, and nice views of two other sought after species – **Rock Sparrow** and **Rock Bunting**.

We then headed out of the woodland into the rocky outcrops along the hillside, this is like a Scottish machair habitat with low scrubby bushes. We soon had two of the sought after species in view, at least **3 Thekla Lark** typical of this habitat. The second species was a little more tricky in windy conditions, a male **Spectacled Warbler** display flighted, but took a while to give itself up! Eventually we had perched views after several attempts! Overhead **Raven**, **Griffon Vulture** soared plus our first **Black Vulture** showed well, passing close by.

We then drove slowly down the mountain, accompanied by numerous singing **Woodlark** and **Nightingale**. As we headed below the village, **2 Hawfinches** flew across the road, so we lunched around this area. The **Hawfinches** reappeared, but refused to perch in the open! Just above our heads a **Black Kite** soared, this drew our attention to two other birds – incredibly an **Egyptian Vulture** was circling over the same thermal as a **Black Stork**! Over lunch a **Hoopoe** flew by and brief views of a **Golden Oriole** and **Cuckoo**.

We next explored the lower area of woodland, a beautiful area of classic Spanish dehesa habitat. A **Melodious Warbler** was singing from nearby and gave nice views, the fields provided good views of **White Wagtail** and **Crested Lark**, plus several **Serins** gave good views. The woodland, held **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Nuthatch**, **Chaffinch**, **Hawfinch**, **Blue & Great Tit**. There were numerous **Blackcap**, **Nightingale** and some nice flight views of a male **Golden Oriole**, and very good numbers of **Woodchat Shrike**. The tricky target species of **Western Orphean Warbler** was heard but refused to show!

We finished the day by visiting a series of small rural pools set in the dehesa, there was a really nice selection of birds – **Great White Egret**, several **White Storks** attending their nests, complete with our first **Spanish Sparrows** nesting below inside the storks nests! Several **Black Kite** were overhead, as were **Booted eagle**, **Griffon Vulture**, **Black Vulture**, several **Buzzard**, **Red-rumped** and **Barn Swallow** plus several beautiful groups of **Bee-eaters**. We then walked along the field and woodland edge, several **Iberian Grey Shrike**, **2-3 Woodchat Shrike**, **Woodlark**, and several **Cuckoo**. An unusual and late migrant was a **Meadow Pipit**! Plus a nice group of at least 5 migrant **Whinchat**.

We rounded off a brilliant first full day with a nice evening meal at the local bar before heading back to the accommodation.



© Cirl Bunting & "Gredos" Bluethroat – Chris Mills



© Corn Bunting & Red-rumped Swallow – Chris Mills

## THURSDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> APRIL

Today we headed to the steppe and plains area to the south! The weather was warm, but a very strong and gusty wind was a concern! Ricardo our local guide joined us, his extra knowledge of the special steppe species is always a benefit.

The beautiful fields here are rolling and full of flowers, with big vistas! Despite the wind we were soon watching and listening to the buzzy, mimicry-rich songs of many **Calandra Lark**, **Crested** and **Short-toed lark**, numerous **Corn Bunting**. We were also had our best views yet of **Hoopoe**.

Despite the weather, a favoured area with a bit of scanning soon provided nice views of a male **Little Bustard**. It was calling and we got good views of it, it was pretty surprising giving the blustery weather. A few minutes later the distant calls of sandgrouse could be heard – Pin-tailed! Then three **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** banked into view and fortunately they landed. With a bit of scanning we found them, or at least we found their heads just sticking up above the grassland, everyone was able to get reasonable scope views as one of them appeared giving head and breast views. Heartened by two good birds in several minutes, we continued scanning and a female **Montagu's Harrier** quartered past us.

We then drove on and made several stops for **Iberian Grey** and **Woodchat shrike**, we also located two more **Little Bustard!** Plus a smart male migrant **Whinchat**.

Next we stopped off for lunch at a river bridge, it was quite hot now and whilst we ate lunch there was a lovely collection of Swifts and Swallows. At least **10 Alpine Swift**, were banking down low past us, these birds are the real masters of aerial supremacy! Also swooping past were several **Crag Martin** and **Red-rumped Swallow**. A **Sardinian Warbler** showed, plus nice scope views of our first **Blue Rock Thrush**, this one a lovely male.

We next headed towards an area with a colony of Roller and Lesser Kestrel, we were soon getting great views of a **Roller** perched atop the roadside wires, and also a striking male **Lesser Kestrel**. We looked hard in a good area for Great Spotted Cuckoo, but didn't see or hear them. We then headed further east and started looking for Great Bustard, after an hour or so we had not seen them, the higher vegetation in May making searching a little tricky! We then looked from a minor road adjacent to the main road and had great views of **4 Great Bustards** including a nice showy male. On the opposite side of the road there was a nice gathering on the ground of **c50 Griffon Vulture**, plus a single **Black Vulture** and we got good scope views of them.

We made a final stop in the plains and were able to watch several **Montagu's harriers** hunting and another **Little Bustard**.

A great day finished off with another fine meal and wine at the local bar.

## FRIDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> APRIL

Today we headed up into the mountain areas to the North of the accommodation.

We then stopped off in Hervas en-route and had a lovely walk around the local park, a green area with a beautiful stream running through. Here we had easy and great views of at least 2 **Black-bellied Dipper**, a **Grey Wagtail** was heard calling, and several commoner species were also noted. Several We then stopped off in Hervas where we had easy and great views of a pair of **Black-bellied Dipper**.

We then headed back up to the higher mountain area. We started off with nice views of a **Bonelli's Warbler**, this was nice, but these became fairly numerous as we climbed higher up! As we climbed up the steep road towards the mountain top, we stopped and took a walk. We had several **Whitethroat & Skylark** singing. Then fine views of a male **Ortolan Bunting**, sat singing from a rocky perch. Also 2 **Rock Bunting** showed, as well as a little higher up a **Tawny Pipit**.

The main target species in the high areas is the beautiful form of Bluethroat – 'azuricollis' ('Gredos Bluethroat'). After a few minutes of searching a superb male **Bluethroat** rose up, displaying and singing, it gave lovely views. As we climbed higher a second **Bluethroat** flew into view. We then had fantastic views from the top of the mountain, which was rounded off brilliantly with a stunning male **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**, it gave us lovely scope views to a huge backdrop of mountain scenery.

It was a beautiful day and we had lunch watching **Black Vulture, Booted Eagle, Sparrowhawk** and a **Peregrine** all soaring overhead. Other birds were 2 **Carrion Crow, Raven, Wheatear** and **Linnet**. Also very impressive was a localised **Cyren's Rock Lizard**, which we saw very well on the rocks.

We then headed down into the beautiful wooded valleys below the mountains in the Candelario valley, a real highlight was a superb pair of **Iberian Pied Flycatcher**, also seen were several **Iberian Grey Shrike, Jay, Firecrest, Nuthatch, Short-toed Treecreeper** and several close views of **Red-rumped Swallow**.

A really top day with great birds, great weather & fantastic scenery.  
Finished off with another fine meal and wine at the local bar.





© Whinchat & White Stork – Chris Mills



© Crested Lark & Bee-eater – Chris Mills

## **SATURDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> APRIL**

Today we journeyed the short distance to the world-famous, scenic and bird-rich Monfragüe National Park. We stopped off and from a roadside stop had pretty good views of **Azure-winged magpies**.

We then headed on to the bridge area and parked up, scanning the hillsides and horizons for the next couple of hours. There was a great constant flow of birds – **Black Kites** were numerous, plenty of Griffons & several Black Vultures, then Booted Eagle, plus an Egyptian Vulture. Just before 10am the target species appeared a fine adult **Bonelli's Eagle**, it came overhead and then headed into the trees on the hillside. It then moved again and was lost briefly, though David's scope scanning paid off and we all had fine scope views of it sat perched! Just to round off an excellent couple of hours a fine migrant **Osprey** appeared and flew overhead up the valley. A brilliant morning's birding!

We then headed for lunch at Pena Falcon. It was spectacular, raptors were in profusion, great views of 100's of Vultures. **Griffon, Black and Egyptian Vulture, Booted Eagle**, and numerous **Black Kite**. Two **Peregrines** also circled the rock stack, we also had great views of **Black Storks**, including one sat on a nest on the rock face. Also notable here was a several thousand **House Martin**, plus **Crag Martin**, good views of **Red-rumped Swallow**, plus a superb male **Blue Rock Thrush**, great views of **Rock Bunting** and several **Black Redstart**.

We then headed over to the east side of the park. We watched many more **Griffon** and several **Black Vultures**! But had to wait quite a long time, for our target species. Just as I was getting concerned a stunning adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle** appeared, nearby the female could be heard calling.

A quick stop at a gravel pit area produced **Little Ringed Plover, Common sandpiper & views of Great Reed Warbler**.

We then off to some rice fields and a small river valley and wetland area. Our first stop produced a **Kingfisher**, a flypast **Golden oriole**, but sadly no Penduline Tit. The rice fields were this year pretty dry, but the reed-beds and pool produced a nice mixture of birds, **6 Spoonbill, 25 Black-winged Stilt, Cattle Egret, Iberian Yellow wagtail**, several **Hoopoe** and good views of **Bee-eaters** perched along the fence-line, nice and close. A **Quail** was calling but this time chose to remain hidden, there was no shortage of Shrikes, with numerous **Iberian Grey & Woodchat Shrike**.

Finished off with another fine meal and wine at the local bar.

## SUNDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> APRIL

Another fine sunny day and hotter, with quite still conditions, made for excellent birding over in the wetland area of Arroyocampo.

On arrival we were soon enjoying great views of a reeling, **Savi's Warbler!** In fact there were several, but one was nice and showy. Next a **Little Bittern** flew past and did several repeat fly-bys, giving everyone great views and finally perched views in the reeds. **Purple Herons** were beautiful and fascinating to watch at a nest, **Purple Swamphens** appeared and disappeared amongst the reed-beds and pools. Then **Gull-billed Tern** and **Marsh Harrier** gave a fly-bys, plus great. **Water Rails** were calling from nearby a **Great Reed Warbler** showed briefly.

A **Great-spotted Cuckoo** flew overhead, drawing attention as it called, unfortunately it flew off distantly without landing! We then drove to another area of the wetland and stopped in some adjacent dehesa habitat. The location had been given to me by Ricardo and we were soon watching and getting wonderful scope views of **4 Black-winged Kites**, great looking birds! Also good views of **Azure-winged Magpie** in the trees and on the ground. Another highlight was a **Praying Mantis** that decided to land on my telescope!

Moving along we checked a series of pools, here there were **Glossy Ibis**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Black-winged Stilt** a **Greenshank** and lots of **Bee-eaters**. A group of 3 migrant **Whinchat** was nice along the fence-line. It was now hot, and we lunched in the shade under some trees, admiring the **Bee-eaters** hawking the bees.

In the afternoon we headed up into the nearby mountains to escape the heat of the day. Above the crags, a nice selection of aerial activity there was **Griffon**, **Black and Egyptian Vultures**, plus **Short-toed** and **Booted Eagle** plus **Sparrowhawk**. Amongst the trees, a **Golden Oriole** was heard and then flew past flashing all yellow and black! **Blackcaps** were singing everywhere, **Hawfinches** flew past several times and more nice views of **Azure-winged Magpie** as one sat preening in a dead tree.

We had an early evening meal tonight just outside Monfrague National park, as we were all set for a dusk session of birdwatching. After a nice tapas meal, we headed into the park. A great start as a **Spanish Imperial Eagle** was silhouetted on the top of the rock face, good scope views, the Eagle then eventually got up and gave nice flight views as well. As the light faded, a large bird flew along the cliffs, it was indeed the species we were looking for an **Eagle Owl**. It was difficult to see in the half light, but 2-3 of the group managed to see it. The **Eagle owl** then flew again as it moved further up the cliff face. Jenny did really well a few minutes later, locating it on the top of the cliff face. It was a black outline, silhouetted against the dimming sky, but the big shape and ear tufts were clear to see! Unfortunately it soon moved and was lost to view! Distantly a Red-necked Nightjar was calling and then suddenly a **Red-necked Nightjar** was hawking overhead. A good end to a very full day, was rounded off with great views of a **Beech Marten** as we headed up the hill in the minibus to the accommodation.



© Crested Lark & Woodchat Shrike – Chris Mills



© Roller & Hoopoe – Chris Mills

## MONDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> APRIL

Another fine sunny day and probably the hottest day of the trip!

We started the day by walking along the scubby areas just below the village, whilst we couldn't find any Dartford warblers, we did have great views of 3+ **Spectacled Warbler**, several singing **Woodlark** and really nice views of **Cuckoo**.

We then took a nice walk through the nearby lower woodland. Whilst we only heard **Orphean Warbler**, we did have really nice views of a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** the first of the trip. All the now familiar species were present again, but and **Short-toed Treecreeper**.

We then headed south to the plains, for a repeat visit. Just as we arrived a **Great Spotted Cuckoo** flew over the road, but despite some searching we couldn't relocate it. We had lunch under the trees, then explored further south. We had a nice group of soaring vultures, **Griffon** and **Black**. We stopped off to check a pool, there was a **Little Grebe**, a new bird for the trip – this proved to be a very fortunate stop! As we watched the grebe, Jenny suddenly noticed the head of a **Great Bustard**, we were able to get good scope views at fairly close distance. Along with the usual mixture of larks and Corn Buntings etc, we particularly enjoyed watching a nice group of around **7-8 Montagu's harriers** hunting and soaring.

We continued on and rounded off the trip with lovely views of at least **12 Rollers**, it seemed that quite a few had arrived since our first visit. Also here were several **Lesser Kestrel** and we had nice views of an adult male. It was a great finish to the last full day.

The last evening of the trip was enjoyed over a fantastic Paella dish in the local bar.

## TUESDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> APRIL

An early departure at 5am to reach Madrid airport for our flights back to the UK at around 11am. One final sighting came in the dark as we left the village as a **European Genet** ran across the road in front of the minibus!



© Osprey & Lesser kestrel – Chris Mills





© Black Stork & Purple Heron – Chris Mills

## **TOUR OVERVIEW**

An excellent tour with a total of **149 bird species recorded**. Also worthy of mention were the following Beech Marten, European Genet & Cyren's Rock Lizard.

## **Future Tours**

If you are interested in joining us in Extremadura then we have tours in **April 2017**, please contact us for details.

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