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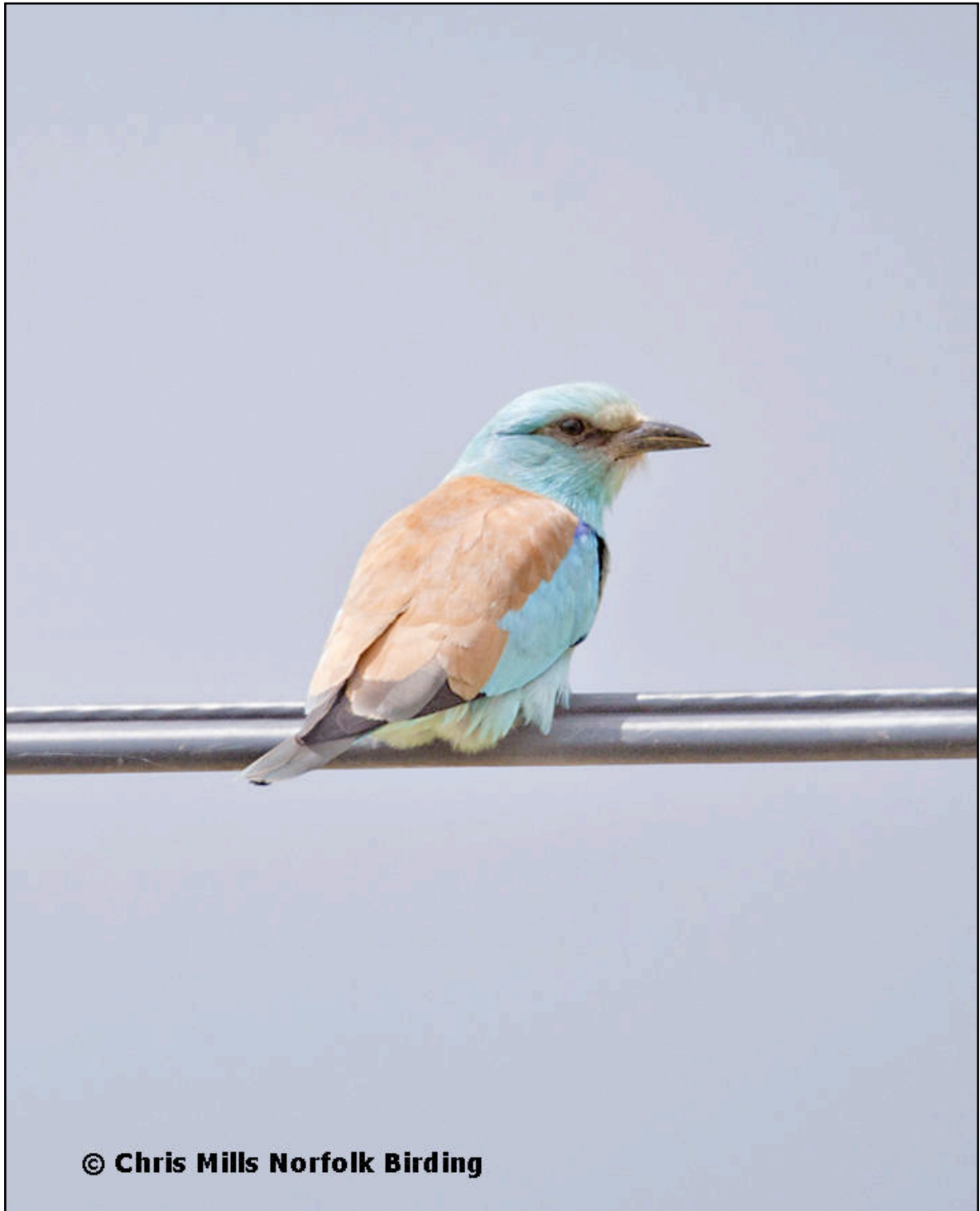


BIRDWATCHING TRIP REPORT

Extremadura 8th – 15th May 2018

Tour leader – Chris Mills & Ricardo Montero

Participants:- Eddie Baxter, Jenny Burgess, Rowland Burgess, Des Dean,
Dave Hickling, Karen Hunt and Dan Martin,



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Roller – up to 12 seen in the plains area

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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 every 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 Gatwick to Madrid are reasonably cheap and the whole of the group arrived via Easyjet with myself on the same flight.

TUESDAY 8th May

The flight from Gatwick left promptly and we arrived in Madrid airport on time. We picked up our 9-seater minibus and were soon heading south-west. It was a nice warm, sunny and dry day, with plenty of sunshine. As we were leaving the city, there were quite large numbers of **Common Swifts**, possibly late migrants moving north!?

As we travelled along the motorways, leaving Madrid behind there were plenty of brief views of **Buzzard**, **Common Kestrel**, **Griffon Vulture**, **Black Kite**, **White Stork**, **Red-rumped Swallow** and **Spotless Starling** were all seen whilst travelling.

We had been travelling for around two and half hours when a raptor came circling across the main highway. The long wings immediately had the alarm bells ringing and I managed to get the minibus parked up off the main carriageway, though probably not legally! A quick look confirmed initial impressions it was an Eagle, very probably a Spanish Imperial. We all got out quickly and sure enough the distinctive shape and the cream forewing on this possibly 3rd-4th calendar year **Spanish Imperial eagle** were evident. We watched as it soared and gained height, a brilliant start to the trip!

We didn't hang around watching too long, but pulled off at the next major junction and managed to find a side road and decided to have a quick bit of birding in this area. There was plenty of raptors and a nice bit of rough farmland. Soaring overhead we had **2 Black Vulture**, **3 Booted Eagle**, very close views of a **Marsh Harrier** and numerous **White Stork**. Dan located a male **Whinchat**, a migrant bird, plus a singing **Cirl Bunting**, **Corn Bunting** were numerous and several **Lapwing** were in the fields.

Eventually after another hour we reached the town of Calera Y Chozas. We found a local bar and tucked into cheese, ham, tomato's fresh bread, olives, coffee and a beer.

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.

There was a reasonable group of **30+ Cattle Egret** feeding close by as drove into the area. A gentle walk and foray along a field edge gave us better views of **Spotless Starling**, very numerous **Corn Bunting**, several **Crested Lark**, a couple of **Tawny Pipits** were located, then a **Short-toed lark** plus **White Wagtail** and **Zitting Cisticola** in the same area. **Bee-eaters** appeared and we had lovely scope views as they hunted from the fenceline. We headed to the woodland area, this was fairly quiet in the heat of the day, a **Green Woodpecker** was heard and a **Woodchat Shrike** was seen.

As we headed out of the complex, we had another surge of activity, firstly a group of **6 Black-bellied Sandgrouse** got up and flew from nearby dried fields, then overhead several **Black Kite**, **White Storks**, a **Booted eagle**, **2+ Marsh Harrier**, next a ringtail **Hen harrier**, followed shortly after by both a **dark phase** and near adult **Montagu's Harriers** – great birding!

It was time to head on, and we reluctantly hit the motorway. The miles or Kilometres I should say, passed by quickly – none of the UK traffic jams to contend with!

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 stopped a couple of times on the way up to the village. Birds were all around us! At least **4 Cuckoo** were calling. A walk through the village provided views of several **Black Redstarts**, **White Wagtail**. Scanning from the accommodation top level veranda gave stunning views of **House Martin**, **Swallow**, **Common** and **Pallid Swift**. 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 9th May

We had breakfast at 7.30am and were out birding by 8.15am. 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, it was a lovely sunny and eventually quite hot day.

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 and we did eventually get views of one of them.

A steady walk through the woodland provided good views of most of the expected birds, **Nuthatch**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, a **Melodious Warbler** was singing from nearby and gave nice views, several **Serin** gave good views. A singing **Sardinian Warbler** played hard to get but eventually gave nice views.

Chaffinch, **Hawfinch**, **Blue & Great Tit Blackcap**, **Nightingale** were all numerous and **Golden Orioles** were heard calling but refused to show. We did get excellent views of several **Woodchat Shrike**. Next our attention was drawn by suddenly hearing the call of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and after a few minutes of listening and looking hard, a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** obliged and provided good views. Next we had nice views of a **Spotted Flycatcher**.

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. As we walked out we flushed **2 Hawfinches** from nearby trees, it was brief but nice flight views as they banked overhead and headed off. Another species that's not always easy to see and lives higher up than in the UK flew overhead, **2 Mistle Thrush**.

We then searched the hillside and slowly the sought after birds appeared, all whilst being serenaded by **Woodlarks**, then at least **2 Thekla Lark** showed well and were also singing. The next species was a little more tricky, seemingly less numerous than in previous years but eventually a fine male **Spectacled Warbler** display flighted, but took a while to give itself up! Another scratchy song further down the hillside had us scanning, it was soon located a superb male **Black-eared Wheatear**, proudly delivering song from the craggy backdrop. Back along the scrub, there was a nice singing male **Girl Bunting**.

It was now lunch time and we drove down the hillside and found a nice shaded spot for lunch, as we ate lunch we were kept entertained with **Raven**, **Griffon Vulture**, **Black Kite**, and nice close views of **Red Kite** circling overhead.

During the afternoon we visited a set of small rural pools set in the dehesa, there was a really nice selection of birds – a pair of **Iberian Grey Shrikes** were feeding young and perching up nearby giving great views. A series of pylons all held active **White Stork** nests and within these nests, both **House and Spanish Sparrow** were nesting below! Several **Black Kite** were overhead, as were **Booted eagle**, **Griffon Vulture**, good views of **Black Vulture**, several **Common Buzzard**, **Red-rumped and Barn Swallow** plus several beautiful groups of **Bee-eaters**. We walked along the field edge and located **2-3 Woodchat Shrike**, also **Crested** and **Woodlark**, several **Cuckoo** and a **Kingfisher** was along the water's edge.

We finished off a great first full day, by searching another area of dehesa and eventually located **2-3 Rock Sparrows**.

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



Bee-eater & Black Kite – both seen on a daily basis



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Blue Rock Thrush & Black Stork – easily seen at Monfrague, also seen from our accommodation!



© Chris Mills Norfolk Birding



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Firecrest & Festoon– both seen higher up in the mountains

THURSDAY 10TH MAY

Today we journeyed the short distance to the world-famous, scenic and bird-rich Monfragüe National Park. It was again another bright sunny day, quite hot by the afternoon. We stopped off and from a roadside stop had pretty good views of **Azure-winged magpies**.

We then stopped off to scan the surrounding hillsides, the first **Black Kites**, **Griffons** and **Black Vultures** were up and soaring around. It didn't take too long with a bit of scanning to locate the target species the nest of a **Bonelli's Eagle**, was just visible in the trees, an adult was sat next to the nest and a chick was also just visible. We sat watching for a while hoping for some activity but evidently the chicks must have recently been fed as the adult sat around and there was no sign of Dad!

We next stopped off in the main part of the park, and took a walk along one of the main tracks through some rocky dehesa. This proved to be excellent – we first located a singing **Subalpine warbler**, several **Nightingales**, **3 Cuckoos** flew around us, a showy **Melodious Warbler**, then one of the real targets, we had great views eventually of a male, singing **Orphean Warbler**.

We then stopped off near the main river bridge, here there was lots to look at in the skies. **Griffon**, **Black and Egyptian Vulture**, **Booted Eagle**, **Short-toed Eagle**, **Black Kites**, **Black Stork**, **Crag Martins**, **Alpine Swifts** being amongst the highlights.

We then headed for a late lunch at Pena Falcon. It was as always spectacular here, withaptors in profusion, great views of many Vultures. **Griffon**, **Black and Egyptian Vulture**, **Booted Eagle**, and numerous **Black Kite**. we also had great views of **Black Storks**, including two 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, en-route we made a stop and were rewarded with lovely purring of **2 Turtle Doves**.

We arrived at the next viewpoint, our timing was impeccable as there were two stunning adult **Spanish Imperial Eagles** feeding on a dead rabbit. We then had pretty much uninterrupted views of them on the ground, flying overhead, interacting with **Griffon Vultures** for over an hour! Another **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Rock Bunting** were also enjoyed from here too.

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

FRIDAY 11th MAY

Today we headed to the steppe and plains area to the south! The weather was forecast hot and quite still, so we left early at 6am. This proved an excellent decision as we arrived at a favoured area and within minutes of scanning we were soon enjoying good scope views of a male **Little Bustard**. It was calling and occasionally doing its jumping display! Several majestic **Montagu Harriers** swept past us, these seemed to be flying behind us, so we headed down the nearby lane in that direction. We all got out to watch the **Montagu's Harriers**, at least 6 birds in the area including a dark morph bird. We were soon interrupted by another **2 Little Bustards**, that flew past us! We ventured a bit further down this road and scanned again. Amazing, this time we had **2 Great Bustards** in view, a brilliant start to the day. We watched these **2 female Great Bustards** for a time and then headed on.

We headed on to another area and stopped to scan for Rollers and Lesser Kestrels. But a somewhat familiar sound grabbed our attention and we looked across to find a pair of **Great Spotted Cuckoos** perched on branches not too faraway. We thoroughly enjoyed great scope views of a species that has proven much more difficult to locate in recent trips, in fact we didn't encounter anymore during this tour. As we were watching these we suddenly noticed a **Great Bustard** in the backdrop, a male this time walking along a field edge. Further scanning of this field revealed two more male **Great Bustards**! The nearby fields also held many **Calandra** and **Crested Larks**.

We next drove down the lane, scanning and stopping as we moved along. We were soon drawing to halt as we reached a colony of **Roller** and **Lesser Kestrel**. We were soon getting great views of **Rollers** perched atop the roadside wires, and also a striking male **Lesser Kestrel**. There were at least **12 Rollers** on the wires here, several **Lesser Kestrel** and at least **3+ Little Owls**.

Up above us there was quite a group of soaring **Griffon Vulture** and **Black Vulture**, plus **Booted** and **Short-toed Eagle**. A bigger eagle was amongst them, this proved to be a sub-adult **Spanish Imperial Eagle**, the fourth one of the trip!

We next headed to an area in the north west of the plains area. It was now mid afternoon and pretty hot so we stopped off for coffees in the nearby town of Hinojal.

Fully refreshed we headed on into the nearby steppe area, this area is full of beautiful rolling fields flowers, with big vistas! We were soon watching and listening to the buzzy, mimicry-rich songs of hundreds of **Calandra Lark**, **Crested** and **Short-toed lark**, numerous **Corn Bunting**. We were also had our best views yet of **Hoopoe**.

We made several stops, scanning and looking for the one species that has eluded us so far today. The third stop I thought I could hear Sandgrouse, but after several minutes I couldn't hear them again. We were about to move on when we confirmed distant calls of sandgrouse – Pin-tailed! Then suddenly, a small group of **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** banked into view, flew along the horizon then disappeared. Fortunately a few minutes later another or the same group could be heard and this time they flew past much closer and appeared to come down into field not too faraway.

We relocated in the minibus near to the area and after quite 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, we then moved a bit closer and got much

better views. We made a final stop in the plains and were able to watch several more **Montagu's harriers** hunting and lots more larks, plus **2-3 Hoopoe**. It had been a very successful day and we headed back to the accommodation with satisfied grins!

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

SATURDAY 12TH MAY

Today was again sunny, but with a strong gusty wind that made birding tricky at times. in the wetland area of Arroyocampo. Though we still managed to see most of the target birds. On arrival we had great views of a **Black-winged Kite**, then further around the reserve we located a pair of **Black-winged Kite** showing very well perched in dead trees.

We then tried for the Little Bittern and Savi's Warbler, but it was evident that both of these were going to be very difficult in the gusty wind. But we added Gadwall, Mallard, Coot though the highlights were the **Purple Herons** and **Purple Swampheens** appearing and disappearing amongst the reed-beds and pools. Both **Gull-billed Tern** and **Marsh Harrier** gave a fly-bys, plus great. **Water Rails** were calling from nearby and we had good views of a **Great Reed Warbler**

Moving along we checked a series of pools, here there were **Common Sandpiper**, **Black-winged Stilt** a **Greenshank** and lots of **Bee-eaters**. It was now hot, and we lunched near the centre.

In the afternoon we headed up into the nearby mountains to escape the heat of the day. We couldn't locate any Eagle Owls, but above the crags, a nice selection of aerial activity there was **Griffon**, **Black** and **Egyptian Vultures**, plus **Short-toed** and **Booted Eagle**.

The day was rounded off brilliantly with eventually great views of **2 Black Wheatear**, also here **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Rock Bunting**.



Spanish Imperial Eagle & pursuing Griffon Vulture, awesome views at Monfrague!



Iberian Pied Flycatcher & Common Redstart – higher up in the mountain forest



Little Owl & Nightingale, the latter being extremely numerous!

SUNDAY 13th MAY

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

We then stopped off en-route and had a lovely walk along the fast running river, we saw several **Grey Wagtail**, several **Serin**, but couldn't locate any Dippers.

We then headed higher up stopping off in one of the higher wooded valleys, as soon as we got out the minibus we were greeted with a singing **Iberian Pied Flycatcher**, showing very well from a leafless oak! This was joined nearby by a truly stunning male **Black-eared Wheatear** vying for attention! Lower down **2 Common Redstarts** were singing but less showy! An **Iberian Green Woodpecker** was calling regularly and eventually flew across, also in this area there were several **Short-toed Treecreeper**. The rocky area below us provided views of a male **Ortolan Bunting**, sat singing from a rocky perch

We next stopped off in some higher level coniferous woodland. A quick stop here proved very successful with firstly, great views of a singing **Bonelli's Warbler**, followed a minute later with great views of a singing **Firecrest**.

We next headed up to the highest point and the mountain top, we stopped halfway up the last section of road and took a walk. We had several **Whitethroat** and **Skylark** singing. 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** started singing and gave reasonable scope views. Then a second **Bluethroat** appeared closer and we got much better views. A **Peregrine** went screaming through overhead and other birds were **Raven**, **Northern Wheatear** and **Linnet**.

We then had fantastic views from the top of the mountain, which was rounded off brilliantly with at least three **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush**, it gave us lovely scope views to a huge backdrop of mountain scenery.

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

MONDAY 14TH MAY

Another fine sunny day, though quite windy again and probably the hottest day of the trip!

We started with a search of the local olive groves near Ahigal, but we couldn't locate any Rufous Bushchats, though I do know 2-3 pairs were present one week later, so presumably they were late arriving this year! We did have good views of **Nightingale** and **Black-eared Wheatear**, plus several **Blackcaps**. Overhead there was **5 Red Kite**, **20 Black Kite** and **2 Booted Eagle**.

We then headed towards Gallisteia area, we firstly visited a gravel pit area, looking for Penduline Tits, but they proved elusive, though the area of bushes along the waters edge was knee deep in **Nightingales**! We headed on to the rice fields area and a short stop produce a couple of nice **Iberian form Yellow Wagtails**, plus a small flock of **15+ Red Avadavat**. A **Little Owl** was just visible peering from his hole and the nearby pools held a nice group of **19 Eurasian Spoonbills**, plus a pair of **Little Ringed Plover**. It was also another good area for **Bee-eaters** plus several **Iberian Grey** and **Woodchat Shrikes** and good views of **2-3 Hoopoes**. A **Great Reed Warbler** was also singing and showed quite well. Lots of **White Stork** were feeding in the fields around the area as well.

We rounded the day off with a really nice bird to add to the list in an area near Coria. We walked along a river area that Ricardo was familiar with and fairly soon we could hear the song of **Western Olivaceous Warbler**. They were quite elusive but after a few attempts we eventually got views of one of the birds, we probably had **3 Olivaceous Warblers** along the area. We also had nice clear flight views of a male **Golden Oriole**.

TUESDAY 15TH MAY

An early departure at 5am to reach Madrid airport for our flights back to the UK at around 11am, we left nice and early at 4.15am to avoid the Madrid rush hour traffic and had a comfortable journey arriving at the airport at around 7.30am. The flight was delayed by a round 20 minutes, but fortunately Easyjet made up the time on the flight and we arrived back in London right on time.



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Purple Swamphen & Red-rumped Swallow nest building



© *Woodchat Shrike & Sardinian Warbler*

TOUR OVERVIEW

An excellent tour with a total of **144 bird species recorded**.

Future Tours

If you are interested in joining us in Extremadura then we have tours in **May 2019** please contact us for details.

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