

Wingspan Bird Tours

Trip Report

Coto Donana & Extremadura 16th - 24 October 2011

Leader Bob Buckler

Participants: Peter & Colin

Summary:

This 9-day tour covered a wide variety of habitats and included two of the best Bird-watching regions of Spain, it is not surprising then that we recorded over 170 species with some rare and unusual birds on the list. We saw 26 species of waders, 20 different raptors and a plethora of ducks, geese, herons, egrets, storks and cranes.

We had great views of an adult Spanish Imperial Eagle in the afternoon sunlight at Trebujena Marshes just after we had logged Marbled Duck! In Donana we found 4 Ruddy Shelduck, Yellow-crowned Bishop, Common Waxbill, Bluethroat and Black Stork within a 30 minute period and in Extremadura we found a White-rumped Swift, a perched Golden Eagle, both Great and Little Bustards, a Merlin and a flock of over 500 Candra Larks all in the same area. We eventually caught up with Pin-tailed Sandgrouse after hours of searching for them.

DAY 1 – SUNDAY 16th OCTOBER

MALAGA AIRPORT - DESEMBOCADURA DE GUADALHORCE - SIERRA DE LAS NIEVES - ENCINAS DE BORRACHAS TRACK – GAUCIN



Peter and Colin - at Guadalhorce

After collecting Colin from Malaga Airport we joined Peter (whom I had dropped off earlier) at the superb Reserve at the mouth of the Guadalhorce. Despite a great number of people milling around; cycling, swimming, jogging and sun-bathing there was a good number of species on show. We spent a couple of hours strolling around the tracks and trails in lovely warm sunshine, noting many species including: Kingfisher, Zitting Cisticola, Sardinian Warbler, White Headed Duck, Black-necked Grebe, Mediterranean Gull, Booted Eagle, Osprey (2), Golden Plover (my first for the Autumn), Curlew Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank and a single Greater Flamingo. Out to sea a number of Gannets were diving for fish whilst several Monk Parakeets flashed noisily overhead.

GOLDEN PLOVER SEEN ON THE LAGUNA GRANDE - GUADALHORCE



We ate our picnic lunch before setting off for Ronda which took an hour to get there. We stopped at the nature reserve at Sierra de las Nieves and a short walk produced Jay, Griffon Vulture(6), White Wagtail Woodlark and large numbers of Black Redstarts, at least 20 were in a small area near the car park.

Our last walk of the afternoon was just south of Ronda on the Algeciras road, the Encinas Borrachas track. It was a little breezy but still nice to be out and quite a few birds were flitting around the pool. We quickly found Corn Bunting, Stonechat, Thekla Lark, Goldfinch, Linnet and Serin. Then Peter walked near the pool and put up a Green Sandpiper and we also found a Southern Grey Shrike, A Rock Sparrow, Northern Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush and yet another Black Redstart.



A VIEW FROM THE ENTRANCE INTO THE SIERRA DE LAS NIEVES RESERVE

It was now 5pm and time to head off to our home at Gaucin, we made a very brief stop at a mirador but didn't add any new species to our list. After an hours rest we tucked into a lovely dinner produced by my wife Dawn, yum, yum (and the food wasn't bad either).

DAY 2 – MONDAY OCTOBER 17TH

LAGUNA DE MDEINA – SALINAS DE BONANZA – LAGUNA TARELO – MARISMAS DE TREBUJENA

Top bird – **SPANISH IMPERIAL EAGLE**

We had a great day today – it was transfer day we left Gaucin for the long journey to Matalascañas in Coto Donana.

After an early breakfast we set off at 8;30am and drove down to the coast before turning inland towards Jerez. We saw several good species along the way including White Stork, many attending their nests near Castellar, Griffon Vultures, a good flock of 30 something over the hill in the Alcornacales Cork Oak Forest.

At Laguna de Medina we spent a nice hour walking to hide and watching many grebes and ducks. In the field behind the reserve we found the usual Black-winged Kites, Red-legged Partridges and to our great delight we had very good views of Stone Curlew.

From the hide we listed the three grebes, Shoveler, White-headed Duck and not a lot else. We heard Penduline Tit several times but didn't get any views, Iberian Chiffchaff, Common Chiffchaff showed well and Cetti's Warblers were very vocal. Along the track we noted up to 5 Egyptian Mongoose and below us from the hide we saw another 2 very close.

We stopped in Sanlucar to eat our lunch whilst looking over the river Guadalquivir, the tide was low, but rising. Many waders were feeding on the exposed mudflats: Dunlin, Sanderling, Common Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Redshank, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Curlew, Curlew Sandpiper were joined by Black-headed Gull, Slender-billed Gull, Sandwich Terns and Grey Heron.



Yes we had good close up views of a couple of Mediterranean Chameleons at Laguna Tarelo

On the salt pans it was business as usual with a huge number of birds present: namely Greater Flamingo, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Knot, hundreds of Redshank but also Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit and Grey Plover. Special sightings included: & Black Storks (7) on the thermals, two Opsreys, Two Red Kites showing superbly, and a couple of Caspian Terns.

At laguna Tarelo most of our time was spent looking for Marbled Duck, which we eventually found as we were leaving (5), but whilst doing so we found Gadwall, Shoveler, Teal, Red-crested and Common Pochard, Black-necked Grebe, Night Heron, White-headed Duck and many common waterfowl. Along the fence-line we found a very obliging Chameleon and a couple of large Preying Mantis.

Lastly we drove through the Algaida Pinewoods without stopping but we did spend sometime looking over the large lagunas at the Trebujena Marshes. This where we found a BIRD OF THE DAY – SPANISH IMPERIAL EAGLE. The bird flew up over the launga and circled right above us before drifting off eastward, wow what a sight, terrific!

We drove up through Sevilla and on towards Huelva before turning south and into Coto Donana. We passed El Rocio, noting that the laguna was almost dry, and then down to Matalascanas. Along the way we saw lots of Azure-winged Magpies and several Eurasian Magpies.

We checked in at 6pm and enjoyed a lovely meal at 8, a huge selection of food was on offer at the buffet at dinner time which was washed down with a nice glass of Rioja.

Our count for the day was 77 species with another 3 heard but not seen. The list included Balearic Shearwater, Common Tern and many Lesser Black-backed Gulls seen from our hotel balconies as we looked out to sea from the 5th floor.

DAY 3 - TUESDAY OCTOBER 18TH

COTO DONANA – MATALASCANAS' CLIFFS - ACEBUCHE VISITOR'S CENTRE – EL ROCIO (LAGUNA MADRE DE LA MARISMAS) – LA ROCINA – PALACIO DE ACEBRON

TOP BIRD - **WRYNECK**

Another superb day in Donana. We ate breakfast at 7:30am and left the hotel at 8:30am reaching the cliffs at Matalascanas within 10 minutes. There was a chill to the air so fleeces were the order of the day but it was bright and clear. Out to sea not a lot was happening, a Gannets flew by as did two groups of Audouin's Gulls and a Sandwich Tern. On the beach we saw many Lesser Black-beck Gulls and Yellow Legged Gulls and small flocks of Sanderling.



At Acebuche we stopped to watch a Hoopoe (the first of 8 birds) along the entrance drive and then we spent sometime in the car park watching the antics of the Azure-winged Magpies and tried to get decent photographs. From the hides we could see that the water level was extremely low and much of the laguna had dried up, however, we did some interesting birds. A Water Rail showed very well as did Common Snipe, Purple Swamphen and Spoonbill. We also great views of Dartford Warbler as a pair flitted from tree to tree. A Kingfisher was superb in the morning light and other species included Shoveler, Marsh Harrier, Teal and Little Grebe.

PETER AND COLIN LOOKING OVER THE DRY LAGUNA AT EL ROCIO

Back at the car park you wouldn't believe it, we had just finished watching a Male Dartford Warbler when we noticed a **WRYNECK** sitting just above our van!! How incredible, we followed the bird as it searched for food on the trunks of the pine trees and eventually it flew off – what a show stopper!



The laguna at El Rocio was virtually dry but we drove through the town to the new visitors centre and scoped from there. Greater Flamingos were joined by Lapwing, Golden Plover, Greylag Geese, White and Yellow Wagtails, Little and Cattle Egrets and we also found two Great White Egrets. We ate lunch in the town before driving the short distance to La Rocina, we took the woodland walk to the Palacio de Acebron before visiting the hides. During the walk we didn't see many species but we enjoyed the forest. Birds seen were Eurasian Robin, Long-tailed Tit, Common Redstart and we heard both Great Spotted Woodpecker and Eurasian Nuthatch.



From the hides and along the boardwalk at La Rocina we added Pied Flycatcher, Mistle Thrush and we heard a Cetti's Warbler singing.

It now late afternoon and we were all tired after along hot day, so we retired to hotel and reconvened in the bar at 7.

AFRICAN GRASS BLUE – many of these tiny butterflies we seen on the sandy tracks around El Rocio.

DAY 4 – WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 19TH

LAGUNA PRIMERA DE LOS PALOS – PARAJE NTURAL DE MARISMAS DE O'DIEL – LAGUNA DEL PORTIL – RIO PEIDRAS EL ROMPIDO

STAR BIRD OF THE DAY - **BLUETHROAT**

BRIGHT sunshine throughout with nice temperatures with a nice cooling breeze. We set off in the dark towards Huelva and stopped at the lagunas del Palos just before the city. With a backdrop of a large oil refinery this superb nature reserve looks so out of place, however over the years I have recroded many species there, including Re-knobbed Coot. We couldn't find the Coot but we watched many other wildfowl, we added Wigeon, and Pintail to our list.



Now where is that Bluethroat? El Rompido



Flamingos in the mist.

At the Marismas de O'diel we first stopped at the laguna Calatillo where the Coot had bred for the last few years, again we dipped but there many birds wading or floating in the water. Waders included our first Turnstone, but also Black-tailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Sanderling and a single Curlew Sandpiper. The other species included Greater Flamingo, Pintail, Shovler, Teal, Gadwall, Common Pochard and Mallard.



DUCKS AT FIRST LIGHT



GREAT WHITE EGRET

We then spent the next couple of hours driving down towards the lighthouse on this superb salt marsh, we passed ancient salt pans, open dry scrub, stone pine woodlands and a large expanse of marshes with open brackish water. Species present we in their thousands, we found White Stork, Great White Egret (2), Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Eurasian Spoonbill (50+), Oystercatcher, Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Stone Curlew (32), Knot, Redshank, Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Grey Plover, Little Stint and many of the other waders already listed. A few Common & Sandwich Terns sat amongst the Audouin's, Lesser Black-backed and Yellow-legged Gulls.

On the dry marsh we added Crested Lark, Northern Wheatear, Stonechat and a single Hoopoe to the tally.

Next we made a short trip to the lauguna Portil - found at the roadside just outside of El Portil. A good amount of water held many birds, no new species but we searched for Ferruginous Duck and whilst doing so added Red-crested Pochard, Black-necked and Great Crested Grebe to the day list. We ate a lovely tapas lunch sitting in the sunshine before making the short drive to El Rompido.

On the tidal-marsh alongside the Rio Piedras we searched for Bluethroat, we found at least 4 individuals, three of them were first winter specimens whilst the fourth was a nice adult male showing nice colours. During our spell on the marshland we also saw Southern Grey Shrike, Whinchat, Dartford Warbler, lots of Sardinian Warblers, a Blackcap and a couple of Chiffchaffs.

On the return journey we stopped again at the Laguna Primera de los Palos to search for the Red-knobbed Coot, but alas there wasn't one there – or at least we couldn't find one! Several purple Swampheens were seen along with all the birds seen earlier.

DAY 5 - THURSDAY OCTOBER 20TH

THE NORTHERN MARSHES – COREDOR DE VERDE – DEHESA ABAJO – THE RICE FIELDS OF ISLA MAYOR - JOSE VALVERDE CENTRE

Another super day of unbroken sunshine, mid 20's temperature and a nice light breeze – Oh I could live here!!!

Top Birds - Male Hen Harrier (stonking good views) but also another superb Bluethroat, 4 Ruddy Shelduck (scarce visitors) and Yellow-crowned Bishop & Common Waxbill (novelty factor).

BIRDS! BIRDS! BIRDS! Everywhere we went today, the sky, fields and lakes were full of all kinds of birds, we logged nearly 90 species without raising a sweat!



PETER AND COLIN AT LUNCH IN THE RICE FIELDS AND AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE NATIONAL PARK

We set off at 7:45am in the dark (again) heading north passing through El Rocio and then east across to Villamonrique before turning onto the tracks leading to the Coredor de Verde. Our first birds were Greenfinch, Serin, Goldfinch, Hoopoe and a brief view of Black-winged Kite, one flew off a pylon and disappeared round the bend in the track. We drove a little further and walked another track to relocate the bird, we had great views of it hovering & gliding whilst hunting. Another bird joined it and after some interaction they both flew off, a Sparrowhawk flew across the trees whilst we were looking for the Kites.

The launga de Quema was full of wildfowl, many Coots to search through but no luck with the Red-knobbed variety. Also Shoveler, Teal, Gadwall, Red-crested & Common Pochard, all 3 Grebes of the region, Kingfisher and Grey Heron.



Another Laguna, (Zorita), provided: Great White Egret (2), Green Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilts, Meadow Pipit, White Wagtail and 3 more Hoopoes.

We by-passed the large man-made lake at Dehesa de Abajo so that we could search the small ponds and lagunas at the nearby gravel pits, however most of them were dried up but we did find some water where we located Common Snipe, Wood Sandpiper, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, White Stork, Night Heron, Glossy Ibis & lots of ducks.

Two of the 4 Ruddy Shelducks found at Dehesa de Abajo

Back at Dehesa de Abajo we scanned the large lake for an hour or so and what a great time we had. There must have been 5000 birds on it! We saw Black-winged Stilt (1500+), Greater Flamingo (500+), Cormorant (200+), Avocet (100+), Shoveler (500+), Mallard (500+), Grebes (3 species 100+), Spoonbill (50+), Grey Heron (100+) - add to that Gadwall, Teal, Pochard, Red-crested Pochard, Coot, Moorhen, Purple Swamphen, Night Heron (20+), Glossy Ibis (200+)...plus Kingfisher, Sand Martin (200+), White Storks (50+).. the list goes on and on!

From our raised position on the road we could look behind us over the vast expanse of rice fields where we could see birds everywhere, several flocks of Glossy Ibis numbered in their hundreds each flock that is, Gulls, Egrets, Storks and many Marsh Harriers were also drifting over.



We ate lunch beside two recently flooded rice fields and we sat right next to a rice harvester machine. In the channels and gullies surrounding the rice fields we found a very obliging Squacco Heron, some Common Waxbills, Yellow-crowned Bishops and a single Bluethroat, we also saw several Green Sandpipers, Zitting Cisticolas, Goldfinches and Spanish Sparrows. Raptors became more obvious in the hazy sky, Booted Eagle, Peregrine Falcon (perched on a pylon), Common Kestrel, Red Kite and Common Buzzard were seen.

NIGHT HERON (juvenile)

The afternoon was spent driving along the tracks to the Valverde Centre, passing the very dry and arid fields which held huge crops of Cotton but many were recently ploughed. Along the way we logged several Common Buzzards, lots of Lesser Kestrels, a small flock of Black Storks (7), countless Stonechats, a Common Redstart, two Black Redstarts and a Red Kite. We stopped to look over one ploughed field after we had seen a small group of Northern Wheatears fly into it. What a good move! Within minute we had located a flock of some 200 Calandra Larks, 50+ Skylarks and the icing on the cake, 100+ Lesser Short-toed Larks, Wow!

As we approached the Valverde centre we put up a male HEN HARRIER, what a fantastic sight and to add to the spectacle a male MARSH HARRIER joined it as it circled above us, two great birds in superb plumage and fantastic light. A nearby laguna held quite a lot of water and had attracted many Spoonbills, Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, Common Coots, Grey Heron & Purple Swamphens. The tracks around the Valverde centre held many Northern Wheatears, White Wagtails, Stonechats but not much else.

After a coffee stop we headed back along a different route hoping to find an Eagle or two, instead we found a lot more Lesser Kestrels, a herd of Fallow Deer and more distant Flamingos. We arrived back at the hotel at 5:30pm, a long day but a very enjoyable last day in the area.



FALLOW DEER - JUST OUT OF THE MIRE!

DAY 6 FRIDAY OCTOBER 21ST

COTO DONANA TO EXTREMADURA – WITH VISITS TO MOHEDA ALTA NATURE RESERVE – MADRIGALEJO RICE FIELDS AND THE PUSED-STEPPE NEAR ZORITA

BIRD OF THE DAY - RED AVADAVAT

We ate breakfast at 7am and departed at 7:45am in the dark as usual. The trip went smoothly and uneventful as we passed through Sevilla and headed north to Merida. We stopped for a break near Merida and arrived at the Rice fields near Madrigalejo at 12 noon. Birds seen along the way included many Common Buzzards, Red Kites, Azure-winged Magpies, Cattle & Little Egrets, Grey Herons and a new bird for the trip Common Crane. In fact, at our first stop near Vegas Altas we saw hundreds of Cranes flying here and there in small flocks. Our visit to the rice fields near Madrigalejo was highlighted by great views of the Red Avadavat, we saw quite few and some were carrying nesting material whilst others carried food for chicks. We also had good views of Common Waxbill, Cetti's Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, large flocks of Spanish Sparrows, finches and egrets.



PETER AND COLIN SEARCHING FOR, AND FINDING, THE RED AVADAVAT

After taking a tapas lunch in the village we made a visit to the newly established nature reserve at Moheda Alta, the whole area is geared-up for the conservation of land to encourage Common Cranes. It seems to be working as we saw about 1000, we had a great sight of them all in the air at once, it was spectacular. We also found Greylag Geese, Shoveler, Gadwall and Lapwing.

Back at the rice fields we searched for Penduline Tit getting only brief glimpses of this elusive little begger, but we did see Grey Wagtail, Kingfisher, many Chiffchaff, Waxbills (again), Skylarks, Robins, we also heard a Water Rail, squealing 'like a stuck-pig' great expression!



SOUTHERN GREY SHRIKE

During the last leg of the journey we passed the wide open steppe-like countryside near Zorita where we saw a couple of Great Bustards quite close to the roadside, we also found a fairly large flock of Skylarks and Calandra Larks. Overhead a few Griffon Vultures drifted by and lots of Common Cranes called noisily as they passed.



HOOPOE

Just before we entered the village where we were staying we stopped to walk along a quiet lane where we found both Mistle and Song Thrushes, Hoopoe, Southern Grey Shrike, Blackcaps, Black Redstart, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Spotless Starling, White Wagtail and Crested Lark.

We arrived at our Casa Rural in San Clemente at 5:30pm with time enough to rest before dinner. Only 4 new species were added today but tomorrow we are going to Monfrague National Park and hoping for more!

[DAY 7 - SATURDAY OCTOBER 22ND](#)

MONFRAGUE NATIONAL PARK

BIRD OF THE DAY - [WHITE-RUMPED SWIFT](#)

We spent the whole day in and around the park at Monfrague and had a great time. We set off at 7:45am, in the car park we saw an Owl fly from a post, in the dark we thought it was a Little Owl, we drove the 60 kilometers to Monfrague without further sightings. It was overcast, a bit chilly and still quite dark when we arrived at the base of the Castillo de Monfrague.



SUN RISE WITH UNCERTAINTY?



ROCK BUNTING

It was amazing because as we arrived we noticed at least 100 Vultures had taken to the air and were circling above the road, we identified two Black Vultures in amongst the masses of Griffon Vultures. By the time we had climbed the steps to the castle it was light and we had logged Hawfinch, Long-tailed Tit and lots of Chaffinches. In the castle 'grounds' we found a superb male Rock Bunting showing very well and lots of Blackcaps, also Black Redstarts, Blue Rock Thrush and many Song Thrushes flew over us. But the star of

the show had to be the **WHITE RUMPED SWIFT** that flew over and around us and even gave us a fly-pass in the strengthening sunlight, what a gem.

On the way back down we found several Griffon vultures perched, a few Crag martins and more Hawfinch sightings were had. At the Pena Falcon rock we watched more vultures, Black Redstarts, a Short-toed Treecreeper on the rock face? Better views of Blue Rock Thrush were had and Grey Herons were down by the water.

Next we stopped at the roadside just passed the main bridge to watch Griffon & Black Vultures at close range and whilst doing so we found a fantastic Bonelli's Eagle as it drifted over the ridge another WOW! was let out by the lads!

The pine woods above the dam were disappointing but we did see Mistle Thrush, Azure-winged Magpies and several common species. The cork woods just passed the watch-point at Portilla de Tietar provided our next venue. We quickly found Eurasian Nuthatch and then after some leg work and good detection we found another star bird, the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.



We took a tapas lunch at a roadside bar and then went back into the park for more birding. We spent from 2:30pm until 5pm revisiting many of the sites and added several birds to the list which included: Raven, Crested Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Red Kite and a Green Woodpecker was heard.

On the way back to Trujillo we stopped at a bridge which spanned the Rio Almonte where we found: Kingfisher, Rock Sparrow, Southern Grey Shrike, Crested Lark, Serin, Crag Martin, White Wagtail, Black Redstart and a little further down the road we saw a flock of 7 Red Kites.

THE CORK OAK WOODLAND WHERE WE FOUND THE LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER

[DAY - 8 SUNDAY OCTOBER 23RD](#)

THE TRUJILLO PLAINS – SANTA MAGASCA – MONROY – RIO ALMONTE – TALAVAN NATURE RESERVE

Bird of the Day: [GOLDEN EAGLE](#)

Our last full day start cold, wet and overcast, what a change, my shorts are packed away for the winter! We started early and arrived on the open fields near Santa Magasca just after first light. A chilly wind kept our outside activity to a minimum, we scanned the fields from beside the van in the lee of the wind. We quickly found half a dozen Great Bustards and hundreds of Corn Buntings, Spanish Sparrows, Crested Larks, Skylarks and Calandra Larks. The fields were dotted with Lapwing and many flocks of Spotless Starlings, the odd Northern Wheatear joined the Stonechats along the fence lines. Southern Grey Shrikes were quite numerous too, we counted 10 in the first couple of hours. Now for the raptors, A few Common Buzzards sat on poles and posts whilst Red Kites drifted over us, we watched a couple of Common Kestrels before locating a male Merlin sitting low down on a rock, a good bird. Then we found an enormous raptor sitting on another rock, the bird was being mobbed by a couple of Common Magpies which looked tiny in comparison. It was a Golden Eagle, fantastic and our 5th Eagle of the Tour – before long it flew off and was lost behind a ridge, wow, that warmed us up.

We stopped at the bridge over the Rio Magasca on our way to Talavan where we found a Kingfisher, Crag Martin, Green Sandpiper and Blackcap, three Hawfinches also flew over.

Next we visited the fairly new Reserve at Talavan, this consists of an artificial lake, an embalse, with reed-beds and a couple of hides. As soon as we got there we saw two Otters along a near bank, these normally shy creatures were very obliging and came very close. (see my film on Youtube). We also watched a very obliging Water Rail which fed just below us! Along the lake shoreline we could see Common Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Greenshank, Grey Heron, Little Egret and Little Grebe. We then drove round to the dam 'end' of the embalse and found quite few more species which included: Black-winged Stilt, Little Stint, White Stork, Teal, Gadwall, Shoveler, Pintail, Mallard and Great Cormorant. As we left, we stopped to watch a couple of Hoopoes, some very close Thekla Larks and a Black Redstart all found on or near the track.



A

couple of pictures of the obliging Water Rail seen at Talavan

At the bridge over the Rio Almonte we spent some time looking for Black Wheatear and eventually one showed up, but we located Blue Rock Thrush, Blackcap, Crag Martin, Barn Swallow, Robin, Serin and several Griffon Vultures in the process.



Northern Wheatear - several were seen today

Little Bustard – 2 small flocks were found

Back on the plains we drove towards Trujillo before turning off to Aldea de Obispo and it was along this road that we found our first Little Bustards, there were 22 of them and we also found 15 Great bustards in the same field.

Our journey back to Santa Clemente was via Monroy and Santa Magasca, we made many stops to look for the elusive Sandgrouse without luck, at one stage we saw a Peregrine which put up a flock of Calandra Larks that must have numbered well above 500.

We did find more Great Bustards and a flock of 9 Little Bustards later on and despite not seeing the sandgrouse we were happy to see the thousands of other birds in huge flocks.

OCTOBER 24TH . 9 - DAY TOUR (9)

Day 9 – TRUJILLO – SANTA MAGASCA ROAD – ARROYOCAMPO PARQUE NATURAL – EL PARDO (MADRID COUNTRY PARK) – MADRID AIRPORT –GAUCIN.

Bird of the Day - **another Spanish Imperial Eagle**

Our last day started with rain and then more rain and then a cold wind and rain. By 10am it started to clear and we saw a few birds. Arriving on the plains at 8:30am it was barely light enough to see but we tried. The usual birds were seen on the tracks and in the nearby grasslands: Lapwing, Great and Little Bustard, Calandra lark, Crested Lark, Skylark, Corn Bunting, Spanish Sparrow, Meadow Pipit, Southern Grey Shrike, Northern Wheatear and Stonechats. A few Red Kites sat on fence posts looking miserable in the cold wind and a few Griffon Vultures drifted over.

It was just as we were watching over the last field before we departed for Madrid that we finally found SANDGROUSE. At last, after hours of searching we found a flock of some 40+ Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, they remained hunkered down but occasionally they would stand up and shake the rain from their feathers. A great relief too, as my two comrades thought that sandgrouse were purely mythical birds!



WE WERE GETTING COLD AND WET LOOKING FOR THE MYTHICAL SANDGROUSE

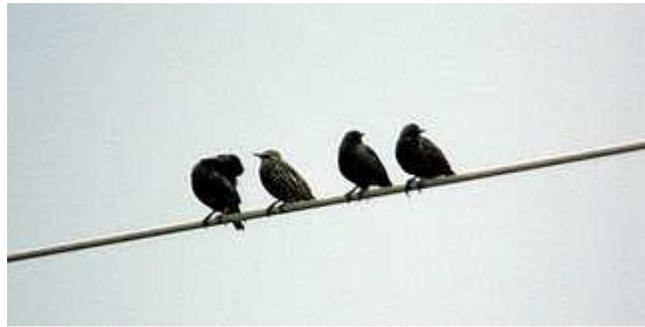


We set off towards Madrid and stopped at a favourite site of mine, the 3 Bridges over the Tajo. However, we didn't get out of the car because of the rain. Such a shame, we did see Spanish Sparrow, Serin, Black Redstart and White Wagtail.

It was a nuclear power station that provided our next venue, the large embalse (man-made lake) that is used for cooling purposes is also a nature reserve with several observation hides. We spent an hour or so there but we couldn't see many species either on the water or in the reed-beds. A Yellow Wagtail was a nice surprise found in with a flock of White Wagtails, we also saw Purple Swamphen (3), Marsh Harrier, lots of Cormorants and Grey Herons.

A GREAT SPOT BY COLIN - WHO FOUND THIS WOODPECKER

Lastly we visited the huge park found on the north side of Madrid, called El Pardo. We arrived just after a rainstorm, which was very good for birding, as many species came out in the brief sunshine to feed and dry out. We added our last two species to the weekly list, Wren and Firecrest, two of the smallest birds of Europe, this was followed by a sighting of one of the biggest birds of Europe, the Spanish Imperial Eagle. Another (albeit the last) “Wow” was muttered by my sidekicks. A great find and in such close proximity to central Madrid. We also saw Common Chiffchaff, Monk Parakeet, Robin, Griffon Vulture, loads of Magpies and Wood Pigeons. Our very last stop found us on the open grass fields on top of a hill which overlooked the Spanish Capital, we looked for Green Woodpecker but only found more Magpies and a large mixed flock of Spotless and Common Starlings.



IT WASN'T ALL BAD - BUTTERFLIES CAME OUT EVENTUALLY TO BASK IN THE AFTERNOON SUNSHINE - BATH WHITE SHOWN - SPOT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE TWO SPECIES OF STARLINGS

We then drove to Madrid airport where I deposited my two trusty companions and then I set off for the 6 hour drive home, singing all the way and arriving at 11:30pm tired but happy that the week went so well.

Species Recorded

1	Great Crested Grebe
2	Black-necked Grebe
3	Little Grebe
4	Balearic Shearwater
5	Great Cormorant
6	Northern Gannet
7	Grey Heron
8	Little Egret
9	Cattle Egret
10	Squacco Heron
11	Black-crowned Night-Heron
12	Great White Egret
13	Eurasian Spoonbill
14	Glossy Ibis
15	White Stork
16	Black Stork
17	Greater Flamingo
18	Greylag Goose
19	Common Shelduck
20	Wigeon
21	Mallard
22	Gadwall
23	Northern Shoveler
24	Marbled Duck
25	Red-crested Pochard
26	Common Pochard
27	White-headed Duck
28	Northern Pintail
29	Eurasian Teal
30	Common Scoter
31	Eurasian Griffon Vulture
32	Black Vulture
33	Osprey
34	Red Kite
35	Black-winged Kite
36	Bonelli's Eagle
37	Booted Eagle
38	Spanish Imperial Eagle
39	Golden Eagle
40	Short-toed Snake-Eagle
41	Eurasian Sparrowhawk
42	Common Buzzard
43	Western Marsh-Harrier
44	Hen Harrier
45	Common or Eurasian Kestrel
46	Lesser Kestrel

47	Peregrine Falcon
48	Merlin
49	Water Rail
50	Red-legged Partridge
51	Common or Eurasian Coot
52	Purple Swamphen
53	Common Moorhen
54	Common Crane
55	Great Bustard
56	Little Bustard
57	Eurasian Oystercatcher
58	Pied Avocet
59	Black-winged Stilt
60	Eurasian Stone-Curlew
61	Northern Lapwing
62	Grey Plover
63	Golden Plover
64	Common Ringed Plover
65	Kentish Plover
66	Knot
67	Ruddy Turnstone
68	Ruff
69	Dunlin
70	Curlew Sandpiper
71	Sanderling
72	Little Stint
73	Common Redshank
74	Spotted Redshank
75	Common Greenshank
76	Common Sandpiper
77	Green Sandpiper
78	Wood Sandpiper
79	Eurasian Curlew
80	Whimbrel
81	Black-tailed Godwit
82	Bar-tailed Godwit
83	Common Snipe
84	Great Skua
85	Black-headed Gull
86	Mediterranean Gull
87	Yellow-legged Gull
88	Lesser Black-backed Gull
89	Audouin's Gull
90	Slender-billed Gull
91	Caspian Tern
92	Sandwich Tern
93	Common Tern
94	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse
95	Feral Pigeon
96	Common Wood-Pigeon
97	Eurasian Collared-Dove
98	Little Owl

99	White-rumped Swift
100	Common or River Kingfisher
101	Common or Eurasian Hoopoe
102	Eurasian Wryneck
103	Great Spotted Woodpecker
104	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
105	Skylark
106	Calandra Lark
107	Woodlark
108	Crested Lark
109	Thekla Lark
110	Lesser Short-toed Lark
111	Eurasian Crag-Martin
112	Barn Swallow
113	Red-rumped Swallow
114	Sand Martin
115	Meadow Pipit
116	Water Pipit
117	White Wagtail
118	Yellow Wagtail
119	Grey Wagtail
120	Zitting Cisticola
121	Cetti's Warbler
122	Reed Warbler
123	Blackcap
124	Sardinian Warbler
125	Dartford Warbler
126	Common or Eurasian Chiffchaff
127	Iberian Chiffchaff
128	Firecrest
129	European Pied-Flycatcher
130	Whinchat
131	European Stonechat
132	Northern Wheatear
133	Black Wheatear
134	Common Redstart
135	Black Redstart
136	European Robin
137	Bluethroat
138	Mistle Thrush
139	Song Thrush
140	Common or Eurasian Blackbird
141	Blue Rock-Thrush
142	Long-tailed Tit
143	Penduline Tit
144	Crested Tit
145	Eurasian Blue Tit
146	Great Tit
147	Eurasian Nuthatch
148	Short-toed Treecreeper
149	Winter Wren
150	Eurasian Jay

151	Eurasian Magpie
152	Azure-winged Magpie
153	Common or Northern Raven
154	Carrion Crow
155	Eurasian Jackdaw
156	Southern Grey Shrike
157	Eurasian Tree-Sparrow
158	House Sparrow
159	Spanish Sparrow
160	Rock Petronia (Sparrow)
161	Common Starling
162	Spotless Starling
163	Common Chaffinch
164	European Serin
165	European Goldfinch
166	European Greenfinch
167	Eurasian Linnet
168	Hawfinch
169	Rock Bunting
170	Corn Bunting
171	Cirl Bunting
	<i>EXOTIC SPECIES</i>
172	Monk Parakeet
173	Common Waxbill
174	Yellow-crowned Bishop
175	Red Avadavat
	Heard but not seen
176	Green Woodpecker
BUTTERFLY SPECIES	
1	Large White
2	Small White
3	Bath White
4	Clouded Yellow
5	Cleopatra
6	Small Copper
7	Long-tailed Blue
8	Small Blue
9	Brown Argus
10	African Grass Blue
11	Two-tailed Pasha
12	Red Admiral
13	Painted Lady
14	Meadow Brown
15	Speckled Wood
DRAGONFLY SPECIES & INTERESTING INSECTS	
16	Preying mantis
17	

18	
19	
20	Lesser Emperor
21	Voilet Dropwing
22	Southern Darter
23	Red-veined Darter
24	Common Darter
25	Epaulete Skimmer
26	

**MAMMALS, REPTILES &
AMPHIBIANS**

1	Fallow Deer
2	Egyptian Mongoose
3	Rabbit
4	Otter
5	
6	European Pond Terrapin
7	Mediterranean Chameleon
8	European Pond Frog
9	
10	