

# WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS

## Bird-watching Holiday

TO



## DOÑANA & EXTREMADURA

### TRIP REPORT

APRIL 15<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> 2015

# PLACES VISITED

<b>Day 1</b>	<b>GUADAMAR FUENTE DE PIEDRA EL ROCIO</b>
<b>Day 2</b>	<b>MADRE DE MARISMA ACEBUCHE VISITOR'S CENTRE LA ROCINA</b>
<b>Day 3</b>	<b>LAGUNA PRIMERA DE LOS PALOS – MARISMAS DE O'DIEL – LAGUNA DE PORTIL – ROMPIDO (Rio piedras) HEATH – NIEBLA CASTLE</b>
<b>Day 4</b>	<b>COREDOR DE VERDE – DEHESA DE PILAS – LAGUNA DE DEHESA ABAJO – NORTHERN MARSHES – LAGUNA DE MADRA DE LA MARISMAS</b>
<b>Day 5</b>	<b>LAGUNA MADRE DE LA MARISMA – VEGAS ALTAS – LLANOS DE ZORITA – FINCA SANTA MARTA</b>
<b>Day 6</b>	<b>BELEN PLAIN – LLANOS DE TRUJILLO – CASERES STEPPE – TALAVAN RESERVOIR – MONROY TO TRUJILLO</b>
<b>Day 7</b>	<b>MONFRAGUE NATIONAL PARK – ARROYOCAMPO NATURAL PARK – JARAICEJO THREE BRIDGES</b>
<b>Day 8</b>	<b>TRUJILLO – SANTA DE MAGASCA PLAINS – ALENJO RESERVOIR – TRANSFER TO ANDALUCUA – MOUNTAINS AT MONTEJAQUE NEAR RONDA.</b>
<b>Day 9</b>	<b>DESEMBOCADURA DE GUADALHORCE NATURE RESERVE MALAGA AIRPORT</b>

## DAY 1 - WEDNESDAY 15<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2015

### **MALAGA AIRPORT – GUADAMAR - FUENTE DE PIEDRA – EL ROCIO (COTO DONANA)**

All went smoothly at the arrivals hall in Malaga Airport, over the course of 3 hours various members of the group arrived from different destinations between 10:30am – 1:45pm I dropped off most of the group at the beach near Guadamar whilst I drove back and forth to the airport picking up new arrivals.

The piece of waste-ground behind the beach near Guadamar was very productive, our very first bird of the trip was a Woodchat Shrike this was quickly followed by Eurasian Hoopoe and then by a group of European Bee-eaters! Barn Swallows dashed about low to the ground and Jackdaws joined a number of Monk Parakeets up in the Eucalyptus trees.

We then parked near to the beach and watched from a raised bank for 30 minutes or so. A pair of Little Ringed Plovers were dashing about calling, they landed in the car park where we also saw Crested Lark and Goldfinch.



A golf course could be seen as we looked across a small stream and in the mature eucalyptus growing there a huge colony of Monk Parakeets had been established. We watched these ‘escapees’ for a while also noting Cattle Egret, Common Kestrel, Common Swift, European Greenfinch and more European Bee-eaters.

I left the group to walk along the stream whilst I collected the final participant from the airport, by the time I returned they had added Turtle Dove, Zitting Cisticola and Serin to the list.

At 3pm we all set off for the trip to Coto Donana as we left the Malaga region we drove into some lovely scenery and nice weather. After about an hour we stopped at Laguna Fuente de Piedra to make a short birding excursion to the pools around the visitor’s centre. It was

a smashing hour that we spent there, the pools were alive with migrant species and several breeding birds were pairing off.

On the first pool we found Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns, Ruff, Wood & Common Sandpipers, Little-ringed Plover, Yellow Wagtail (*ibericus*) and lots of Black-winged Stilts.

Other pools near the main laguna held more terns plus Garganey ( 2 males), Curlew Sandpipers, Redshank, Shoveler and Gadwall.

‘Lagunete’ is a large pool at the back of the visitor’s centre and in recent weeks I had seen Ferruginous and White-headed Duck there, but today they were gone. A large number of Shoveler joined Common & Red-crested Pochard, Little Egret, Little Grebe and a few Greater Flamingos.

The main Laguna held thousands upon thousands of Greater Flamingos, they stretched out in groups as far as the eye could see, it was an amazing sight. Alongside the Flamingos were over 100 Gull-billed Terns, good numbers of Common Redshank, 2 White Storks and 4 Common Shelduck.

We continued our journey at 5pm, as we got nearer to Sevilla it started to rain heavily, we drove through a thunderstorm and the rain continued until we headed out the other side of the city.

El Rocio was our destination which we reached by 7pm, the sandy streets were partially flooded and muddy but we got through to our hotel. We enjoyed a nice glass of 'vino de la casa' with a lovely meal, it was too cold to sit outside on the terrace.

## **DAY 2 - THURSDAY 16<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2015**

### **LAGUNA MARISMA DE MADRA – ACEBUCHE – ACEBRON WOODS - LA ROCINA**

The day started with a thick mist over the town which lifted enough for us to see the laguna behind the hotel, so after breakfast we took a short walk along the promenade to the visitor's centre.

The water was dead calm and in the mist we could see many birds dotted about, the morning light improved as the mist drifted off. We saw Eurasian Spoonbills, Black-winged Stilts, a single Black-tailed Godwit, lots of Eurasian Coots, Shoveler, Common and Red-crested Pochard, the odd Gadwall and a few Whiskered Terns. In the reeds close by we found Reed Warblers and a Cetti's Warbler sat out nicely for us.



From the visitor's centre we had great views of roosting Night Herons, we also saw a few Yellow Wagtails and we heard Common Nightingale, a Red Deer fed on the grassy shoreline and a couple of Greater Flamingos fed in the distance with more Eurasian Spoonbills.

Acebuche was quite disappointing, the large lagunas were completely dry and consequently the numbers of bird species was very low. Of course we enjoyed many sightings of Azure-winged Magpies, European Bee-eaters, Eurasian Hoopoes, a single European Golden Oriole but warbler numbers were very low.

We worked hard for little reward, a couple of Crested Tit sightings, a brief view of a Common Nightingale and several European Serins were all we got after an hour's walk. We gave up at 12 noon and retired to the restaurant where we ate a nice tapas lunch.

From Acebuche we drove to La Rocina which is another visitor's centre found just outside of El Rocio. From the first hide we could see that the lagunas held water where a number of species were feeding. Common and Red-crested Pochard, Gadwall, Little Grebe, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Grey Heron, Whiskered Tern, White Stork, Marsh Harrier and Black Kite were some of the species we encountered.

Our walk to the next hide took us across a boardwalk which gave us views of a reed-marsh and it was there that we saw a Savi's Warbler, the bird 'buzzed' constantly whilst we were there and gave great views.

We also heard Iberian Chiffchaff, seen by just two of us and another Crested Tit. On the return journey we heard a distant Common Cuckoo and Sarah in the group imitated the call which brought the cuckoo much closer, the bird flew in a wide circle around us weaving its way through the pine trees, it was amazing. Next we heard a Golden Oriole which also showed well but briefly and it too came closer when Sarah made the Cuckoo call! It was a memorable experience enjoyed by everyone.

From La Rocina we drove to the Palacio de Acebron passing through open heath where a brief 'stop and search' resulted in good views of Dartford Warbler. Other birds out on the heath were Stonechat, Woodchat Shrike and Crested Lark.

We walked through the deciduous woodland at the Palacio de Acebron hoping for views of Lesser-spotted Woodpecker which we never got, in fact it was fairly quiet. We did see Blackcap, a few common woodland birds, a Wryneck was a nice bonus.

Lastly we stopped at the Marisma de Madre just outside of El Rocio, we looked from the old road on the western shoreline. With the sun behind us we had a wonderful vista of the water and the town of El Rocio forming a picturesque background. Not too many species were out there but it was a nice and relaxing birding session. We ate dinner at 7:30pm back at the hotel.



### DAY 3 - FRIDAY 17<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2015

#### **LAGUNA PRIMERA DE LOS PALOS – NATURAL PARK MARISMAS DE ODIEL – LAGUNA EL PORTIL – ROMPIDA HEATH (Rio Piedras).**

We decided to head for the coast as the weather forecast for inland was rain, it was a good decision, as we had sunshine all day and the temperature was in the mid-twenties.

We set off early, at 7am, carrying our picnic breakfast with us, it was dark until we reached Huelva some 45 minutes later. Our first stop was at the Laguna de Primera de los Palos this spot had produced some good birds in the past but recent visits were not so successful and today was the same, perhaps the habitat has become degraded which does not surprise me as there is a huge oil and gas refinery adjacent to it. From the small railway track we saw Common and Red-crested Pochard, Whiskered Tern and a couple of pairs of Gadwall.

We drove through Huelva Port and round to the O'diel nature park where we spent the rest of the morning. This huge area of Salinas, lagunas, marisma and tidal mudflats is a fantastic birding venue and usually produces a long list of waders and raptors. We stopped first at the small Laguna Calatillo, which was quite shallow and over recent years it has hosted a breeding pair of Red-knobbed Coots, but today it was quite barren. A few Black-winged Stilts loafed around with Common Sandpiper, Little-ringed Plover and a few Common Coots, Gadwall, Moorhen and not much else.

The Salinas across the road were full of Greater Flamingos they looked superb in the morning light, groups of Stilts were joined by Dunlin, Curlew Sandpipers, Redshank and a single Common Shelduck. In the distance we could see an Osprey standing next to its' nest, this is one of two sites locally where this magnificent bird has been successfully encouraged to breed through the provision of nesting platforms.

This extensive salt marsh lies parallel to the coast on a outcrop of land that extents 30 kilometers culminating in a narrow point where a lighthouse stands guard to the port of Huelva at the mouth of the river O'Diel. We travelled along most of it stopping to look at waders, gulls, terns and some scrubland for passerines.

Our best finds included: Montagu's Harrier, Collared Pratincole, Little Tern and a good selection of waders. The tide was very low and as a consequence the shore birds were widely distributed and we never saw a high concentration of birds anywhere, nevertheless we listed nearly 20 species of waders!

From the salt marsh we drove into Portil where a roadside viewing platform gave us perfect views over a large



laguna. Normally it is packed with ducks but today it wasn't, it sometimes has a number of Ferruginous Ducks but not this time. One surprising find was a Northern Pintail but we soon realised that this bird had a damaged wing, it should have hundreds of miles north at this time of the year. Common & Red-crested Pochard, Gadwall, lots of Common Coot, Little Grebes with fewer numbers of Little-ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank made up the rest of the sightings. We also found a European Chameleon in the hedgerow.

We ate a tapas lunch in El Portil before driving round to La Rompido where we spent an hour on the heath looking for warblers. A male Golden Oriole was our best find followed by a Caspian Tern along the Rio Piedras.

Lastly we stopped at Niebla Castle where a huge colony of Lesser Kestrels can be found, we had fantastic views of them in the late afternoon sunlight. We also found nesting Crag Martins, White Storks and Jackdaws. We got back to El Rocio at 6pm after stopping to watch a Short-toed Eagle along the way, we made a quick visit to the laguna before returning to the hotel to get ready for dinner.

## **DAY 4 - SATURDAY 18<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2015**

### **COREDOR DE VERDE – DEHESA DE PILAS – LAGUNA DEHESA DE ABAJO – NORTHERN MARSHES – LAGUNA MADRA DE LA MARISMAS**

We had a full programme planned for today's birding, the weather was just perfect for it, we had sunshine all day and no wind except for a late afternoon breeze.

We set off in the dark at 7am carrying our picnic breakfast, we drove towards Villamonrique making just one stop just before the town. Tawny Owl was our target and after some brief searching by the roadside we found two of them and we also heard a Little Owl call in the distance.

We arrived at the Coredor de Verde at 8am it was now fully light, the coredor is a green belt that buffers the national park and sits between the intensive fruit growing farmland and the park itself. A 'canal' or branch of the Rio Guadiamar is the main-stay of the coredor.



We stopped just the other side of the canal and walked through some open pasture with scattered scrub and mature trees. This was the ideal habitat for the Black-winged Kite which was our main target species, however, after an hour of walking we never saw one! We did find a good number of other species and the dawn chorus was intense, bird song came from all directions with Common Nightingale and Cetti's Warbler leading the choir.

Several Common Cuckoos entertained us as they chased one another around the 'bubbling' call of the female was heard a few times too. We found a few migrant species besides the cuckoos, Whinchat, Melodious Warbler, Subalpine Warbler, Red-rumped Swallow and a good number of swifts all showed well.

After eating our picnic breakfast we drove a short distance to a second track which had similar habitat to the first one, there we were successful in finding the Black-winged Kite, two birds were seen perched and in flight, beautiful, graceful and majestic all at the same time.

Next we drove to the Dehesa de Pilas, a misnamed piece of land that comprises of flat open grass meadows with a square shaped, dense Eucalyptus woodland sitting in the middle of it, nothing like Dehesa! Regardless of the name, the sky was full of birds, the wires and fences held a host of Bee-eaters. Spanish Sparrows dashed about in their thousands and Black Kites patrolled the woodland. White Storks, Cattle Egrets, Martins, swifts and Swallows added to the throng, a wall of noise was coming from the sparrows in the woods. But the most remarkable of all was the colour, scent and sheer magnificence of the wild flowers, a true spectacle, a veritable feast for the eyes.

The laguna at Dehesa de Abajo was superb, it was flat calm and although it didn't hold that many species of birds we were thrilled by the ones that we did find. Top of the list was the Red-knobbed Coot, 3 of them were found, but the beauty of the grebes was quite stunning too. We also enjoyed Red-crested Pochard, Purple Swamphen, Night Heron, Whiskered Tern, Greater Flamingo, Glossy Ibis, Great Reed Warbler and a huge number of White Storks, Black Kites and hirundines.

From there we drove to a series of gravel pits heading toward Isla Mayor, the final pool held two more Red-knobbed Coots, Night Heron and Little Egret but not the hoped for Marbled Duck. Our lunch was an omelette in a sandwich!! A bizarre combination but everyone enjoyed it, a nice cup of coffee enlivened the group as we set off for the Valverde Centre.



Disaster struck after 15 kilometers, the road to the Valverde Centre was completely blocked by road-works and no alternative or diversion was on offer, what a blow. We attempted to find our own alternative route without success, it's a pity because the Valverde centre is the showcase of Donana and a terrific place to visit. During our 'alternative tour' we drove along many tracks and we found a few interesting

sights the best of which was a feeding flock of some 25 Lesser Kestrels. Then we spent more time at the Dehesa de Pilas watching Bee-eaters and Spanish Sparrows before heading back to El Rocio.

For our last hour's birding we scanned the Laguna at El Rocio from a couple of places, it was a beautiful sight in perfect light, we added Black Tern to our list (a single bird) and enjoyed views of many other species seen previously on the tour. We ate our last evening meal at our current hotel as we were setting off in the morning for Extremadura.

#### DAY 5 – SUNDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2015

**TRANSFER FROM COTO DONANA TO EXTREMADURA WITH VISITS TO; LAGUNA MADRE DE LA MARISMA - ALENGE RESERVOIR – VEGAS ALTAS – LLANOS DE ZORITA – FINCA SANTA MARTA.**

We had a lie-in today and had breakfast at 8am, then after loading the bus with our luggage we drove to the laguna for a last look before departing for Extremadura. It was a lovely still morning, the water looked calm and peaceful, its surface only broken by the occasional rising fish or diving duck.

In the reeds nearest to us there was a great mass of Sand Martins, a conservative count put their number at 500, occasionally they would fly up from the reeds en-masse and fill the air like a cloud of bees, it was quite a spectacle.

We noted the usual species and one observation was of Greylag Geese with a string of chicks! We now had to down-grade our sighting of this species from a late migrant to a feral species.

Our journey began around 9:30am we made good progress and passed through Sevilla in no time, the traffic was exceptionally quiet, it was, of course, a Sunday. After stopping for coffee we arrived at our first birding venue around 11:30am, the Alenge Reservoir, just south of Merida, was flat calm we had great views of it from the dam and the raised car park. A group of Alpine Swifts swarmed around the dry side of the dam with Eurasian Jackdaws and a few Red-rumped Swallows on or around the railings.



From the car park we walked a few hundred meters whilst scanning the sky, also the distant hills and a pinnacle of rock adjacent to the path. Soon we had a nice list including a few species previously not seen before on the trip, these were Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Bunting and a very distant flock of 5 Black-bellied Sandgrouse. We constantly searched for Bonelli's Eagle as this was a well-known spot for them but we had no luck.

We continued our journey and made a second stop some 50km south of our final destination. Vegas Altas is an area where intense rice-growing is carried out, we stopped on an old bridge that sat over one of the feeder rivers to the rice fields. We quickly found Cetti's Warbler, a Garden Warbler, Great Reed Warbler and several Common Waxbills. An Iberian Shrike sat on a wire as did a Eurasian Hoopoe, Stonechat and a few Corn Buntings. White Storks were everywhere and we also logged Tree

Sparrow, Common Nightingale (heard), Common Cuckoo and Marsh Harrier.

Moving on we made one final birding stop near Zorita, this was an area of vast grassland with occasional cultivated fields, ideal for larks, bustards, Sandgrouse etc. We scanned the rolling hills, grass fields and ploughed fields finding Crested Lark, Short-toed Lark, Calandra Lark, Common Cuckoo, Raven and lots of Black Kites. Just as we began to leave we noted two Black Vultures very high above us.

We finally arrived at new accommodation, Finca Santa Marta, around 5pm, the afternoon warm sunlight added to the pleasant ambience of the finca and its environs. It still is a wonderful birding venue set in its own vine-yard, orchards, olive groves and dry stone walling. The rustic setting has a lovely calming influence, a nice cuppa sitting out on one of the terraces was well appreciated.

For dinner we drove into the nearest town, Trujillo, where first we stopped at the old bull-ring to watch Lesser Kestrels before driving up to the huge 'Plaza Mayor' at the top of the town. It was magnificent, surrounded by historical buildings and a huge statue of Pizarro (conquistador of Peru) and the old church tower the plaza exudes Spanish ambience at its very best. Hundreds of swifts, jackdaws, storks and kestrels dashed about above us adding both movement and noise to the atmospheric 'buzz' of this ancient plaza.



Everyone enjoyed a lovely meal, we drove back to the finca at 10pm, it was a beautiful star-lit night, we listened for Scops Owl but none was heard, it had been a long day so off to bed we went.

## DAY 6 - MONDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2015

### **BELEN PLAIN – LLANOS DE TRUJILLO – CASERES PLAINS – EMBALSE DE TALAVAN-MONROY TO TRUJILLO**

Another perfect morning greeted us as we left the finca after an early breakfast for our first birding excursion of the day. The sun rose, a beautiful orange orb in a clear sky shedding coloured light across the huge expanse of Belen Plain. Not a whiff air stirred this vast grassland the only movement was of cattle and birds. The short song of the Corn Bunting came to us from all directions, Calandra Larks, ascending, delivered their sweet, melodic songs from on high, Crested & Thekla Larks sang from almost every rock. Common Quails asked us to ‘wet their lips’ from deep in the grass and the call of the Eurasian Hoopoe came to us from afar.

But it was the Bustards great and small that grabbed the limelight, we saw them distantly at first then nearer later, the male Little Bustard standing to attention and throwing back its head as he delivered a short rasping note as if blowing a ‘raspberry’. The giant form of the Great Bustard could be seen dotted all over the plains, a male would display as he approached a female by erecting his tail and neck feathers and then contorting itself and all its body feathers into a ball of white, like an inverted feather mattress. He would strut around her with his long neck thrown backwards, what a performance we awarded full marks for effort.



A string of trees with wide domed-shaped canopies supported a couple of dozen vultures and a few Black Kites, it was a morning roost site, they stood alert like ‘sentinels of the dehesa’. Griffon, Black and Egyptian Vultures showed a great variety in size, shape and colour, whilst the smaller Black Kites stood aloof or sat on the ground, belittled by their giant comrades.

Great-spotted Cuckoos chased one another across fields and tree tops occasionally perching on fences, we enjoyed the show, a much anticipated spectacle hoped for by the group. In the meantime the sun rose higher the light became superb and the boundaries of this magical landscape stretched as far as the eye could see. In all directions birds were sky-bound, soaring, circling, drifting or displaying it was a wonderful wildlife experience. The prolific wild flower-show was simply amazing too, vibrant blues, yellows, pinks and whites covered the fields, the roadside and any shrubby patch.

We left the magic of Belen to explore the ‘steppe’ landscape between Trujillo and Caseres. After stopping off to buy lunch in Trujillo we made our way to Santa Marta, making frequent stops to watch a variety of species.

An old bridge spanning a stream gave us a vantage point from where we watched Common Kingfisher, Common Nightingale, Zitting Cisticola, Spanish Sparrow and a few finches. By now the temperature had risen by 15 degrees and sat at 24C, this brought the added difficulty of ‘heat-haze’ when viewing open steppe, so our couple of stops to look for Sandgrouse proved to be fruitless. But it was larks-ville, hundreds of Calandra Larks were pairing off in the fields, or singing in the sky, Crested and Thekla sang from rocks, wires and fences and the odd Short-toed Lark scurried away in front of the bus when we drove along tracks.

After eating lunch we drove to the large Embalse at Talavan, along the way we stopped to watch a few soaring raptors and saw a magnificent Golden Eagle with the Vultures, other quick stops produced Short-toed Eagle and Montagu's Harrier. The reservoir was very quiet and a nearby Golden Eagle nest-site looked deserted for now.

Our return journey took us through areas of semi-steppe, rocky landscapes and some cultivated fields at one point we stopped to watch a Montagu's Harrier then we soon realised that there were around 10 of these beautiful, delicate raptors, several were perched on fence posts.

We returned to the finca with enough time to relax and enjoy the peaceful ambiance of the lovely gardens before getting ready for dinner.

### DAY 7 – TUESDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2015

**MONFRAGUE NATIONAL PARK – ARROCAMPO NATURE RESERVE – JARAICEJO (three Bridges)**

This was to be our special day out but it was ruined somewhat by the very windy weather which lasted virtually all day. Monfrague is the Spanish Flagship National Park it is always full of visitors and is one of the best places in Europe to watch raptors especially Vultures.

We arrived around 8:30am and went straight up to the Castillo de Monfrague which stands on a rocky pinnacle from where you can see for miles in all directions. Terrific views were had of Salto del Gitano (Gypsies leap), where two terrific limestone peaks are separated by the Rio Tajo and where hundreds of vultures breed. To the north we could see where the two main rivers converge in the park; the Rios Tajo & Tietar.

The windy conditions were even worse at the top but some birds ventured across the valley, we saw all three breeding species of vultures, Egyptian, Griffon and Black. Many Black Kites drifted over too but not much else, passerine sightings were minimal.



At Salto del Gitano we watched the vultures from the car park, a Peregrine Falcon put in regular appearances as did Black Kite and we had excellent views of Black Storks that had made a nest on a rocky island in the river below us. We also had very close views of Blue Rock Thrush, Serin, Wren and Crag Martin whilst Black Redstart and Rock Bunting showed intermittently.

We drove deeper into the park noting good numbers of Alpine Swifts near the Puente del Cardenal (an ancient bridge that is exposed during low water) and we stopped at Villareal the only village in the park where we used the facilities and had a nice top-up of

caffeine.

A short stop at two more places near the dam produced Cirl Bunting and not much else so we pressed on to the Portilla del Tietar which is another lookout point over another huge pinnacle of limestone. It was

there that we had magnificent views of Spanish Imperial Eagles, they performed so well for us, the male performed his display flight by stooping down and looping back up, fantastic.

After that spectacle we walked through a nearby oak woodland looking for woodpeckers and warblers but again we were disappointed because of the windy conditions. We did see lots of Common Cuckoos, Golden Orioles, Mistle Thrush, Azure-winged Magpies but failed to find Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Orphean Warbler (we did hear one) or Rock Sparrow.

We ate lunch in a nearby venta before driving out of the park to a local nature reserve near Alvarez, called Arroyo Campo. This reserve is an area of lakes, reed-beds and scrub surrounding by open meadows and Dehesa. The water from the largest lake is used to cool the nuclear reactors of the power station at Alvarez. We viewed the lake from the main road which forms a causeway, it was still windy but we managed to see a few species. Purple Swamphen, Cattle, Little and Great Egrets, lots of Grey and Purple Herons, Night Heron, our first Squacco Heron, Great Reed Warbler and a few Whiskered Terns.

To finish off our day's birding we stopped off at the 'three bridges' at Jaraicejo and from where we parked we had great views of three generations of bridges, we walked over the oldest bridge and viewed the river from there. Hoping for a Kingfisher sighting that never materialised but we were not too disappointed as we were entertained by European Bee-eaters, Eurasian Hoopoe, Grey & White Wagtails, Serins, Woodchat Shrike, distant Rock Sparrows and a good variety of raptors.

We arrived back at the finca around 5pm giving us a couple of hours to relax before dinner, one or two of the group went for a walk down a local track and came back with news of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker find! How good was that, one of our most wanted species right on our doorstep, most of group went to see it, fantastic find, well done Eric.

Dinner was a joyous event, plenty of good food, local red wine and lots of merriment, unfortunately we have to pack tomorrow!

#### DAY 8 – WEDNESDAY 22nd APRIL 2015

**TRUJILLO to SANTA DE MAGASCA PLAINS – ALENJO RESERVOIR – TRANSFER TO ANDALUCUA – MOUNTAINS AT MONTEJAQUE NEAR RONDA.**



Well our last full-day had arrived and most of the afternoon will be spent travelling back to Andalucia. It was dull and overcast when we got up, daylight was just creeping into a grey, cloudy sky as we left the finca. Our plan was to try to find the elusive Sandgrouse so we made a second attempt in the fields along the Santa Marta road. After a very long walk we failed to find any, however we did enjoy seeing male Great Bustards displaying and we had excellent close views of Southern (Iberian) Grey Shrike.

After breakfast it was time to pack and load up into the bus, we said goodbye to the excellent staff at finca Santa Marta as we set off for Andalucia.

A brief stop at Vegas Altas to look for Penduline Tit produced Golden Oriole, Common Waxbill, Red Avadavat, Reed &

Great Reed Warbler, Common Cuckoo and Cetti's Warbler but not the Penduline Tit. We next stopped to buy lunch before we turned off the motorway to pay a second visit to the huge reservoir at Alenjo, this time we succeeded in seeing Bonelli's Eagle but the two birds on show were extremely high up. We found all the other species that we saw on the first visit but nothing new and exciting.

So after eating our lunch we set off for 3 hour journey to Malaga. We passed through Sevilla and turned onto the road to Ronda, this very pleasant and scenic road passes through miles of rolling hills with heavily cultivated fields before rising up into the mountains near Ronda.



We turned off the main road near Montejaque to visit a cork oak woodland. This turned out to be uneventful although we did find Short-toed Treecreeper, Mistle Thrush, Eurasian Nuthatch and a few common species.

From there we drove into the 'hidden' valley behind Montejaque village called Llanos de Libar, it was another location for Bonelli's Eagle but we never did see one. We did have good views of Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear, Sardinian Warbler, Red-billed Chough, Black-eared Wheatear and Black Redstart.

Our final birding was done on the last leg of the journey between Ronda and Malaga a large outcrop of limestone stood by the side of the road and there we finally had good views of Bonelli's Eagle, a pair of them performed really well for us, at last the group could tick this species with confidence.

We arrived at our hotel near Malaga airport at 6:30pm and met up again at 7:30pm for dinner. The trip was over for most of the group as they had to be at the airport early next morning. For some there was still time tomorrow for one last birding excursion.

## DAY 9 – THURSDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> APRIL 2015

### **DESEMBOCADURA DE GUADALHORCE**

It was goodbye to some of the group, I dropped Graham, John & Sarah off at the airport at 9am and then I drove Beth into central Malaga leaving her at the train station. Barbara, Eric and Fred were waiting for me at the hotel when I returned at 10am we then went for a short birding excursion to the local nature reserve at the Rio Guadalhorce.

We spent a couple of hours scanning the lagoons, the shoreline and the scrub and building a nice list of species. Our main target bird was the White-headed Duck and of course it wasn't until we looked at the last lagoon that we found it. Several birds were on display including three or four feisty males that were fighting over the females.

Other birds seen included Oystercatcher, Greenshank, Redshank, Kentish Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Avocet, Curlew Sandpiper, Bee-eater, Monk Parakeet, Booted Eagle, Zitting Cisticola, Serin, Goldfinch and Greenfinch.

Alas it was time to go, we drove back to airport at 12 noon where Eric and Fred departed, Barbara stayed with me until I dropped her at Casares with friends of mine, she was staying a few extra nights before going onto to Morocco to finish her long vacation.

Another wonderful trip was over, our total number of species seen was an impressive 176, we missed some species which generally should have been seen but you can't see everything every time!

My thanks go out to the group for being such good company, for their enthusiastic approach to the trip and for finding most of the birds! We had a few good laughs during our journey together through this beautiful, bird-rich country and I am sure everyone went home happy, I really hope to see you all again on future tours.



# SPECIES LIST

SPECIES			DATES											
			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23			
1	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	√		√									
2	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			
3	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	√	√		√	√							
4	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	√	√	√	√	√					√		
5	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	√	√										
6	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	√	√	√	√	√					√		
7	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	√	√	√	√	√							
8	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		√										
9	White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>										√		
10	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			√									
11	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	√			√	H	√	√					
12	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>				H		H						
13	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>				√								
14	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√						
15	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				√		√		√				
16	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			√		√		√	√	√			
17	Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	√	√		√								
18	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	√		√	√	√	√	√					
19	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>								√				
20	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
21	Great Egret	<i>Casmerofius alba</i>	√							√				
22	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√			√		
23	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>			√					√				
24	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			
25	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>					√	√	√					
26	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		√		√								
27	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		√	√	√	√			√				
28	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	√	√	√	√								
29	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			
30	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>					√	√	√					
31	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>						√	√					
32	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			√									
33	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>							√					
34	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila aldaberti</i>								√				
35	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>			√	√	√	√	√	√	√			
36	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>		√		√	√	√	√			√		
37	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>									√			
38	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>						√		√				
39	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			
40	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			

SPECIES			DATES											
			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23			
41	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>			√		√	√		√				
42	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√				
43	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>				√								
44	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	√		√	√	√	√	√			√		
45	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	√		√	√	√	√	√					
46	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subuteo</i>					√							
47	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			√					√				
48	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			√		
49	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			√		
50	Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>				√								
51	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>		√		√								
52	Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>							√					
53	Little Bustard	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>							√					
54	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>											√	
55	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>											√	
56	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√		
57	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>			√	√								
58	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	√		√									
59	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			√								√	
60	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>			√								√	
61	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			√									
62	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			√									
63	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			√									
64	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			√									
65	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	√		√								√	
66	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			√									
67	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	√	√										
68	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	√		√	√	√						√	
69	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	√		√								√	
70	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			√	√							√	
71	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		√		√								
72	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponicus</i>			√									
73	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			√									
74	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			√									
75	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	√											
76	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	√										√	
77	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	√					√		√				
78	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	√		√	√	√						√	
79	Lesser Black-back Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	√		√									
80	Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>			√									
81	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>			√								√	
82	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>	√					√						
83	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>			√									

SPECIES			DATES											
			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23			
84	Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>			√									
85	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>				√								
86	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	√	√	√	√	√							
87	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>					√							
88	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
89	Common Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√					
90	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
91	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	√		√	H								
92	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		√		√	√	H			H			
93	Great-spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandularis</i>						√						
94	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>				√								
95	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>				√		√						
96	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√		
97	Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		√		√	√	√			√			
98	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>					√	√	√	√				
99	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√		
100	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>						√						
101	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
102	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>					√	√			√			
103	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridus</i>		H										
104	Lesser Sp. Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>		H						√				
105	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>		√										
106	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>						√						
107	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
108	Thekla Lark	<i>Galerida theklae</i>						√						
109	Wood Lark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>								√				
110	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>			√	√	√	√						
111	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>					√	√						
112	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		√		√	√							
113	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			√		√	√	√	√	√			
114	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
115	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			
116	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
117	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	√		√		√	√	√			√		
118	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	√	√		√								
119	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>						√						
120	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		√	H	H	H	√	√			H		
121	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>							√	√				
122	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			√	√								
123	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>						√			√			
124	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>						√						
125	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				√				√				
126	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>		√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√		

SPECIES			DATES										
			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23		
127	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>								√	√		
128	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
129	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola salitarius</i>					√			√	√		
130	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>					√						
131	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	√	√	√	H				H	√		
132	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			√								
133	West. Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>								√			
134	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
135	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>				√							
136	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		√	√								
137	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			√	
138	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>		√						H			
139	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	√	H	√	√	H	H			H	
140	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		√		√	H					H	
141	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>				√	√	√	H				
142	Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>				√							
143	West Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>		√							H		
144	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				√							
145	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>		√									
146	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>					√			√			
147	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		√									
148	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		√	√	√			√	√		√	
149	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>		√						√	√		
150	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		√									
151	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		√						√			
152	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>								√	√		
153	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>		√						√	√		
154	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>		√			√	√	√	√			
155	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
156	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
157	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
158	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus grandarius</i>	√	√								√	
159	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√		
160	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>									√		
161	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	√		√		√	√	√	√	√		
162	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
163	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolis oriolis</i>		√	√	√				√			
164	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
165	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>				√	√	√	√	√			
166	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		√			√						
167	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>								√			
168	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringella coelebs</i>		√				√	√	√			
169	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>			√	√	√					√	

SPECIES			DATES											
			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23			
170	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		
171	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	√	√		√	√			√		√		
172	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√		
173	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>								√				
174	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			
175	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>						√		√	√			
<b>EXOTIC / FERAL SPECIES</b>														
176	Monk Parakeet	<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>	√									√		
177	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>		√	√	√	√							
178	Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>						√				√		
179	Greylag Geese	<i>Anser anser</i>			√		√							
180		<b>DAILY TOTAL</b>	62	76	87	81	80	72	76	47	46			
181														
182		<b>RUNNING TOTAL</b>	62	96	126	138	151	162	171	173	176			
BUTTERFLY SPECIES			DATES											
			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23			
1	Large White				√									
2	Small White		√	√	√									
3	Bath White			√										
4	Clouded Yellow			√		√								
5	Brimstone			√										
6	Spanish Festoon					√				√				
7	Small Copper		√	√										
8	Black-eyes Blue							√						
9	Painted Lady		√	√		√				√				
10	Meadow Brown					√	√			√				
11	Spanish Gatekeeper							√	√					
12	Speckled Wood			√						√				
MAMMALS, REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS			DATES											
			15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23			
1	Red Deer			√						√				
2	Egyptian Mongoose					√								
3	Red Fox								√					
4	Hare				√									
5	Rabbit			√	√	√								
6	Moorish Gecko			√										
7	Large Psammondromus			√					√					
8	European Pond Terrapin		√	√					√			√		
9	Mediterranean Chameleon				√									
10	Marsh Frog								√					
11	Common Iberian Wall-Lizard								√		√			
12	European Tree Frog							√						

