

# ***WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS***



## ***TRIP REPORT***

***COTO DOÑANA & EXTREMADURA***

***27<sup>TH</sup> APRIL – 5<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2014***

**Leader: Bob Buckler**

**Co-driver; Paul Fletcher-O'Neill**

**Participants: GEOFFREY & SHEILA BLAMIRE, DEREK PIKE, JEAN BROOKES, TONY USHER, LEN MASON, JEAN ELMSLEY, JUDITH HALMAN, SUSAN GRASSBY, TONY ELLIS, BOB GROOM and DAVID (BUTTERCUP) BUTTERWORTH.**

### **DAY 1 – APRIL 27<sup>TH</sup> 2014**

Malaga Airport – Laguna Dulce – Laguna Fuente de Piedra – El Rocio (Laguna Madra de la Marismas)

I collected the party of 12 members of Knutsford Ornithological Society from Malaga Airport, it was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the club, quite an achievement I must say.



Paul, my birding-pal from Gaucin was with me, he was to drive the second bus. The group all turned up on time and by 12 noon we all set off for Coto Donana after a little delay in procuring the buses.

Our first birding stop was at Laguna Dulce near Campillos, we had seen Griffon Vulture, Spotless Starling, Barn Swallow and a couple of Alpine Swifts along the way. At the Laguna we saw a few thousand birds sitting or feeding on or above the water. The vast majority of birds were Common Coot but we also saw, Black-necked, Great Crested and Little Grebes, Northern Shoveler, Mallard, Gadwall, Common and Red-crested Pochard, Purple Swamphen and the star bird, White Headed Duck.

Birds swarmed over the water, Common Swifts were joined by hundreds of House Martins, Yellow-legged Gulls, Whiskered Terns and a few Collared Pratincoles. Birds seen along the shoreline and in the reeds were; Common Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Great Reed Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, Goldfinches and a couple of Marsh Harriers quartered the distant reeds.

Next we stopped at Laguna Fuente de Piedra, our route took us high over the western shore and a mirador provided fantastic views of the throngs of Greater Flamingos breeding on the Laguna. It was a magnificent sight, I am told that 10,000 pairs breed there, it certainly looked like it.

At the visitors centre we walked around the boardwalk and along the approach-road to view some shallow seasonal pools, they were full of birds. Most waders were Dunlin, Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper all looking fabulous in their summer plumage. They were joined by Common Sandpiper, lots of Ruff, Common Redshank, Pied Avocet and many Black-winged Stilts. We had several views of Gull-billed Tern and Iberian Yellow Wagtails. Time soon ran out and we had to leave this lovely place to continue our journey.

We stopped for a late lunch on the motorway near Sevilla and a little further along the road we encountered our first Black Kites, Common Buzzards and White Storks. After passing through Sevilla unhindered we arrived on the edge of Coto Donana. From the bus we saw Corn Bunting, Turtle Dove, European Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe and lots more Black Kites.

Our final birding was done at the Laguna which sits on the edge of El Rocio in Donana which is a unique little town with sand streets and was to be our home for the next 4 nights. The light was superb and the water was covered in Common Coots, Greater Flamingos, Eurasian Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis, Little Egret and a few species of Ducks. Very few waders were present, we saw Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, Ruff and Common Sandpiper.

From the Laguna we drove round into town to check into our hotel and get ready for dinner, it had been a very long day for most of us and an early night was the order of the day.

## **Day 2 – April 28<sup>th</sup> 2014**

La Rocina – Palacio de Acebron – Acebuche visitor's centre – Laguna Madra de la Marismas

Our first full day-out in Coto Donana was spent taking a leisurely stroll through the nature reserves in the Natural Park surrounding the Donana National Park. But before we set off we took a pre-breakfast early morning walk to the edge of the Laguna Madra de la Marismas which is just a few meters from our hotel.

It was still fairly dark at 7am when we got there but we still managed to see a few Night Herons flying from the reed-beds to their roosts. As the light improved we stood to watch the explosion of egrets, herons and Ibis as they poured out from their night time roost. It was simply stunning at times when hundreds of birds took to the air, we saw Little and Cattle Egrets, Purple, Night and Squacco Herons all in good numbers, but the Glossy Ibis outnumbered them all by far.

After breakfast we drove across to La Rocina, a huge natural park with pine forest, a series of lagunas, some heathland and reed-beds. A number of new species were quickly added to our list with

Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Eurasian Spoonbill, Red-crested and Common Pochard all showing well. In the pine woods we found Long-tailed Tit, Tree Sparrow, Serin and lots of Common Chaffinches, we heard Iberian Chiffchaff a couple of times but they failed to show.

A section of reeds and pools produced great views of Night Heron and Purple Swamphen and we heard a few Savi's Warblers calling but we could not see one in the reeds. The track led us to a wonderful to area of open of heath which held Woodchat Shrike, Stonechat and we got good views of Common Cuckoo, a male chasing a female.

Back at the car park we jumped into the buses and our route took us across another section of the heath where we stopped first, to admire a Southern Grey Shrike, and then a Thekla Lark singing from the top of a bush, whilst watching the lark we saw a male Dartford Warbler flitting about in the scrub below.

From the heath we drove further along the entrance road to a unique piece of deciduous woodland, near the Palacio de Acebron, this huge building, formerly a Royal Hunting Lodge is now a Hunting Museum, hundreds of Spanish visitors were making lots of noise around the area, so we quickly got lost into the trees. The woodland was quiet as it was now around 12 noon so bird activity had greatly reduced. The walk through it was a nice experience we did see a few



species, Short-toed Treecreeper, Great Spotted Woodpecker and lots of Chaffinches. One interesting sighting made by two of the group near the car park was of a Wryneck!

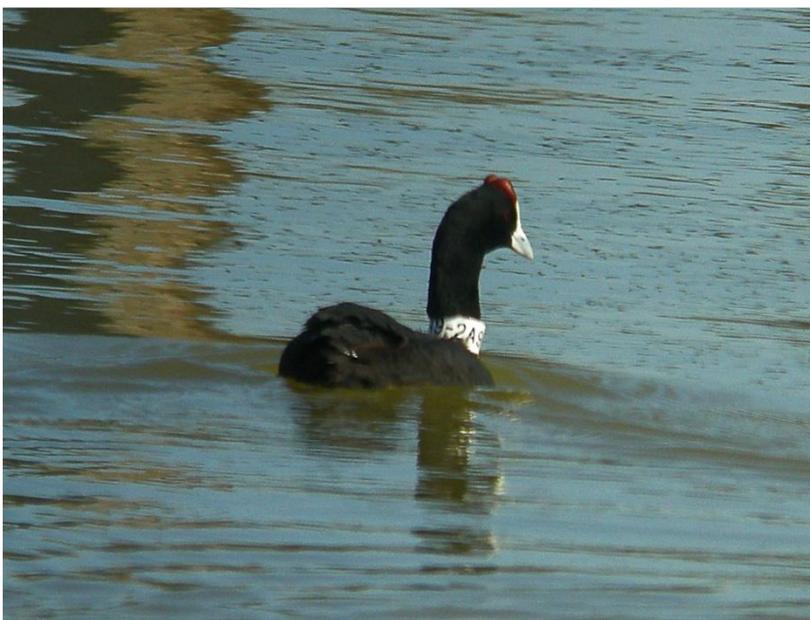
Our afternoon was spent at the wonderful Acebuche Centre, some of the group ate lunch near the car park where very close views were had of Azure-winged Magpie and the rest of us ate in the restaurant. Our walk in the hot afternoon produced very little, a few short glimpses of Golden Oriole and later even shorter views of Common Redstart were the highlights. We did watch several Booted Eagles and Black Kites drifting overhead and of course the nesting White Stork and Red-rumped Swallows provided some nice entertainment.



Finally we drove back to El Rocio after a short visit to the cliffs of Matalascanas, the beach was heaving with sun-bathers and the sea was pretty much devoid of birds, we did a single Sandwich Tern. Our visit to the Laguna of El Rocio was very nice, the light was superb and hundreds of birds were strewn all over it. We added a Northern Pintail to the list but we did enjoy the lovely colourful spectacle of water, sedges, reeds and grass with the contrasting White Village of El Rocio in the background.

After a lovely dinner on the terrace, we made an effort to see Red-necked Nightjar at La Rocina. The evening was perfect, very still with a wonderful sunset. However we had only up to 10pm because the gates to the reserve are closed at that time. By 10pm it wasn't quite dark enough, we did hear 2 or 3 nightjars but none were on the wing by the time we had to leave.

### **DAY 3 – APRIL 29<sup>TH</sup> 2014**



COREDOR DE VERDE – PILAS DEL REY  
WOODS - NORTHERN MARSHES –  
EMBALSE DE DEHESA DE ABAJO – JOSE  
VALVERDE VISITOR'S CENTRE

Today we ventured into the real Donana taking a network of dry dusty tracks to discover just over 90 species with some excellent sightings of both common and hard to find species.

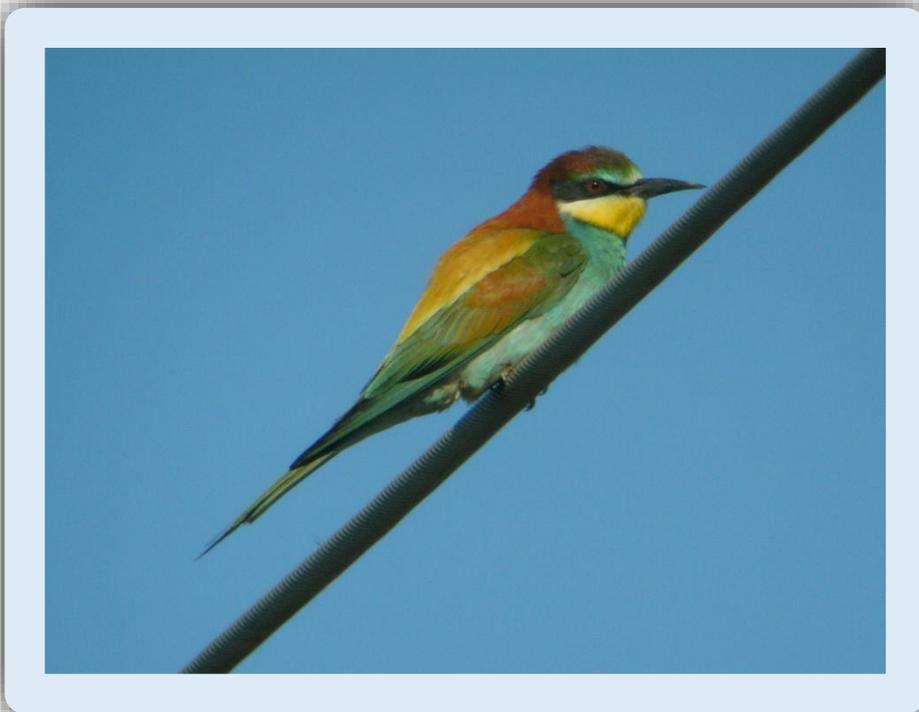
We left the hotel in the dark at 7am carrying our breakfast with us, it was light by the time we reached the Coredor de Verde and birds were appearing on wires and flitting across the track in front of us. We passed a small White Stork colony in Villamonrique where many birds stood silhouetted against the dawn sky and many Azure Winged Magpies were seen leaving a roost in a nearby

pine wood. European Bee-eaters, Woodchat Shrikes and the ubiquitous Corn Bunting sat on wires or the tops of bushes.

Our first walk in the open woodland in the Coredor de Verde produced excellent views of the stunning Black-winged Kite, it hunted over the trees before settling down on an open perch, lovely. We also had great views of Melodious Warbler and Sardinian Warbler both of which were singing from the tops of the bushes. Woodchat Shrikes were very numerous as were Serin and Zitting Cisticola.

We ate our picnic breakfast looking over the small Laguna Quema, it was quite empty with just Great Crested Grebes, Common Coot, Purple Heron and Mallard there. Many Serin were singing and chasing one another around, too many to count. Greenfinches, Goldfinches joined the Serins and Cetti's Warbler along with numerous Common Nightingales added to the bird song.

Our path led us through open fields where Yellow Wagtails sang and Common Quail called from the grasses, Buzzards sat perched in dead trees whilst Black Kites used the pylons, the occasional Marsh Harrier was seen in the distance. We made a quick visit to the square-shaped eucalyptus wood called Dehesa de Pilas where thousands of Spanish Sparrows breed, they made such a din compared to the lovely chirrup of the European Bee-eater, there must have been 100 Bee-eaters in the area and over a 1000 Sparrows!



A recently ploughed field stretched away behind us, it climbed over a gentle rise and on the rise we found 4 Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and a single Stone Curlew, how nice was that?

At the Embalse (reservoir) at Dehesa de Abajo there were hundreds of birds, most of them appeared as dots in the scope because they favoured the far bank as usual. But we did see good numbers of Red-crested Pochard, Common Pochard, Gadwall and a few Shoveler in the water nearby, hundreds of Common Coot and Great Crested Grebes were dotted all over the water. The reeds and tamarisk along the shoreline were alive with the sound of Reed and Great Reed Warblers, many Night Herons crouched in the shadows trying to get some sleep despite the din!

At the far end of the reservoir we stopped for a second look and found our target species the Red-knobbed Coot, we saw three of them, two released birds wearing white collars and one without. A Little Bittern was very showy there and Purple Swamphen came close to us too.

After a small interlude during which we grabbed a quick coffee and enjoyed tostada in a local venta, we set off for the Valverde centre hoping to see a good number of new species for our list. We drove the dirt tracks alongside deep ditches and marshes where we saw huge numbers of herons, egrets, Spoonbills and ibis. One small pool held 2 Great Egrets, 9 Purple Herons, 23 Glossy Ibis, 3 Squacco Herons, many Night Herons sat in the bushes and Little Egret and Grey Herons sat on the fringes.

At Casa Bombas, the pumping station, we saw Common Kestrel, Short-toed Eagle, Montagu's Harrier and our first Linnets. A couple of dozen White Storks took to an early thermal as they circled above us.

The final 9 kilometres to the Valverde Centre was quite uneventful we couldn't find a lark, the heat haze was bad and the temperature quite high, but there was a breeze. However one piece of excitement happened when we stopped to watch a second Montagu's Harrier, a Black Kite was mobbing an eagle higher up and when we scoped the bird it

was quickly identified as an Imperial Eagle, the kite looked tiny beside it, what a super find. A small colony of Lesser Kestrels were seen nearby too.

Near the centre we stopped to look over a large seasonal pool where we added Black-headed Gull, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns to the list, but generally the number of birds was low. The track that led back to El Rocio was more productive, we drove slowly making many short stops to look at perched birds or raptors in the sky, the innumerable Black Kites were joined by the occasional Booted Eagle and we saw a party Griffon Vultures circling on high. However it was the perched birds that provided the entertainment, we saw dozens of Yellow Wagtails and Corn Buntings and lots of Zitting Cisticola, these were joined on the list by a single Northern Wheatear, a couple of Whinchat, two or three Short-toed Lark and a single Lesser Short-toed Lark.

Our visit to the Valverde centre was very enjoyable as we watched the huge colony of breeding egrets, ibis and herons, the noise was unbelievable, we also saw a couple of Little Bittern and many ducks on the water.

On the homeward journey we found a few waders on the marsh, Greenshank, Redshank, Green, Common and Wood Sandpipers were found. A series of pylons provided nice perches for a few Short-toed Eagles and we had great views of a Calendar Lark in the grass near to the track.

Well our journey back to the hotel took about an hour, it had been a long day, but the time was quickly forgotten as we enjoyed a nice cold beer with our dinner sitting out in the warm evening air on the terrace.

#### **DAY 4 – APRIL 30<sup>TH</sup> 2014**

#### **MATALASCANAS CLIFFS – LAGUNA PRIMERA DE LOS PALOS – MARISMAS DE O'DIEL – LAGUNA DE PORTIL – NIEBLA CASTLE**

It was another event filled day with excellent weather throughout, wall to wall sunshine with a nice breeze at the coast and lots of birds to see.

We set off after breakfast at 9am and drove the short distance down to the coast at Matalascanas for a quick sea-watch to start the day off. We had a cool breeze at our backs as we scanned the sea hoping for a passage of anything avian. All we got was a small number of Sandwich Terns and a Whimbrel which fed nervously on the beach, as we returned to the buses some of group saw a Peregrine Falcon and we all noted Pallid Swifts near the car park.

Our next birding stop was made just outside Huelva at the Laguna Primera de los Palos, where we watched Whiskered Terns, a selection of wildfowl, a couple of Purple Swamphen and a Squacco Heron.

At the Marismas de O'Diel we noted a couple of Ruddy Turnstones as we crossed the river O'Diel and our first stop was made at the salt pans where we scanned the huge area for waders and gulls. A few Yellow-legged Gulls sat on a bank nearby and with them we found Audouin's Gull and a couple of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, a Common Shelduck also sat not too far away. A large flock of waders consisted of Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper and a couple of Little Stint, all of these birds were sporting their summer clothing and looked superb. One good find was an Osprey, this bird was eating a large fish and was most probably one of the nesting pair of the O'Diel. These birds rarely breed in Andaulica but have bred here since 2012 on a purpose-built platform.

The Laguna de Calatillo was very quiet with no sign of the breeding Little Bittern. Our next stop was at the 'old' salt pans where we spent a nice time watching more wading birds. We added more Whimbrel to our list, as well as Common Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Redshank, Greenshank and a few Red Knot which were looking very red. From our view point out on the marsh we had views of our first Montagu's Harrier, eventually we all had great views of at least 3 different birds, a male Marsh Harrier was also nice to see.



We continued down the road towards the lighthouse, as we progressed the strip of land that we were travelling along began to narrow, we then had the Atlantic Ocean on our right and the river O'Diel on our left. We crossed over a bridge and saw Eurasian Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwits and Greenshank below us.

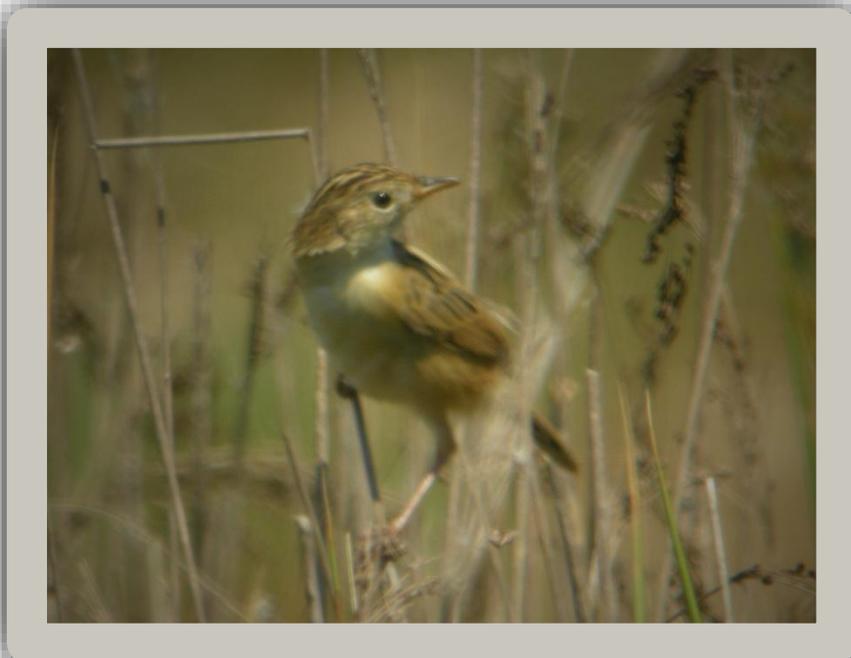
Then our bird of the day was seen! Another group of birders was ahead of us and they began to wave as we approached indicating for us to join them, we soon realised the reason for their

excitement when we saw a ROCK THRUSH sitting on top of a bush, what superb looking bird, we spent 30 minutes watching it and at one stage it flew near to us and sat on top of a fence, its colours were sublime, how lucky we were seeing this hard-to-find migrant. Other birds seen in the narrow strip of scrubland included Woodchat Shrike, Crested Lark, Stonechat and Linnets.

More marshes and areas of mud provided more waders, large groups of Whimbrel were flying around or feeding with more Dunlin, Curlew Sandpipers, Sanderling, Little Stint, we also found Kentish Plover and lots more Grey Plover. Good numbers of Little Terns were nice to see and the odd Sandwich Tern fished out over the river. Finally we stopped near the lighthouse where the land mass was now less than 100 meters wide. On a large flat area we watched over 120 Collared Pratincoles hawk insects above us, what a fantastic sight, distant raptor sightings included Montagu's Harrier, Booted Eagle and a Peregrine Falcon caused panic in the Pratincole flock.

By now lunchtime was pending so we drove back towards the visitor's centre and along the way we stopped to look

for a warbler that dashed into a bush, this led to a twenty minutes sortie as we discovered a Dartford Warbler and several Flycatchers, we saw three Pied and a couple of Spotted Flycatchers.



For our afternoon birding we began at the large Laguna at El Portil, it was covered in birds most of which were Common Coot there must have been a couple of thousands of them. We also noted good numbers of both Common and Red crested Pochard as well as Northern Shoveler, Mallard and Gadwall. On the shoreline of the Laguna we saw Little Ringed, Common Ringed and Kentish Plover, Black-winged Stilts and Common Sandpipers. A nice

observation was a European Chameleon found sitting in the broom plants next to the viewing platform.

Lastly we stopped at Niebla Castle to watch the Lesser Kestrels, they were fantastic in the late afternoon sunlight and gave us quite a show as we sat drinking coffee and cold drinks adjacent to the castle walls.

We got back to the hotel at 5:30pm giving us enough time to pack and to relax before sitting down to our last dinner, I must say that the food at Hostal Cristina is excellent and the service superb.

## DAY 5 – MAY 1<sup>ST</sup> 2014



TRANSFER DAY – COTO DONANA TO EXTREMADURA WITH STOPS AT; EMBALSE ALENTE – VEGAS ALTAS – RIO PIZZAROSA AND LLANOS DE ZORITA

We ate a leisurely breakfast at 8am and set off at 9am for the 400km journey to Finca Santa Marta which is situated some 14km south of Trujillo in Extremadura. I set my passengers a target of 25 'journey birds' which they achieved easily reaching a total of 32, a new record for this trip.

At Embalse Alente we spent half an hour looking for Bonelli's Eagle which breeds there but unfortunately failed to turn up. We had great views of Alpine Swift as many of them wheeled around the dam area with Barn Swallows and Red-rumped Swallows. On the rocky pinnacles at the side of the water we saw Rock Bunting, Blue Rock Thrush, Black Wheatear and Crag Martin. Several Gull-billed Terns 'hunted' over the water and in the distance we saw Black Kite, Short-toed Eagle and lots of Griffon Vultures.

At our next stop we ate our picnic lunch whilst sitting on a bridge over a small stream near to the village of Vegas Altas, lots of White Storks were nesting nearby and in the reeds and hedgerows we saw Great Reed Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, Common Nightingale and a couple of Golden Orioles. A few species were seen by single observers, Common Kingfisher, Little Bittern and Common Waxbill were seen by just a few of the group. A large flock of Collared Pratincoles was seen in the distance flying over the rice fields.

As we drove on we found several Eurasian Hoopoe and our first Rollers were seen attending nest boxes put up on telegraph poles, these beautiful birds caused quite a stir, especially the first ones. Many raptors began to appear over the hills or on the thermals we added Marsh and Montagu's Harriers to our list and also several Common Buzzards.

We spent a short time at the rice fields just north of Madrigalejo where the highlight was the finding of several European Tree Frogs!! However we did find a small colony of Red Avadavats (escaped caged birds now breeding freely in the area), along with more Common Waxbills, several pairs of Common Stonechat, Iberian (Southern) Grey Shrike, Tree Sparrows and not much else.

The Rio Pizarrosa gave us the opportunity to look for Penduline Tit, none appeared but we enjoyed great views of Common Cuckoo, Long-tailed Tit, lots of European Bee-eaters and we enjoyed the afternoon sunshine.

Finally we spent some time at Llanos de Zorita, an area of flat, open grassland, we were hoping to see any of the Bustards, I couldn't believe the height of the grass which had grown a foot since my last visit less than two weeks ago. No Bustards appeared but we found Raven on a rock and lots of Calandra Larks, as we were getting back into the bus a shout went up as two GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOOS flew right over us, they landed about 100 meters away and settled in a bush, from a reasonable distance we all got superb views of these enigmatic birds.

We were now not too far from our destination so another 15 minutes on the road found us at Finca Santa Marta, we arrived at 5:30pm.

I checked the Hoopoe nest that we had found during my last visit only to find two healthy chicks and one dead one, they were almost ready to fledge so we quickly retreated and left them well alone.

Dinner was noisy and full of laughter, the local wine went down well at dinner!

#### **DAY 6 – MAY 2<sup>ND</sup> 2014**

**BELEN PLAINS – LLANOS DE SANTA MARTA – LLANOS DE CASARES – RIO ALMONTE – EMBALSE DE TALAVAN – OAK WOODS NEAR TORREJON EL RUBIO**

The Belen Plains are the best and nearest place to watch both species of Bustards performing their courtship display and today they did not disappoint. We arrived just as the sun came up and despite large scale road works we navigated our way to a high point along the track to view the huge grass plains. We immediately found an area where 5 male Great Bustards were performing and as time went by about 15 females appeared. It seemed that the females were inspecting each of the males to assess the quality of the display and eventually hung



around one particular male, but we never saw any attempt at mating.

In the meantime many Little Bustards were performing their own routines, males were calling from the grass, the sound is exactly like blowing a 'raspberry', when two males got too close to one another they would fly up and chase each other around. We had a very enjoyable hour seeing all this as well as many Larks, Hoopoe, storks and kites.

We had to return to the Finca to collect those that decided on a late breakfast before setting off for the day. After shopping in Trujillo for lunch supplies we arrived at the Rio Santa Marta just west of the town at about 10:30am. The sun was well up and the air was very warm, we saw a few species at the river such as, Common Kingfisher, Common Sandpiper, Melodious Warbler, Spanish Sparrow and both Cetti's Warbler and Common Nightingale shouted from the bushes without showing.

Our visit to the grass plains just outside the village was disappointing as far as seeing Sandgrouse was concerned, none were seen or heard, heat haze spoilt our viewing but we saw more of both Bustard species and we found a pair of Stone Curlew. We ate our picnic lunch at 12 sitting under oak trees close by.

We spent an hour or so crossing the Llanos de Casares stopping to look at European Rollers sitting on wires, poles and nest boxes provided for them. Common and Lesser Kestrels together with Eurasian Jackdaws and Spotless Starlings

also use the nest boxes. At the beginning of the Casares track we stopped to watch six Montagu's Harriers chasing one another around, pairing off we assumed.

The bridge over the Rio Almonte provided nesting sites for lots of hirundines and Swifts, especially Alpine Swifts and it is a fantastic place to view this species at eye-level together with Crag Martins, House Martins, Barn Swallow and Red-rumped Swallows, we had a great time watching from the shade of the bridge. A short walk to view the craggy slopes of the river produced Black Wheatear and several butterflies.

The Embalse at Talavan was also a little disappointing, we

were hoping to see the Golden Eagle at the nest site but the nest seemed deserted with no sign of any chicks. Both Great Reed and Reed Warblers were singing from the rushes and many White Storks sat on their nests most of which had chicks on show.

Lastly we visited an area of oak woodland to try to find a few woodland species, it was now 3pm and it was very hot so progress was slow and bird life very quiet, we saw a couple of Woodchat Shrikes, some Thekla Larks and Chaffinches but not much else. Half of the group decided to call it a day so one minibus set off for an early finish whilst six of us remained for another hour. We didn't see much more, an Egyptian Vulture was nice and a Hawfinch appeared briefly as we pulled away but it was generally very quiet.

On the way back to the Finca we saw a Red Kite, our first of the trip! Later, just after dinner we walked the grounds of the Finca to look for nightjars and owls in the twilight. The weather conditions were perfect but we only heard a couple of Scop's Owls and no nightjars called or showed so we went off to bed.

## **DAY 7 – MAY 3<sup>RD</sup> 2014**

MONFRAGUE NATIONAL PARK



We spent a complete day in this superb area, the park has such a lot to offer so we got up early in order to maximise our visit. After breakfast we left around 7am and drove straight to Castillo de Monfrague which sits on a limestone pinnacle and commands a terrific panoramic view of the whole park.

It was a little chilly at first but it soon warmed up. We parked the buses near the base of the castle and scanned the rock face before we climbed up. A few Griffon Vultures sat /lazily on the ledges whilst busy Crag Martins and Red-rumped Swallows dashed about above us. A Blue Rock Thrush sang from a wire and occasionally performed its flight display, we also saw a couple of Rock Buntings, a Serin and House Martins were very numerous.



As we climbed up to the castle huge Griffon Vultures would drift majestically passed us at eye level or below us joined by a few Black Kites, we also had good views of Rock Bunting and short glimpses of Black Redstart.



At the top a breeze was blowing from the east so we concentrated our efforts looking westward. A Golden Eagle was found very high and quite far off, this bird stayed in the sky for about 20 minutes so everyone got to see it, we also saw a couple of Egyptian Vultures and a few Black Vultures. The nearest pinnacle which could be seen from our vantage point at the castle is called Pena Falcon and it was covered by Griffon Vultures all waiting for the air to warm up.

Our next stop was at the base of Pena Falcon, we joined a good number of tourists and other birdwatchers to enjoy the spectacle of the vultures as they took to the air it was a truly

memorable sight.

We also had excellent view of Blue Rock Thrush, Black Stork and a pair of Peregrines hassled the vultures if they ventured too close to their nest site.

From there we drove deeper into the park and made several stops to watch other species as and when we found them. Our lunch stop was another area which overlooked a large limestone rock face, we found Black-eared Wheatear there. But it was at the Portillo del Tiete that our best sighting was made, we knew that a pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles were breeding and that the nest could be viewed from the roadside, we quickly found it. A fluffy chick dressed in white down sat on the nest, then after about 30 minutes the male adult bird was seen very high up, as it drifted down towards the nest it harassed a few Griffon Vultures before perching on a dead branch near the nest. It was a magnificent bird and sat looking regal and all-powerful.

Another great sighting was made of an Otter which fished in the River Tietar below the rock face, we also saw more Rock Buntings, a Subalpine Warbler but failed to see any of the Eagle Owls that breed on the cliff.

Our final two hours of birding was done in the Dehesa found a few hundred meters from the Portilla del Tietar. It was still very hot but the shade of the trees helped. We found several interesting species and was surprised by the number

of Golden Orioles found there. Woodchat Shrikes were common but we found rarer birds in the form of Orphean Warbler and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, we had fleeting views of both species but we heard them well.

A pair of Hawfinches showed well and a Common Cuckoo sat out for us and we nearly trod on a Woodlark as it sat incubating four eggs on a nest. We made a final attempt to see the owls on the way back through the park without success but we did see our first Blackcap and two more Subalpine Warblers.

We were back at the Finca at 6pm with enough time enjoy a relaxing cold drink before dinner at 8pm.

## **DAY 8 – MAY 4<sup>TH</sup> 2014**

LLANOS DE SANTA MARTA – JARAICEJO (THREE BRIDGES AND HEATH) – PORTILLA DE TIETAR AND DEHESA IN MONFRAGUE

The final birding day had arrived and oh so quickly too! The weather was the same as all week, clear sky all day, but today it got even warmer. We decided to make a pre-breakfast trip back to the grassy plains of Santa Marta to try to see Sandgrouse as we had only seen Pintail Sandgrouse from a distance and Black-bellied not at all. Well the situation did not improve as far as Sandgrouse sightings were concerned, we only saw two Pintails and they were even further than before. However it was a lovely morning with the most beautiful sunrise and we saw plenty of other species which included; both of the Bustards, we had close views of the Great Spotted Cuckoo, Black Vultures sitting on the ground, Montagu's Harrier and lots of Larks including Short-toed Larks.

After a leisurely breakfast we went out for the day with intention of getting back early because we were going into Trujillo for dinner. We intended to visit Arrocampo nature reserve near Almaraz. Before we got there we made several stops, we took the old road to Madrid which was deserted, we hardly saw a car so we could stop wherever we wanted to.

A group of vultures circled over the hillside, they were all Griffon Vultures but as we watched them we found Woodchat Shrike and Cirl Bunting, a Jay flew in front of the leading bus a little later.

Our stop at the picturesque valley near Jaraicejo was superb, the scenery is so nice there and despite the modern bridge carrying motorway traffic it still has a tranquil ambiance. We found Bee-eaters, White Wagtails, Little Ringed Plovers, Green Sandpiper and lots of common finches.

After climbing up through the village of Jaraicejo we turned onto the heath to look for warblers, with some success. Several Dartford Warblers were singing from the top of bushes and eventually we found our main target bird the Spectacled Warbler, this little gem showed very well and even performed its flight display several times.

After stopping for a quick coffee and to collect supplies for lunch we arrived at the pools of Arrocampo nature reserve, the main lake is bisected by a road and it was from there that we viewed the eastern section of the water. An extensive reed-bed provides habitat for acrocephalus warblers, including Savi's Warblers. It took us some time to locate one, we could hear them but it was hard to see them, finally one sat up long enough for all of us to see it in the 'scope.

Other species on show were Purple Heron (a nest with two chicks), Purple Swamphen also with chicks, Reed Warbler, Cetti's Warbler and we heard Great Reed Warbler but never found one and a Kingfisher sat out in the reeds for all of us to see well. Whilst eating lunch at the visitor's centre we saw our first Sand Martins of the trip as they perched above us on telephone wires.

The afternoon was spent travelling through the lanes to the north/western entrance to Monfrague national park, we stopped at the entrance for a quick ice-cream and/or a cold drink. Then we took our second walk through the open woodland adjacent to the river Tietar, this unique habitat supports a huge range of species and even in the heat of mid-afternoon birds were singing. We listed many of the birds seen previously but had better views of Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Orphean Warbler, Common Cuckoo, Golden Oriole, Woodlark and a Mistle Thrush was the first of the tour.

At the Portillo del Tieter we found an Eagle Owl sitting deep in the shadows of a cave, it was an adult bird and everyone got to see it, the chick of the Spanish Imperial Eagle was fine still sitting on the nest and also we saw Blackcap, Subalpine Warbler, Black Redstart and Blue Rock Thrush.

Our evening was spent in Trujillo, after driving into town we walked up to the Plaza Mayor which looked as if a bomb had hit it because a Cheese Fair had been on with hundreds of Trade Stand squeezed into the square, most stands were in the process of being taken down, it was a mess and ruined our enjoyment of this beautiful town plaza. We ate dinner in the lower part of town before driving back to the finca for a night cap.

The trip was virtually over, we have some time tomorrow to walk the grounds but I do not anticipate any new sightings for the trip list which stands at 168 seen, plus 8 more heard, plus two ( Sparrowhawk and Mistle Thrush) seen by the leader only.

It was a superb list of species with some excellent memorable sightings, we talked at dinner about our best birds and favourite and although many were mentioned we could not agree on a single species as being the best, and rightly so because they were all wonderful!

**DAY 9 – MAY TH 2014**

**FINCA SANTA MARTA GROUNDS – TRANSFER TO MADRID**



We had some time to spare before we had to leave for the airport so after breakfast we took a short walk towards Santa Clemente the nearest village to the Finca.6

It was fairly quiet but we did see Hoopoe, Spotless Starlings and lots of Serins. A pool of water attracted both Barn and Red-rumped Swallows, they were collecting mud for nest building. A pair of Cirl Buntings were bathing in the same pool and were seen on the way back.

At 12 noon we set off for Madrid, the journey was uneventful everyone was in a reflective mood and the bus was quite quiet. We arrived at 2:30pm and said our goodbyes, it had been a fantastic trip with a lot of hilarity and leg-pulling, oh and the bird watching was excellent too!

**LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THIS TRIP**

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.	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</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.	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>
11.	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i> <b>(H)</b>
12.	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
13.	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
14.	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
15.	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>
16.	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
17.	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
18.	Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
19.	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
20.	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
21.	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
22.	Great Egret	<i>Casmerofius alba</i>
23.	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
24.	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
25.	White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
26.	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
27.	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
28.	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
29.	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>
30.	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>
31.	Black Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>
32.	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
33.	Osprey	<i>Pension haliaetus</i>
34.	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
35.	Spanish Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila aldaberti</i>
36.	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
37.	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>
38.	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>
39.	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
40.	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
41.	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
42.	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
43.	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Acciptor nisus</i> <b>(LO)</b>
44.	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
45.	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
46.	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</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.	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
55.	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>

56.	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</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.	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
63.	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
64.	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
65.	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
66.	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
67.	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
68.	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
69.	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
70.	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
71.	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
72.	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
73.	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponicus</i>
74.	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
75.	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
76.	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
77.	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
78.	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>
79.	Audouin's Gull	<i>Larus audouinii</i>
80.	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
81.	Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
82.	Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
83.	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>
84.	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>
85.	Pin-tailed Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>
86.	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
87.	Common Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
88.	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
89.	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
90.	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
91.	Great-spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandularis</i>
92.	Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>
93.	Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus Scops.</i> (H)
94.	Red-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruficollis</i> (H)
95.	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
96.	Pallid Swift	<i>Apes pallidus</i>
97.	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>
98.	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
99.	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
100.	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
101.	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>

102.	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridus</i>	<b>(H)</b>
103.	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major</i>	
104.	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus minor</i>	
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.	Lesser Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella rufescens</i>	
112.	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocoryphra calandra</i>	
113.	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	
114.	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	
115.	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
116.	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	
117.	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	
118.	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	
119.	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	
120.	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	
121.	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	
122.	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	
123.	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	
124.	Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	
125.	Black Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe leucura</i>	
126.	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	
127.	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	
128.	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	<b>(LO)</b>
129.	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	
130.	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola salitarius</i>	
131.	Common Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	
132.	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	<b>(H)</b>
133.	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	
134.	West Orphean Warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>	
135.	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>	
136.	Spectacled Warbler	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>	
137.	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	
138.	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	
139.	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	
140.	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	
141.	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	
142.	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	
143.	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	
144.	Iberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus ibericus</i>	<b>(H)</b>
145.	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	<b>(H)</b>
146.	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	
147.	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula striata</i>	

148.	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
149.	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
150.	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>
151.	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus.....(H)</i>
152.	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
153.	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
154.	Short-toed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia brachydactyla</i>
155.	Iberian Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>
156.	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>
157.	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>
158.	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
159.	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus grandarius</i>
160.	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
161.	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
162.	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>
163.	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolis orioles</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>
170.	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
171.	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
172.	European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>
173.	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
174.	Cirl Bunting	<i>Emberiza cirlus</i>
175.	Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>
176.	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
177.	<b>Common Waxbill</b>	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>
178.	<b>Red Avadavat</b>	<i>Amandava amandava</i>

**MAMMALS/REPTILES/AMPHIBEANS**

	Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>
	Iberian Hare	<i>Lepus granatensis</i>
	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
	Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>
	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
	Moorish Gecko	<i>Tarentola mauritanica</i>
	Large Paammodromus	<i>Psammmodromus algirus</i>
	Iberian Wall Lizard	<i>Podarcis hispanica</i>
	Common Tree Frog	<i>Hyla arborea</i>
	Mediterranean Chameleon	<i>Chamaeleo chamaeleon</i>
	Marsh Frog	<i>Rana ridibunda</i>
	Red-eared Terrapin	<i>Trachemys scripta</i>
	Ladder Snake	<i>Elaphe scalaris</i>
