

WINGSPAN BIRD TOURS

COTO DONANA AND EXTREMADURA

TRIP REPORT

SEPTEMBER 20TH - 27TH 2007

Robin + Meg Griffiths + Friends

Tour leader Rebecca Butler (Donana Bird Tours)

Bird Tour Guide Bob Buckler (Wingspan Bird Tours) in lieu of the late John Butler of Donana Tours

DAY 1 - THURS 20TH SEPTEMBER

AIRPORT PICK-UP – PARTY OF 9 - NO TIME FOR BIRDING DUE TO LATE FLIGHT TIME

The group arrived on time and we quickly loaded up the buses and set off on the two hour journey to El Rocio in the Coto Donana. We dropped our belongings into our rooms at the Hotel Toruno and ate dinner at 10pm amidst growling thunder and spectacular lightening with bouts of torrential rain.

DAY 2 - FRIDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER - Dry sunny warm, cloudy later

EL ROCIO –LAGUNA MADRE DE LA MARISMA 9-10:30

Large pools of rain water littered the sandy roads of El Rocio and the main laguna was bursting at the seams, an unusual site for September. However the excessive water did not deter the birds and the laguna was teeming with life. After our 8 am breakfast of ham, cheese, juice and coffee we assembled at 9am for a walk to the viewing platform.

Large numbers of Greater Flamingo, Glossy Ibis, Shoveler, Mallard, Common Coot and Black-winged Stilt could be seen alongside Black-tailed Godwit, Little Grebe, Whiskered Tern, Pochard, Gadwall and a few Teal.

From the viewing platform we saw a couple of distant Spotted Redshank, we had good views of Cetti's and Great Reed Warbler and an elusive Little Owl was seen by a few in a nearby gum tree. A Garden Warbler kept us waiting for a while as it flitted in a small Stone Pine eventually revealing its identity by showing itself.

We made a couple of other stops to view the laguna from different aspects adding Hawfinch, Crested Lark, Common Sandpiper and a distant Squacco Heron to our tally.

LOTS OF WATER AND BIRDS 300 GT FLAMINGOES, 100+ GLOSSY IBIS, 200+ SHOVELER, ALSO BLACKWITS, BLK WINGED STILTS, SHORT-TOED EAGLE, GADWALL, TEAL, MALLARD, LITTLE GREBE 40+, WIGEON, COOT, MOORHEN, CATTLE EGRET, LITLE EGRET, GREY HERON, SQUACCO HERON, WHITE STORK, SPOTTED REDSHANK, COMMON SANDPIPER,

PASSERINES - SPOTLESS STARLING, GT REED WARBLER, GARDEN WARBLER, CETTI'S WARBLER, LITTLE OWL, GOLDFINCH, HAWFINCH, CRESTED LARK, HOUSE SPARROW.

LA ROCINA- ACEBRON PALACIO AND WOODLANDS 10:45 – 1PM

Next we stopped in at La Rocina but as we arrived we noticed a coach full of very noisy Spanish ladies were just disembarking, so we quickly decided to move onto the Palacio de Acebron, to explore the wonderful riparian woodland found there. From the car park we took the main path towards the palacio and found a number of Common Redstarts, Pied Flycatchers, Long-tailed Tits, Blue and Great Tits. From the viewing platform that overlooks the laguna we added Spotted Flycatcher. The circular forest walk was quite quiet but we all enjoyed the cork oaks and saw Short-toed Treecreeper and more Spotted Flycatchers. As we returned to La Rocina we noted Stonechat and Southern Grey shrike on the heathland.

GRIFFON VULTURE, BOOTED EAGLE, PIED FLYCATCHER, SPOTTED FLYCATCHER, COMMON REDSTART, BLUE TIT, GT TIT, LONG TAILED TIT, SH. TOED TREECREEPER, MELODIOUS WARBLER, HOUSE MARTIN, BARN SWALLOW, RED RUMPED SWALLOW, CHAFFINCH, BOOTED EAGLE, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, SOUTHERN GREY SHRIKE, STONECHAT

ACEBUCHE VISITORS CENTRE - 1:15 – 2:30PM

We made it to the visitors car park at Acebuche for lunch, the Azure-winged Magpies provided the lunchtime entertainment. After lunch a scout was sent to the first hide to check on the water level and found that it was very, very low and so we decided to leave after our visit to the shop.

AZURE WINGED MAGPIE

LOS GUAYULES 2:45 – 5PM

The next area we explored was an unscheduled stop at Los Guayules an area of low lying grass meadow and open heath. The area looked promising and we quickly found Yellow Wagtails and Tawny Pipits in good numbers. Whinchats and Northern Wheatears were everywhere as proved to be the case throughout the rest of the tour. A number of Red Kites delighted the group with their beautiful plumage and delicate flight manoeuvres, as did a pale morph Booted Eagle. Further along the track we added Red-legged Partridge, another Common Redstart and a distant Southern Grey Shrike.

WHINCHAT, TAWNY PIPIT, YELLOW WAGTAIL, RAVEN, RED LEGGED PARTRIDGE, COMMON REDSTART, STONECHAT, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, RED KITE, BOOTED EAGLE, SOUTHERN GREY SHRIKE.

LA ROCINA 5PM – 6PM

We eventually arrived at La Rocina at 5pm leaving little time to explore this wonderful reserve with its 3.2 kilometer-long boardwalk. However the water level of the laguna was extremely low and we decided to watch from the first hide only. A couple of Hares were seen just a few meters from the hide and little else was found except for Grey Heron, Stonechats, Whinchats and a Willow Warbler. As we made our way back to the car park we had a brief encounter with a Wood Warbler.

WHINCHAT, GREY HERON, WILLOW WARBLER, WOOD WARBLER, BOOTED EAGLE, GRANADA HARE (2).

EL ROICIO LAGUNA 6PM- 6:25PM

One last look at the laguna at El Rocio, with the bright sunlight behind us, was made on the way home. The “white” town of El Rocio, the blue water of the laguna and the bright green marshes made a colourful sight. We added Avocet, Pintail and Red-crested Pochard to our growing list, all distant sightings.

AVOCET, RED CRESTED POCHARD, PINTAIL.

DAY 3 - SATURDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER – thick morning mist, dry sunny warm, breezy later

LAGUNA PRIMERA DEL LA PALOS 9:30 – 10:30 am

Today we headed west out of Donana towards Huelva stopping off at the Laguna Primera de los Palos the mist thinned as we neared the coast and completely dissipated by the time we reached Huelva. Primera de los Palos is one of my favourite lagunas as it always has water and good bird life. It did not disappoint us, we quickly notched up over 20 species, most notable were Purple Swamphen, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Kingfisher and Pintail.

PURPLE SWAMPHEN, YELLOW LEGGED GULL, SQUACCO HERON, KINGFISHER, COMMON POCHARD, SHOVELER, GADWALL, TEAL, WIGEON, PINTAIL, MALLARD, COOT, MOORHEN, LITTLE GREBE, BLACKCAP, WILLOW WARBLER, ZITTING CISTICOLA, PURPLE HERON, GREY HERON, CORMORANT, WHINCHAT, LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL,

MARISMA DE O’DIEL (high tide) 10:45 – 2:30

SALT PANS

As we drove onto the reserve of the Marisma de O’diel we stopped at the salt pans to admire good numbers of Kentish Plover, Curlew Sandpiper and Sanderling.

DUNLIN, SANDERLING, KENTISH PLOVER, RINGED PLOVER, CURLEW SANDPIPER, BLACK HEADED GULL, YELLOW LEGGED GULL, LITTLE STINT,

CALATILLO VISITOR CENTRE

The large laguna at the visitor centre at Calatillo proved very exciting as three Red-knobbed Coots showed very well. A Bar-tailed Godwit attempted to land and join Common Snipe, Common Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilts and Ringed Plover.

RED KNOBBED COOT (3), KINGFISHER, CURLEW SANDPIPER, COMMON SANDPIPER, SNIPE, BLK WINGED STILT, BAR TAILED GODWIT, GT FLAMINGO, SHOVELER, POCHARD, MALLARD, ZITTING CISTICOLA, RUDDY TURNSTONE, (from the bus) COMMON SWIFT, COLLARED DOVE, FERAL PIGEON, TURTLE DOVE.

CABEZA ALTO (LUNCH 12:45 – 1:30)

We drove further into the reserve and stopped at Cabeza Alto where a large sea water inlet held Whimbrel, Spoonbill, Greenshank and numerous Yellow-legged Gulls. We stopped to have lunch here and during our stay we added Skylark, Sardinian Warbler, Northern Wheatear, Whinchat, Caspian Tern and Zitting Cisticola to the day list.

WHIMBREL, GREY HERON, SPOONBILL, REDSHANK, GREENSHANK, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, WHINCHAT, MARSH HARRIER, OSPREY, SARDINIAN WARBLER, ZITTING

CISTICOLA, MAGPIE, LITTLE EGRET, CASPIAN TERN, SANDWICH TERN, AUDOUINS GULL, GREY PLOVER, OYSTERCATCHER, LESSER BLACK BACKED GULL

We drove onwards and stopped near a crowded sandy spit, there we saw Audouin's Gull, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Sandwich Terns and Little Terns. A Zitting cisticola posed for the cameras on a fence post. A little further on, the group on the second bus, had very close views of a Turtle Dove missed by the leading bus.

PUNTA DE LA CANALETA

Our last destination was the Punta de la Canaleta where a large open area usually held a Gull roost, alas there were no birds there but we did see distant Northern Gannets out to sea.

NORTHERN GANNET, (shrubby tobacco plant in flower),

EL PORTIL LAGUNA 3PM- 4PM (with coffee break).

Next we drove to another coastal laguna and a designated reserva natural – Laguna El Portil. There were hundreds of ducks on the far bank with Black-winged Stilts, Black-tailed Godwits, Kentish Plover, Ringed Plover, Little Stints, Dunlin and a Common Sandpiper. Amongst the many Mallards, Shoveler, Pochard, Gadwall, Teal and Pintail we found a single Garganey. We lost three of the party for a short while but we all regrouped at a convenient bar/café.

MALLARD, POCHARD, WIGEON, TEAL, GARANEY, PINTAIL, SHOVELER, COMMON SANDPIPER, LITTLE STINT, DUNLIN, KENTISH PLOVER, RINGED PLOVER, LITTLE RINGED PLOVER, BLK TAILED GODWIT, FLAMINGO, GREY HERON, LONG TAILED TIT, GREAT TIT, SARDINIAN WARBLER, MAGPIE, YELLOW LEGGED GULL

RAMPIDO – RIO PIEDRAS 4:15-5:30PM

After our coffee/beer/ice-cream break in El Portil we drove through Rampido to a site that over looked the tidal section of the Rio Piedras. The tide was gently receding and waders began to appear. Curlew were voiciferous, as were Whimbrel and the Little Terns. A solitary Caspian Tern stood on the far bank looking gigantic behind the feeding Little Terns. We spent some time chasing warblers in the nearby bushes noting Sardinian, Melodious, Blackcap and an exciting find, an Orphean Warbler.

CASPIAN TERN, LITTLE TERN, SANDWICH TERN, WHIMBREL, CURLEW, BLK TAILED GODWIT, LITTLE STINT, REDSHANK, KNOT, BLK HEADED GULL, SARDINIAN WARBLER, MELODIOUS WARBLER, WHINCHAT, CRESTED LARK, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, WESTERN ORHPEAN WARBLER

NIEBLA CASTLE 5:45 – 6PM

To complete our circular tour we drove to the large Castle at Niebla hoping for a sighting of the many Lesser Kestrels that breed there, however the birds had either gone on migration or were playing hide and seek, winning hands down.

FERAL PIGEON (no Lesser Kestrel)

EL ROCIO – LAGUNA MADRE DE LA MARISMA (7PM -7:30PM)

Back at El Rocio some of us took an evening look over the laguna and noted that the first Grelag Geese had arrived for the winter. Green Sandpiper was also noted and a solitary Collared Pratincole hawked over the marsh.

GREY LAG GOOSE (20), GREEN SANDPIPER, MARSH HARRIER, COLLARED PRATINCOLE.

DAY 4 – NORTHERN MARSHES - SUNDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER – dry, sunny very warm

CORREDOR DE VERDE, LAGUNA ZURILLO, LAGUNA QUEMA, 9:30-12:30

Our first destination today was the Corredor de Verde a designated reserva natural and protected area. The usual Northern Wheatear and Whinchats were everywhere along the fence line that bordered the Canal de Guadimar. We stopped off at a field of sunflowers which was in full seed. Large mixed flocks of finches were feeding there and the group on the second bus found a Hawfinch. We visited the laguna de Quema where we noted our first Gt Crested Grebe, and our one and only Tufted Duck which was found along with the usual variety of duck. A confiding Willow Warbler entertained us for a while before we set off for the laguna Zurillo. A flooded wood was visible as the carcasses of trees extended above the water of this laguna. Tree Sparrows were flitting in and out of the dead branches and behind us in the dehesa Woodlarks could be seen and heard. We stopped to look for, and found, a very large butterfly that flew across the track, it turned out to be a Two-tailed Pasha and was much admired and photographed by the group.

Further along the track we searched for Black-winged kite but had no luck, however, in a ploughed field we watched several colourful Yellow Wagtail.

GOLDFINCH, GREENFINCH, SERIN, HAWFINCH, WHINCHAT, COMMON BUZZARD, BOOTED EAGLE, COMMON KESTREL, MARSH HARRIER, SHORT TOED EAGLE, WHITE STORK, BLACK STORK, SOUTHERN GREY SHRIKE, GREY HERON, LITTLE EGRET, CATTLE EGRET, MALLARD, TUFTED DUCK, POCHARD, RED CRESTED POCHARD, SHOVELER, GT CRESTED GREBE, LITTLE GREBE, COMMON COOT, MOORHEN, WILLOW WARBLER, WOODLARK, CRESTED LARK, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, YELLOW WAGTAIL, GREAT TIT, HOUSE SPARROW, SPOTLESS STARLING, BLACK CROWNED NIGHT HERON, (Two-tailed Pasha)

DEHESA DE PILAS 12:45 – 1:15PM

A quick stop at the dehesa de Pilas was made to look for the Spanish Sparrows that breed there, but again we had no luck, only a very distant flock of Sparrows were seen.

COMMON KESTREL, WHINCHAT, NORTHERN WHEATEAR

DEHESA DE ABAJO, 1:30 – 2:3:PM

We settled for lunch at the visitors centre at the Dehesa de Abajo overlooking the large laguna found there. Hundreds of birds were there and the list included an impressive 200+ Glossy Ibis, Greater flamingo, Spoonbill, 300+ Mallard, Shoveler, Gadwall, Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit, Black-winged Stilts, Black-headed Gulls, 25 Grey heron, 50+ Jackdaw and many more species.

AVOCET, BLACK WINGED STILT, BLACK TAILED GODWIT, BLACK NECKED GREBE, LITTLE GREBE, GT CRESTED GREBE, CORMORANT, GREATER FLAMINGO, GLOSSY IBIS (200+), COMMON SANDPIPER, COMMON COOT, JACKDAW, BOOTED EAGLE, WHITE STORK, SPOONBILL, LITTLE EGRET, CATTLE EGRET, GREY HERON (25), MALLARD, POCHARD, RED

CRESTED POCHARD, SHOVELER, PINTAIL, TEAL, MOORHEN, BLACK HEADED GULL, L B B GULL,

TRACK TO VALVERDE CENTRE.

Next we drove the bumpy track to the Jose Valverde centre that is found deep in the northern marshes, we saw many species along the way including Common Redstart, Short-toed Eagle, Egrets, Herons, Larks and Wagtails.

COMMON REDSTART, CRESTED LARK, GREEN SANDPIPER, SHORT TOED EAGLE, MARSH HARRIER, WHITE STORK, LITTLE EGRET, CATTLE EGRET, GLOSSY IBIS, SPOONBILL, RED-RUMPED SWALLOW,

VALVERDE CENTRE

The pool around the Valverde centre held no water and an eerie silence hung over the area, but the bushes were full of Willow Warblers and Flycatchers, some water nearby held the usual array of ducks, herons and egrets along with some waders that included our first Ruff and Lapwing of the trip. Two of us walked around the bushes whilst the rest finished their refreshments, we noted Swallowtail butterflies and saw the only Stone Curlew of the trip as it flew into a ploughed field and promptly sat down out of sight.

SPOONBILL, AVOCET, BLACK TAILED GODWIT, RUFF, RINGED PLOVER, LITTLE STINT, GREEN SANDPIPER, LAPWING, BLACK WINGED STILT, SHOVELER, MALLARD, FLAMINGO, COMMON COOT, LITTLE GREBE, GT CRESTED GREBE, CORMORANT, GLOSSY IBIS, LITTLE EGRET, CATTLE EGRET, SPOTTED FLYCATCHER, PIED FLYCATCHER, RED RUMPED SWALLOW, WILLOW WARBLER, ZITTING CISTICOLA, STONE CURLEW, CRESTED LARK,

RETURN JOURNEY

Returning along the same track back to Villamanrique we noted a melanistic Montagu's Harrier flying high above us, an unusual sighting indeed.

COMMON REDSTART, CRESTED LARK, MONTAGU'S HARRIER, MARSH HARRIER, SHORT TOED EAGLE, KESTREL, CORN BUNTING, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, WHINCHAT, CATTLE EGRET, LITTLE EGRET, BLACK CROWNED NIGHT HERON, MAGPIE, AZURE WINGED MAGPIE, COLLARED DOVE, BLACKBIRD, ZITTING CISTICOLA,

DAY 5 DRIVE TO EXTREMADURA MONDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER dry, sunny hot.

SET OFF 9AM EL ROCIO – ARRIVED TRUJILLO 3PM

We set off at 9 am for the long journey to Extremadura via Sevilla and Merida, we made good time and took a coffee break some 50 kilometers north of Sevilla at 10am. We continued and made it passed Merida by lunchtime where we took lunch in a nice restaurant at the Monchanez turn off.

Trujillo was some 47 kilometers away from the lunch stop, we travelled slowly looking out for new birds for the tour. A late Honey Buzzard was found circling over the plain and Azure-winged Magpies became prominent once again.

HONEY BUZZARD, GRIFFON VULTURE, CRESTED LARK, RAVEN, AZURE-WINGED MAGPIE

Just before entering Trujillo we stopped at a small reservoir where there was a bit of bird activity, a small flock of Lapwings were roosting along the shoreline, a Ringed Plover popped up and there were Mallard, Shoveler and Little Grebes on or in the water. A Short-toed Eagle was perched on a nearby pylon.

TRUJILLO RESEVOIR – LAPWING, RINGED PLOVER, MALLARD, SHOVELER, SHORT TOED EAGLE, KESTREL, SPOTLESS STARLING, LITTLE GREBE

SANTA MARIE DE MAGASCAR -4PM -6PM

We arrived at the hostel Julio in Trujillo and off loaded our luggage and then after a brief settling in period we set off onto the plains and dehesa found towards Casares. We saw some Spanish Sparrows but they were very elusive and hard to see. Wheatears and Whinchats seemed to have followed us from Donana but the sighting of our first Black Vulture proved much more exciting. Further along the road we found an Osprey perched on a pylon near a small laguna and more Ravens were seen overhead. The afternoon excursion terminated at a bridge over the rio Almonte near Santa Marta de Magascar, Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow and House Martin were seen there and after a short while we returned to the hostel for a beer before our 8pm dinner call.

SPANISH SPARROW, CRESTED LARK, WHINCHAT, STONECHAT, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, RAVEN, BLACK VULTURE, GRIFFON VULTURE, OSPREY, AZURE WINGED MAGPIE, BLUE TIT, CATTLE EGRET, LAPWING, RIO ALMONTE - CRAG MARTIN, HOUSE MARTIN, RED RUMPED SWALLOW,

DAY 6 - MONFRAGUE NATIONAL PARK TUESDAY 25TH SEPTEMBER – dry, sunny hot.

JOURNEY BIRDS

From Trujillo we headed north towards Plasencia noting a few common species along the way before stopping just before Torrejon el Rubio.

SPOTLESS STARLING, HOUSE SPARROW, AZURE WINGED MAGPIE, MAGPIE,

BRIDGE – RIO ALMONTE

We stopped at the Rio Almonte to appreciate the wonderful scenery and experience a lovely warm morning with a cloudless sky giving fantastic light. If that wasn't enough we had a good variety of birds to look at, ranging from the colourful Kingfisher to the plain Corn bunting.

CORN BUNTING, CRESTED LARK, CRAG MARTIN, RED RUMPED SWALLOW, JACKDAW, KINGFISHER, GREY HERON, WHITE WGTAIL, BLUE TIT, COMMON SANDPIPER,

CASTILLO MONFRAGUE.

The climax of any Extremadura birding trip is a visit to the wonderful Monfragüe Nacional Parque and so it was in very warm conditions we mounted the steps up to the famous Castillo, the pinnacle of our visit. The view from the top was magnificent, we could see for miles in all directions, covering mountains, rivers, dehesa and open plains. Griffon Vultures drifted both below and above us and sometimes came within a few meters of us until, that is, someone reached for a camera. Red-rumped Swallows joined Crag Martins and House Martins in the melee above us. Most other raptors were noticeably absent and the only new bird was a Black Redstart.

GRIFFON VULTURE, BLACK REDSTART, HOUSE MARTIN, GRAG MARTIN, RED RUMPED SWALLOW,

PEÑA FALCON

Our next stop was around the corner at a limestone rocky outcrop where Vultures were perched and we saw our first Blue Rock Thrush.

BLUE ROCK THRUSH, GRIFFON VULTURE, CRAG MARTIN

VILLAREAL - LUNCH

Next we stopped at a restaurant at Villareal for lunch which was well appreciated by the group, outside the restaurant we chased butterflies and caught up with Bath White, Spanish Brown Argus, Clouded Yellow and a Two-tailed Pasha. A Hawfinch flew by and landed in a tall tree near the car park and was never seen again.

HAWFINCH

Next we stopped at the long bridge over the reservoir at Fuente del frances to look at our first Alpine Swifts, a large group were screaming above us at one minute and then lost to sight the next.

HOUSE MARTIN, CRAG MARTIN, ALPINE SWIFT

MIRADOR DE BASCULA ABOVE THE TIETAR DAM – WOODLAND WALK

We parked in a shady car park and walked back down the hill towards the large dam, in the mixed woodland We found Crested, Great and Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Hawfinch, Great-spotted Woodpecker and a small flock of Azure-winged Magpies.

CRESTED TIT, GT SPOTTED WOODPECKER, CHAFFINCH, AZURE WINGED MAGPIE, GREAT TIT,

PORTILLO DE TIETAR

Our last port of call for the day was the craggy outcrop of Portillo de Tietar this is the site made famous by the presence of breeding Eagle Owl and Spanish Imperial Eagle none of which presented themselves to us. However we had a lovely hour watching the Vultures (one was screaming incessantly) and other species such as Kingfisher, Black Stork, Blue Rock Thrush and Common sandpiper. We got very hot when the breeze eased off so we decided to call it a day and head back for the hour long drive to Trujillo.

GRIFFON VULTURE, BLUE TIT, RED LEGGED PARTRIDGE, BLACK STORK, BLUE ROCK THRUSH, KINGFISHER, COMMON SANDPIPER.

DAY 7 – THE PLAINS OF BELEN AND CASARES – dry sunny, hot.

BELEN PLAIN – 7:45 – 9:45 AM

We set off in the dark for an early visit to the nearby Belen plains. Along the way we flushed a Little Owl from the fence line and one or two Crested larks from the roadside. We stopped at a cross-roads a couple of kilometers east of Belen and waited for sunrise. The usual Northern Wheatears and Whinchats were joined by Corn Buntings along the fence posts but we had no sightings of Bustards.

Moving further along the road in brighter light we noted many Calandra Larks, Crested and Thekla Larks. We turned around at a farm house and now had the sun behind us giving us better viewing conditions and before long we had spotted some distant dots in a field. The dots turned out to be Little Bustards, a dozen or more. The stop proved fruitful as we had good views of bustards in flight as well as many Red Kites, a perched Short toed Eagle, 3 Black Vultures on the ground and a distant Black-winged Kite. More Little Bustards were noted on the return journey as were Hoopoe, Red Kite, Griffon Vulture and Corn Buntings.

CRESTED LARK, THEKLA LARK, LITTLE OWL, HOOPOE, MAGPIE, HOUSE SPARROW, SPOTLESS STARLING, LITTLE BUSTARD (20+), CALANDRA LARK, RED KITE, GRIFFON VULTURE, BLACK-WINGED KITE, MARSH HARRIER, MONTAGU'S HARRIER, BOOTED EAGLE, SHORT TOED EAGLE, COMMON KESTREL, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, WHINCHAT, STONECHAT, WILLOW WARBLER, ZITTING CISTICOLA, SHORT TOED LARK, JACKDAW, RAVEN,

CASARES PLAIN 11:30 – 1:30 PM

After our late breakfast we set westward towards Casares in search of Bustards and Sangrouse. Just outside Trujillo we saw eight lesser Kestrels feeding over a roadside field.

8 LESSER KESTREL OVER PLAIN JUST WEST OF TRUJILLO.

We arrived at our destination and within minutes had picked up two Great Bustards feeding very close to the track, unfortunately they flew off after a very short time and the second bus had very poor views of them.

After a few kilometers we had clocked up 20 Great bustards in small parties (11 being the highest count in one group). We also had great views of Black Vultures flying over us alongside the smaller Griffon Vulture, what a magnificent a bird, the proverbial flying barn door. We continued along the bumpy track for what seemed a lifetime until we reached the Casares to Torrejon road. We waited for the second vehicle at the road junction only to be moved on by the police.

GREAT BUSTARD (30+), RED LEGGED PATRIDGE, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, WHINCHAT, SHORT TOED LARK, CORN BUNTING, GREY HERON, COMMON SANDPIPER, BLACK VULTURE, GRIFFON VULTURE, BOOTED EAGLE, COMMON KESTREL, MARSH HARRIER, CRESTED LARK,

RIO ALMONTE 1:45 – 2:30 PM

After a short wait we all set off towards Monroy making a short stop off at the bridge over the Rio Almonte, the first track to the river was blocked so we parked in the access track to the water-board building only to be thwarted by a water board van wanting access. We eventually parked in the official car park and walked under the bridge to view the much depleted water. A large group of Alpine Swifts were screaming above as we arrived and they were joined by Crag and House Martins both in good numbers.

We scanned the rocks and the old bridge ruins and found White Wagtail, Common Sandpiper and a Blue Rock Thrush, just as we were leaving a couple of Black Wheatears showed up, they gave us all great views and made the effort of parking all worth while.

ALPINE SWIFT, RED RUMPED SWALLOW CRAG MARTIN, HOUSE MARTIN, WHITE WAGTAIL, COMMON SANDPIPER, BLACK WHEATEAR, BLUE ROCK THRUSH,

LUNCH MONROY 2:50 – 4PM

It was now getting late for lunch and we needed to find a venta quickly, so we set off for Monroy and after some searching we found a restaurant in the main square that was serving food.

MONROY TO TRUJILLO 4PM-6:30PM

To finish off the day we took a leisurely drive back to Trujillo along the scenic route from Monroy. We spent two and a half hours doing this, making many stops and watching many birds. More Great Bustards were found, a roadside pool held Green Sandpiper and a Greenshank, we saw a party Red-legged Partridges, large flocks of both Corn Bunting and Short-toed Larks and more Black Vultures.

GREAT BUSTARD (7), GREENSHANK, GREEN SANDPIPER, SHORT TOED LARK, GRIFFON VULTURE, BLACK VULTURE, LESSER KESTREL (8), BLACKBIRD, AZURE WINGED MAGPIE, HOUSE SPARROW (200+), NORTHERN WHEATEAR, WHINCHAT, STONECHAT, MAGPIE, RAVEN, JACKDAW, BOOTED EAGLE, CRESTED LARK, CORN BUNTING (LARGE FLOCKS).

DAY 8 - RETURN JOURNEY TRUJILLO TO FARO – dry, sunny warm.

JOURNEY BIRDS

We set from the Hostal Julio at an early time of 8:45am and headed south towards Zorita. The scenery along this route is quite spectacular with wide vistas of the dehesa and the distant mountains.

4 GT BUSTARDS FROM THE CAR JUST BELOW ZORITA, COMMON BUZZARD, SOUTHERN GREY SHRIKE, CALANDRA LARK, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, WHINCHAT, LESSER KESTREL

EMBALSE SIERRA BRAVO 9:30 – 10:30

The Embalse Sierra Bravo is a man made reservoir just south of Zorita, it holds vast amounts of water behind a massive dam, the water is used for irrigation of the rice fields but inadvertently provides a haven for bird life. A flooded woodland at the eastern side of the reservoir hosts an Egret roost of epic proportions and the waters surface is usually covered in ducks and Grebes. Today the wildfowl were confined to the distant shoreline because many fishermen were along the nearest shores.

LESSER B B GULL, BLK HEADED GULL, GT CRESTED GREBE, BLK NECKED GREBE, CIRCA 1000 HIRUNDINES(MOSTLY SAND MARTINS), HOUSE MARTIN, BARN SWALLOW, RED RUMPED SWALLOW, MARSH HARRIER, SPARROWHAWK, HOPOE, NORTHERN WHEATEAR, WHINCHAT, COMMON KESTREL, SPOTLESS STARLING, MELODIOUS WARBLER, SMALL PARTIES OF GT BUSTARD 3-5 BIRDS, MARSH HARRIER, GRIFFON VULTURE

ROAD TO CAMPO LUGAR,

We received a tip-off from a Spanish birder that many Bustards were to be found along the road to Campo Lugar. We found a small group of 15 Great Bustards and a party of over 25 Ravens but not the quantity of Bustards that the Spaniard had inferred.

15 GT BUSTARDS, 25+ RAVENS

ROAD STOP JUST ABOVE MADRAJALEGO

An unscheduled stop just north of Madrajalego found us watching a party of Black bellied Sand Grouse as they flew high across the road, in the meantime the party in the second bus were watching a very large flock of Little Bustards in a roadside field.

6 BLK BELLIED SANDGROUSE, 80+ LITTLE BUSTARDS, WHITE STORK ON NEST, SPOTLESS STARLING ON NEST BOXES OF ROLLER,

Our last stop was a disused bridge just west of Vegas Altas, where we hoping to see Common Waxbill and/or Red Avadavat, neither bird showed but Cetti's Warblers called from the thick bushes and hundreds of House Sparrows were constantly flushed by regular gun fire and bird scarers. We decided to leave for Merida as time was pressing on.

We made a detour into the centre of Merida hoping for a lunch stop and a visit to the Roman ruins but we found the town very busy and gave the tour and lunch stop a miss. We lunched at a roadside restaurant just south of Merida at 1pm.

We then set off at 2pm for Faro airport arriving at 16:45 local time after an uneventful but pleasant journey.

BUTTERFLY LIST

TWO TAILED PASHA
BATH WHITE
LANG'S SHORT TAILED BLUE
SPANISH BROWN ARGUS
CARDINAL
BERGER'S CLOUDED YELLOW
SMALL WHITE,
MEADOW BROWN,
WALL BROWN,
SMALL COPPER BROWN,
SPANISH GATEKEEPER,

FLOWERS

AUTUMN SPURRY,
AUTUMN DAFFODIL,
AUTUMN CROCUS,
SHRUBBY TOBACCO,
OLEANDER,