

# Spain

## Spanish Steppes in Autumn

Wed 12th – Wed 19th November 2014



*Trip photos (clockwise, from top): Some of the many **Great Bustards** seen during the week – these near Santa Marta de Magasca • Five from the party of six **Little Bustards** along the Campo Lugar road • A fine portrait of an **Iberian Grey Shrike** • The **Water Pipit** at Rio Almonte • One of the many **Griffon Vultures** at Pena Falcon... • ...and on a different scale a **Black Redstart** there too! © top four photos Stephen Daly/andalucianguides.com; bottom two Brian Small/Limosa*

**report compiled by tour leaders:  
Stephen Daly & Brian Small**



*Trip photos: top - an amazing close-up of a **Griffon Vulture** as it glided past the viewpoint at fingertip range at Pena Falcon • bottom – part of the flock of 28 **Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** we saw near Santa Marta, their colours fitting perfectly into the landscape © top photo Stephen Daly/andalucianguides.com; bottom Brian Small/Limosa*

## Trip Diary

### **Tour Leaders: Stephen Daly & Brian Small**

**with Ian & Jean Bennion, Alan & Ann Clegg, Hazel Cunningham, Peter Neep, Brook & Heather Phillips, Robert & Tricia Shanks and Bob & Nadine Timberlake**

This autumn's tour to the wild heart of Spain was not blessed by the weather, but was by the birds. We really enjoyed some terrific late autumn birdwatching, with birds of prey in abundance – notably huge numbers (and great views) of Black and Griffon Vultures, Great and Little Bustards on the steppe, thousands of wintering Cranes, two species of sandgrouse, and so much more; we could hardly fail to have had a great time. Coupled with seven nights at a beautifully restored country house hotel near Trujillo, with fantastic food and wine to look forward to each evening, hopefully it was a trip to remember.

### **Tour Highlights**

- Watching some of Europe largest and sought after Raptors – Black and Griffon Vultures and Golden and Spanish Imperial Eagles
- Enjoying Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse and White and Black Storks
- Visiting the wetlands at Almaraz finding Black-winged Kite, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron and Eurasian Spoonbill
- Wonderful views of Great Bustards on the Extremaduran landscape
- Good views of 'simple' birds like Hawfinch, Dartford Warbler, Corn Bunting and Zitting Cisticola

### **Day 1 - Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

Arrival of the group from London accompanied by Brian at Madrid's Barajas airport went well, where they were met by Hazel, who had traveled direct from Morocco, then Stephen. Driving towards Trujillo many birds were seen which included Common Kestrel, Red Kite, Common Buzzard, Marsh Harrier, White Stork, Cattle Egret, Grey Heron, Crane, Lapwing, Feral Pigeon, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove and Crested Lark. At a rest stop, after a coffee (or beer), a small number of Chiffchaffs hinted at the huge numbers we would see in Extremadura.

At our hotel, we settled in to our rooms then met in the lounge and had a welcoming drink supplied by our hosts Juan Pedro and Belen before our meal.

### **Day 2 - 13<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

Dawn broke gradually over the Extremaduran landscape through a dark sky, as we stood outside in the garden of our hotel watching hundreds of Song Thrushes fly overhead. Black Redstarts posed nicely on the various gables and window ledges of the hotel as a Wren sang and Robins and Blackcaps called from the orange and lemon trees. With Great Tits and Blue Tits added to our bird list we went inside for breakfast.

Leaving the hotel in the minibuses we headed south passing lots of Azure-winged Magpies flying across the road or through the wooded meadows on either side of the road. Taking the road to Campo Lugar, we scanned across the edge of the steppe and found Black-bellied

Sandgrouse and a group of seven Little Bustards in flight. More sandgrouse were seen flying then landing in a distant field. Calandra Larks, Crested Larks, Meadow Pipits, Lapwings and White Wagtails fed on the close cropped rocky grassland. Stephen talked with one of the local sheep farmers who gave permission to enter his land where we found Little Owls perched on distant ruins and rocky outcrops. Alas no Great Bustards were seen, but we saw Ravens, Red Kites and a male Merlin hunted larks.

We took a coffee at Madrigalejo and sheltered a while from the rain and took this opportunity to have close views of Serins, Goldfinches, Spanish Sparrows, Spotless and Eurasian Starlings. Cattle Egrets, Black-headed and Yellow-legged Gulls flew past before we moved on towards the agricultural areas. The sound of Common Cranes calling filled the air and soon we were creeping along the tracks where the harvest of rice was almost completed and the maize was still being cut although the recent wet weather had halted the latter. We saw a small flock of Red-legged Partridges fly off as we approached and Stephen excellently found a single Quail hiding in a ditch. We exited the buss, but the Quail inevitably flushed – but at least we all saw it - and then watched the many small troops of Red Avadavats and Common Waxbills that have established many colonies throughout the Iberian peninsular.

Many Iberian Grey Shrikes were watched and Hoopoes came into view at various intervals. Sky Larks and Short-toed Larks added to the bird song as we continued exploring and came across Cranes and Great Bustards feeding together near a small olive grove. This was such a lovely sight to see and we set up our telescopes and enjoyed really good views.

Taking a picnic lunch we heard Water Rail and Cetti's Warbler and watched vast flocks of more Spanish Sparrows, a few White Storks and thousands of Cranes. After lunch we continued through the rice fields near the solar panels, stopping where we found Little Egret, Little Grebe and Lesser Black-backed Gulls feeding or resting as Common Snipe, Green Sandpiper and a small group of Dunlins fed in the flooded fields. Chiffchaffs and Stonechats were frequently seen; as parties of Cranes took off from both sides of the road, we watched many Marsh Harriers hunting low over the mud dykes and cut fields. Huge numbers of Black-headed Gulls and Cattle Egrets followed the tractors churning up the rice fields, profiting from the crayfish, frogs and other life that had been disturbed.

As we continued to the large network of canals of the Sierra Brava dam complex that feeds this huge agricultural area in summer with a constant supply of water, we found a Sparrowhawk that landed beside us in a Tamarisk bush. At the dam wall we saw Kingfisher and Common Sandpiper fly off as we scanned the water from above. Here were huge numbers of duck with tens of thousands of Shoveler as well as Teal, Pintails, Wigeon and Gadwall. Over a hundred Greylag Geese were counted on the banks of the reservoir and a few flew past. Great Crested Grebes and Common Coots boosted the huge numbers of wintering birds at this site.

Driving back to the road to Campo Lugar, we were delighted to find another small flock of Little Bustard as well as Great Bustard on the ground and in the air. More Black-bellied Sandgrouse were seen and the male Merlin from earlier in the day was initially found hunting larks. As an adult female Hen Harrier appeared, there was a contretemps, with first the Merlin after the harrier, then the tables turned and the harrier went after the young Merlin! For such a dull day with frequent rain showers we had seen many top birds and talked about the many birding incidents over the trip list and dinner back at the hotel.

**Day 3 - Friday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

As it was still dark 'til around 8am, we had a quick look outside the grounds of the hotel and saw a considerable movement of Song Thrushes flying over the countryside. The small passerines in the gardens made their presence known through contact calls, some song and their flitting from trees through the shrubbery.

After breakfast we left the hotel and headed north towards the famous National Park of Monfragüe. Stopping a few times en route we came across Grey Wagtail, Grey Heron, three Rock Sparrows, Great Egret, and Wood Lark. Hawfinch was briefly seen in flight and a few were heard. Large spirals of vultures were seen circling in the distance and we stopped at Torrejón el Rubio to get a better view, identifying Griffon and Black Vulture. Ian and Brian spotted an *Aquila*-type eagle that came over the village, though it never really showed well, the features visible (plumage and structure) could only mean it was a *Clanga* - Spotted or Lesser Spotted Eagle. On reflection it was almost certainly a Lesser Spotted Eagle. As we drove north towards the park, the second vehicle had amazing views of a Golden Eagle by the road.

Making our way to the car park leading to the Castillo de Monfragüe we stopped to watch Short-toed Treecreeper and heard more Hawfinch, Blue and Great Tits. A Queen of Spain Fritillary butterfly was seen on the steps to the castle and by now many Griffon and a few Black Vultures came in close to the side of the ridge. Looking out over the river gorge to the massive slabs that form Peña Falcon we watched another Golden Eagle and Peregrine Falcon come past and were amazed at the sheer volume of vultures that were in the area.

After watching for some time we descended and headed to the upper side of the park into the Tietar dam area and to the Spanish Imperial Eagle watchpoint and hide in the upper valley. The previous night's rain had swollen the river considerably as the run off from the distant Sierra de Gredos mountains and other highlands resulting in the dam sluices being opened, letting water flow down towards lower sections. Quite a few groups of Red Deer were seen close to the road and we had great views of this striking mammal.

Many Great Cormorants were seen with Grey Herons and a few more Great Egrets. Rock Doves flew past in small to medium size groups and their main predator the Peregrine Falcon was also seen flying nearby. Distant Cranes were in flight over the mountain ridges as were Greylag Geese. Sardinian Warblers flitted below us as we took lunch watching the Jays fly cross the river and listening to the young Griffons on their nests opposite cry out to their returning parents.

We left the Griffon colony and headed back to some woodland where we watched Coal Tit, Crested Tit, Great Tit and a Great Spotted Woodpecker in the pines. Overhead a single adult Spanish Imperial Eagle glided past then was lost from view. Then returning to the lower sections around the dam and then back down to Peña Falcon, we stopped again to watch the raptors circling and gliding above our heads and often straight out in front of us in the gorge only a few metres away. The sound of the air rushing over the immense Griffon and the even larger winged Black Vultures was impressive to say the least!

All in all we had a wonderful flying show, which was interspersed with Blue Rock Thrushes and Black Redstarts. We later travelled back south to our hotel and relaxed before dinner.

**Day 4 - Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

A cold wind from the northwest brought the temperature down as we set off into the countryside. Some Azure-winged Magpies were seen close to the hotel as we drove to the Santa Marta de Magasca road. Stopping to watch Wood, Crested and Thekla Larks we scanned the open grazed fields for Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and fairly quickly we found 28 birds feeding on the grassy slope. Although the birds were quite distant, we managed to set up the telescopes and watch them for some time, admiring their subtle colours glowing in the sun. Eventually they took to the air calling and wheeling over the landscape, climbing higher until finally landing out of sight over the brow of the hill.

Iberian Grey Shrikes were seen at many places as were Meadow Pipits, Common Stonechats and Corn Buntings. Following a track through the steppe we found more shrikes and several groups of Black-bellied Sandgrouse flying and feeding on the bare earth. Over the brow of another hill on this wonderful undulating landscape we came upon a group of 20 or more Great Bustards. Again setting up the telescope we had good views of the birds feeding.

We continued on to the village of Santa Marta de Magasca and had a coffee and comfort stop before descending down to the Rio Magasca. Spotting a good number of Griffon and the larger Black Vultures we also found two Thekla Larks by the road, which allowed those who hadn't had good views earlier in the day to look at the subtle differences of this lark and compare with the commoner and often very similar Crested Lark. We took lunch in the shelter of the gorge by the river watching Crag Martins, Kingfisher and a passing Golden Eagle.

A male Hen Harrier was seen hunting as were Marsh Harriers, Red Kites and Common Buzzards as we made our way back along to a track, where we took a walk up past a farmers feeding pen where Rock Sparrows were feeding with many larks, Meadow Pipits and White Wagtails. Our first good views of Calandra Larks were had here, despite the many birds seen yesterday. The sky looked very threatening and as the first drops of rain came we made our way quickly back to the minibuses.

In the evening we drove to Trujillo and had an excellent meal at one of the many restaurants in the Plaza Mayor. Sad to say that it was pouring with rain and we didn't see much of the old town.

**Day 5 - Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2014**

It was a very misty start to the day and visibility was poor when we set off in the direction of Trujillo and we stopped in the old town to have a look at this very pretty medieval centre. The mist was still quite thick as we drove into the countryside and found several Dartford Warblers flitting through small bushes and trees along the roadside. We drove towards Jaraicejo where at the rain-swollen river we found Green Sandpiper, Little Egret, Great Egret and Grey Heron. Wood Larks and Crested Lark were abundant as were Stonechats, Corn Buntings, White Wagtails, Meadow Pipits with a few Robins, Chaffinches and one or two Rock Sparrows. We took a walk through part of a Holm Oak lined track where we had better views of Azure-winged Magpies, Sardinian Warbler, Wood Lark and Hoopoes. A female Northern Wheatear was also seen.

Driving on towards Monfragüe we had a couple of stops en route to Torrejón el Rubio and saw two distant adult Bonelli's Eagles above a ridge. Focusing our 'scopes on the birds we had reasonable views as they climbed high in a group of Griffon and Black Vultures and after a while glided away out of sight. With them was an adult Spanish Imperial Eagle, which sadly

glided out of view. Driving a short distance further on we managed to find another adult Spanish Imperial Eagle soaring amongst the vultures. We had fairly good views as the bird turned high in the sky above us, showing all the necessary identification points, with white feathering on the leading edge of the wing and shorter tail than Golden Eagle.

We took a delicious Sunday lunch at the Hotel Carvajal in the town of Torrejón el Rubio and afterwards travelled the short distance to Peña Falcon. Here we watched again the mass of vultures, both the more numerous Griffon and the scarcer Black Vultures wheel and glide above our heads. Blue Rock Thrushes, Black Redstarts were seen and a Peregrine Falcon sat opposite on a cliff face preening.

It was late in the afternoon, so we reluctantly drove back towards Trujillo and our hotel passing perched Iberian Grey Shrikes, Common Buzzards and watching the Azure-winged Magpies flit through the *dehesa*. After another splendid evening meal back at the hotel, we chatted around the lounge fireplace finishing our drinks.

#### **Day 6 - Monday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

Leaving the hotel after breakfast, we drove north to Almaraz and the warm waters close to the nuclear power plant. Close to the town we saw a few Dartford Warblers flitting through the tamarisk bushes close to the motorway and a couple of Sardinian Warblers and three Zitting Cisticolas flew across the road near the wetlands at Saucedilla. Walking around the lower reed beds at Saucedilla we watched Red Avadavats and Common Waxbills take to the air. Penduline Tits were calling with a few glimpses of the birds as they flew into the reeds. Purple Swamphens were calling almost constantly and we managed to see some exposed birds as well as a few that flew.

Four Marsh Harriers quartered over the reed beds and a single Black-winged Kite was watched hunting just outside the town. Red Kites flew slowly past the edge of the lakes and in the distance Black and Griffon Vultures soared in small groups. Some unexpected birds that were seen were Spoonbill in flight (looking like an albino cormorant!) and a lovely male Little Bittern that flew out from the reeds opposite the group.

Later in the morning we drove back along to the town of Jaraicejo where just after the turnoff from the motorway we saw a Merlin. As we entered the town a Sparrowhawk hunting and just by the road a juvenile Pallid Harrier was also seen, before gliding off above the ridge over the town. A superb juvenile bird (actually the first record of a juvenile for Extremadura), it showed a lovely gingery body and dark boar.

We continued on through the town and descended to the River Almonte, where we took our picnic lunch by the river and older bridges that span the gorge. Two Water Pipits showed and we walked along the swollen riverbank to get better views and some of us even managed to digiscope one of the birds as it fed on the water's edge. There seemed to be a good number of Chiffchaff around feeding on flying insects over the river as up to ten or so Grey Wagtails fed below.

Taking a walk back at our base we looked out for Hawfinches as a few birds flew overhead. Azure-winged Magpies scattered as we walked down paths lined between dry stone walls. The olive harvest was in full swing and the olive groves had piles of freshly gathered fruit piled in mounds on the ground. The disturbance meant lots of insects were now visible and active in the warm afternoons sun and the flocks of finches and other birds were much in

evidence profiting from the availability of a convenient and new food source. Chaffinches came in and with them Bramblings were watched on the ground and in the olive trees.

Back at the hotel we relaxed before dinner with a wine tasting presented by Juan Pedro and his sister Mercedes. Later we enjoyed another fine meal prepared by Belén.

#### **Day 7 - Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

Hawfinches were on the wires outside the hotel just before breakfast but were seen by the leaders only, before the group arrived... Setting off after being fed we drove south again to visit the wintering Cranes but first made a stop on the road to Campo Lugar. Almost straight away we saw Golden Plovers, Black-bellied Sandgrouse feeding, Little Bustards in flight and a large party of Great Bustards feeding on a nearby slope on the open steppe. Northern Wheatears and Little Owls popped up here and there and the Calandra Larks and Sky Larks sang – the former singing from small stones in the fields.

After enjoying ‘scoped views we drove down to the village of Campo Lugar, and aided by local information from our friend Martin Kelsey, we found the wintering flock of Stone Curlews. Again we ‘scoped the birds from a distance in order not to flush them and counted around 30 birds! Around the fields there were Rock Sparrows and many Zitting Citicolas.

Moving back towards the rice fields below the Sierra Brava reservoir we watched a sizeable flock of Common Waxbills by the road – the males being especially rosy on the underparts – then stopped for lunch watching the processions of Cranes in flight as they moved across the landscape to new feeding grounds, their calls as ever carrying far across the flat countryside in the cool air. The rice harvest had almost finished but it had attracted hundreds of Black-headed Gulls, Cattle, Little and Great Egrets as well as many Grey Herons that waited behind the tractors churning up the remains of the cut rice. A spiral of White Storks held over 60 birds.

Passing Sparrowhawk and Red Kites were seen as we arrived at the dam and the thousands of duck wintering there were present as were small flocks of Greylag Geese. We met some Spanish birders who told us of a recent sighting of White-headed Ducks at another reservoir which wasn't too far off. Travelling across the steppe we arrived at Alcollarin and found Black-necked Grebes diving near the reservoir wall. Across the water we could see good numbers of Spoonbills and Great Egrets. A little further north in our search for the ‘southern ducks’, we saw five Black Storks feeding with White Storks. Gadwall came next as did two Garganey and a small flock of Egyptian Geese.

Driving around the reservoir we came to the far side and spent more time searching for the White-heads, but only found Tufted Duck. Then the two Spanish lads turned up and pointed out that the ducks had in fact been seen back where we had started!! Feeling inadequate that we had not seen them before, we returned to the east and located the two White-headed Ducks that were feeding near a small island. These are still a rare bird in Iberia and it was nice to watch them carefully.

It was getting dark when we arrived back for our last dinner and we weren't disappointed with both birds of the day and the meal at our hotel.

**Day 8 - Friday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

Hawfinches greeted us in the hotel gardens as if to say, “Where have you all been?” – and it was nice for all to eventually see them – a lifer for some! After breakfast we loaded up the minibuses and said our farewells to Juan Pedro and Belén.

We had some time before the drive back to Madrid airport and stopped on the way to visit Almaraz once more. This time Penduline Tits and Purple Swamphen showed themselves a little bit better than on the previous visit and a wintering Squacco Heron made an appearance, settling down at the water’s edge quite close to where we were standing to do some fishing. The Little Bittern was also seen again as Marsh Harrier quartered over the reeds and Red Kites moved slowly across the lake.

It was a cold morning and we were glad to have a coffee in a bar in town before heading east to Madrid. Flight check-in and security checks went to plan and we finished a very happy and successful tour.

Thanks to all that took part and also for all the fun that we had together. You were all great company, we saw many wonderful birds and this area is truly one of the best places to visit in Spain, at any time of the year. Hopefully we will meet up with you again on another Limosa tour.

*Stephen Daly & Brian Small*

**ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED**

*(total number of species recorded by the group - 130)*

**Red-legged Partridge** *Alectoris rufa*

Seen in low numbers or heard on five dates

**Quail** *Coturnix coturnix*

One found by Stephen by a track near Madrigalejo

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser*

Seen in the Vegas Altas area often in flight, with 100+ at Sierra Brava

**Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

Eight at Alcollarin reservoir on 18th

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera*

c. 50 on the Embalse de Sierra Brava and Alcollarin

**Wigeon** *Anas penelope*

100+ on the Embalse de Sierra Brava on 13<sup>th</sup>, but many more here and at Alcollarin on 18th

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

Large numbers at Sierra Brava and Alcollarin, plus small numbers recorded on wetland areas

**Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*

Large numbers on the Embalse de Sierra Brava, with 10,000+ estimated on 13th

**Pintail** *Anas acuta*

Oddly just two noted at Sierra Brava on 13<sup>th</sup>, but then c. 1000 on 18th

**Garganey** *Anas querquedula*

Two seen by a few of the group at Alcollarin on 18th

**Teal** *Anas crecca*

100 or so seen at Sierra Brava and Alcollarin

**Pochard** *Aythya ferina*

Four on the Sierra Brava and four at Alcollarin on 18th

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*

Four at Alcollarin

**White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala*

Two at Alcollarin were very pleasing to see, as they are becoming rare again in Spain. Probably a young male and female based on the amount of white on the head and the colour of the bodies

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Noted in low numbers on five dates, with four seen on 16<sup>th</sup> at various places

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

Moderate numbers on the Embalse de Sierra Brava

**Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*

Up to 25 at Alcollarin on 18<sup>th</sup>, with really good views of some close birds near the dam

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*

Five – adults and immatures, at Alcollarin

**White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia*

Seen on six days, with the largest numbers in the Vegas Altas area, e.g. 200+ on 18<sup>th</sup>

**Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*

One at Almaraz on 17<sup>th</sup> and 20+ at Alcollarin. Quite surprising to see them so late

**Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides*

One young bird, with grey tips to the primaries at Almaraz on 19<sup>th</sup>; unusual in November

**Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*

Large numbers at Vegas Altas and on a few other days in various locations during the week

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*

Small numbers recorded daily most around the agricultural areas and wetland habitats

**Great Egret** *Ardea alba*

Noted on four days, with the most being two at Tietar, but the best views at Vegas Altas on 18<sup>th</sup>, when we could compare its large size with various other heron and egret species

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

Seen every day in small numbers

**Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus*

A male was seen (and heard) at Almaraz on 17<sup>th</sup>, but was heard only on 18<sup>th</sup>; another unusual sight in November

**Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Common and seen daily with concentrations on the Monfragüe and Sierra Brava reservoirs and at Almaraz

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

Fairly common throughout the week

**Merlin** *Falco columbarius*

Singles on three days, with the best being a male along the Campo Lugar Road, which ended up being chased by a Hen Harrier!

**Peregrine** *Falco peregrinus*

Seen at Peña Falcon on two dates, with one that perched on the cliff opposite being very nice; one young bird chased a Black-headed Gull across the lake at Alcollarin, but it too was mobbed/disturbed by a Marsh Harrier that tried to join in

**Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus*

One was found at Almaraz and 'scoped for a while before disappearing

**Red Kite** *Milvus milvus*

Seen every day of the tour, fairly common.

**Eurasian Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus*

Common, seen in good numbers everyday of the week with exceptional sightings at Torrejon el Rubio/Peña Falcon and Portal del Tietar in the Parque Nacional de Monfragüe. Great views of birds simply cruising bay

**Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*

Lower numbers, still up to 100 on some days; seen every day of the tour with some excellent close views at and the Castillo at Peña Falcon

**Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*

Seen every day with up to 50 in the rice-fields at Altas Vegas

**Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus*

Seen on three days of the tour with some good views of both very smart males and females hunting

**Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus*

Seen well, but not for long at Jaraicejo on 17<sup>th</sup>. A juvenile bird with lovely gingery unperparts and distinct collar was seen by some but not all the group

**Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*

Seen on five days, often singles.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

Fairly common, recorded in small numbers each day of the tour

**Spanish Imperial Eagle** *Aquila adalberti*

Two adults seen near Monfragüe on 16<sup>th</sup>

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos*

An adult was seen on the way to Monfragüe on 14<sup>th</sup>, then two more later in the day in the park; a single the next day.

**Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciata*

A pair seen south of Torrejon were especially well received – a smart eagle

[**Lesser Spotted Eagle** *Clanga pomarina*

Seen as it peeled off from a group of vulture over Torrejon on 13<sup>th</sup>. Most notable were pale commas on the underside of the wing, general brown hue to the plumage and relatively short tail]

**Great Bustard** *Otis tarda*

Great views of some sizeable flocks (up to 32 in some), totalling up to 120 birds on three days of the tour

**Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax*

Small numbers seen in flight on two days of the tour; 14 seen on 13<sup>th</sup> along the Campo Lugar road

**Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*

Heard calling at Río Gargalligas and Almaraz

**Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Seen and heard at Almaraz lagoons on our two visits

**Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

Three at Almaraz

**Coot** *Fulica atra*

Good numbers seen on the Embalse de Sierra Brava, Almaraz and Alcollarin

**Common Crane** *Grus grus*

Seen every day of the tour. 1000s of birds seen within the Vegas Altas agricultural area. Good numbers of medium-sized flocks in various *dehesas* throughout the area. Extremadura has concentrations of Common Crane exceeding 140,000 birds most winters.

**Stone Curlew** *Burhinus oediconemus*

A flock of 25+ wintering birds were seen near Campo Lugar as they hunkered down in a field near the town

**Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

Seen every day of the tour in good numbers

**European Golden Plover** *Pluvialis apricaria*

Seen along the Campo Lugar road on 18<sup>th</sup>, with c. 30 in the flock

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

Up to 100 seen in rice fields at Vegas Altas

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*

Seen in small numbers most days of the tour

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

One then two bird seen at Sierra Brava on our two visits

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*

Seven seen at Vegas Altas on 13<sup>th</sup>

**Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis*

Several birds seen at Vegas Altas

**Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus*

Seen in low numbers on four days of the tour

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Good numbers over the agricultural areas, seen on six days of the tour

**Pin-tailed Sandgrouse** *Pterocles alchata*

A flock of 28 were seen near Santa Marta de Magasca and were very much admired, with the colour and pattern of the plumage, but then again as they flew

**Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis*

Small groups seen feeding, heard calling and seen in flight on three days of the tour – c. 20 on 13<sup>th</sup> along Campo Lugar road

**Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia*

Recorded every day of the tour. There were some likely ‘pure’ Rock Doves seen at Portal de Tietar

**Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus*

Seen every day of the tour; common, but in huge numbers

**Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

Recorded in smallish numbers throughout the week

**Monk Parakeet** *Myiopsitta monachus*

As we left Madrid small groups flew across the road

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua*

Recorded on three dates, with three birds noted on two of them

**Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*

Single birds seen on four days, plus one day of two birds

**Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*

Fairly common throughout the week and seen most days in low numbers

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopus major*

Seen only on one day

**Iberian Grey Shrike** *Lanius meridionalis*

Fairly common on the steppes and on telegraph wires alongside roads, but always a little flighty

**Jay** *Garrulus glandarius*

Singles and pairs seen in the appropriate woodland areas throughout the tour

**Azure-winged Magpie** *Cyanopica cyanus*

Very common and vocal with flocks seen daily. Good numbers around our hotel

**Magpie** *Pica pica*

A very common species throughout the week.

**Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula*

Fairly common throughout the week with a good flock in the square in the old square in Trujillo

**Raven** *Corvus corax*

Recorded in small numbers throughout the week.

**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater*

Two seen near Tietar dam

**Crested Tit** *Lophophanes cristatus*

One seen by Ian at Tietar

**Great Tit** *Parus major*

Fairly common during the week but only seen in ones and twos

**Blue Tit** *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Small numbers seen most days and one seen most days in the hotel garden

**Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus*

Heard at Madrigalejo and Almaraz, but only glimpsed until a nice male seen well at Almaraz on our last day

**Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Seen in low numbers on six days. Larger concentrations at Peña Falcon and Portal del Tietar in Monfragüe

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

Three near Zorita on 13th

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus*

Six seen on two dates – of the short-tailed Iberian race *irbii*

**Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra*

Quite numerous in open fields, notably along Campo Lugar road and near Santa Marta

**Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla*

One flock watched feeding on open ground at Vegas Altas

**Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata*

Very common throughout the week.

**Thekla Lark** *Galerida theklae*

Seen on two dates with birds to compare with Crested Lark near Santa Marta

**Sky Lark** *Alauda arvensis*

Abundant at Vegas Altas and other cultivated places

**Wood Lark** *Lullula arborea*

Recorded on four days around woodland in small numbers, with best views on 16th

**Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis*

Seen well on five days at Campo Lugar, Vegas Altas and other sites.

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*

Seen or heard blasting out their explosive call on five days – best views at Almaraz

**Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*

Very common throughout the week, with two paler and grey birds noted on 17th

**Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*

Common seen and heard most days. Present in the hotel gardens.

**Dartford Warbler** *Sylvia undata*

Seen well on a number of occasions on five dates, the first along the Campo Lugar road

**Sardinian Warbler** *Sylvia melanocephala*

Skulking birds seen most days and heard as well. A fairly common warbler in Extremadura.

**Firecrest** *Regulus ignicapilla*

Seen or heard on three dates

**Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

A few birds seen and others heard in various locations. Present and calling from the hotel gardens

**Short-toed Treecreeper** *Certhia brachydactyla*

Three seen on 14th the best of which was at the Castillo at Peña Falcon

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

Small flocks from the north seen every day in the company of Spotless Starlings

**Spotless Starling** *Sturnus unicolor*

Very common throughout the week.

**Blackbird** *Turdus merula*

Fairly common throughout the week.

**Redwing** *Turdus ilacus*

Seen or heard in very small numbers over the hotel

**Song Thrush** *Turdus philomelos*

Fairly common and seen in low numbers most days, with a good passage over the hotel noted especially early in the week

**Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus*

Singletons noted in wooded *dehesas* and meadows on three days

**Robin** *Erithacus rubecula*

Recorded fairly regularly throughout the week.

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Common around buildings and rocky areas and roosting at local buildings around our hotel

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Noted on three days, with the first along the Campo Lugar road

**European Stonechat** *Saxicola rubicola*

Fairly common, recorded daily throughout our week – it was nice to see so many

**Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius*

Seen on the three days in Monfragüe at Peña Falcon and Portel del Tietar and Cabañas del Castillo; always good to see the males

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

Common, recorded daily

**Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis*

1000s seen at lunchtime on 13th around Vegas Altas with other large flocks recorded at several locations

**Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*

Small numbers seen on three days of the tour

**Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia*

Seen on four dates with good views near Campo Lugar and south of Torrejon el Rubio

**Common Waxbill** *Estrilda astrild*

Seen a few times at various places in Vegas Altas, with the best views from the 'bus on 18th

**Red Avadavat** *Amandava amandava*

Seen at Río Gargalligas and nearby Vegas Altas – the 'flying strawberry'

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*

Recorded in ones and twos on five days along streams, at reservoirs and on flooded rice fields

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*

Encountered regularly in really good numbers

**Meadow Pipit** *Anthus pratensis*

Very common on the steppes and on agricultural fields

**Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta*

Two seen along the Rio Almonte on 17th

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla*

Several amongst a large Chaffinch flock near the hotel on 17th

**Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs*

Common, recorded in good numbers each day

**Serin** *Serinus serinus*

Recorded daily in small numbers

**Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris*

Recorded on five days in smallish numbers

**Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*

Common, recorded in good numbers throughout the week

**Linnet** *Linaria cannabina*

Reasonably common, recorded in smallish numbers on four separate days

**Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

It was nice to (eventually) see this species as it had lead us a merry dance; with two birds at the hotel at quite close range, we very much enjoyed them – kerching, indeed!

**Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra*

Very (pleasingly) common on the steppe and surrounding open areas

**Cirl Bunting** *Emberiza cirlus*

Seen or heard on two dates, the first at Sierra Brava

**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Noted on two dates: one at Vegas Altas and two at Almaraz

**MAMMALS****Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes***Red Deer** *Cervus elaphus***Rabbit** *Oryctolagus cuniculus***Iberian Hare** *Lepus granatensis***Soprano Pipistrelle Bat** *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

**REPTILES/AMPHIBIANS**

**Marsh Frog** *Pelophylax ridibundus*

**Moorish Gecko** *Tarentola mauritanica*

**European Pond Terrapin** *Emys orbicularis*

**BUTTERFLIES**

**Small White** *Artogeia rapae*

**Bath White** *Pontia daplidice*

**Clouded Yellow** *Colias crocea*

**Small Copper** *Lycaena phlaeas*

**Red Admiral** *Vanessa atalanta*

**Peacock** *Aglais io*

**Queen of Spain Fritillary** *Issoria lathonia*

**Speckled Wood** *Pararge aegeria*

**Painted Lady** *Vanessa cardui*