

ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT
EXTREMADURA 2ND
– 6TH JANURAY 2011

Sunday 2nd January

After a late arrival due to fog, problems with the hire vehicles and an impromptu trip through the centre of Madrid, we finally made our way onto the E90 motorway heading south-west towards Trujillo and from there enjoyed a good journey down, making a coffee stop halfway. This in itself produced some decent birds with a Black Redstart around some barns at the back of the parking area, a few Spotless Starlings, Common Chiffchaff, Red Kite, Common Kestrel, Crested Lark and a very distant Black-shouldered Kite mobbing a Common Buzzard! White Stork and Southern Grey Shrike, as well as huge flocks of Common Starling and Black-billed Magpies were seen along the motorway too, and as we approached Hotel Rural Vina las Torres, our base for the next four nights, thirty Azure-winged Magpies crossed the road. Another Black Redstart and our first Hoopoe were also seen in the fading light as we parked the vehicles and checked in.

Monday 3rd January

The same fog which had delayed us yesterday was back with a vengeance today though it didn't hamper our morning walk through the gardens and nearby fields and olive groves. Spotless Starlings were seen in good numbers and other species noted included five Sardinian Warbler, three Common Chiffchaff, ten Blackcap, three Hoopoe, thirty Song Thrush, twenty Corn Bunting, two European Serin, three Black Redstarts and two song flighting Woodlarks. A Southern Grey Shrike was also singing near the hotel, giving very good views. Heading North from Trujillo we took the Caceres road and then the minor road towards Santa Marta de Magasca. Our first stop overlooking the steppelands here produced many White Wagtails and more Southern Grey Shrikes, Crested Larks and Corn Buntings. Five White Storks, male Spanish Sparrow, three Red Kites, Common Buzzard and fifty Northern Lapwing were also seen. A nearby track dissecting quality steppe produced our first flock of Great Bustards with about twenty seen, and several small groups of Black-bellied Sandgrouse amounted to about twenty birds also. Three Thekla Larks showed well and huge flocks of passerines feeding on the steppe amounted to around one hundred Linnets, two hundred Corn Buntings and fifty Goldfinches many Greenfinches, Skylark, Meadow Pipit and Calandra Lark were also mixed in. Fifty European Golden Plovers, two Common Raven and a male Merlin were also seen during a welcome coffee break. Moving North towards Monroy we stopped for lunch at the Rio Almonte crossing, which proved an excellent choice. A Hawfinch here was seen a couple of times but only by Ashley though Grey Wagtails, twenty Griffon Vultures, Black Redstart, ten Blackcap, Common Chiffchaff and Dunnock were also noted. The best bird though came in the form of a superb first-winter Spanish Imperial Eagle which drifted low along the top of the ridge allowing for first class views of this globally threatened raptor. Heading east from Monroy towards Villareal de San Carlos, our first small flock of Common Cranes were seen by the roadside. Finally we rounded off the day at the superb Castillo de Monfrague where the fog lifted and allowed for fantastic views back across the Dehesa towards Trujillo in the south and the snow-capped Gredos Mountains in the North. What a sight though as huge flocks of Griffon Vultures took to the air and circled low overhead, many passing below and around us as they caught the first thermals of the day. Many were also coming down at close range to collect nesting material and some great photographic opportunities were had. Two Black Vultures also gave great views and Black Redstart, three Firecrest, ten Blackcap and twenty one White Storks were also seen. Our first wine tasting session before dinner allowed us to sample some of the excellent wines from the local area, rounding off a great day.

Tuesday 4th January

Today we headed west from Vina las Torres towards Montanchez accompanied by hotel proprietor Juan Pedro who had promised to show us a new birding spot. On the way we stopped at the 'oldest Holm Oak in Extremadura', an impressive tree but the surrounding area was also good for birds. Ten Azure-winged Magpies gave great views and there were plenty of Corn Bunting and Spotless Starling about. Black Redstart, Red Kite and Sardinian Warbler were also noted here. Heading up the the Castillo in Montanchez, stunning views could be had looking over the white-washed town and out across the plains. Crag Martins circled overhead and many Black Redstarts were flitting around the tumbling castle walls. A Short-toed Treecreeper climbing the mossy covered turret was a surprise, and a Hawfinch appeared briefly in a fruiting tree for three lucky observers. At the top, Blue Rock Thrush was easily seen and three House Martins were circling with more Crag Martins. Two Sardinian Warblers, many European Serin and a single Eurasian Siskin were also seen, though our target species, Alpine Accentor, was proving frustratingly elusive. Just as we were about to give up though after a couple of hours searching, one was spotted down on the rocky slopes below the castle and with patience, everyone had good views of between four and six birds. A great result! Moving on we called in next at Embalse del Salor where huge numbers of Great Cormorant were present [eight hundred plus]. Little Egret, thirty Northern Shoveler, three Common Sandpipers, two Green Sandpipers, Grey

Wagtail, Hawfinch, seventeen Common Cranes, ten Greylag Geese, Black Vulture, four Griffon Vultures, twenty Red Kites, two Woodlark, European Nuthatch, ten Azure-winged Magpies, two Little Grebes and two Grey Herons were also seen here, with a nice Common Kingfisher by the dam.

Wednesday 5th January

Today we visited the spectacular Sierra Brava Reservoir to the south of our base and spent the day exploring the environs of the reservoir and surrounding ricefields, a magnet to waterfowl and in particular the regions wintering population of Common Cranes. From the dam, huge concentrations of dabbling ducks were difficult to estimate but must have included 5000 Northern Shoveler. Vast distant flocks were uncountable but also included good numbers of Mallard, Gadwall, Common Teal, Northern Pintail and Eurasian Wigeon. Single Common Shelduck and ten Great Crested Grebes were also seen, with Marsh Harriers and Red Kites constantly on view. 1500 Common Cranes were in the area, with small family parties flying over us calling and the fields away in the distance covered with these superb birds. Moving on towards the adjoining ricefields, we passed through open country with scattered bushes where two Black-shouldered Kites were perched right by the road before flying quickly away. A Peregrine was also glimpsed here and once we dropped down towards the ricefields, small flocks of Red Avadavat and large flocks of Spanish Sparrows were seen along the fencelines and a few Common Snipe were flushed from the fields. Stopping by a small patch of reeds and small willows, several Zitting Cisticola were flitting around amongst the vegetation and two White-spotted Bluethroats, including a splendid male, gave us the run around as we tried to get good views. A female Dartford Warbler was also here along with Cetti's Warbler and two more Black-shouldered Kites were seen in the distance, as was a male Hen Harrier. At a nearby smaller reservoir we saw huge flocks of Spanish Sparrow around the raised bank and another Bluethroat was here, while views across the fields gave us the chance to view further flocks of Common Cranes. A Great White Egret was on the pool and in the distance, a Squacco Heron flew by which was a surprise. Fifty Cattle Egrets were seen from here and in this whole area we must have seen several hundred Corn Buntings. Finally we headed out of the ricefields and through open dehesa back towards Madrigalejo where we stopped for lunch along a minor road. A few Hoopoe were seen, and a Little Owl was well spotted in its daytime roost. Best bird was another male Hen Harrier which flew right past us, a superb sight indeed. Near the main road, a short stop by a large pool surrounded by Eucalyptus yielded a couple of Common Kingfisher, more Red Avadavat and good views of Zitting Cisticola, while another Great White Egret flew by and the first Common Moorhen was seen. At nearby Vegas Altas, we had what was probably our best showing of Common Cranes in the ricefields here with one flock of 800 near the road. Finally we took a detour on the way back via Campo Lugar, and although the minor road across the steppe was very badly potholed we managed to negotiate it and saw some further flocks of Great Bustards, Calandra Lark, European Golden Plovers and Hoopoe.

Thursday 6th January

Our final morning saw us pack and leave the excellent Vina las Torres where we had enjoyed some great wine tasting and superb food. A very dreary and wet start prevented us doing much birding at nearby Belen plain so we hit the motorway and began our journey North hoping the visibility would improve for another stop. It did a little, so we called in at Embalse de Arrocampo-Almaraz and spent some time looking for Purple Swamp-Hen. Five birds were seen well from the first stop and we also saw Black and Griffon Vultures near the motorway here. The small visitor centre a little further along the road was closed, but we pulled in anyway. This proved a good decision, as upon getting out of the car, Ashley flushed a medium sized passerine which flew away across open ground and into a small tree where it perched partly hidden. Thinking that it looked like a Eurasian Wryneck, the group moved round for a better look and sure enough there was the bird, performing well to all in the bottom of the tree and on the ground. A great way to end the tour! The journey back to Madrid went reasonably well despite one or two navigational issues again, but we arrived at the airport in plenty of time and enjoyed a hassle free trip back to the UK.

Systematic List

Birds

1. Great Crested Grebe
2. Little Grebe
3. Great Cormorant
4. Grey Heron
5. Little Egret
6. Cattle Egret

7. Great White Egret
8. Squacco Heron
9. White Stork
10. Greylag Goose
11. Common Shelduck
12. Mallard
13. Common Teal
14. Eurasian Wigeon
15. Gadwall
16. Northern Shoveler
17. Northern Pintail
18. Red-legged Partridge
19. Black-shouldered Kite
20. Red Kite
21. Griffon Vulture
22. Black Vulture
23. Spanish Imperial Eagle
24. Common Kestrel
25. Merlin
26. Peregrine
27. Marsh Harrier
28. Hen Harrier
29. Common Buzzard
30. Common Moorhen
31. Common Coot
32. Purple Swamp-Hen
33. Common Crane
34. Great Bustard
35. European Golden Plover
36. Northern Lapwing
37. Common Greenshank
38. Green Sandpiper
39. Common Sandpiper
40. Common Snipe
41. Black-headed Gull
42. Lesser Black-backed Gull
43. Black-bellied Sandgrouse
44. Woodpigeon
45. Collared Dove
46. Rock Dove
47. Little Owl
48. Common Kingfisher
49. Eurasian Wryneck
50. Skylark
51. Crested Lark
52. Woodlark
53. Thekla Lark
54. Calandra Lark
55. Crag Martin
56. House Martin
57. Meadow Pipit
58. White/Pied Wagtail
59. Grey Wagtail
60. Winter Wren
61. European Robin
62. Dunnock
63. Alpine Accentor
64. White-spotted Bluethroat
65. Black Redstart
66. Stonechat
67. Common Blackbird

68. Redwing
69. Song Thrush
70. Mistle Thrush
71. Blue Rock Thrush
72. Cetti's Warbler
73. Dartford Warbler
74. Sardinian Warbler
75. Blackcap
76. Common Chiffchaff
77. Firecrest
78. Blue Tit
79. Great Tit
80. Short-toed Treecreeper
81. Nuthatch
82. Common Raven
83. Western Jackdaw
84. Black-billed Magpie
85. Azure-winged Magpie
86. Southern Grey Shrike
87. Common Starling
88. Spotless Starling
89. House Sparrow
90. Spanish Sparrow
91. Chaffinch
92. Greenfinch
93. Goldfinch
94. Linnet
95. European Serin
96. Eurasian Siskin
97. Hawfinch
98. Reed Bunting
99. Corn Bunting
100. Red Avadavat