

## **EXTREMADURA 13th – 16th March 2009**

### **Friday**

We all met at Stansted Airport for our flight to Madrid's Barajas Airport. As we came in to land we flew over a WHITE STORK and saw another two soaring over the airport, let's hope they had clearance from air traffic control! We were soon on our way towards Extremadura and on our journey noted several GRIFFON VULTURES, 2 BLACK-WINGED STILTS plus plenty of SWALLOWS. We stopped for lunch at a services and enjoyed excellent views of a pair of HOOPOE along with two very confiding CRESTED LARKS. Our first main site was a large lake where the birds came thick and fast. Overhead EGYPTIAN VULTURE, BLACK KITE, GRIFFON VULTURE, several MARSH HARRIERS and a male LESSER KESTREL were noted whilst on the lake we enjoyed good views of PURPLE SWAMPHEN, KINGFISHER and a GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO, which flew past us whilst a SAVI'S WARBLER reeled from the reedbed. Several IBERIAN BLUE-TAILED DAMSELFLIES were seen in the grass before we moved around to another part of the lake. Several SPANISH SPARROWS were seen at close range and a PURPLE HERON dropped into the reeds. Over the next 30 minutes we noted SQUACCO HERON, 5 GARGANEY, GREAT WHITE EGRET, 8 PURPLE SWAMPHEN and a SOUTHERN GREY SHRIKE. With time getting on we headed to our accommodation in the heart of Extremadura, where we received a warm welcome from our hosts and a tour around the grounds, after which we were given a welcome drink and some local 'nibbles' before enjoying a first class meal using all local ingredients, washed down with regional wines and liqueurs. Needless to say, we all slept very well.

### **Saturday**

Our early morning walk took us around the local area where we watched SERIN, AZURE-WINGED MAGPIES, HOOPOE, SARDINIAN WARBLER and SPOTLESS STARLINGS amongst others before heading back for a hearty breakfast. The first main stop of the day was nearby and we had absolutely amazing views of LESSER KESTREL allowing us to see every I.D. feature as well as plenty of the common SPOTLESS STARLING. After watching these great birds, we headed to Monfrague National Park and en route saw a stunning BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE perched 20 feet from the road. We repositioned the vehicles so we could watch this rare Spanish bird hunting over the adjacent trees. The rest of the day was spent within the park where we saw 2 BONELLI'S EAGLE, BLACK STORKS, EGYPTIAN, GRIFFON & BLACK VULTURES, BOOTED EAGLE, 30 HAWFINCH, RED-RUMPED SWALLOWS, CRAG MARTIN, ALPINE SWIFT, PEREGRINE, HEN HARRIER and SHORT-TOED EAGLE the highlight being an adult SPANISH IMPERIAL EAGLE that we watched soaring for over 20 minutes plus many more good birds.

### **Sunday**

The pre-breakfast walk produced HAWFINCH, good numbers of AZURE-WINGED MAGPIES and a number of CHAMPAGNE ORCHIDS along a grassy verge. The rest of the day was spent on the vast rolling steppes. At our first site we immediately found over 20 LITTLE BUSTARD before 4 GREAT BUSTARD flew in. A MONTAGU'S HARRIER flew past whilst several BLACK STORKS

could be seen flying in the distance. Around us the air was alive with the calls of PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE and we eventually located a pair on a hill. We then took a walk and discovered over 20 GREAT BUSTARD, 20 PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE and a few more LITTLE BUSTARD as well as BLACK VULTURE and plenty of RED KITES. The nearby lanes had several GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO as well as SOUTHERN GREY SHRIKE and a large flock of SPANISH SPARROWS. We also discovered a freshly dead LADDER SNAKE on the path. Heading for our lunch stop, we discovered a small pool with four BLACK-WINGED STILT and several LITTLE OWLS. The afternoon was spent at several sites where the birds were keeping a little quiet due to the hot weather but we finished the day watching four BLACK-SHOULDERED KITES, which included a pair at the nest. The views were astonishing! WOODCHAT SHRIKE, SARDINIAN WARBLER, SHORT-TOED EAGLE were also seen. Before dinner in the evening we searched for SCOP'S OWL but only managed to hear 1-2 calling. Dinner was again exceptional.

### **Monday**

There was no early morning walk today as we headed out early to spend the morning around another area of steppe and rice-fields. GREAT and LITTLE BUSTARD were in good supply and included a few of the former indulging in full 'foam bath' display. CALANDRA LARKS and THEKLA LARKS were common and a small flock of RAVEN were good. Reaching the rice fields, MARSH HARRIERS became very common and several LITTLE RINGED PLOVERS displayed over a small pit. We stopped at a marsh area and found a good number of WATER PIPIT including some in summer plumage and more LITTLE RINGED PLOVER. In the roadside scrub we found several RED AVADAVATS as well as WHITETHROAT. Small numbers of SNIPE and GREEN SANDPIPER were noted and as we were leaving we had excellent views of four COMMON WAXBILLS. We had a brief coffee stop before heading back to the accommodation to say our farewells before the drive back to Madrid. Our flight was on time and we arrived back in England early evening. A fantastic weekend, the birding was unbelievable and the accommodation and food really surpassed itself. Can't wait until next year!