

## **EXTREMADURA – 24th – 27th March 2010**

### Wednesday 24

We landed at Madrid airport on time and were soon on the motorway southwest. It didn't take long to note our first WHITE STORKS and SPOTLESS STARLINGS. A lunch stop produced SERIN, CRESTED LARK and best of all, a dark-phase BOOTED EAGLE sat on a WOODPIGEON. Several BLACK-WINGED STILTS and a GREENSHANK were noted on motorway pools. We visited a large reservoir where PURPLE SWAMPHENS and up to 6 PURPLE HERONS were seen along with GREAT WHITE EGRET, FAN-TAILED WARBLER, IBERIAN GREY SHRIKE, LESSER KESTREL and SAVI'S WARBLER. We visited a nearby church and had further views of LESSER KESTREL before a torrential thunderstorm hit the area. We retreated down to our hotel and after welcoming drinks and nibbles we enjoyed an excellent three-course meal washed down with a local wine.

### Thursday 25

A pre-breakfast walk gave us two GREAT-SPOTTED CUCKOOS, HOOPOE, AZURE-WINGED MAGPIES and SARDINIAN WARBLER. We headed to an area of steppeland but didn't get far when it started raining and continued to do so on and off for the rest of the day. Despite this we enjoyed some excellent birding with 24 GREAT BUSTARDS, 11 LITTLE BUSTARDS and plenty of BLACK KITES, CALANDRA LARKS and six BLACK-BELLIED SANDGROUSE. A bonus in the form of a 2nd year SPANISH IMPERIAL EAGLE was watched at very close range but due to Spanish traffic laws, we just could not stop – typical! We visited the ricefields area and did reasonably well with two COMMON CRANES, RED AVADAVAT, 'GREENLAND' WHEATEAR, 8 LITTLE RINGED PLOVER as well as loads of CATTLE EGRETS. Our last site was a nearby reservoir that had over 300 SHOVELER, PINTAIL and over the surrounding countryside we watched RED-RUMPED SWALLOW, BLACK KITES and on the ground we found BARBARY NUT IRIS and plenty of SAWFLY ORCHIDS. Another scrummy meal was had back at the hotel and a warm bath was very welcome after the days' weather.

### Friday 26

We spent the day in the Monfrague National Park and with much better weather forecast we hoped to see plenty of raptors. It didn't take long to see our first BLACK & GRIFFON VULTURES of the day, quickly followed by two SHORT-TOED EAGLES. PALLID SWIFT, CRAG MARTIN and RED-RUMPED SWALLOW fed overhead on the numerous insects present in the warm sunshine. A stop further on saw us watching BOOTED EAGLE and a few EGYPTIAN VULTURES and a walk to the nearby castle yielded two CHOUGH, PEREGRINE, two HAWFINCH not to mention hundreds of GRIFFON VULTURES. With lunchtime approaching, we spent some time at a raptor viewpoint where we saw a brief adult SPANISH IMPERIAL EAGLE as well as RED KITE and at least three BLACK STORKS. We had a lovely picnic lunch in the sunshine watching SWALLOWS, BLACK REDSTART and a stunning male WHITE WAGTAIL before driving through the park. A stroll along the road gave us good views of a male SUBALPINE WARBLER and up to three BLUE ROCK THRUSH including two males. With the bad weather the previous day we had missed out on trying to see Black-winged Kite so with the weather looking good we tried the late afternoon for them. As we neared the site, the heavens opened and things were not looking too good. We parked and the sun came out and so did the birds and over the next hour we had great views of two BLACK-WINGED KITES hunting in front of us. TREE PIPIT, EGYPTIAN VULTURE, RAVEN and a male HEN HARRIER rounded off a great day. Before our evening meal, we watched a male SCOPS OWLS singing in the garden.

### Saturday 27

After breakfast we loaded up and headed off to the steppes for a morning's birding. CALANDRA LARKS, GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO and IBERIAN GREY SHRIKE were seen and we had good views of a THEKLA LARK. Overhead we could hear the calls of several PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE and eventually had distant views of them feeding on the ground. Three LITTLE BUSTARDS were present but this was eclipsed by the 42 GREAT BUSTARDS seen. More BLACK-BELLIED SANDGROUSE, BLACK VULTURE, SPANISH SPARROW and a BLACK STORK rounded off a good morning. The journey back to Madrid gave us SHORT-TOED EAGLE, HEN HARRIER, RED KITES and a flock of 20 BLACK-WINGED STILTS. We arrived back in England after a slight delay but had thoroughly enjoyed the trip and can't wait to go back.