

# WILD SPAIN

3 – 9/14 MAY 2009

## TOUR REPORT

**LEADER:** SIMON HARRAP

The 2009 Birdquest to Spain was another very successful trip to one of the greatest birding areas in Europe. We recorded 162 species in the most delightful surroundings. In Extremadura we found both Great and Little Bustards, Black-bellied and Pin-tailed Sandgrouse, three species of vulture, Spanish Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite and the rare melanistic form of Montagu's Harrier. Other highlights included good views of Eurasian Eagle Owl, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Black Wheatear and Orphean Warbler, and, at the local lakes, Little Bittern, Purple Heron, and Savi's and Great Reed Warblers. We also visited the Gredos, where Iberian Green Woodpecker, Water Pipit, Bluethroat, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Bonelli's and Dartford Warblers, Citril Finch and Ortolan Bunting were complemented by the great weather and fantastic scenery. Moving north and east we had good views of Dupont's Larks near Zaragoza and in the Pyrenees we found Lammergeier, Black Woodpecker, a stunning male Wallcreeper, Iberian Chiffchaff and Alpine Accentor.

The tour started in Madrid and in that vast and crazy airport we eventually found the baggage carousel and, finally, also retrieved our baggage. After a light lunch we left the airport and successfully negotiated Madrid's motorways and headed south and west to Extremadura. A brief stop for a leg stretch produced Black Vulture and Dabchick. Then, as we neared our destination, we stopped again at the lakes at Almaraz. Here, as well as Gull-billed Tern, Black-winged Stilt, Purple Hero and some very obliging Little Bitterns, we added Great Spotted Cuckoo (a superb close-range fly-past), Savi's Warbler (brief but good scope views) and, after an un-necessarily long wait, scope views of Great Reed Warbler. In the early evening we then continued on to our lovely *Hotel Rural* and a warm welcome from our hosts.

Our first full day in Spain started with a bang when a brief pre-dawn excursion produced Red-necked Nightjar. True, it was a brief fly-past, and true, it only called briefly, but at least we saw it. As dawn slowly broke and the light got better, we added Azure-winged Magpie, European Bee-eater and Woodchat Shrike; three particularly attractive and colourful species. After breakfast we then headed out on the plains east of Trujillo at Belen. White Storks were everywhere and we quickly found Little Bustards and, not long afterwards, a pair of Great Bustards, and enjoyed some good looks at both. The Little Bustards were engaged in calling and display flights, while the Great were much more sedate, marching up and down with a military bearing showing off their well-groomed moustaches. We were lucky enough to also have a good close fly-by by a pair of Black-bellied Sandgrouse and

find a couple more Great Spotted Cuckoos, while Calandra Larks were everywhere. Other notable species were the numerous Hoopoes, Tawny Pipit, Whinchat, Little Owl, several Lesser Kestrels hunting over the plains, a Montagu's Harrier and lots of Griffon Vultures, joined too by a few Black Vultures. And it was only 9.45 in the morning. Inevitably things slowed down a little, but not much. Heading west towards Cáceres we stopped at a desolate reservoir where a quick scan produced a pair of Collared Pratincoles and a lonely young Yellow-legged Gull. Further on a rocky ravine spanned by an impressive viaduct gave us great looks at Alpine Swifts and Crag Martins (viewed from above, rather than below) and we lucked into a Black Wheatear, which performed very well for us. We then explored an area of heavily-grazed *dehesa* where we studied half a dozen Thekla Larks at close range and enjoyed a long picnic in the shade. Another stop in more wooded country continued our run of luck when we spotted a Black-shouldered Kite before we had even stepped out of the vehicle and we went on to have good long looks both at rest and in flight. Other notable birds here were Spanish Sparrows and a very tame pair of Red-legged Partridges, while the final stop of the day, at the bullring in Trujillo, gave us more chances to study Lesser Kestrel, this time at close range. With clear blue skies, stunning scenery and wild flowers, and so many good birds, it had been a brilliant day.

Our second full day in Extremadura was as good as the first. After a brief look around the hotel garden, logging a singing Nightingale and some tongue orchids, we headed north to Monfragüe. Our first stop was the famous cliff face at Portilla del Tieta where, as I had hoped, a well grown Eagle Owl chick was on view, as well as several Black Storks. We waited around for a while and then, just as we were distracted by some Rock Buntings, the shout went up as a Spanish Imperial Eagle appeared on the skyline. It vanished quickly, but then came sailing overhead giving magnificent prolonged views. It was a full adult, with as much white on the shoulders as you could have wished for. Well pleased, we moved on, but a couple more stops only added Egyptian Vulture and an elusive Subalpine Warbler. We then pulled off the road at a little spot that has always been productive and, after enjoying really good looks at a male Subalpine Warbler, we found a splendid Western Orphean Warbler too, which also gave us the chance for a good look. Our next port of call was the famous Castile Monfragüe and nearby Pena Falcon. The castle was thronged with school children and only produced a brief Hawfinch, but at Pena Falcon, as well as several more Black Storks (including two adults on a nest with three small chicks) we had really good looks at two more Imperial Eagles, this time not as mature and with much less white on the wing, but nevertheless distinctive in silhouette and colouration. At our picnic stop in the heat of the afternoon we were entertained by yet more Black Storks, as well as tame Azure-winged Magpies, Long-tailed Tits of the dusky Spanish race and two Red Deer. Our final stop in Monfragüe was in some Cork Oak forest, where we added Short-toed Treecreeper and Nuthatch to the list and found some *Cytinus*, strange little parasitic plants closely related to *Rafflesia* of tropical South-East Asia. On the way back to the hotel we stopped again at the lakes at Almaraz where Savi's and Great Reed Warblers showed well and there were some distant Black Terns.

We had done very well and inevitably this meant there was not a lot left to see in Extremadura, so we followed these successes with a 'bits and pieces' sort of day. Starting again before dawn we had two more flight views of Red-necked Nightjar, and then headed out to the plains in search of sandgrouse. This was not successful, but several young male Great Bustards, a couple of Little Bustards, Short-toed Lark and Montagu's Harriers were not too bad. After a late breakfast it was back out on to the plains, where we at last found some Rollers as well as a smart male Western Black-eared Wheatear, Southern Grey Shrikes and more Short-toed Larks. We had some really good looks at Spanish Sparrows, admiring the 'chain mail' on their backs, but best of all, amongst several smart Montagu's Harriers was a melanistic male, a rare bird, which showed quite well as it quartered the huge fields. Over our picnic lunch we added Short-toed Eagle to the list and then, as it was again rather hot, headed back to the hotel for a siesta. We set out again in the late afternoon for the plains but it was still a mite hot and we saw, well, nothing much at all. On the way back to the hotel we stopped off at the main square in Trujillo and almost immediately found some Pallid Swifts; we went on to have

some very good views of this sometimes difficult species and also enjoyed good views of Lesser Kestrel.

We returned to the plains yet again early the next morning and this was to prove well worthwhile. Little Bustards were all around us, calling and flying, at least once both male and female together. It was the Great Bustards that stole the show, however, with two large bachelor parties and some smaller groups totally at least 33 birds. They were very agitated, running around in groups and looking very interested every time new birds arrived. Apart from this spectacle, the main target was still sandgrouse and we saw a pair of Black-bellied almost as soon as we arrived and then another singleton later on, but Pin-tailed were conspicuous by their absence until two birds flew in and dropped to the ground not too far away. The views were poor and, as usual, they were either hiding or in dead ground, and we did not see them again until they flew off, again showing poorly. Somewhat chastened by this, we had to return for breakfast and then it was time to say goodbye to our fabulous hosts and their marvellous hotel. We returned to the plains for one last try, but were truly out of luck with sandgrouse, although good looks at Fan-tailed Warbler (!) and an immature Golden Eagle were some compensation. We again picnicked in the shade of some Cork Oaks, and a stop at a bushy-covered ravine provided a host of Viperine Snakes in the river and a frustrating Cirl Bunting, which flew off before we could clinch it. Our final bird in Extremadura was Rock Sparrow, with a noisy pair in another stand of Cork Oaks, and then it was time to speed north to the Gredos, where we arrived in the cool of the evening. For this with some energy left to raise their binoculars, both Citril Finch and Crossbill could be logged from the bedroom windows before we met up again for dinner in the grand old Parador.

We had one full day in the Gredos and the weather was kind to us, as it was warm, calm and did not rain (or snow). We started off before breakfast in the Parador grounds, where we had really good looks at a large party of Common Crossbills, as well as Firecrest, Western Bonelli's Warbler and a stunning Red Squirrel, but Citril Finch, although it did show, played hard to get. Later in the morning we headed up to some high altitude broom scrub and, almost before we had got out of the bus, we had a fine male Bluethroat on show. We enjoyed really good looks at this little stunner, as well as Water Pipit, Spanish Wagtail and some smart Ortolan Buntings. We then moved on to a road through the forest at lower altitude, where we had another brief Citril Finch (don't worry, by the time we left the Gredos we had all seen it, some of us very well indeed). More obliging were several Pied Flycatchers of the distinctive Iberian race, some more Rock Sparrows and Bonelli's Warblers, a furtive Hawfinch and a noisy Iberian Green Woodpecker. We finished the day at the Plataforma de Gredos, where there were some magnificent Spanish Ibex, a very tame fox and, back along the road, up to four Dippers.

We had a little time before breakfast on the last day of the main tour to fill in some gaps in the Gredos and did rather well. At the Parador we had good looks at Crested Tit, and then further along the road found some very tame Woodlarks and a superb Melodious Warbler, which sat up and sang for us just a few yards away. One of the wanted birds was, however, Dartford Warbler and we had drawn a blank when, driving along, one flew in front of the bus. We stopped and had good looks at a pair as they perched up on the broom scrub, and a little further along the road a male Rock Thrush sat and posed in the scope and also engaged in some high-flying song-flights - a fitting end to the session. It was then time to pack and drive back to Madrid airport, where we said goodbye to most of the party at the end of a great trip to Wild Spain.

It was a stalwart group that stayed on for the extension, and the first task was the long drive north and east to Zaragoza. On a Saturday afternoon the roads were quiet, however, and we made good speed, arriving in time to have a go at our target birds in the steppes around Belchite. Almost as soon as we arrived I heard Dupont's Lark singing, but they played hard to get and for a long time all we could see were Lesser Short-toed and Calandra Larks, with a Stone-curlew as another new bird for the trip, while a flying Pin-tailed Sandgrouse was, yet again, frustratingly distant. Then, with heavy rain

threatening and just as we were about to leave, I spotted a Dupont's Lark sat up on a little bush and we had good scope views of this notoriously difficult bird.

After a night in a rather plush hotel in the centre of Zaragoza we returned to the steppes at Belchite early the next morning. We found a variety of birds, both expected (Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Western Black-eared Wheatear, Greater Short-toed Lark) and unexpected (Pied Flycatcher, Marsh Harrier), and after a little effort had fantastic views of another couple of Dupont's Larks. Back at the hotel for breakfast we could sit back and relax, and once we had finally extricated ourselves from Zaragoza, head north to Jaca and the Pyrenees. With the weather looking fair I decided to head up into the hills and we spend a very productive few hours scanning a scenic valley and enjoying our picnic. We saw three Lammergeiers, an immature and two smart adults, and, although the views were a little distant, they were still much appreciated. A Golden Eagle perched on the skyline was harassed for a long while by several Ravens, and on the very high slopes we spotted parties of Alpine Choughs (just identifiable) and several Pyrenean Chamois. Around the car there are plenty of Common Crossbills, Crested Tits and some Citril Finches, and on the way back down to the hotel we added Firecrest too.

On our first full day in the Pyrenees the weather looked a little threatening, but I decided to risk it and we headed up the Hecho valley in search of Wallcreeper. Around its traditional crags Red-billed Choughs, Crag Martins and Alpine Swifts were wheeling and it was not long before we spotted a fine male Wallcreeper. He came lower and lower and we had great views, even watching him catch and eat a Painted Lady. Very well pleased, we could enjoy more views of vultures, choughs, Crested Tits and chamois, as well as a variety of wild flowers and butterflies (including Scarce Swallowtail and Camberwell Beauty). After our picnic we made a long circuit around, adding very little and watching the clouds gather, until finally back at Jaca we struck lucky and found first Cirl Bunting (in a gap in the rain) and then had good flight views of Black Woodpecker before returning to the hotel.

Our luck with the weather continued as we headed west from Jaca the following morning. Our first stop was in some riverine forest where, after a bit of searching, we found a singing Iberian Chiffchaff which went on to give good views. Further on we stopped at the impressive gorge of the Foz de Lumbier. Here we heard another Iberian Chiffchaff, as well as Common Chiffchaff, and were surprised to see an adult Yellow-legged Gull on the bank of the river. A Honey-buzzard overhead was a new bird for the trip, and we enjoyed good looks at Rock Sparrow, Red-billed Chough, Nightingale, Subalpine Warbler and Cirl Bunting, as well as the numerous Griffon Vultures. Bill was in his element here, with plenty of butterflies in the sunshine, including Spanish Fritillary, Spanish Festoon and Scarce Swallowtail. By the time we left it was hot, and it seemed appropriate to 'head for the hills' and cooler conditions. We drove along a scenic road up to the French border, enjoying our picnic en route, and slipped over into France to follow up a lead that I had been given. There was plenty of snow, although it was not cold, and Alpine Choughs, Black Redstarts and Water Pipits were on show. Soon, the tip-off paid off when we found the first of half a dozen Alpine Accentors, which went on to perform brilliantly as they sang from low trees and grovelled almost at our feet. Well pleased, we set off back over the pass into Spain only to find the road had been blocked with a row of large concrete blocks! The Spaniard responsible was unsympathetic, merely indicating they were working on the road. So, with the blockage looking long-term there was nothing for it but to head back into France and return to Jaca via 100 km of foreign soil. In the event it was pleasantly scenic and made a nice comparison with the Spanish side, and was probably only about 30 km longer.

On the final day in the Pyrenees we did not have too much to look for, which was fortunate because we experienced the worst weather of the whole trip. We started at the French border crossing at Portalet where, after a short while, it started raining and it just got heavier and heavier, with some rumbles of thunder. Needless to say we did not see much, with just Water Pipits and Black Redstarts on view as we sheltered in the abandoned remains of the customs post. Dropping to lower altitudes the rain stopped but there were few birds to see, although of course the scenery and flowers were

very pleasant. We pottered on, looking for something, and near Jaca found a Lammergeier circling with some Griffons (it even stooped on one of the Griffons) and then a kettle of 14 Honey-buzzards, evidently still on their way north. Bonelli's and Subalpine Warblers and Cirl Buntings were pleasant, but the highlight of the day came when we found a Honey-buzzard perched at eye level almost at the roadside and enjoyed some really great views. Finally, it was back to the hotel to pack, enjoy one last meal and, after breakfast the next morning, say goodbye to the Pyrenees and head for Madrid and the flight home and the end of a truly memorable experience of 'Wild Spain'.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

### PODICIPEDIDAE

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: Several at Almaraz and at least one on the huge reservoir west of Jaca.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: One seen at the rest stop en route from Madrid to Trujillo, and a couple on a small pond in the *dehesa* north of Trujillo.

### PHALACROCORACIDAE

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Two on the first visit to Almaraz lakes.

### ARDEIDAE

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*: Several sightings at the lake at Almaraz, including birds seen perched in the reeds.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: Abundant in Extremadura.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*: A couple on both visits to the lake at Almaraz.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: A scatter throughout the tour.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*: Several at the lake near Almaraz.

### CICONIIDAE

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*: A number of great sightings of this truly 'prehistoric' bird, including a pair at a nest in Monfragüe NP at Pena Falcon (with three chicks).

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*: Abundant in Extremadura, but few in the Pyrenees.

### ANATIDAE

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: A pair on the Embalse de Guadiloba west of Trujillo, and also seen on a pond in Monfragüe and on the return drive to Madrid at the end of the extension.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*: A scatter seen flying around over the plains

### ACCIPITRIDAE

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*: Only recorded on the extension. One soaring over the Foz de Lumbier, and then a flock of 14 near Jaca on the last day there, with a singleton perched by the road later the same afternoon.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*: With almost no effort one was found in the *dehesa* near Monfragüe and it gave great views, both perched and in flight.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*: Common.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*: Far less numerous than Black Kite, but some great views of this superb raptor. It seemed to be rather common in the Pyrenees, but relatively scarce in Extremadura. Listed by Birdlife as 'Near Threatened', with a world population of around 50,000 birds.

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*: Only recorded on the extension. Good views on our first afternoon in the Hecho valley of an immature and then a pair flying together over the distant mountains, and then a singleton near Jaca on the last afternoon.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*: A scatter, with several excellent views. Despite its huge range, listed by Birdlife as 'Endangered', with a world population of 21,000 - 67,200 birds.

- Eurasian Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*: Abundant, with nesting/roosting birds at cliff sites in Monfragüe and the Pyrenees; possibly as many as 100 were seen flying overhead as we were looking for Iberian Chiffchaff.
- Eurasian Black Vulture (Cinereous Vulture) *Aegypius monachus*: Common on the plains around Trujillo. One of the most widespread vultures, it is listed by Birdlife as 'Near Threatened', with a world population of just 14,000 - 20,000 birds.
- Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*: Three seen in Extremadura, with nice views of a pair in the air together over the plains west of Trujillo.
- Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: One at the lake near Almaraz and one at the Dupont's site near Zaragoza (carrying nesting material).
- Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*: Good views of several in Extremadura, including the rare dark morph: this bird was sooty black with contrastingly paler undersides to the primaries, and was probably a subadult male.
- Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*: A scatter, and often seen sitting on roadside poles.
- Spanish Eagle *Aquila adalberti*: A magnificent adult showed well in flight on our first morning in Monfragüe, with a pair seen later in the day at Pena Falcon. Listed by Birdlife as 'Vulnerable', the population is now believed to number around 200 breeding pairs. Numbers have increased annually in Spain since 2000 and the species has recently recolonized Portugal (two pairs).
- Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*: An immature on the plains west of Trujillo showed very nicely, then an adult seen in the Hecho valley, perched on a high crag and periodically mobbed by Ravens.
- Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*: A good scatter seen at Monfragüe, the Gredos and the Pyrenees. Suspiciously, almost all were light-phase birds (perhaps the dark phase individuals are 'lost' among the Black Kites - but we did look carefully).

#### FALCONIDAE

- Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*: Common around Trujillo, with good views at the bullring and at the Plaza Major in the town itself. Listed by Birdlife as 'Vulnerable', with a world population of 140,000 birds. The European population is estimated at 25,000-42,000 pairs, with half of these in Spain. Several thousand pairs breed outside this range, principally in central Asia. Western Palearctic populations have undergone serious declines (and the western European population has declined by around 95% since 1950), although a few have begun to increase again.
- Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Seen almost daily in small numbers, but you have to be careful....

#### PHASIANIDAE

- Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*: Some nice views of this species in its true home, with a particularly tame (stupid?) pair at the Black-shouldered Kite site.
- Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* (H): Only recorded on the extension, where heard near Zaragoza.

#### RALLIDAE

- European Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* (H): Heard at the lake at Almaraz and at the Dupont's Lark site near Zaragoza.
- Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: A few at Almaraz and a singleton on a pond out in the dehesa.
- Purple Swamp-hen (Purple Gallinule) *Porphyrio porphyrio* (H): Heard briefly at the lake near Almaraz.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*: Singletons at the stop en route from Madrid to Trujillo and at the lake at Almaraz.

#### OTIDIDAE

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax*: A scatter seen on the plains, the males giving their 'raspberry' call and often flying around to show off their conspicuous white wings. Listed by Birdlife as 'Near Threatened', there are thought to be around 250,000 birds in the world, but the population trends are unclear.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*: Good numbers on the plains around Trujillo, including a mixed bag of at least 33 birds on our last morning in Extremadura. Listed by Birdlife as 'Vulnerable', with a world population of 45,000 birds and falling.

#### RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Haematopus haematopus*: Two at the lakes at Almaraz and two on a pond on the steppes west of Trujillo.

#### BURHINIDAE

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicanus*: Only recorded on the extension, when one was seen near Zaragoza.

#### GLAREOLIDAE

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*: Two at the reservoir near Cáceres.

#### CHARADRIIDAE

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*: One at the reservoir near Cáceres.

#### SCOLOPACIDAE

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: A few singles seen in Extremadura.

#### LARIDAE

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*: A grotty immature at the reservoir near Cáceres, and three adults seen on the extension (at the Foz de Lumbier, the large reservoir west of Jaca, and en route to Madrid).

#### STURNIDAE

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*: Several at the lakes at Almaraz and a couple of calling birds over fields near Cáceres.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*: A few distant birds at the lakes at Almaraz.

#### PTEROCLIDAE

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis*: Good views of two in flight on the first morning at Belen, then three flying birds on the plains west of Trujillo on our last morning in Extremadura, and finally two on the steppes at Zaragoza.

Pin-tailed Sandgrouse *Pterocles alchata*: Poor flight views of two on the plains west of Trujillo on our last morning in Extremadura, and an even poorer view of a singleton near Zaragoza.

#### COLUMBIDAE

Rock Dove *Columba livia*: A scatter of 'feral' pigeons.

Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*: Small numbers throughout.



Eurasian Collared Dove: *Streptopelia decaocto*: Fairly common, especially around towns and villages. A relatively recent colonist in Spain.

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: Just a few seen, including one scoped in Monfragüe at Portilla del Tieta.

#### CUCULIDAE

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius*: After our first sighting at Almaraz, we had several sightings on the plains around Trujillo, including good views on the first morning on the Belen plain.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: Commonly heard, but very few seen.

#### STRIGIDAE

European Scops Owl *Otus scops*: Heard, mostly more-or-less distantly, around our *Hotel Rural* near Trujillo, and then one seen very well on the extension, just outside our hotel in Jaca.

Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo*: A well-grown chick seen nicely at the traditional rock in Monfragüe.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: One out on the plains, sitting, as usual, on piles or rocks and walls.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* (H NL): Heard by Dave at the Parador Gredos.

#### CAPRIMULGIDAE

Red-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruficollis*: Several sightings around our Hotel Rural near Jaca, mostly fairly brief, but some good views for a couple of partying n'er do wells!

#### APODIDAE

Common Swift *Apus apus*: Common.

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*: Great looks in the *Plaza Major* in Trujillo.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*: Great looks at the Black Wheatear spot (where we could look down on them) and also seen nicely at the Wallcreeper spot in the Pyrenees.

#### ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: Singles at the lakes at Almaraz.

#### MEROPIDAE

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*: Fairly common in Extremadura, but never commonplace.

#### CORACIIDAE

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*: Several on the wires out on the plains near Cáceres.

#### UPUPIDAE

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: Great views of several in Extremadura.

#### PICIDAE

Iberian Green Woodpecker (Sharpe's Green Woodpecker) *Picus viridis*: One seen in the Gredos, but mostly in flight, and others heard in the Pyrenees, with again one seen in flight, crossing the valley below the Wallcreeper crags.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*: Only recorded on the extension, where one was seen near Jaca.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*: A handful in the Gredos and the Pyrenees.

## ALAUDIDAE

Dupont's Lark *Chersophilus duponti*: Only recorded on the extension. Around three seen well on the plains near Zaragoza, both in the evening and early morning, although it took some time to track them down. Listed by Birdlife as 'Near Threatened', with a world population of around 35,000 birds scattered across a vast range, of which there are 2,500-3,000 singing males in Spain.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra*: Abundant in some areas of the plains, the song was almost constantly audible.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*: Three on the plains near Trujillo, and a couple at Dupont's site near Zaragoza.

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*: Only recorded on the extension, when abundant on the plains near Zaragoza.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: Scattered, especially along the roads, but also present in the *dehesa*.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*: Great views of several singing and sat up on bushes and fence posts at our picnic spot in Monfragüe; only subtly distinct from Crested Lark.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*: A handful seen and heard in the *dehesa* and then good looks at several on the last morning in the Gredos.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*: Common at higher altitudes in the Gredos and also heard at Portalet in the Pyrenees.

## HIRUNDINIDAE

Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*: Common, with some great views, especially at the bridges in Monfragüe.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Seen in small numbers.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*: Fairly common in Extremadura.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbica*: Common, and often found around ravines and steep valleys.

## MOTACILLIDAE

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: A single seen briefly on the first morning on the Belen plain.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*: A few in the Gredos and the Pyrenees.

Spanish Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] iberiae*: Several of the race *iberiae* in the Gredos; a 'split' for some.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: A couple in the Gredos and the Pyrenees.

White Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] alba*. Just small numbers seen, all of the nominate form, *alba*.

## CINCLIDAE

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*: Four seen in the Gredos and then three on the river in the Foz de Lumbier.

## TROGLODYTIDAE

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*: Scattered throughout but seldom seen.

## PRUNELLIDAE

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*: Abundant in the Gredos and a few in the Pyrenees.

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*: Following a tip-off, we had great views of around six on the French border near Jaca.

## TURDIDAE

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*: A few in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*: Commonly heard, with several views (mostly brief) of singing birds in Extremadura and the Gredos, but commoner and, apparently, easier to see at lower altitudes in the Pyrenees, especially at the Foz de Lumbier.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*: At least three in the broom scrub high in the Gredos, showing superbly; one of these actually had a small white spot on the throat.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochrurus*: One at Pena Falcon in Monfragüe and a few in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*: A single on the Belen plain in Extremadura.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*: Fairly common in Extremadura.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: Quite common higher up in the Gredos and Pyrenees, with several (presumably migrants) at the Dupont's Lark site near Zaragoza.

Western Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica*: A smart male on wires near Cáceres and a couple at Zaragoza.

Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucura*: Good views of one near Trujillo.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*: A male seen briefly high in the Gredos and then another male, watched song-flighting, was found on the last morning there.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*: Several around the crags and gorges in Monfragüe.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*: Indeed common.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*: Several heard in the Pyrenees and one seen briefly near the hotel.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*: Several in the *dehesa* and also seen in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

#### SYLVIIDAE

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*: A few heard, and seen at the lake near Almaraz.

Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Warbler) *Cisticola juncidis*: Several heard in Extremadura and some good views of one or two.

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*: Good scope views of one at the lake near Almaraz.

European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*: Several showing briefly at the lake near Almaraz.

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: Great views at the lake near Almaraz, especially on the second visit.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*: One seen superbly on the last morning in the Gredos.

Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*: After something of a struggle, we eventually got good views of a couple in the Gredos. Despite a world population estimated at 5,700,000-11,000,000 birds, listed by Birdlife as 'Near Threatened'. The species is restricted to southern and western Europe and north-west Africa, where it is patchily distributed but locally common to very common. The European breeding population, which numbers 1,900,000-3,700,000 pairs, constitutes more than 90% of the global population, but underwent a large decline during 1970-1990. The stronghold is located in Spain which holds 1,700,000 to 3,000,000 pairs, but the population here decreased by 5.9% per year between 1998-2006. France holds the next largest population, but the trend here is unclear. In the UK it has recently increased rapidly and extended its range northwards, reaching a total of 3,209 territories in 2006. However, if trends in Spain are reflected elsewhere in Europe, the European breeding population may have declined by over 40% over the last ten years.

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*: Great views of a couple in Monfragüe and then again in the Pyrenees

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala*: Eventually, good views of several.

Western Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis*: One seen well in Monfragüe, showing its hulking body and pale eyes, with another seen there by Richard.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: A few in the Gredos.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*: A couple of singing birds in the Pyrenees.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: Commonly heard (but relatively seldom seen) in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Bonelli's Warbler (Western Bonelli's Warbler) *Phylloscopus bonelli*: Several in the Gredos and a few heard in the Pyrenees.

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus brehmii*: Only recorded on the extension, where one seen and another heard at Foz de Lumbier. Looks like a cross between a Common Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler, with a song that is distinct from Common Chiffchaff.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: Several heard in the Pyrenees.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* (NL): Recorded in Extremadura and on the last morning in the Pyrenees.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* (NL): Seen by Dave on his early morning patch in Jaca.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*: A couple in the Gredos and common in the Pyrenees; a little stunner.

#### MUSCICAPIDAE

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* (NL): Seen by Bill on the last morning at Jaca.

European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*: Three in the Gredos, including a smart male, and one (a migrant) on the plains near Zaragoza.

#### AEGITHALIDAE

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*: Several little parties seen; the race in southern Iberia (*irbii*) is short tailed and very dusky.

#### PARIDAE

Crested Tit *Parus cristatus*: Seen nicely in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Common in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

European Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*: Scattered throughout.

Great Tit *Parus major*: Again, scattered throughout.

#### SITTIDAE

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*: Several in the Cork Oak forest of Monfragüe, the Gredos and the Pyrenees.

#### TICHODROMADIDAE

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*: Only recorded on the extension. After just a short wait we were treated to great views of a male at the upper Hecho valley in the Pyrenees; we even saw him catching a Painted Lady.

#### CERTHIIDAE

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*: A few in the Cork Oaks in Monfragüe and in the pinewoods of the Gredos and Pyrenees, but heard much more often than seen.

#### ORIOLIDAE

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: Heard and seen well by some at the *Hotel Rural* near Trujillo, and also a couple of other brief sightings.

#### LANIIDAE

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*: A few on the plains in Extremadura.

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*: Many good views of this handsome shrike.

## CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: Scattered sightings.

Iberian Magpie (Iberian Azure-winged Magpie) *Cyanopica cyanus*: Common in Extremadura.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*: Scattered along the roadsides.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocolax graculus*: Only recorded on the extension, with distant views of a big flock in the Hecho Valley and much better views up at the French border.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocolax pyrrhocolax*: Only recorded on the extension. Common in the Pyrenees, keeping us amused with its aerial acrobatics as we waited for the Wallcreeper.

Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Surprisingly local, but common in Trujillo town.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*: Scattered (all are black 'Carrion Crows' rather than grey-and-black 'Hoodies'), with most sightings in the Gredos and Pyrenees,

Common Raven *Corvus corax*: Odd birds seen throughout the tour.

## STURNIDAE

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*: Truly spotless.

## PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: Common.

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*: Very local, we had our best views at the roadside in the plains west of Trujillo.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* (NL): One in the Gredos.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*: A noisy pair in the Cork Oak forest in the north of Monfragüe and also seen in the Gredos and at the Foz de Lumbier.

## FRINGILLIDAE

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*: Ubiquitous.

European Serin *Serinus serinus*: Common, the jangly song was a constant backdrop to our explorations, especially in Monfragüe.

Citril Finch *Serinus citrinella*: In dribs and drabs we eventually all had decent views in the Gredos, then several birds on the extension, in the upper Hecho valley.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*: A good scatter of sightings.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*: This delicate little finch was rather common.

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*: A handful, including at least one juvenile, in the Gredos.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*: A few in the Gredos and Pyrenees.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*: Seen well in the Gredos, where there were up to 25 outside the Parador, and also in the Hecho Valley.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* (NL): Seen by Bill in the Gredos.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*: Two seen briefly at the Castle Monfragüe, and then a skulking bird seen in the Gredos.

## EMBERIZIDAE

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*: One heard in Monfragüe and then several seen well around Jaca.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*: A few in Monfragüe and then great views in the Gredos.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: Great views of several in the Gredos.

Corn Bunting *Miliaria calandra*: One or two.

## MAMMALS

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*: One in Extremadura and also seen by Bill in the Gredos.

Eurasian Red Squirrel (Red Squirrel) *Sciurus vulgaris*: One in the Gredos. What ears!

Alpine Marmot *Marmota marmota*: One seen well but briefly at close range in the Pyrenees.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*: Great looks at a rather tame animal around the La Plataforma car park in the Gredos.

Red Deer (Elk) *Cervus elaphus*: A couple scoped at a picnic spot in Monfragüe and then five in roadside fields on the drive from Jaca to Madrid.

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*: Several in the Pyrenees.

Spanish Ibex *Capra pyrenaica*: Several at the Plataforma de Gredos.

Pyrenean Chamois *Rupicapra pyrenaica*: Only recorded on the extension. Up to eight in the high pastures in the Hecho valley, with some nice scope views.

## BIRD OF THE TRIP (based on a vote at the end of the main tour)

- 1 Little Bustard
- 2 Great Bustard
- 3 Spanish Eagle
- 4= Sardinian Warbler
- Citril Finch
- Azure-winged Magpie

27 species received at least one vote

**WILD SPAIN 2009:** all photographs by Simon Harrap



CLOCKWISE: Great Bustards; Lesser Kestrel.



CLOCKWISE: Black Stork; Eagle Owl chick;  
Great Reed Warbler; Red-legged Partridges.





CLOCKWISE:  
Thekla Lark;  
Melodious Warbler;  
tongue orchid *Serapias sp.*;  
Fox;  
*Cytinus sp.*  
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CLOCKWISE:  
Lesser Short-toed Lark; Citril  
Finch; Griffon Vulture; Spanish  
Festoon; Pyrenean Chamois.



CLOCKWISE:  
Alpine Accentor; Wallcreeper; Painted Lady.