

# Swallow BIRDING

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## **EXTREMADURA** **Bustards, Eagles & Sandgrouse** **22nd - 25th March 2011**

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### ***TOUR PARTICIPANTS***

JOHN CHURCH  
BRIAN McGHIE  
MARTIN WASS

NIGEL KENDALL  
ERNIE WELLS

### ***TOUR MANAGER***

ANNETTE ADAMS

### ***TOUR LEADER***

STEVE GRIMWADE

### ***Tuesday 22nd March***

We all met at Stansted Airport for our 8.20am flight to Madrid's Barajas Airport. Unfortunately the plane was delayed by an hour but when it did arrive, we were off straight away.

Touching down in Madrid we quickly picked up our baggage and with car hire sorted we're soon on our way around the ring road before using the R5 toll road to make up time. Spotless Starlings were quite common and a single Common Buzzard as well as several Kestrels, were seen near the outskirts of Madrid. We reached the E5 motorway and headed south towards Extremadura.

Soon we were picking out our first Black Kites and Griffon Vultures and a roadside pool produced a pair of Black-winged Stilts, not easy to see at 110km an hour! Further along the motorway a large raptor was seen flapping slowly over a nearby service station and luckily with a road junction close by, we quickly turned off and chased after this mystery bird, turning out to be a stunning first year Golden Eagle accompanied by three Black Kites. An excellent start!

After around 45 minutes we arrived at the reed-fringed Embalse de Arrocampo. This large reservoir's water helps cool the nearby nuclear power station at Almaraz. Although sunny, the wind was gusty and cool, but this didn't stop us



Iberian Grey Shrike



Great Egret

seeing Little, Cattle and Great Egrets, White Stork, Cormorants and up to 6 Purple Swamphens that were elusive on occasions. Both Iberian Grey and Woodchat Shrikes hunted from fence posts and up to two singing Zitting Cisticola's bounced in the air. Other passerines included Stonechat and Meadow Pipit.

Due to high water levels only Mallard, Coot and up to 25 Gadwall frequented the open water. Sand Martins and Swallows fed above the reservoir, as did several Marsh Harriers over the reedbeds. The reedbeds also produced a couple of Purple Heron although they kept their heads down in the windy conditions.

Retracing our steps back along the track, we stopped to watch several Lesser Kestrels and a Short-toed Eagle hovering over fields.

Corn Bunting and Crested Lark were also seen nearby and a Squacco Heron produced excitement as it landed right in front of us before deciding to move further downstream. A further search yielded another bird but both birds flew out of view.

In the streamside scrub we located up to 30 Spanish Sparrows including some stunning males and a few House Martins were also noted. With a little time spare we visited a nearby church to watch its nesting Lesser Kestrels and we had excellent views as 12 of these fantastic birds just floated above us with Jackdaws, allowing good photo opportunities.

We then headed on towards our hotel close to Trujillo, where after settling in we were invited to drinks by our hosts Juan Pedro and Belen. By now we were quite hungry so some nibbles of chorizo sausage and fresh goats and sheep's cheese were welcome.

Dinner was fantastic with Chickpeas in tomato sauce, courgette, onion and herbs to start, followed by an appetiser of Pomegranate Jelly and blue cheese cream served in a shot glass, as well as grated quince, cheese and thyme on toast and this was before our main course! This consisted of Chicken and rice, cooked with apples and served with salad, then Lemon cream for dessert, made with fruit from the garden, all served with a northern spanish rosé. As an aperitif we tried the local speciality – Acorn Liqueur. After the large meal and a few drinks we were all ready for a good nights sleep.



Purple Swamphen



Lesser Kestrel

### ***Wednesday 23rd March***

Before breakfast we took an optional pre-breakfast walk around the grounds of the hotel, although several of the group were missing due to the complexities of setting Spanish time on their alarm clocks!

A good number of Azure-winged Magpies flew around the wooded fields and as usual, Corn Buntings sang from tops of bushes. A calling Cuckoo and Hoopoe could be heard but not seen. The colours of the wildflowers were fantastic in the early morning light and included Spanish Broom and the beautiful Champagne Orchid. Then back for breakfast at 7.45am, which consisted of cereal, yoghurt, cheese, meats, sausage, eggs, bacon, toast and home-made preserves. Then time to go and whilst outside the hotel loading the van with optics, packed lunch etc, we were attracted to two Red-rumped Swallows, performing in front of us. Over the ridge behind the hotel we had good views of both Griffon and Black Vultures side by side for ID comparison.



Azure-winged Magpie

A few minutes later we were in the town of Trujillo watching up to eight Lesser Kestrels on the roof of the bullring, allowing good views.

Our first main site of the day was an area of steppe grassland, where we immediately heard singing Calandra Larks. A cold wind blew over the plains making us put on layers of clothes, despite the sun being out! Several Little Bustards were noted including some males with their distinctive black and white neck collars.

Soon they took off and displayed large white wings, looking like ducks in flight. We left the shelter of the vehicle and walked slowly along track. Thekla Larks sang from rocky outcrops and we had better views of Calandra Larks with large black underwings and white trailing edges, looking good in the sun.

A scan of the area produced a large flock of 45 Great Bustards, including a couple of males, one of which performed its amazing 'foam-bath' display. Spanish Sparrows were seen in good numbers and Corn Buntings were ever present. We achieved a little shelter further



Spanish Wagtail

up the track and amongst Cattle, watched up to 12 White Wagtails and a male Spanish Wagtail, resplendent with its bright colours. Suddenly the air was alive with calls of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse and we got onto several groups in flight but they soon dropped out of view. Moving up the track to get better views we located about 20 on the ground and they looked really smart through the scope.

With the thermals rising we soon saw Griffon Vulture, Red and Black Kites and a few Black Vultures of which two went straight over our heads. The track was blocked further along with a farmer in his tractor feeding cattle, so we stopped and a scan of the area produced two Black-bellied Sandgrouse. A Wheatear sp was seen briefly but promptly disappeared so we retraced our steps along the track. We didn't get very far when amongst the wagtails were four Short-toed Larks and a male Greenland Wheatear. A few Ravens and yet more Great Bustards were seen as we got back to the minibus. In the van we had lunch to get some shelter from the wind and found a pair of Spectacled Warblers sitting on a wire fence. The female flew off leaving the male in full view allowing good scope views.

With some of our main targets acquired, we headed south of Trujillo to Embalse de Sierra Brava, where the reservoir looked more like the sea with a large amount of white-topped waves. A scan produced up to 500 Shoveler and several hundred Pintail, not to mention Great Crested Grebes, Wigeon and a single Avocet swimming in the deep water with the Shoveler. The flora of the area was great with Barbary-nut Iris and Sawfly Orchid being the most notable. A few Hoopoe, Red-legged Partridge and two female Great Bustard were also seen. Large numbers of Swallows were constructing their nests on the dam and were constantly wizzing past and a Lesser Black-backed Gull was seen over the reservoir. Nearby we visited an area of rice paddies, but these were surprisingly quiet, although a Little-ringed Plover, Snipe, Fan-tailed Warbler, Kingfisher and large amounts of Cattle Egrets were found. Another promising area was being excavated for a massive thermal solar plant, but this did provide us with good views of Iberian Grey and Woodchat Shrikes. Trying our luck further south was again quiet with 150 Black-headed Gulls and 5 Black-winged Stilts being the highlights.

We drove back north to another area of steppe, where we watched around 25 Black-bellied Sandgrouse on the ground giving good views, but the highlight was undoubtedly the 95 Great Bustard and 35 Little Bustard in a field together. We drove towards them and using the van as a hide, had brilliant views of at least three male GB's displaying to the females, whilst the Little Bustards sat in the grass close by.

With time against us we turned round and headed off only stopping because one of the minibus doors wasn't closed properly. By doing this we disturbed three Stone Curlew close by, one of which sat in full view for us.



Short-toed Eagle

It didn't take long for us to get back to the hotel, where we enjoyed a starter of Mediterranean vegetables, followed by Migas, a main course consisting of breadcrumbs, fried egg, chorizo, green pepper and lardons (which you mix together) served with tomato salad. Dessert was Rice pudding and again we had either peach or acorn liqueur to finish off the day.

### **Thursday 24th March**

The pre-breakfast walk produced several views of Hawfinch and this time the Hoopoe and Cuckoo were seen in the Oak woodland. The surrounding woodlands were awash with colour and on the track we found Petticoat-hoop Narcissi. Large numbers of Azure-winged Magpies flew through and a few more Song Thrushes than the previous day were seen.

After breakfast we drove through Trujillo, noting a few Lesser Kestrels on the bullring before heading north towards Monfrague National Park. Our first unplanned stop produced a hovering Short-toed Eagle and several Crag Martins over the nearby river. Pressing onwards we took a walk around the area below Monfrague Castle. More Hawfinches were noted, although remained generally elusive and good numbers of Blackcaps were present, including several singing males. As we walked up the hill Griffon Vultures glided by at eye level and a few Black Vultures were seen. A pair of Chough flew around the castle and a pair of Blue Rock Thrush surveyed the area from atop of the cliffs. We retraced our steps back down to the carpark and could hear a calling Wryneck but despite searching it remained hidden.

We drove the short distance to Salto de Gitano and quickly picked up at least three Black Storks, either flying or perched on rocks. With our main emphasis now on a few missing raptor species, we drove through the park to the watchpoint at Portilla de Tietar.



Spanish Imperial Eagle

A fantastic male Subalpine Warbler entertained us as he sang from a bush at close range and a couple of Black Redstarts were observed. It was now a matter of patience and checking out every bird that we saw. A fine pair of Short-toed Eagles gave good views as they hunted and we were lucky to see at least three Bonelli's Eagles, which came low enough to see well. We also noted a few Egyptian Vultures drifting by. Sitting slightly sheltered from the wind we had lunch, which was welcome indeed. Black Kites constantly were passing through the area and suddenly a bird drifted low over the hillside and Steve shouted Spanish Imperial! This endangered raptor gave stunning views as it circled around and its plumage shone in the sun for 6-7 minutes before it drifted away.



Black-winged Kite

Absolutely delighted we drove slowly through the park stopping briefly in an area of pines, where a Hobby flew along the ridge at speed and a Crested Tit was seen briefly, along with an even briefer Long-tailed Tit. Below the pines a couple of Red Deer walked across the road before disappearing up the hillside. At the Mirador de Trajadilla we partook in a refreshment break at the picnic tables, but our attempts at attracting any Azure-winged Magpies failed miserably as they appeared not to like sausages! A couple of Hawfinches were the highlight of the visit! Another brief stop

at Punte Del Cardenal saw us finding a Nettle-tree Butterfly and a dark phase Booted Eagle that showed briefly.

With time on our side we drove to a site close to the National Park where we located our target birds close to a parking area. A magnificent pair of Black-winged Kites quartered the surrounding area and gave us a good show in perfect light. A female Woodchat Shrike perched on a fence allowing close approach. A single Tree Pipit called in flight as it flew north and in a ploughed field a flock of Meadow Pipit fed. We slowly retraced our steps as the weather to the south looked decidedly dodgy as a pale-phase Booted Eagle circled round before drifting off west. Driving back towards Trujillo, the skies got blacker and blacker before lightning filled the air.

Arriving at Vina las Torres in torrential rain that soon turned to hailstones, a few of the group made a dash to the house whilst the others waited in the minibus. The whole area was white and several of the floor tiles of the courtyard smashed with the intensity of the storm. We all got into the hotel eventually and headed for a hot shower before meeting up for a beer or wine before dinner. Starter was a tomato dish, followed by beetroot pate on biscuits and cheese with tomato or plum jam. Pork cooked with prunes and mashed potato was the main course and dessert was chocolate mousse with strawberry sauce. Today was John's birthday and he had a birthday cake and invited us to join him with a brandy to celebrate!



Bonelli's Eagle

### **Friday 25th March**

After the previous evenings storm it was going to prove interesting to see if any birds were forced down in the rain and it soon became apparent that this was the case as good numbers of Blackcap as well as Subalpine and Sardinian Warbler were seen and a couple of Chiffchaffs fed in the bushes. Hoopoe and Black Redstart were common and we had a good sighting of Iberian Hare.

After breakfast, we said our goodbyes to Juan Pedro and Belen and headed back to the large area of steppe west of Trujillo.



Cattle Egret

A Cattle Egret fed close to the road and the usual Calandra Larks were present, not to mention the omnipresent Corn Bunting. A distant Great Spotted Cuckoo was well found perched on a fence. Iberian and Woodchat Shrikes perched on brambles and a few Red Kites drifted over. We continued along the road and found an Osprey, which flew over a field before completely vanishing. Driving slowly we kept our eyes peeled for any more GS Cuckoos, but this didn't happen. A distant pool produced a pair of Black-winged Stilts, Gadwall, Black-headed Gull and both Little and Great Crested Grebes. A mile or two further along the road produced a Rock Sparrow, which fed on a nearby field before flying away and not having the decency to come back!



Montagu's Harrier

With time running out we tried our luck at one last site and were treated to stunning views of at least 10 Montagu's Harriers hunting the nearby fields. Across the road we watched a mixed group of Griffon and Black Vultures, which sat resting in a field. Unfortunately it was time for our return journey to Madrid. Red and Black Kites, Marsh and Montagu's Harriers as well as the usual numbers of White Storks brightened up the journey. Negotiating the ring road was a challenge and the flight was delayed by 15 minutes, but we were soon underway and on our return to Stansted with delightful memories of the last few days.

# BIRD LIST

	<i>Species</i>	<i>Scientific Name</i>	1	2	3	4
1	EURASIAN WIGEON	<i>Anas penelope</i>		6		
2	EURASIAN GADWALL	<i>Anas strepera</i>	25	20		2
3	MALLARD	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	2	X	X	X
4	NORTHERN SHOVELER	<i>Anas clypeata</i>		300		
5	NORTHERN PINTAIL	<i>Anas acuta</i>		200		
6	RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		4	2	2
7	COMMON QUAIL	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>		H	H	H
8	LITTLE GREBE	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1	12	1	1
9	GREAT CRESTED GREBE	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		6		2
10	BLACK STORK	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>			6	
11	WHITE STORK	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	X	X	X	X
12	CORMORANT	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	2	1	16	
13	GREY HERON	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	2	3	X	X
14	PURPLE HERON	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	3			
15	GREAT EGRET	<i>Ardea alba</i>	3			
16	LITTLE EGRET	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	2	20		
17	CATTLE EGRET	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	X	X		X
18	SQUACCO HERON	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	2			
19	OSPREY	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>				1
20	BLACK-WINGED KITE	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			2	
21	RED KITE	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	1	6	1	10
22	BLACK KITE	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	50	X	X	X
23	EGYPTIAN VULTURE	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>			10	
24	EURASIAN GRIFFON VULTURE	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	X	X	X	X
25	BLACK VULTURE	<i>Aegyptius monachus</i>		4	X	6
26	SHORT-TOED EAGLE	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	1		6	
27	WESTERN MARSH HARRIER	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	3	X	X	1
28	MONTAGU'S HARRIER	<i>Circus pygargus</i>		1		10
29	EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1	
30	COMMON BUZZARD	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2	X	X	X
31	GOLDEN EAGLE	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	1			
32	SPANISH IMPERIAL EAGLE	<i>Aquila adalberti</i>			1	
33	BONELLI'S EAGLE	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>			3	
34	BOOTED EAGLE	<i>Aquila pennata</i>			2	
35	LESSER KESTREL	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	16	20	3	1
36	COMMON KESTREL	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	X	X	X	X
37	EURASIAN HOBBY	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			1	
38	PURPLE SWAMPHEN	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	6			
39	COMMON MOORHEN	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	1	1		
40	EURASIAN COOT	<i>Fulica atra</i>	20			
41	GREAT BUSTARD	<i>Otis tarda</i>		140		
42	LITTLE BUSTARD	<i>Tetrax tetrax</i>		58		

# BIRD LIST

	<i>Species</i>	<i>Scientific Name</i>	1	2	3	4
43	STONE CURLEW	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>		3		H
44	LITTLE RINGED PLOVER	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		4		
45	BLACK-WINGED STILT	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	2	9		7
46	AVOCET	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		1		
47	GOLDEN PLOVER	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		7		
48	RUFF	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>		9		
49	COMMON SNIPE	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		7		
50	BLACK-HEADED GULL	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		150		2
51	LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL	<i>Larus michahellis</i>		1		
52	PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE	<i>Pterocles alchata</i>		50		
53	BLACK-BELLIED SANDGROUSE	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>		25		
54	ROCK DOVE / FERAL PIGEON	<i>Columba livia</i>	X	X	X	X
55	WOODPIGEON	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	X	X	X	X
56	EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	X	X	X	X
57	GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>		H		1
58	COMMON CUCKOO	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		H	1	H
59	ALPINE SWIFT	<i>Apus melba</i>			1	
60	PALLID SWIFT	<i>Apus pallidus</i>		2	4	
61	COMMON KINGFISHER	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		1		
62	EURASIAN HOOPOE	<i>Upupa epops</i>		8	2	X
63	EURASIAN WRYNECK	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>			H	
64	IBERIAN GREY SHRIKE	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	3	12	X	X
65	WOODCHAT SHRIKE	<i>Lanius senator</i>	1	2	X	X
66	EURASIAN JAY	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			2	
67	EURASIAN MAGPIE	<i>Pica pica</i>	X	X	X	X
68	AZURE-WINGED MAGPIE	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>		X	X	X
69	RED-BILLED CHOUGH	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>			2	
70	WESTERN JACKDAW	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	X	X	2	
71	COMMON RAVEN	<i>Corvus corax</i>		4	2	2
72	CALANDRA LARK	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>		X		X
73	GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>		5		
74	CRESTED LARK	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	X	X	X	X
75	THEKLA LARK	<i>Galerida theklae</i>		X		X
76	COMMON SKYLARK	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		H		
77	SAND MARTIN	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	X	X	X	
78	EURASIAN CRAG MARTIN	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			X	2
79	BARN SWALLOW	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	X	X	X	X
80	RED-RUMPED SWALLOW	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>		2	X	X
81	COMMON HOUSE MARTIN	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	X	X	X	X
82	CRESTED TIT	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			1	
83	LONG-TAILED TIT	<i>Aegithalos caudatus irbii</i>			H	
84	GREAT TIT	<i>Parus major</i>	1	X	X	X

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85	EUROPEAN BLUE TIT	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			2	X
86	EURASIAN WREN	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		H	H	
87	CETTI'S WARBLER	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H			
88	COMMON CHIFFCHAFF	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			H	1
89	ZITTING CISTICOLA	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	3	6	X	
90	BLACKCAP	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		X	X	X
91	SPECTACLED WARBLER	<i>Sylvia conspicillata</i>		2		
92	SUBALPINE WARBLER	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>			1	1
93	SARDINIAN WARBLER	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>			H	1
94	EUROPEAN ROBIN	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			H	X
95	BLACK REDSTART	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>			4	X
96	NORTHERN WHEATEAR	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	1			1
	GREENLAND WHEATEAR	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe leucorhoa</i>		1		1
97	STONECHAT	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	3	X	X	X
98	BLUE ROCK THRUSH	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>			6	
99	EURASIAN BLACKBIRD	<i>Turdus merula</i>	X	X	X	X
100	SONG THRUSH	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		1	X	X
101	SPOTLESS STARLING	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>	X	X	X	X
102	HOUSE SPARROW	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	X	X	X	X
103	SPANISH SPARROW	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	X	X	X	X
104	ROCK SPARROW	<i>Petronia petronia</i>				1
105	'IBERIAN' YELLOW WAGTAIL	<i>Motacilla flava iberiae</i>	1	1		
106	WHITE WAGTAIL	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		15	1	X
107	MEADOW PIPIT	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	6	10	X	
108	TREE PIPIT	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			1	
109	ROCK BUNTING	<i>Emberiza cia</i>			H	
110	CORN BUNTING	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	X	X	X	X
111	COMMON CHAFFINCH	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			6	1
112	EUROPEAN GREENFINCH	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		X	X	H
113	EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	X	X	X	X
114	EURASIAN LINNET	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		X	X	X
115	HAWFINCH	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			6	

H = HEARD

X = RECORDED



# BIRD OF THE TOUR

ERNIE - BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE

MARTIN - MONTAGU'S HARRIER

NIGEL - GREAT BUSTARD

JOHN - BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE

BRIAN - BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE

ANNETTE - GREAT BUSTARD

STEVE - SPANISH IMPERIAL EAGLE



Stonechat



Champagne Orchid



Great Bustard



Black Vulture



Griffon Vulture



Sawfly Orchid



Thekla Lark



Chough



Subalpine Warbler



Another Bonelli's Eagle



Egyptian Vulture



Vulture Bait!



'The Group'

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## Swallow Birding

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