



Extremadura

Neville Davies and Mike Cram

28th February to 4th March 2010

We arrived on time in **Madrid** via our scheduled **Easy Jet** flight from **Bristol** (£65 rtn each). We were pleased to be upgraded to an Audi A3 (Diesel) with **AVIS** (£114 each inc. extra driver) and were promptly on our way at 1800h. Our decision to use the R5 toll road paid dividends as we very quickly left Madrid behind and took the A5 all the way to Trujillo, and 10km SE to our base for the next 4 days. En route we saw a **Black-winged Stilt** and the first of many **Little Egret, White Stork, Yellow-legged Gull, Spotless Starling**. We reached the **Hotel Rural Vinas de las Torres** (£240 each BBEM + picnic lunch) in the dark at 2045 and were greeted by our hosts Juan Pedro and Belen. Early night.

Monday 1st March 2010

Our trip was based on exploring central Extremadura around Trujillo, Caceres, Montanechez and Madrigalejo, particularly the 'dehesa' habitat. After breakfast we scanned the countryside in cool breezy sunny weather and got off to a great start with **6 Hoopoe, 20 Azure-winged Magpie, 3 Hawfinch** and the first of many **White Stork, Swallow, Crested Lark, Black Redstart, Spotless Starling, Serin and Corn Bunting**. As we travelled west of Trujillo and then north to the entrance to the easternmost tracks around **Santa Marta de Magasca** Gos26(1) we also noted a displaying **Great-spotted Cuckoo** and 2 **Southern Grey Shrike**. We spent the next 3 hours walking these tracks as they were very muddy in places and not suitable to risk the hire car. This proved a great decision as we had some superb views of a hunting **Black-winged Kite, 2 Black Vultures, Red & Black Kites, 2 Black-bellied Sandgrouse, 300+ Lapwing, 50+ Golden Plover, 1 Ruff, 1 Little Owl** and numerous **Calandra Lark**. More distant views were also obtained of **Griffon Vultures, 75+Common Crane** overhead, **1 Great Bustard** and **14 Little Bustard**.



Hotel Rural Vinas de las Torres



White Stork



Great Bustard

As we headed north of **Caceres** mid-afternoon (1430h), we saw 2 Short-toed Eagle just south of the pot-holed track eventually leading to the farmhouse '**La Encinella**' Gos26(2). We spent the next couple of hours slowly working this track and were rewarded with fabulous views of **18 Great Bustard**, together with **1 Grey Heron, 1 Cattle Egret, Black Vulture, Griffon Vulture, 1 Black-winged Kite, Red Kite, 2 Lesser Kestrel, 2 Black-bellied Sandgrouse, 1 Little Owl, 1 Western Subalpine Warbler, 2 Southern Grey Shrike** and **50 Spanish Sparrow**.

Further north of Caceres, a picnic break overlooking at the bridge across the dammed **Rio Almonte** [Gos26\(3\)](#) was enlivened by **2 Short-toed Eagle**, **2 Common Swift**, and **20 House Martin**. We headed back to the hotel via the EX208 **Torrejon el Rubio** to **Trujillo** road where we saw **2 Great-spotted Cuckoo** in a territorial squabble and then at the crossing of the **Rio Tozo** **4 Black Vulture** and a **White Wagtail**.

An early finish to the day's birding was enforced by heavy rain which continued overnight. An excellent evening meal washed down with Spanish Red was followed by a good night's kip.

Tuesday 2nd March 2010

Our second day was to be spent in **Monfrague National Park**. A relaxed late start after breakfast. We took the A5 north of Trujillo to exit 194 where we cut back across the carriageway and took a rough track back south-west through an industrial estate to the village of **Almaraz**. This unplanned adjustment to our itinerary produced close views of a flock 20 Cattle Egret. WE headed north out of the village, stopping briefly to watch a field packed with over 100 Azure-winged Magpie and 200 Spotless Starling and then at the **Embalse de Arracampo** and its nature reserve. We scanned from outside the locked hide in very cold and windy conditions, but still managed to see **2 Marsh Harrier**, **1 Common Kestrel**, **2 Purple Gallinule**, **Common Coot**, **Common Moorhen**, **Swallow**, **Cetti's Warbler** and **Reed Bunting**.



Otter



Tietar Gorge



Black Stork

We used the A1 motorway and CC911 to get to Monfrague and arrived at **Tietar Gorge** [Gos29\(9\)](#) at 1245h and spent the next 2 hours staking it out. It was occupied by over **50 Griffon Vultures**, but we also noted **2 Great Crested Grebe**, **2 Egyptian Vulture**, **2 Black Vulture**, **2 Golden Eagle**, **1 Red Kite**, **1 Black Kite**, **1 Lesser Kestrel**, **2 Black Stork**, several **Blue Rock Thrush**, **1 Firecrest**, **2 Short-toed Treecreeper** and more fortunately an **Otter** oblivious to us as he ate his catch! There was no sign of the famous Eagle Owls, who sadly did not appear before us. By all accounts, they have moved the nest site to a cave more out of view than usual. There was no sign of the resident pair of Spanish Imperial Eagles either. Again we were informed they had been seen, but were nesting over the other side of the gorge and alas we dipped them too. We retraced the route in [Gosney's guide Pg28-29](#) in reverse as far as [site 4](#) near **Villareal de San Carlos**, but saw nothing new apart from a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and the wonderful spectacle of loads more Black and Griffon Vultures. The rain set in again early evening again cutting short our birding. We headed back this time via the EX389 through Serrejon which appeared newly re-surfaced and in our opinion was a quicker route than taking the A1. For mile after mile the scenery was cork oak woodland which was grazed by Black Pigs and Sheep.

Another fine evening meal was washed down with Rose and local Acorn liqueur.

Wednesday 3rd March 2010

We headed SE along EX208 to Zorita and then via the EX355 along the bumpy minor road that descends east to **Campo Lugar**. Although a little bleak, the views down towards the rice fields were really lovely. We enjoyed excellent views again of **Great Bustard** as another huge bird flapped right over us! We also noted plenty of **Zitting Cisticola**, **2 Little Owl**, **Lesser Kestrel** and then a **Black-winged Kite** sat in a field. The area was very wet especially after more heavy rain and we did not chance driving some of the tracks and as a result our search for Red Avadavat was fruitless, but we did see plenty of **Azure-winged Magpie**, **2 Linnet**, **3 Moorhen** and **2 Carrion Crow** en route.



Alpine Accentor

Blue Rock Thrush

Cirl Bunting

We moved back west mid-morning and drove part of the way around **Embalse de Sierra Brava**, a huge reservoir. We only saw a few **Great Crested Grebe**, **Black Kite** and **Lapwing** and another flight view of **13 Common Crane** flying SE of Zorita. You could really spend all day driving around the place. Due to the Avadavat dip we decided to press on to our next site in the Sierra de Montanchez. We took EX102 SW to **Miajadas** and then EX206 NE to the Castillo at **Montanchez**. The best access is to take the main road up the left hand side (north) of the old town and then follow the signs for the Castillo. The streets are narrow, but passable and you have to park at the gate and walk clockwise around the ramparts to the south facing part. The view is fantastic and we took a lunch break there. We immediately had superb views of at least **3 Alpine Accentor** and at least 2 pairs of **Blue Rock Thrush** and 2 pairs of **Black Redstart**, which kept us entertained. On our way back to the car we saw **6 Serin**, **4 Greenfinch** and a female **Rock Bunting**. We were later told by an English birder who visits the site regularly that the Accentors which normally winter there had only been back at the site for a few weeks.

At 1300h we headed NE via **Trujillo** to **Monfrague CP** where we birded the route in **Gosney's "Finding Birds in Northern Spain" Pg28-29** from west to east finishing off at **Tietar Gorge** to dig in for dusk. We again enjoyed superb views of **Griffon** and **Black Vulture**, **Peregrine Falcon** plus **Nuthatch** and **Woodlark** (both heard) below the monasterio **Gos28(3)**. The rain frustratingly set in again by 1515h at the **Rio Tajo Bridge**, but we had the consolation of a pair of **Cirl Bunting** feeding in the car park. Perseverance paid off at the dam **Gos28(5)** where we watched a superb male **Hawfinch** singing. Then at the **Mirador de la Bascula**, once the rain stopped and the sun came out we scoped 2 massive **Black Vulture** nests on top of the trees below us.

Tietar Gorge Gos29(9) from 1700h-1930h produced **1 Egyptian Vulture**, **1 Black Stork**, **4 Crag Martin**, **Short-toed Treecreeper**, **Firecrest** and a male **Rock Bunting** as well as the hundreds of Griffons. Alas no Eagles or Eagle Owl and another long wet trip in the dark back to the Hotel, but salvation was ours in the form of Belen who produced another superb meal and to Neville's delight, more red wine!

Thursday 4th March 2010

With an early evening flight, we felt the only option was to go for the endemic species that we had failed with so far. As we looked out the window, a thick blanket of fog adorned the landscape around us. Ouch! Nevertheless, we packed, took breakfast, settled up with Belen, bade our farewells (Neville laden with 2 very large bottles of the Acorn liqueur) and took one final trip across to Monfrague, this time in the morning. We felt cautiously optimistic as we left to the views of yet more **Azure-winged Magpie** and **Hoopoe** and the fog began to lift as we approached the Parque.

We timed our arrival perfectly at 1045h as **Tietar Gorge Gos29(9)** was bathed in sunlight as the last of the morning mists burned off. A memorable hour then unfolded as first a pale phase **Booted Eagle** floated by, followed by an unfamiliar call from the woods. Nev ran back from his comfort break to draw our attention to a pair of **Spanish Imperial Eagles** mating on top of a tree!! The male powered off and began displaying whilst the female, looking very pleased with herself, continued to display from the tree. With that, Nev though he could see another Eagle approaching. As it loomed in to view we scoped it as it came in to land on top of the gorge briefly – a superb **Bonelli's Eagle** – outrageous luck, but I think our little **purple patch** was well deserved considering the hours put in.



Roe Deer



Spanish Imperial Eagle

Feeling dutifully smug we headed off eastwards for the long drive back to Madrid. The journey was brightened by a hovering **Black-winged Kite** just north of **Casatejada**. We dipped on the species at **Oropesa**, but Neville saw another 10 **Common Crane** in the distance and we saw more **Zitting Cisticola**. We struck on towards **Calera y Chozas**. For this site we turned off A5 at km135. Only about 500m south I picked out a **Stone Curlew** in the fields. We took a right in the town along CM4101 towards **Alcolea**. On leaving town after about 3 km, take the right hand track about 300 yards before a stand of eucalyptus trees. There is a barn with aeration holes (missing bricks). The afternoon heat at 1315h prevented us seeing any Bustards properly, but this is reportedly a good site. We spent a good hour here slowly working the tracks up to the railway line and took lunch and scanned some more. The highlights apart from a few other common species were another **Black-winged Kite**, **1 Booted Eagle**, female **Marsh Harrier**, **Red-legged Partridge**, **6 Great Bustards**, and a **Sardinian Warbler**.

Our motorway trip to Madrid from there was uneventful, a couple of **Red-legged Partridge** and 3 flyover **Rose-ringed Parakeet** on the outskirts of the city.

Journey's end

We dropped the car off at the airport at 1630h. We'd covered 1,436km (900 miles) and the Audi was very economical at about 55 miles to the gallon (*we spent approx £67 / £34 each on Diesel and approx £5 / £2 each on tolls*). The **Easy Jet** flight back to **Bristol** at 1930h was enlivened by an excited crowd of Spanish teenagers on a school trip. Thank goodness for strong coffee and an MP3 with earphones. We landed on time at about 2040h and astoundingly were first off the plane, straight through passport control and one of the first to get our luggage. **EZ Parking** (Meet & Greet £40 / £20 each) dropped my car off and we were away by 2100h!! (Petrol UK and Bridge approx £10 each)

I think the whole trip cost us around **£485 each**, pretty good value considering we were out in the sticks. It was a successful birding trip. We saw all the main target species well. A shame we could not see the Red Avadavat, or Eagle Owl which has become my bogey bird!

Written by Mike Cram - mikecram67@btinternet.com

Bird List (100 species): [4 lifers for both Nev and Mike](#)

Great Crested Grebe	Great Cormorant	B-crowned Night Heron	Cattle Egret
Little Egret	Grey Heron	White Stork	Black Stork
Mallard	Griffon Vulture	Black Vulture	Egyptian Vulture
Golden Eagle	Spanish Imperial Eagle	Short-toed Eagle	Booted Eagle
Bonelli's Eagle	Red Kite	Black Kite	Marsh Harrier
Black-winged Kite	Common Buzzard	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Common Kestrel
Lesser Kestrel	Peregrine Falcon	Merlin	Red-legged Partridge
Common Coot	Common Moorhen	Purple Swamp-hen	Common Crane
Great Bustard	Little Bustard	Black-winged Stilt	Stone Curlew
European Golden Plover	Northern Lapwing	Ruff	Black-headed Gull
Yellow-legged Gull	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	Rock Dove	Wood Pigeon
Collared Dove	Great Spotted Cuckoo	Little Owl	Common Swift
Hoopoe	Common Kingfisher	Rose-ringed Parakeet	GS Woodpecker (hd)
Crested Lark	Woodlark	Calandra Lark	Sand Martin
Crag Martin	Barn Swallow	House Martin	Meadow Pipit
White Wagtail	Winter Wren	Alpine Accentor	European Robin
Black Redstart	Common Stonechat	Blue Rock Thrush	Song Thrush
Common Blackbird	Cetti's Warbler	Blackcap	Sardinian Warbler
Subalpine Warbler	Zitting Cisticola	Common Chiffchaff	Firecrest
Great Tit	Blue Tit	Long-tailed Tit	Wood Nuthatch (hd)
Short-toed Treecreeper	Southern Grey Shrike	Azure-winged Magpie	Black-billed Magpie
Eurasian Jackdaw	Carrion Crow	Common Raven	Spotless Starling
House Sparrow	Spanish Sparrow	Common Chaffinch	Common Linnet
European Goldfinch	European Greenfinch	Serin	Hawfinch
Reed Bunting	Cirl Bunting	Corn Bunting	Rock Bunting

Mammal List :- Otter, Roe Deer, Rabbit, Fox

Thanks to:- **Andy Howes** and **Paul Roberts**, for their advice and help with our trip planning, **Nev** once again for doing the driving, **Mike** for the mapping and **Juan Pedro & Belen** and family for their hospitality. Please see: www.birdwatching-extremadura.com/hotel-birding-extremadura.html

Bibliography / Other:-

- ✓ **Collins Field Guide to the birds of Britain and Europe** sufficed.
- ✓ **Dave Gosney's "Finding Birds in Northern Spain"** – see cross ref's in purple in report.
- ✓ **Michelin Tourist & Motoring Atlas for Spain & Portugal (2007) 1:400 000 – 1cm = 4km.**
This was more than adequate backed up by the Gosney information and the pre-trip research and gen.