

SPAIN: LA MANCHA, COTO DONANA & EXTREMADURA

May 7, 2010 to May 19, 2010

Guided by
Chris Benesh

We started the tour off in Madrid under partly cloudy skies and cool temperatures and made our way south to Laguna Larga, a large shallow saline lagoon in the La Mancha region of Spain. Here we were treated to some breeding Black-winged Stilts, a number of Shelducks, and almost 200 Greater Flamingos. Other highlights here included a dashing Pied Avocet and a brief visit with a couple of Spanish birders. We then headed to the nearby Laguna Tirez where conditions were great for shorebirds. We had several colorful Curlew Sandpipers, four breeding plumaged Black-bellied Plovers, a large group of Ringed Plovers, a handful of Kentish (Snowy) Plovers, and a couple of Greenshanks. Irma spotted a handsome Stone-curlew (thick-knee) in a plowed field nearby as well. A nice flyby calling Great Spotted Cuckoo was also a treat. From here, it was off to the town of Campo de Criptana where we paid a visit to the Molinos de Vientos (the scenic windmills made famous through the story of Don Quixote). Then we settled in to our hotel and our first group dinner.

Our second morning started off cold and windy with threatening storms as we headed to Laguna Manjavaca. We were greeted with several colorful Yellow Wagtails and with a bit of searching scoped a singing Savi's Warbler. Water Rails taunted us from the cover of reeds, and eventually the weather and breakfast urged us back to the bus. After breakfast, we headed to Miguel Estiban. This wetlands is one of the richest in the area and again proved a wonderful spot. We enjoyed great views of several White-headed Ducks, along with beautiful Little and Eared grebes. The Red-crested Pochards were glowing among the more common Pochards. A number of European Turtle-Doves put in an appearance as well. Passerines were highlighted by a sneaky Cetti's Warbler, both Great Reed and Reed warblers, and a migrant Garden Warbler that showed very well. Again, Water Rails called from out of sight. After lunch and a siesta came our visit to Pedro Munoz where we ducked and covered to avoid some passing rain showers. The bird activity was good here, however, and we had good views of Nightingale, Garden Warbler, and heaps of Reed Warblers. Soon after our arrival, a White Wagtail paraded around the grounds. Out over the marsh, a Collared Pratincole put in a brief appearance.

The following day found us briefly back at Miguel Estiban for another visit. White-headed Ducks were actively courting and Cetti's Warbler was singing in full voice. The local stork nest was being visited by nesting Tree Sparrows. From the marshes, Water Rails grunted their pig like calls. Then it was time for breakfast and the long journey to the Coto Doñana and El Rocio. On the drive, we were distracted by some wonderful landscapes. Bird highlights were topped by a flying Spanish Imperial Eagle, this one a subadult that was still mostly pale with darker flight feathers. An impressively large bird of prey. Then it was on to Cordoba where we had some time to take in the Mezquita and enjoy the active Cattle Egret and Night-Heron colony there. All day long we were impressed by the powerful forces of nature's weather, with some tremendous rain showers seen along the way.

Our first day at Doñana began with clearing skies and a trip into the park in their all-terrain unimog vehicles. Traveling down the beach, we encountered flocks of Sanderlings, along with scattered Yellow-legged Gulls. Small numbers of Lesser Black-backed and a lone Audouin's Gull were also on the beach. Other shorebirds included a lone Bar-tailed Godwit, a few Black-bellied Plovers, and some Eurasian Oystercatchers. Close to the river mouth we began to see lots of Little Terns (later with some Black Terns and a Sandwich Tern), and a couple of Slender-billed Gulls. We then entered the wooded areas of

Doñana and saw a number of Wild Boar and Fallow Deer. Raptors featured well in the park with lots of Black Kites, a Red Kite, a couple of Booted Eagles, and the star of the show, a nice adult Spanish Imperial Eagle. In the afternoon we visited the Acebuche Center and had a number of good birds including a couple of Purple Swamphens, a tree full of Orioles, a singing Dartford Warbler, and perhaps best of all, some charismatic Azure-winged Magpies.

Our second day at Doñana included a visit to the northern section of the park and adjacent natural park. Although the Iberian Lynx again proved elusive, we had a number of terrific highlights. A couple of close Little Owls were a treat, with the first nesting in a large cork oak bough. There were all sorts of water birds, including huge flocks of breeding plumaged Black-bellied Plovers, Ringed and Kentish plovers, three close Collared Pratincoles, some stunning Great Crested Grebes, a singing Spectacled Warbler, nesting Black Kites, and the Jose Valverde Visitor Center that had some spectacular breeding colonies chock full of Glossy Ibis, Cattle Egret, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Squacco and Purple herons, and a bunch of Great Reed Warblers. Mammal highlights included a couple of Red Deer and close studies of a couple of Cape Hares. In the afternoon we ventured to the Huelva area where we stopped a couple of lagoons looking for additional species. Close views of Zitting Cisticola were of interest, as was a large bathing aggregation of gulls including 20 plus Audouin's Gulls. Then it was back to the hotel after a bird filled day.

The next morning we headed south of Sevilla to the town of Los Palacios. A small lagoon here held our attention for most of the morning. Our main target was the Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin aka Rufous Bush Robin or Bush Chat. We had fantastic views of one near this lagoon. Also present were several species of warbler, including Melodious and Western Olivaceous (Isabelline) in the tamarisk trees there. A couple of Penduline Tits entertained most, and some calling Collared Pratincoles put on a good show for us. Then we traveled most of the afternoon to Trujillo. Cold winds and threatening weather put down all of the swifts, and just a few hardy Lesser Kestrels could be found. But we enjoyed the antics of some Jackdaws and a Hoopoe while taking in Pizarro's home town.

We were off early the next morning to enjoy the plains of Belen. Once again, this area did not disappoint for bustards. We had as many as nine Great Bustards and two Little Bustards. While out on the plains, we also had fantastic views of a pair of Great Spotted Cuckoos. We then headed north and west of Trujillo for a long day of birding. Early highlights included a Pallid Swift zooming around the Rio Almonte bridge with a number of Common Swifts. Later that morning, we had a fantastic singing Black Wheatear, and then on to the plains and other goodies. The Talavan reservoir was a haven for Great Crested Grebes which we saw nesting and in display. A last minute dash southwest of Trujillo yielded very close views of a couple of Rollers and several Montague's Harriers. Then we headed for Monfrague. Though the skies had cleared, the cold front left cold temperatures and high winds in its place. Despite that fact, we did well at Monfrague with great views of the three vulture species and another Spanish Imperial Eagle. Black Storks were new for us, as were some handsome Subalpine Warblers and a Mistle Thrush. It was a treat to see so many Spaniards out birding on the weekend. The sight of so many Griffon Vultures on the rocky cliffs at Monfrague is inspiring. Our second morning at Monfrague was warmer and calmer and a number of birds seemed to be more active. We had some nice views of several species including Woodlark and Subalpine Warblers, a very vocal Nuthatch, among others. Once midday rolled around, we headed toward the Gredos Mountains.

Our morning at the Parador began with a pre-breakfast stint that yielded several species including the famous Citril Finches (well, at least one). There was a large flock of crossbills hanging around. Coal Tits were very vocal and we had good views of a Firecrest there as well as a beautiful Great Spotted Woodpecker that Dave spotted for us. Then it was off to the high country. On our way up we had some fantastic views of Ortolan Bunting, Booted Eagle, Whitethroat, among others. Then we set off on our hike being surrounded by Dunnock. Good views of singing Gray and Yellow wagtails was a treat, and a female Rock Thrush showed well for us. Just the sight of all of the granite with its green-yellow lichen was of interest. We started running into Wheatears, Skylarks, and Water Pipits, and the hike culminated with a couple of Bluethroats. At one point we came face to face with a bunch of Spanish Ibex. To our surprise, a couple of males approached to within inches of us. Wow! Later that afternoon, we added Robin and Goldcrest to the list of things seen.

Our final morning found us heading back up to the Plataforma to fill in a few holes. On the way up, we had great views of a couple of Western Bonelli's Warblers and a bunch of Melodious Warblers. A Blackcap sang its lovely song for us as well. At the Plataforma, we connected (albeit briefly) with a White-throated Dipper and saw some other now familiar species. Then we headed down to the Puente del Duque campground where the real highlight was a couple of European Red Squirrels. This declining species is quite spectacular. Some of us also had a striking male Pied Flycatcher. We eventually made our way back to Madrid, stopping along the way to take in the sight of Avila, the highly fortified, walled city. Then it was on to Madrid for our final dinner and recap.

After all was said and done, the following species were voted as the most popular of the trip. There were, of course, many additional species that could easily have found themselves on the list. Great Bustard (3 votes), Linnet (2 votes), Subalpine Warbler (2 votes), Azure-winged Magpie (2 votes), Great Crested Grebe (2 votes - of course!), Greater Flamingo (2 votes), Blue Rock Thrush, and Bluethroat.

Thanks to all of you for coming along and helping to make the trip such a success. We were also sad to see Irma depart early and wish her the best. I hope to see you all again on another birding adventure. Until then, have fun out there! Chris.

List total: 174 bird taxa and 8 mammal taxa

*If marked to left of list, * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic,
N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant*

Triplist file: spa10-CB

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

COMMON SHELDUCK (*Tadorna tadorna*)

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)

RED-CRESTED POCHARD (*Netta rufina*)

The heads of the males seem to glow in the sun.

COMMON POCHARD (*Aythya ferina*)

WHITE-HEADED DUCK (*Oxyura leucocephala*)

Well seen at Pedro Munoz and Miguel Estiban.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE (*Alectoris rufa*)

COMMON QUAIL (*Coturnix coturnix*)

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LITTLE GREBE (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*)

Some fantastic views of this species, in particular at the Talavan Lagoon where we saw nesting birds and some in display.

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

Phoenicopteridae (Flamingos)

GREATER FLAMINGO (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)

Good numbers of flamingos this year.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

LITTLE BITTERN (*Ixobrychus minutus*)

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*)

PURPLE HERON (*Ardea purpurea*)

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

LITTLE EGRET (*Egretta garzetta*)

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

SQUACCO HERON (*Ardeola ralloides*)

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

EURASIAN SPOONBILL (*Platalea leucorodia*)

There was a huge flock of these (150+) in the main lagoon at El Rocío.

Ciconiidae (Storks)

BLACK STORK (*Ciconia nigra*)

WHITE STORK (*Ciconia ciconia*)

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

RED KITE (*Milvus milvus*)

Sadly declining. We saw a few in Extremadura and at Donana, but most were in the Gredos.

BLACK KITE (*Milvus migrans*)

EGYPTIAN VULTURE (*Neophron percnopterus*)

EURASIAN GRIFFON (*Gyps fulvus*)

CINEREOUS VULTURE (*Aegypius monachus*)

SHORT-TOED EAGLE (*Circaetus gallicus*)

EURASIAN MARSH-HARRIER (*Circus aeruginosus*)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

MONTAGU'S HARRIER (*Circus pygargus*)

EURASIAN BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*)

SPANISH EAGLE (*Aquila adalberti*)

The Spanish Imperial Eagle. We saw an immature on the drive to Donana. Then we had our first adult there and then another adult at Monfrague.

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

Little more than a mota for those who could see it at all.

BOOTED EAGLE (*Hieraetus pennatus*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

LESSER KESTREL (*Falco naumanni*)

EURASIAN KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*)

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

WATER RAIL (*Rallus aquaticus*)

PURPLE SWAMPHEN (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)

COMMON MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*)

Note than Old World birds are likely to be those in the New World.

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*)

Otididae (Bustards)

GREAT BUSTARD (*Otis tarda*)

Some great looks on the Belen plains. We also saw another in flight in La Mancha.

LITTLE BUSTARD (*Tetrax tetrax*)

Burhinidae (Thick-knees)

EURASIAN THICK-KNEE (*Burhinus oedicnemus*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

NORTHERN LAPWING (*Vanellus vanellus*)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

SNOWY PLOVER (KENTISH) (*Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*)

COMMON RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (*Charadrius dubius*)

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers)

EURASIAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*)

PIED AVOCET (*Recurvirostra avocetta*)

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

COMMON GREENSHANK (*Tringa nebularia*)

COMMON REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*)

BAR-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa lapponica*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

CURLEW SANDPIPER (*Calidris ferruginea*)

Glareolidae (Pratincoles and Coursers)

COLLARED PRATINCOLE (*Glareola pratincola*)

Very enjoyable views at Donana and again south of Sevilla.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SLENDER-BILLED GULL (*Chroicocephalus genei*)

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)

AUDOUIN'S GULL (*Ichthyaetus audouinii*)
Quite a few of these bathing on a small lake near Huelva.

YELLOW-LEGGED GULL (*Larus michahellis*)
LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*)
LITTLE TERN (*Sternula albifrons*)
GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)
BLACK TERN (*Chlidonias niger*)
WHISKERED TERN (*Chlidonias hybrida*)
SANDWICH TERN (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*)
COMMON WOOD-PIGEON (*Columba palumbus*)
EUROPEAN TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia turtur*)
EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

GREAT SPOTTED CUCKOO (*Clamator glandarius*)
COMMON CUCKOO (*Cuculus canorus*)

Strigidae (Owls)

LITTLE OWL (*Athene noctua*)

Apodidae (Swifts)

COMMON SWIFT (*Apus apus*)
PALLID SWIFT (*Apus pallidus*)
ALPINE SWIFT (*Apus melba*)

Meropidae (Bee-eaters)

EUROPEAN BEE-EATER (*Merops apiaster*)

Coraciidae (Rollers)

EUROPEAN ROLLER (*Coracias garrulus*)
One near the coast at Donana was a bit of a surprise. More were well seen east of Caceres.

Upupidae (Hoopoes)

EURASIAN HOOPOE (*Upupa epops*)
What an outstanding bird.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER (*Dendrocopos major*)
Dave spotted this handsome bird from the balcony of the Parador de Gredos. A handsome bird!

Laniidae (Shrikes)

SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE (*Lanius meridionalis*)
We had several of these in open dehesa near Monroy. Recently split from the Great Grey/Northern Shrike species.

WOODCHAT SHRIKE (*Lanius senator*)

Oriolidae (Old World Orioles)

EURASIAN GOLDEN ORIOLE (*Oriolus oriolus*)
Fantastic views of this species feeding in mulberry trees near a hide at El Acebuche.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

EURASIAN JAY (*Garrulus glandarius*)
AZURE-WINGED MAGPIE (*Cyanopica cyanus*)
One of the more charismatic birds of the trip, being quite common around Donana and in Extremadura.
EURASIAN MAGPIE (*Pica pica*)
RED-BILLED CHOUGH (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*)
EURASIAN JACKDAW (*Corvus monedula*)

CARRION CROW (*Corvus corone*)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Panuridae (Bearded Reedling)

BEARDED REEDLING (*Panurus biarmicus*)

Alaudidae (Larks)

CALANDRA LARK (*Melanocorypha calandra*)

GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK (*Calandrella brachydactyla*)

CRESTED LARK (*Galerida cristata*)

THEKLA LARK (*Galerida theklae*)

SKY LARK (*Alauda arvensis*)

Absent outside of the Gredos.

WOOD LARK (*Lullula arborea*)

This has one lovely song.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*)

EURASIAN CRAG-MARTIN (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*)

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW (*Cecropis daurica*)

COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN (*Delichon urbicum*)

Paridae (Chickadees and Tits)

COAL TIT (*Pariparus ater*)

CRESTED TIT (*Lophophanes cristatus*)

GREAT TIT (*Parus major*)

EURASIAN BLUE TIT (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)

Remizidae (Penduline Tits)

EURASIAN PENDULINE-TIT (*Remiz pendulinus*)

Cettiidae (Bush-Warblers and Allies)

CETTI'S WARBLER (*Cettia cetti*)

Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)

LONG-TAILED TIT (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

EURASIAN NUTHATCH (*Sitta europaea*)

Certhiidae (Creepers)

SHORT-TOED TREECREEPER (*Certhia brachydactyla*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

WINTER WREN (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

Cinclidae (Dippers)

WHITE-THROATED DIPPER (*Cinclus cinclus*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

GOLDCREST (*Regulus regulus*)

FIRECREST (*Regulus ignicapilla*)

Phylloscopidae (Leaf-Warblers)

WESTERN BONELLI'S WARBLER (*Phylloscopus bonelli*)

Acrocephalidae (Reed-Warblers and Allies)

WESTERN OLIVACEOUS WARBLER (*Hippolais opaca*)

Also now known as the Isabelline Warbler. We eventually saw one south of Sevilla.

MELODIOUS WARBLER (*Hippolais polyglotta*)

Seen south of Sevilla and again in the Gredos where it was common in open areas.

EURASIAN REED-WARBLER (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

GREAT REED-WARBLER (*Acrocephalus arundinaceus*)

Megaluridae (Grassbirds and Allies)

SAVI'S WARBLER (*Locustella luscinioides*)

Scoped at the Laguna Manjivacas.

Cisticolidae (Cisticolas and Allies)

ZITTING CISTICOLA (*Cisticola juncidis*)

Sylviidae (Old World Warblers)

BLACKCAP (*Sylvia atricapilla*)

GARDEN WARBLER (*Sylvia borin*)

GREATER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia communis*)

SPECTACLED WARBLER (*Sylvia conspicillata*)

One singing bird was seen at Donana.

DARTFORD WARBLER (*Sylvia undata*)

Great views of one at Donana and another in the Jerte Valley.

SUBALPINE WARBLER (*Sylvia cantillans*)

This handsome warbler was very evident at Monfrague.

SARDINIAN WARBLER (*Sylvia melanocephala*)

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa striata*)

EUROPEAN PIED FLYCATCHER (*Ficedula hypoleuca*)

EUROPEAN ROBIN (*Erithacus rubecula*)

COMMON NIGHTINGALE (*Luscinia megarhynchos*)

BLUETHROAT (*Luscinia svecica*)

Great views of one above the Plataforma in the Gredos.

RUFIOUS-TAILED SCRUB-ROBIN (*Cercotrichas galactotes*)

Whatever it's called - robin or chat - we had great views of this species south of Sevilla.

BLACK REDSTART (*Phoenicurus ochrurus*)

BLACK WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe leucura*)

We were fortunate to see this scarce species well along the Rio Almonte.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

STONECHAT (EUROPEAN) (*Saxicola torquatus rubicola*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

RUFIOUS-TAILED ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola saxatilis*)

BLUE ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola solitarius*)

EURASIAN BLACKBIRD (*Turdus merula*)

MISTLE THRUSH (*Turdus viscivorus*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

SPOTLESS STARLING (*Sturnus unicolor*)

Prunellidae (Accentors)

DUNNOCK (*Prunella modularis*)

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

WESTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (*Motacilla flava*)

Quite evident in a lot of the areas we visited, they were most common in the Gredos where they breed.

GRAY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*)

A few seen along the fast moving rivers in the Gredos.

WHITE WAGTAIL (*Motacilla alba*)

WATER PIPIT (*Anthus spinoletta*)

Emberizidae (Buntings, Sparrows, and Allies)

* CIRL BUNTING (*Emberiza cirrus*)

ROCK BUNTING (*Emberiza cia*)

A handsome bird with a great song.

ORTOLAN BUNTING (*Emberiza hortulana*)

CORN BUNTING (*Emberiza calandra*)

Seemingly always nearby, we had it on all but the last couple of days.

Fringillidae (Siskins, Crossbills, and Allies)

COMMON CHAFFINCH (*Fringilla coelebs*)

EUROPEAN GREENFINCH (*Chloris chloris*)

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*)

EUROPEAN GOLDFINCH (*Carduelis carduelis*)

EURASIAN LINNET (*Carduelis cannabina*)

CITRIL FINCH (*Serinus citrinella*)

Great looks at a male feeding in the garden of the Parador de Gredos.

EUROPEAN SERIN (*Serinus serinus*)

HAWFINCH (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*)

SPANISH SPARROW (*Passer hispaniolensis*)

EURASIAN TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*)

ROCK PETRONIA (*Petronia petronia*)

Mammals

OLD WORLD RABBIT (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

CAPE HARE (*Lepus capensis*)

Great views of this species at Donana.

EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL (*Sciurus vulgaris*)

A classy squirrel indeed. We had fine views at the Puente de Duque campground.

RED FOX (*Vulpes vulpes*)

WILD BOAR (*Sus scrofa*)

FALLOW DEER (*Dama dama*)

RED DEER (*Cervus elaphus*)

SPANISH IBEX (*Capra pyrenaica*)

What a show with this species in the Gredos this year. There were a couple of males that were a little too tame, walking right up to us.